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THE EXPERIENCE OF PETER

David Wright

John 21: 1-17; 1 Peter 5: 1-7; 2 Peter 1: 12-18

Peter was one who was sovereignly taken up by the Lord; he was “first ... Peter”, Matt 10: 2. The experiences of Peter with the Lord in the gospels are recorded for our education. It is not to expose Peter, but for us to learn from his experiences. I think Mr. Taylor used an expression in relation to him that God had invested much in the way of overheads in Peter. I think what he meant by that was that there were times when Peter was adjusted but it was to make him fit for the Lord’s service in the launching of this dispensation in which we are, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter took the lead in the Acts, and there was much power in his ministry and discernment. He was able to discern the deception of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, and he was able to rebuke Simon in Acts 8 for thinking that he could have part in the laying on of hands, and receiving the gift of the Spirit for money. Peter had discernment in relation to those things, and he acted accordingly.

Where we read in John 21, we see Peter receiving his commission, and we also see another set of circumstances in which he was adjusted. Peter was sovereignly taken up to lead the saints, and I read the accounts in the epistles because I believe that in them we see the fruit of his exercises and of his adjustment by the Lord.

Peter, looking back on this experience, would have remembered at first-hand the knowledge of the Lord Jesus in His service of love to him; he would have seen the perfect One who was the Leader and the One who was the Shepherd. The first thing in this chapter is that Peter said, “I go to fish” and others followed him. I think through the experience that he had here, he would have been adjusted in relation to leadership. Leadership among the saints of God cannot be carried out on partisan lines. They went, and there was no fruit in the expedition at all – they caught nothing. Peter went off on an independent line, and there was nothing for God in it. Then in the early morning, “Jesus stood on the shore; the disciples however did

not know that it was Jesus. Jesus therefore says to them, Children, having ye anything to eat? They answered him, No". I think that was a humbling experience for them. The Lord had served them in love many times before, but now he says "Have ye anything to eat?" and they had to say "No". The reason for that was that Peter had gone off on an independent line.

However, we see the service of grace, of the true Shepherd, in this chapter. Peter speaks feelingly in his epistle of returning "to the shepherd and overseer of your souls", 1 Peter 2: 25. The Lord did not immediately rebuke Peter, but He said "Cast the net at the right side of the ship". Peter was now acting under the direction of the Lord, and there was immediate fruit from it – a hundred and fifty three great fishes. A great number, but it was possible to number them. There was distinction about each one of them, there was quality there, maybe relating to the crowd of names in the upper room in Acts 1. John has in mind quality in his gospel. So under the Lord's own touch, there is fruit, a hundred and fifty three great fishes. John recognises the Lord, and then Peter recognising the Lord, casts himself into the sea, and they dragged the net full of fishes to the land, and "When therefore they went out on to the land, they see a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it". Who supplied that, dear brethren? The Lord himself provided that, in grace. He says, "Bring of the fishes", but He brings in food. If the saints are to be built up in the most holy faith, in whatever circumstances may prevail, it is important to bring in food to build up the spiritual constitution. The Lord says, "Come and dine" – what grace! There is still no word of rebuke, but there was that which had been provided by the Lord Himself, secured under His own direction, and there was food to meet the situation for the moment.

Now after that experience, the Lord Jesus addresses Peter. He says to him, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He says to him, Yea Lord; thou knowest that I am attached to thee. He says to him, Feed my lambs". Peter has gained first-hand knowledge of the way the Lord did things Himself, the way He brought in food. So it is interesting to see in relation to Peter's

commission, it is feeding the lambs, feeding the sheep, and shepherding the sheep. The Lord probes Peter three times in relation to his love for Himself. I think another thing that Peter would realise is that he could not rightly serve the saints unless the motive was affection for Christ. Notice the little word “my” here – “Feed my lambs”, “Shepherd my sheep”, “Feed my sheep”. They belong to the Lord. They were not Peter’s. The Lord would say, ‘they are mine’. I think Peter would understand that they were precious to the Lord, and they became precious to Peter. It is interesting that he is not told to shepherd the lambs; I suppose that a lamb instinctively keeps near its mother. But sometimes those of us who are older need shepherding in this way. This was an experience of Peter which more fully fitted him for the service which was before him.

