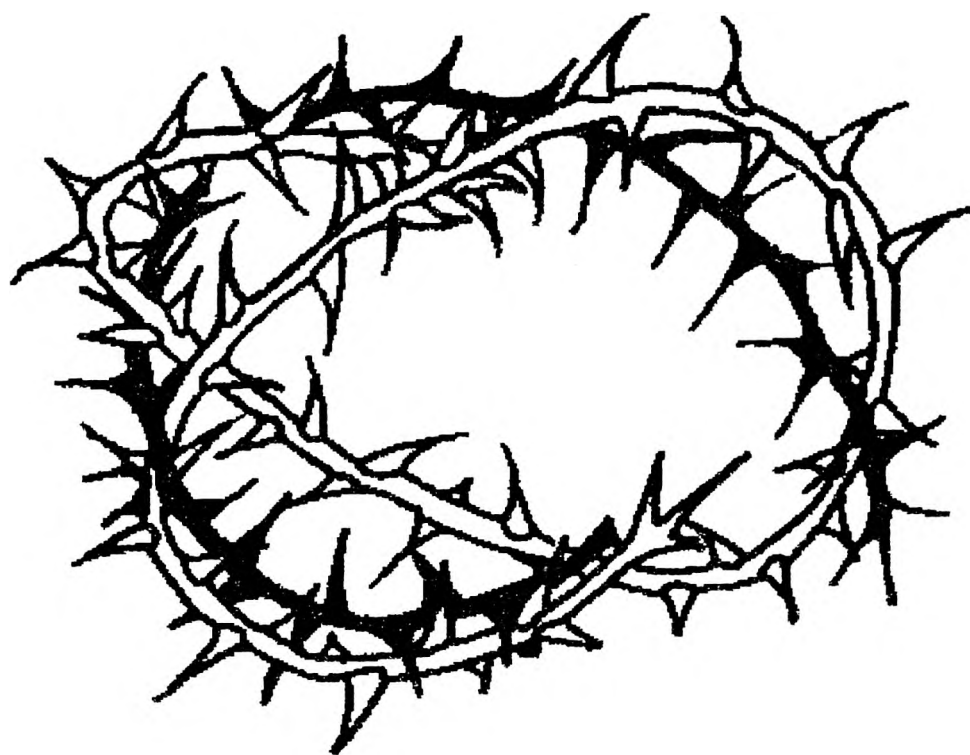


The

Endeavour

Magazine



*The head that once
was crowned with thorns
is crowned with glory now*

June 1999

No 101

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For Christian Thought and Action

June 1999

No 101

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Our object is to promote a faithful Bible-based response to issues which confront us both in thought and in day-to-day living. The *Endeavour Magazine* is published so that the range of views which exist within our Christadelphian Brotherhood may be discussed and represented, and so that issues of wider concern may also be studied and analysed. We therefore encourage discussion and criticism of what appears in our pages, provided it is done in a Christ-like spirit and with a concern that truth should prevail. The views expressed in the magazine are not necessarily those of the Editorial Committee but are published because it is believed that they will make a useful contribution to discussion, and help us all to a deeper understanding of our faith. Articles appearing in this magazine should not be published elsewhere without the permission of the author and the editor.

Desideratum

With the end of the second Christian millennium approaching, our community has produced literature for use in evangelistic activities, literature in which there is sadly little or nothing said about one of the central features of New Testament teaching, namely the present reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. We seem to be so intent on telling others that he is to return to reign on earth that we neglect to tell them what the New Testament teaches so clearly, that he reigns now from heaven. And yet this is repeatedly affirmed in all strands of the New Testament and should be at the heart of every disciple's confession of faith.