I thought that in the first epistle, Peter had learnt experimentally at first-hand under the Lord, and he was reflecting that, in his service of shepherding the saints, in the character of it. One thing that a shepherd will never ever contemplate is the scattering of the sheep.

Peter addresses the elders here, but he does not address them as an apostle, he addresses them as a fellow-elder. That is, he would take his place alongside them. They would enter feelingly in relation to what he was saying. “I exhort, who am their fellow-elder and witness of the sufferings of the Christ, who also am partaker of the glory about to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God”. Peter would remember the word of the Lord, “Shepherd my sheep”. He says to the elders here, it is the flock of God, it is not your flock, it belongs to God. Let us get some sense, beloved brethren, of the preciousness of what there is for God in the saints. He values them. There has never been a time when this character of shepherding is more needed. I feel that for myself. And the brethren will pardon me for being practical, but I feel that we know the truth so well but sometimes I feel that I am found wanting in the practice of it, and in doing things in the way in which the Lord would do things. He says, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, exercising oversight, not by necessity, but willingly; not for base gain but readily”. That would bring out that the source and motive of it was

love – love for Christ and love for the sheep. The elders were not to set themselves above the flock, or to look down on them, or to speak down to them. The elders would be drawing alongside, in order that the sheep might be shepherded in relation to the will of God for them for the moment, that they might have their part effectively in the testimony. Peter says, “not as lording it over your possessions, but being models for the flock”. There is a certain moral authority in one who is a model. Peter speaks in his epistle of the Lord as a Model for us in suffering, and we are to follow in His steps. The Lord is a Model for us in shepherding. So such persons as these elders would set out the features of Christ, and thus there is moral power in what they are able to do. That is, the thing is set out in themselves, and it carries moral authority – “Ye shall receive the unfading crown of glory”.

In the next section, there is a word for the younger ones, “Likewise ye younger, be subject to the elder”. It is a good thing – I have found for myself – to draw alongside older ones who have been in the testimony many years, to get the gain of their experience.

There are many, in a generation fast passing off the scene, who knew what it was to sit under the ministry of Mr Taylor, which I have not known, and it is good to get the gain of their experiences and exercises. I was speaking to a brother the other day, about the reality of the exercises passed through in relation to the ministry about the worship of the Holy Spirit. I commented to him that I was glad to get the gain of his experience in that way, and he said that as a younger man, he had always tried to draw on the experience of the saints who had gone through the exercise of the Eternal Sonship question. These are very real things, beloved brethren. There is a wealth of experience among those who have been in the path for longer than ourselves. Paul could speak about those who were in Christ before him, and the respect that he had for them. Let us retain respect therefore for the elder saints who have had real experience with God, and who can help us to get the gain of it.

And then there is a word for all of us: “all of you bind on humility towards one another”. Now that is young and old. It does not come

to me naturally. Beloved brethren, I speak feelingly: how many local eruptions would there be if we were in the gain of this verse, “all of you bind on humility towards one another”? It is not something to be put on for a special occasion, but it is something that is to be characteristic at all times. It was a feature of Christ Himself of course, One who humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death (see Phil 2: 8), and that the death of the cross. He did not need to be humbled, He humbled Himself. We, because of what we are, often need to be humbled. The thing is to accept it under the mighty hand of God, so that we can be maintained in this attitude towards one another.

This all has to do with the service of shepherding I believe, so that it is carried out in this character. It is not for self-aggrandisement, but the Lord was One who was among them as One who served in all lowliness. It says that, “God sets himself against the proud”; what a definite statement that is, “God sets himself against the proud, but to the humble gives grace”. There is recompense in that. He gives us grace in whatever circumstances we may find ourselves. So Peter says, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in the due time”. That is a principle with God. Who humbled Himself like the Lord Jesus did? Yet He has been given “a name, that which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow”, Phil 2: 9,10. He has been exalted on high, and has ascended up through the heavens, and His glory has filled every heaven through which He has passed. Such is the greatness of the Man of God’s choice, He stands out in His distinction, and He stands out as a Model to us in everything.