At the end of his Gospel and as the climax of his Gospel, Matthew shows us Jesus taking leave of his disciples with these words: 'I have been given **all** authority in heaven **and on earth**. Go, then, to **all** peoples **everywhere** and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey **everything** I have commanded you. And I will be with you **always**, to the end of the age.' (Mat 28:18-20,GNB) Although the words 'rule' and 'reign' are not used here by Jesus, it is abundantly clear that he has been put in charge of heaven and earth and what else can that mean but that he rules and reigns over both domains. We should not fail to notice the universality of the language: ...all...all...everywhere...everything...always; his rule and reign is to be all-embracing. Equally, we need to take note that, although he is about to go to heaven, his authority, **all** authority, is to be exercised **on earth**, while he is in heaven. He is about to leave the disciples but wants them to know that he is nevertheless going to be involved in and directing all that they will do on earth in his name; he will be with them always to the end of the age and so chooses to exercise his reign through them.

The phraseology of Jesus' declaration is reminiscent of Dan 7:14 which says: 'He was given authority, honour, and royal power, so that people of all nations, races and languages would serve him. His authority would last forever, and his kingdom would never end.' There is clear evidence that Jesus had Daniel 7 in mind also when he answered the High Priest's enquiry (Mat 26:63) as to whether or not he was the Messiah, the Son of God, with the words: 'So you say. But I tell all of you : **from this time on** you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right side of the Almighty and coming on the clouds of heaven!' Here, Jesus combines thoughts from both Daniel 7 and Psalm 110, implying that they are about to be fulfilled 'from this time on' i.e. from now on. With this strong hint from Jesus himself, how can we fail to conclude from his declaration in Matthew 28 that he is announcing the fulfilment of Daniel 7?

It is Jesus himself who has brought Psalm 110 into the picture, as he did also when previously (Mat 22:41-46) he challenged some Pharisees to explain why it was that David called the Messiah 'Lord'. Following Jesus' lead, the

early Christians made considerable use of Psalm 110 to explain their understanding of Jesus' role in God's purpose. In fact, it is commonly acknowledged that this Psalm is that part of the Old Testament which is most quoted in the New and so we should take great care to check that we really do understand why that should be the case. The use of Psalm 110 in the New Testament was explored in some detail by the present writer in an article published in Endeavour No 86, November 1991. Here it will suffice to take another look at some of the evidence.

In his first epistle, Peter speaks of Jesus Christ 'who has gone to heaven and is at the right side of God, **ruling over** all angels and heavenly authorities and powers.' (3:22) This would seem to restrict Jesus' rule to heaven but Rev 1:5 describes him as 'the faithful witness, the first-born Son, who was raised from death and who is also **the ruler of the kings of the world,**' indicating that his dominion is more widespread than that. John continues by saying that 'He loves us, and by his death he has freed us from our sins and made us a kingdom of priests to serve his God and Father,' repeating Jesus' own teaching that he will exercise his rule on earth through his disciples. In recognition of this and in gratitude for it, John continues with an outburst of praise: 'To Jesus Christ be the glory and power forever and ever! Amen.' Jesus is exercising his power in the same way that he taught his disciples to expect to exercise power in his name, not 'as the rulers of the heathen' (Mat 20:25) do but as servants, 'like the Son of Man, who did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life to redeem many people.' The rule of life in Christ's kingdom is simple: like master, like disciple; service is the way Jesus rules and so it must be the way his disciples rule.

Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians combines references to Psalms 8 and 110 when he says in 1:18-23: 'I ask that your minds may be opened to see his light so that you will know what is the hope to which he has called you, how rich are the wonderful blessings he promises his people, and how very great is his power at work in us who believe. This power working in us is the same as the mighty strength which he used when he raised Christ from death and seated him at his right side in the heavenly world. **Christ rules there** above all heavenly rulers, authorities, powers and lords; he has a title superior to all titles of authority **in this world** and in the next. God put all things under his feet and gave him to the church as **supreme Lord over all things**. The church is Christ's body, the completion of him who himself completes all things everywhere.' It is true that the word 'rule' is not literally in the Greek but this does not alter the sense of the passage, for how can you have all things put under your feet and be put above all rulers etc. and not rule over them? And if the head rules, how can the body not be involved? Like head, like body. It goes without saying that the dominion in question is characterized by service. It is in this very real sense that

we can with Paul give thanks to the Father with joy for giving us a 'share of what God has reserved for his people in the kingdom of light. He rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the kingdom of his dear Son, by whom we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven.' (Col 1:12,13) Again, we are set free in Christ's kingdom for service, as the rest of Colossians makes clear.

All of this has to do with the here and now and not just with the future. This is the way the world is now. **Jesus is King! Jesus is Lord!** These are twin confessions as Peter indicated at Pentecost when he said: 'All the people of Israel, then, are to know for sure that this Jesus, whom you crucified, is the one that God has made **Lord and Messiah[King]!**' (Acts 2:36) Jesus is not merely the *heir* to the throne, for he **is now** enthroned at his Father's side sharing his Father's throne, (Rev 3:21), clearly there as King. Earlier in his message at Pentecost, Peter reminds his hearers that 'God had made a vow that he would make one of David's descendants a king, just as David was.' (Acts 2:30) (AV he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne.) Now, Peter reports that Jesus has been raised from the dead and raised to the right side of God, i.e. to sit on God's throne as Messiah, as King, and that his first action as King is to send the Holy Spirit. What else can Peter be implying other than that this is the fulfilment of the promise to David which he has just referred to in verse 30? In other words, Jesus' ascent to heaven to sit at and reign from his Father's right side fulfils Psalm 110:1, 2 Sam 7:12-13 and Psalm 132:11. Surely Peter is declaring the fulfilment of all the scriptures he refers to in his speech, those already mentioned as well as Joel 2:28-32 and Psalm 16:8-11. Again, Peter says in Acts 5:31 that 'God raised him to his right side as Leader (AV a Prince; Gk *archegos*) and Saviour, to give the people of Israel the opportunity to repent and have their sins forgiven.'

It should come as no surprise to us that the fulfilment is far greater than the prophecies might have led us to expect, for it is characteristic of God that he can and does do far more than we are likely to anticipate. (See for example Eph.3:20,21 and 1 Cor 2:9) Here, the Jewish Messiah reigns not just on David's throne over the Jews but on God's throne over the whole world! This has undoubtedly been the case for the last two thousand years as the evidence already presented here indicates.

Why should we have any problems with this? One regular response is that it can't be true that Jesus is reigning now because of all the evil and wickedness we see around us. But this is just the usual objection of those who say that they just can't believe in God because of all the evil he apparently allows to happen. In objecting to the present reign of Christ on these grounds, we effectively join forces with the unbeliever. We need to have better reasons than this for rejecting what, I would maintain, is so clearly taught in our New

Testament. Are there any such reasons?

It is certainly not good enough to say that Jesus will not begin his reign until he returns to the earth when God will then begin to make his enemies his footstool, for Paul has told us that God has already put all things under his feet (Eph 1:22) and the last two thousand years have seen this working itself out in the pages of history. True, evil and wickedness have continued, wars, rumours of wars, earthquakes and famines persist, the church has been unfaithful, but nevertheless the gospel has made inroads into the kingdom of Satan and victories have been made for Christ. In other words, the Son has been busy bringing the world into subjection to the Father, so that, in the end he may 'hand over the Kingdom to God the Father' (1 Cor 15:24). Meanwhile, the patience and mercy of both the Son and the Father allow the continuance of evil in order to give more people the opportunity to repent and join the household of God (2 Pet 3:12). 'And this Good News about the Kingdom [the reign or rule of Christ, ongoing since he took his seat on the throne of his Father] will be preached through all the world for a witness to all mankind; and then the end will come.' (Mat 24:14) It will be the end and not the beginning, the end that is of the struggle with evil but of course a new beginning of a world that we all have some difficulty in imagining, a world without sin and death and suffering.

It seems to the present writer that we underestimate and therefore underemphasize the significance of Jesus being at the right hand side of God. We have a choice that we can only make on the basis of the evidence provided by the New Testament: is Jesus there waiting for the subjection of his enemies, his Father's enemies, to begin when he returns or is he waiting for that process, already begun, the essential victory having already been won at the cross, to reach its climax? Is it not most likely that the reason for the widespread use of Psalm 110 in the N.T. is that the early church thought that it applied to them in their circumstances? They acknowledged Jesus as Messiah (King) and Lord and took it for granted that he was working with them and through them to reduce the reign of evil in this world and eventually bring it to an end. A careful and close examination of the full evidence will, I believe, confirm this approach.