“Having cast all your care upon him, for he cares about you”. That we can know One who cares about us makes us restful. Each of us here should be conscious that the Lord cares about us, that we have known something first-hand of the shepherd service of Christ to us. I can say that I have experienced the shepherd service of Christ through brothers who I regard as fathers, and I respect them for that. Certain adjustments have been brought in; I can remember

preaching as a younger man, and afterwards there was just a fatherly touch of adjustment, and that has become a strongpoint in my heart in relation to the truth of what they said. So there is One who cares about us. May we be conscious of that, and be restful in relation to it.

In the second epistle, I thought we saw the service of Peter in feeding the sheep. He is about to put off his earthly tabernacle, he is about to pass off the scene, and he says, I want to stir you up.

“Wherefore I will be careful to put you always in mind of these things, although knowing them and established in the present truth”. The present truth I suppose, would have included the ministry of Paul. “But I account it right, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance”. Now, there is nothing to stir up the hearts of the saints more than the presentation of Christ Himself. It is only Christ that can touch a chord in our hearts; his own unique touch. In John 21, they did not ask who He was, they knew who He was. It was His own unique touch, beloved brethren, and it is only that which is able to stir us. Peter, in his service of feeding the sheep, knew that. So he says, ‘I am going to pass off the scene, but there is something I want to leave with you, that you can refer to at any time, in the canon of scripture’, and we can call upon it today, where we are in Grangemouth, we can call upon this scripture for the edification and upbuilding of the most holy faith of the saints.

There is a challenge too as to what I could leave among the saints in the way of an impression of Christ through my own experience, which is what Peter did here. He was going to leave it to bear fruit in the saints, in whatever circumstances they might pass through. It was in relation to his experience on the holy mountain, the mount of transfiguration. It is not called the holy mountain in the gospel, but Peter calls it the holy mountain here, because he could look back on it and see that that place was where the presence of God had been known, it was a holy mountain. It was an impression that had matured with him through his life. The negative experiences in the gospel are all left out here; the three tabernacles

are not referred to. He says, I want to draw attention to the One who is beyond any other. I want to draw attention to the greatness of the One who is the Man of God's choice. So the voice was uttered from the excellent glory, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight", Matt 3: 17. As passing off the scene, Peter would say, I would leave this impression with you, that there is no one who is to be compared to the Lord Jesus. What rich impressions of Christ he would leave. There is nothing other than the presentation of Christ which will stir the affections of the saints. It is something that we should be exercised about in the last days, that we are drawn increasingly to and attracted to the Person of the Lord Jesus. He is our bond. We have spoken earlier of the Christian circle, but it is not what is social in the Christian circle that holds us; it is the fact that Christ is the centre, and that we have come to know Him and to love Him, and are drawn to Him. Therefore he is the Truth, He is the bond, and He is what will hold us. Peter says, I am presenting that Man to you. He is carrying out the service of feeding the sheep. He has shepherded the sheep, and now he feeds them. He was adjusted in John 21 in relation to how that service was to be carried out.

Well, beloved brethren, I feel tested by these things, but they are practical, they are real. We need to work towards them, to the end that the enemy's efforts at the present time to destroy any sense of the representation of the assembly might fail, that we might be held together through Christ being the centre, and that we might have love and respect for what He has among the saints. They are His, they are not ours; they are His and if we serve them at all, it must be out of affection for Christ and affection for one another.

May God bless the word to us.

GRANGEMOUTH

8 March 2003

FELLOWSHIP

Eric Burr

1 Corinthians 10: 16, 17

I could see a connection between the thought that I had in mind and what our brother has brought before us as to not forgetting, in that, in this chapter Paul weaves what he has to say by way of teaching round the history of Israel. Paul knew that history well and he himself had not forgotten it, certainly to the extent that he is able to teach from it – in this epistle and in Galatians and in the Acts and, if it is he that wrote it, in the epistle to the Hebrews. The other point with which I might connect it is that the Supper is directly connected with remembrance and therefore with not forgetting. The Lord must, in His mercy and goodness, have taken account of our natural tendency to forget, and He provided the Supper, He said, “this do in remembrance of me”, Luke 22: 19. That is not, as people have nowadays, a memorial service. Mr. Darby’s note is better in that he says, ‘for a calling of me to mind’, and that is an active thing on our side and the coming together for the Supper is intended to stimulate and help our own weaknesses in relation to the remembrance and the not forgetting of the Lord.