What do our reader's think?

Crown him with many crowns,
 The Lamb upon his throne;
 Hark, how the heavenly anthem drowns
 All music but its own!
 Awake, my soul and sing
 Of Him who died for thee,
 And hail Him as thy matchless King
 Through all eternity.

First Century Influences on Christianity

Here Margery McGregor concludes her study of influences that may have had some impact on early Christianity.

I have written earlier about the way Jewish thought was influenced by the East (Babylon/Persia), and by the West (Egypt, under Greek domination, Syria also influenced under Greek kings, Greece itself and Asia Minor, and all other countries in the West where Rome held sway). Greek philosophy was the dominant feature even though such philosophy was attacked as subversive from time to time. The important thing was **to be able to think for oneself**, to know oneself, and not just accept what the priests and priestesses said. So God had meticulously set the right stage for the coming of His Son; for Christianity is a calling of individuals, not of nations, as the Jews, nor of city states, as for example Ephesus, where all worshipped Artemis, or Athens, Athena, etc. 'Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved', was hammered home by the apostles.

What then of other influences active at the time of the early church?

The first group we ought to look at should be the **PROSELYTES**, I think. They were, of course, more influenced *by* Judaism than an influence *on* it; but without doubt their thinking would have had an effect on their discipleship. It is suggested that the system of proselytising went back to the time of Moses, and even before him, the theory being that the 'stranger within thy gates' was in fact a proselyte, i.e. a gentile who wished to be associated with Jewish religious observances. (This idea of the stranger should not be confused with the N.T. Greek word for stranger - a foreigner, one with no citizen's rights, a refugee, a wanderer. The Greek word for 'proselyte' means one who comes or approaches.)

There were various levels of proselytes, those who wished to get closest to being a Jew having to be circumcised. The two main types were proselytes of the gate and proselytes of the covenant. When, later, baptism amongst the Jews became an accepted way of inducting a proselyte, then we can understand that the early Jewish Christians would have looked on gentile converts not as equals but as proselytes. We can also understand why they wanted the gentiles to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses (Acts 15:1,5,24). For them Christ was not the end of the Law; he was only superimposed on it: it still retained its full force.

It is also suggested that the Samaritan sect had been proselytised by the Levite who was sent back from exile; and, if this is true, it might account for the fact that, as I have written earlier, Samaritan food was 'clean' and could be eaten by any Jew. (See part 1 of this article and 2K 17:27,28)

As with every human movement, what began well deteriorated until, by

the 1st century AD, the Jews were using force to make proselytes and, where they could not use force, they used fraud and deception. In particular, they tried this on women; and this may throw some light on Paul's warning in II Tim.3:6. When anyone became a proselyte, and frequently, as I have said, by the time of Christ, this was by the rite of baptism, all previous relationships were cancelled: so, incest, brother marrying sister, was not a sin! Many must have felt disillusionment that what they had been led to expect as a clean, pure religion was so corrupted. No wonder Jesus said to the Pharisees: 'You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.' (Matt 23:15).

Now Christianity when first practised was looked upon almost as a sect of Judaism; certainly it was under its 'umbrella'. We have only to read through the Acts of the Apostles to see that the apostles themselves were still devoted to the temple and its rites (Acts 2:46, 3:1, etc.). And while the disciples were seen to be temple worshippers, and while they went to the synagogue, there was no persecution. At first, converts were mainly Jews or proselytes, but the cultures that had influenced Jewry both from East and West soon began to surface in the baby church. We saw previously that there were three main streams affecting the Jews, largely stemming from such centres as Syrian Antioch/Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Rome and its colony-cities. These were also to have an effect on the church.