I was struck on Lord’s Day, while we were waiting for a brother to break bread, with how much is involved in two such simple things, a loaf and a cup. How much they teach us, how great the Supper is! The occasion itself is one for remembrance, but it is also a teaching occasion. The Supper itself is a teaching occasion. The verses that I have read bring out that one thing the Supper teaches us about is fellowship – “the communion of the blood ... the communion of the body”. The Supper teaches us about fellowship. In this chapter Paul refers twice to our being one loaf and one body and that is something that we must never forget, that every believer who has the Spirit – and that would be normal – is there in that loaf, and in that way we express fellowship with them all, because there is one Spirit and one body. Other believers do not have a different Holy Spirit, there is one Spirit and one body, and the Lord would help us

and I am sure the Spirit Himself would help us; and, if I may say so here the Lord is helping us, to keep in our minds the fulness of what He has here in believers. How many He has, what multitudes there are and how great they are. The loaf embraces them all. We cannot conceive what it would be if all believers were able to be at the same occasion for the Supper. They could not all come into one room – there were some three thousand souls at the beginning of the Acts, quite a lot of people, but you could not have the Supper between so many people and you would therefore have to have companies. The occasions in the wilderness when Jesus fed the multitudes help us a bit about that. He said, “Make them sit down in companies by fifties”, Luke 9: 14. I do not make that literal, but use it to illustrate that in spite of the fact that all believers cannot be together, it is possible for them, in the companies in which they are, to represent the whole. It is a very sad thing, and we should feel the sorrow of it, that we do not meet with all believers. There are good grounds for that. If you go back to Mr Darby’s day, some of the elements that hinder believers breaking bread together are set out in what the Lord gave through our beloved brother. For instance, you cannot have the Supper rightly represented where there is what is spoken of as a Minister, or someone ordained to serve. If I may refer to current events, I do not think you could rightly hold the Supper with a woman ministering it, and this hinders our expressing fellowship with other real believers. These things are hindrances, but let us regard them as hindrances, and not regard them as barriers that divide one company from another, because everyone who sets up a barrier thinks he is better than anyone else. Keep that out of your mind.

The tendency of division is to make one company, in any circumstance, think they are better than others. Let us be humble ourselves.

I was looking at Mr Darby’s volume 1 recently and he speaks of the way in which a man’s ministry is limited to a place and that the man who carries on ministry in London is not one who can carry it on in Birmingham. The expression of the truth of the body is hindered in that. There are companies that derive their names (I will not say

they are exactly called by them) from the believers who initially had the exercise that gave rise to them. All these things hinder the enjoyment of fellowship and to that extent, unless there is the ability in the souls of those present to get beyond those divisions, they hinder the fellowship of all believers. Let us hold that. Let us not shrink from that. We seek to walk together and to break bread in the light of the whole and, as Paul shows in this chapter, in fellowship. We seek to break bread in fellowship. Paul refers to the cup first here and then refers to the loaf, but he attaches communion to them both. Therefore we need to be sensitive because we are not far from the last time we took the Supper and we are not very far from the next time we shall take the Supper, subject to the Father's timing. We are therefore coloured by fellowship.

One of the things of the most cardinal importance is that, in a company which meets in the light of the Supper, fellowship should not be interrupted (unless, of course, by that last resort, assembly action) when something arises and I make a hindrance of it. What I mean by that is, I cannot say, for instance, that I shall not come to the Supper because so and so will be there. By that I am saying I am not in fellowship. Let us be quite clear about such things. We do things and say things and we put a kind of net curtain over them so that their real outline is not discerned, but if I say, I will not go because so and so will be there, then I am out of fellowship to that extent. Beloved, let us be careful. I cannot also say that Mr or Mrs X will be at so and so and I might have been there, but I shall not go because he or she is there, but I will go and break bread somewhere else. You cannot do it because you will in any case break bread with him or her. The two places are in fellowship together. You cannot escape the reality of fellowship by taking yourself off to some other place. There is a danger that brethren are in principle ignoring what fellowship is when they think that they are maintaining it by going or coming to meetings elsewhere. Beloved, let us have the teaching right about this. Let us understand that if I am in fellowship with so and so, I cannot get out of the expression of that fellowship by going somewhere where he or she is not on that particular occasion.

Neither can I say, I shall not go to hear Mr so and so because of x, y and z. There may be good reason – you may be sick or ill, or you may be detained by your work, or you may have to go somewhere else, or you may be hindered – but you cannot use as an excuse for not going to the Supper in a particular place who else will be there, you are in fellowship together. Let us be clear about these things.

Let us hold them. We may not like what so and so does, and we may think it is wrong, many issues amongst us present us as individuals with the fact that the only thing we can do about them is to pray. We do not have to write letters, we do not have to think that this meeting can solve the problems of that meeting – just look at the Bible. When there was trouble in Galatia, when Paul thought they were adrift as to the bearing of the truth of the gospel, did he ask the nearest meeting to go and look at it? When John had a word from the Lord about the seven assemblies, did he say that Philadelphia is a meeting which appears to be getting on prosperously; let someone from there go down to Laodecia and “help”, them? No beloved, the Lord has these localities under His own hand. I just repeat that often the only thing that you or I can do, if we are not local in a place where there is a difficulty, is to pray, because in the nature of the dispensation in which we are – when thankfully there are many many believers, and thankfully also there are many with whom we have fellowship – responsibility is local and Philadelphia is not asked to go and sort out Laodecia, Sardis is not asked to go and sort out Thyatira. I do not exclude help but responsibility rests in the place and the Lord’s word there. And beloved, just take note of those seven assemblies – in every assembly, whether as we would say, going on well, or not going on very well, in every one of them, there is an overcomer. Does that overcomer not need your prayers? You may not be able to say, the overcomer in such a place is Mr so and so. Some of us have lived through a decade when things were thought to be resolvable in the hands of Mr so and so, or so and so in the local meeting, but the One who resolves things in local meetings is the Lord and He does it by the Spirit and He would use us under His own hand, but under *His* hand.

I say these things because there are matters current among us which are surprising. At the fellowship meeting our brother talked about getting down to foundations. The bearing of the scripture in Luke 6 is, "Every one that comes to me, and hears my words" (v 47). That is the foundation on which you will always be secure, that you come to the Lord and you hear His words. It may often require patience. Paul says to one company, ye have need of patience (see Heb 10: 36). How scarce it is! I look in myself and I see how scarce patience is. How easily impatience springs up and every thought in you is tense and you long that you could do something. But the thing that you can do is to wait on the Lord. These things maintain fellowship because they keep us all in contact with the same blessed Person who one day we are going to see, not just administering assemblies, but administering this whole poor world – one Man responsible to God for the whole world and taking it on as a charge given by His God. How great Jesus is, how much we need to depend on Him, how much we need Him more than we practically give expression to! How much the preaching of the gospel should promote among us that Christ is God's answer to every question and the enjoyment of Christ is the key to the enjoyment of fellowship. That is why if you meet another believer you have a link with them in your common enjoyment of Christ. You may not actually be able to break bread with them, for reasons such as I have referred to, but you find a link with them in their enjoyment of Christ.

Another exercise of mine is what our brother spoke about last week – what John says from the Lord to that assembly, "strengthen the things that remain" (Rev 3: 2). I am more and more carried by the thought that the strength of a company is the bond of every individual with the Lord. It is not in knowledge, it is not in remembrance and memory of what is in print: the strength of a company is the strength of every individual's link with the Lord Jesus and their ability to enjoy it together. I come back so often to the words my mother used to quote from the Scottish catechism, because she was brought up in the Church of Scotland – 'the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever'. You could start

that now and that would be fellowship, the ability to exchange together thoughts about Christ:

Every view of Him unfolding,
Wakes fresh bursts of joyful praise!

Every circle gathered round Thee
Yields of Christ some beauteous ray. (Hymn 83)

As our brother has referred to and the hymn given out says, how readily we forget. Beloved, let us not forget. Let us remember that when we come to the Supper it is an occasion not only for remembrance of the way that the Lord has cleared everything out of the way, but it helps us to remember the basis on which we have fellowship together and on which we may enjoy fellowship together with everyone who is in fellowship and every locality which is in fellowship.