The Acts of the Apostles shows the growth of Christian teaching affecting Jews, and vice versa. Ch.3.1 shows us Peter and John going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, while ch.4 relates the effect of their miraculous healing of the beggar and subsequent preaching. 'Many who heard the message believed.' Ch.5 tells us that 'all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's colonnade ... more and more men and women believed in the Lord.' So much so that the envy and jealousy shown towards Jesus by the high priest and his associates was transferred to the apostles, and it took the wise counsel of Gamaliel to save them from being stoned.

By ch.6 we read of the Hellenistic, or Grecian, Jewish Christians, and of their complaint about 'racial discrimination'! Stephen and Philip were of their number, Hellenistic Jews, and there was one proselyte. Probably only someone who was not a Palestinian Jew could have made such a devastating speech as Stephen did.

Significantly, a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. But, apart from the Ethiopian eunuch and the centurion Cornelius, most of the preaching was still to Jews, and most of the converts were Jewish, so much so that Peter was criticised for preaching to Cornelius (11:1-3). The first missionary campaign was largely conducted in Jewish synagogues, and it wasn't until Pisidian Antioch that Paul and Barnabas 'turned to the Gentiles'.

Now we have the three groups within the Christian community - Jews, Hellenistic Jews and Gentiles. And what happens? Pharisaic Jewish Christians demanded that the gentiles be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses! Peter's forthright statement: 'We believe that it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that we (Jews) are saved, just as they (gentiles) are,' was revolutionary to Jewish thinking, which held that those born Jews were the elect by right of birth alone. And 'saved by grace' (undeserved favour), and not by works? Such teaching turned the Jewish world on its head, and Jewish Christians were loth to let the Law go. The letter to the Galatians is all about this problem within the church, while the later letter to the Hebrews shows that the danger was still there.

It becomes obvious that the influence of Palestinian Jews in the infant church, and particularly the fact that the apostles largely remained wedded to Jerusalem and the temple in the early days, was nearly disastrous. It needed someone of the mental stamina of Paul to fight it. Jewish Christians, including the apostles, still wanted to take part in the temple worship, although Jesus had told them that something (or someone) greater than the temple had come. They still wanted to attend the synagogues; they just wanted to add Christ to their keeping of the Law. As for Paul himself, yes, he did attend the synagogues, but I think this was firstly to get a captive audience, and secondly to try to assuage his desperate desire to save his Jewish brothers (Rom.10). It took persecution, and finally the overthrow of the temple, really to make the Jerusalem faction understand that the old order was finished. Jesus Christ cannot be superimposed on to the law of Moses; the whole concept had changed.

There is clear evidence that Jewish fellow-Christians were following the apostle Paul about, doing their best to add legalistic Judaism to the gospel of freedom in Christ. Judaism, from both inside and outside the church, was a bad influence; and yet Christian Judaizers, as we might call them, were not excommunicated, nor did they excommunicate. Just as Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes could all be members of the synagogue, so Judaizers, Hellenistic Jews and gentile Christians were all in fellowship. Had the Judaizers won, we might have been keeping all the pettifogging do's and don'ts with which the Jews hedged the Law about. Give thanks to the Father for His wisdom in choosing Paul, and say a prayer of thanks too for Paul's stout-hearted and unceasing defence of freedom for all in Christ. The Law makes for an interesting study: the Law was holy, just and good. But it put up a barrier. God always knew that it was not a permanent thing, it was only valid until the time was right for His Son to be born to call all unto him. 'If righteousness came by the Law, Christ died for nothing!'

It is recorded for us in Matt.28 that Jesus gave a commission to his disciples (the 11, then) to go and make disciples of all nations. We have seen

that they signally failed to do this at first. The fact that the Jews were to lose their prime place as God's chosen people was hard to swallow, even perhaps for the Levite Barnabas. So, eventually, it came about that Paul chose Silas (or Silvanus) to journey with him. Now Silas was a Jew, a leader of the Jerusalem church chosen to take the letter mentioned in Acts 15 to Antioch. He was obviously sympathetic to the gentile cause and the freedom in Christ that Paul preached. He was also a Roman citizen. Of Paul's other main companions, Luke was a gentile, and Timothy a half-and-half! What then were the pagan influences that would beset the gentile churches that these men, with God's blessing, set up?

PAGAN INFLUENCES

One of the first 'schools' we read about was that of the **STOICS** - a philosophic school founded by one Zeno sometime between BC 350 and 250. To call someone a stoic today means that they can endure pain or suffering without complaint; the 'stiff-upper-lip' syndrome. Is this how this philosophy began? Zeno came to Athens at a time when patriotism had decayed and political liberty was lost. His philosophy was one of brave and self-sustaining endurance (so the idea of stoicism has not changed much). This, rising above the general degradation of the times, found willing acceptance among what are termed 'nobler minds'. It was from this upper class that stoicism found its adherents.

The Stoics had high principles of duty and morality, believing in the common humanity of all mankind. They condemned images and the use of temples, regarding them as nothing better than the ornaments of art, but they justified the popular Greek polytheism, and, in fact, considered the gods of mythology as minor developments of the Great World God, while accepting Zeus as the father of gods and men. They were pantheists (god in everything); they said that God was merely the spirit or reason of the universe. The world itself was a rational soul, producing all things out of itself and resuming them all to itself again. Matter was inseparable from the Deity - he did not create; he only organised. He merely impressed law and order on the substance, which was in fact himself. The manifestation of the universe was only a period in the development of God! To them the soul was corporeal, and at death it would be burnt or return to be absorbed in God. So, the Christian teaching of resurrection from the dead would have seemed to a Stoic irrational.

A Stoic accounted pleasure to be no good, and pain no evil: living according to reason he reigned as a king and justified his boasting as a god. But in reality his philosophy was nothing better than an apprenticeship for death - there was no hope in it. And the fruits of its principles were illustrated by the fact that its first two leaders committed suicide! To be fair, this was usually only done as a last resort, because of their opposition to the immoral regime; the

philosopher Seneca, for example, in the first century, was ordered by Nero, his erstwhile pupil, to take his own life. William Barclay makes a wonderful comment on Stoicism: 'they tried to make of the human heart a desert, and call it peace!'

EPICUREANS; To call someone 'an epicure' these days is to describe them as having a discriminating palate for good food and wine. How does this compare with the way the School started? It was founded by one, Epicurus (c.BC 342-270), and the primary principles he laid down were never matured or modified by any other Epicurean.

The philosophy was materialistic; the world was formed by an accidental concourse of atoms, and was not in any sense created –or modified– by the Divinity. The Epicureans had a vague theory about gods, but these were phantoms, dreams which had no objective reality. Their deity, if one existed at all, dwelt apart, in serene indifference to all the affairs of the universe. And yet they taught that you should do whatever good you could today, not trusting in tomorrow, and Lucretius is remembered for liberating people from the fear of death.

Popular mythology was derided, but the Epicureans had no positive faith in anything better. As there was no creator, so there was no moral governor, no form of retribution or judgement: the resurrection would be an absurdity. The soul, to them, was itself a body, or at best an unmeaning compromise between the material and the immaterial. Both body and soul were dissolved together and dissipated into the elements, and when this occurred the life of man was ended. The moral result was described by Paul: 'If the dead rise not, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!' So the highest aim was to gratify self, pleasure the end of all endeavour.

The two enemies with which the Gospel has always had to contend were and are the two ruling principles of the Stoics and Epicureans – **pride** and **pleasure**. Some of the principles of Stoicism did infiltrate the teaching of the early church, particularly the talk of divine reason (logos) immanent in the world, permeating all things, and present also in man. There was no such absorption of the Epicurean philosophy. However, it is possible to see in both movements some of the seeds of modern humanism.

NICOLAITANS;(Rev.2.), the followers of one, Nicholas. The name means 'conquerors of the people' (Dr.Thomas), or 'victors over the people'. Who this Nicholas was we don't know for sure: some have suggested that he was the proselyte of Acts 6, Nicholas of Antioch, but there is no scriptural evidence one way or the other. Irenaeus says the sect claimed him as their founder, but Clement of Alexandria takes the opposite view. The name is said to be the equivalent of the Hebrew 'Balaam' – either the 'lord' or 'master', or 'devourer of the people', depending on the reading and pointing of the Hebrew

word. We can therefore probably link the Nicolaitans of Rev.2 with the Balaam references in Jude and II Peter, and consider one influence and not two.