I have not said anything which is not well known among the brethren, but I just speak of this because I feel concerned about it.

One thing and another comes up and you are surprised how far from the fundamentals we sometimes get, but the Lord would recall us. May He do so for His Name's sake.

LONDON

11 March 2003

FROM THE BOOKSHELF

(i) LOVE'S CHALLENGE

J.B.Catterell

The Lord Himself has instituted the Supper, and when you consider what He has done, it becomes very great to your soul – far beyond an ordinance. If things are normal, the Supper is not a time for heart-searching, though I know of nothing that we do that searches the heart more. But do you not feel that the bearing of the Passover must come first with us? When the Apostle Paul speaks of the Passover to the saints at Corinth, does he speak of it as an ordinance? No, he does not speak of it as an ordinance in a religious way, but in connection with the greatness of Christ: "For also our passover, Christ, has been sacrificed", 1 Cor 5: 7. That is what carries the affections. "so that let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with leaven of malice." If we say an unkind, bitter word in the middle of the week, is it surprising to find it comes between the Lord and ourselves on the first day of the next week?

Do you think that the Lord keeps no histories? Has He no records? Yea, more, my spirit has records, and cause and effect are things we have to consider in a sober way. I may speak disparagingly of a brother or sister; I may say something that possibly could not be challenged in form, but it leaves an effect of malice, and when I sit down to answer to the Lord in the Supper, the brother or sister is there whom my word has made little of, and in virtue of what the Lord has done, He speaks in this wise: The one you have made less than yourself is as much to Me as any other, as much to Me as you; I laid down My life for you all. But, you say, suppose a brother is not walking well. Brethren, if I touch that at all, may the Lord give me grace to touch it in relation to Himself. The Lord has left us without the slightest ground for speaking ill of the brethren, and if I stand on that ground I am standing on ground of my own. I know of nothing in a way that may explain why there is not the rendering of an answer more free, more full, and more fruitful to the Lord than the fact that we hold one another in our hearts at times in such an inferior way. I

feel sure your hearts will confirm me in this, that any making little of the brethren must receive love's challenge from the Lord Himself.

The Lord will not have it. Evil speaking is not outside only, and that is solemn to think of. And not evil speaking only, but the sense carried in the mind in respect of others that, either in their persons or in their service, they are less than we are, comes between our hearts and the Lord.

May the blessed Lord give us the power to esteem each other better than ourselves. No power in nature is sufficient for that. Nature may go to the length of allowing that another is as good as oneself. The grace of Christ, the patience of Christ, the beauty of the Lord – let these shine on the brethren as your eyes look on them for the Lord's sake.

From: Words of Grace and Comfort

January 1925

(ii) THE CROSS

G.V. Wigram

Himself, He knew all about it, though nevertheless He entered into and felt it all perfectly. His God's name and honour had been outraged by man, in and from Eden downwards. It was no light burden to bear the penalty thereof, and He had to allow man then and there to express his thoughts about His God upon and against Himself. He had the consciousness of the contrast between flesh in men, and His own flesh (as spotless, the only One that could be a sin-offering). He felt He had, too; the patient waiting for the devil to outwit himself, and go beyond the limits of any power which was of God; and I know not what else was in the mixture which He, as the One dependent upon and obedient to God, had to drink. In the midst of it all, He it was, and He alone, who gave to God His place, and fully owned God in it all. The light of "there is God" shined out in perfect light amid the darkness, though the time was not come for God's being love in it all to be declared. He knew the love, and His love attributed in His own mind all about redemption, and salvation to God. He was the servant of God in it, suffered then as He had done before all what was apportioned to Him. And how does the power and value of His obedience unto death, the death of the cross, make Him to be the touchstone of "what is truth" then and there, when with enlightened eyes and hearts we, since Pentecost, look back upon it! *Below the superficial surface of the current of the world, there was an under current of the counsel (Acts 2: 23) of God. Below the surface of One crucified through weakness, there was the Lamb of God bearing sins. And above it all, there was glory to God in the highest, peace toward man.*

From: Memorials of the Ministry of G.V. Wigram

Vol. 1 p. 31-2

(My italics – Ed.)