The Nicolaitans were a sect inside the Christian community. Both II Peter and Jude refer to the profit motive, doing or saying things for money. And the things they were doing or persuading others to do were exactly the things warned of in the letter sent by the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). This letter, as we have seen, was the response to the great controversy which threatened at one time to destroy the unity of the church, namely, were they to give up old friends and associates for fear of contamination? Was there not the risk of eating food offered to idols? And what about the sexual practices of that pagan worship?

The Nicolaitans made their liberty in Christ a cloak for cowardice and licentiousness. In times of persecution they went for expediency rather than faithfulness, being prepared to acknowledge 'Caesar as Lord', and thus denying the true Lord who had bought them. To them these matters were things of indifference. And then, mingling in those pagan feasts, they brought impurity into the young church. There was an imminent risk that the Agape, the love feast, might become as full of abominations as the Bacchanalia of Greece and Italy had been. And all this was done, remember, not simply as an indulgence of a fleshly appetite, but as part of a system, supported by a doctrine, accompanied by a boast of prophetic illumination. The trance of the son of Beor and the sensual debasement into which he led the Israelites were reproduced in the Christian community.

One of the successor groups of the Nicolaitans, known as **PHIBION-ITES**, rejected marriage, and had their women in common. Violently opposed to child-bearing, as stopping the soul going to heaven, they practised dreadful forms of abortion. Their negative attitude to childbearing was shared by a number of unorthodox groups. Does this then throw some light on what is otherwise a difficult statement of Paul in I Tim.2:15?

MITHRAISM, This religion introduced Romans to the idea of a world divided between good and evil, light and darkness (concepts from Persia). It was a man's religion, a soldier's religion, virile, rigorous, with orders of membership somewhat similar to Freemasonry. It had initiatory rites similar to baptism, and a cult of bull sacrifice. Mithraism and Christianity were for a time competitors for the religious affections of Rome.

Then there was the cult of **ORPHEUS**, who was a Greek hero of mythology who sailed with the Argonauts to find the golden fleece. He was notable for being a peaceful, peaceable man, and he sought life from the dead for his wife, Eurydice. Later the cult of Orpheus got mingled with the Egyptian cult of Isis and Osiris which, like Mithraism, included a perspective that looked beyond mundane existence and explored the notion of immortality, with the resurrection of Osiris.

And so we come finally to the great **GNOSTIC** umbrella – perhaps a mushroom is a better word, for ideas popped up in many parts of the Near and Middle East and Europe over several centuries. Dean Inge, in his 'Essay on Religion - the Legacy of Greece' writes: 'If Nietzsche was right in calling Plato a Christian before Christ, I do not therefore regard him as an unhellenic Greek. Rather, I trace back to him, and so to Greece, the religion and political philosophy of the Christian church, and the Christian type of mysticism. The teachings of Plato... are not alien to those of Christ; and the same is true of the Stoics. Heracleitus and Socrates lived in accordance with the divine logos and should be reckoned as Christians (according to Justin Martyr). Clement says that Plato wrote by inspiration of God. Augustine, much later, finds that only a few words and phrases need be changed to bring Platonism into complete accord with Christianity.'

So what did Plato teach? Well, in essence his philosophy is the search for an ultimate reason, an unchangeable essence which lies behind and beyond the outward appearance, and which was invisible, intangible and imperceptible to the senses. Yet it was the true being, and more real than anything perceived by the eye. Now this philosophy inevitably lays more emphasis and importance upon what is not seen, and rejects as inferior, or even bad, the physical and material side of existence. It leads to a picture of man as a creature of two worlds, body and soul, the former corruptible, the latter incorruptible. So man is taught to ignore the body and seek the things that are not mortal. The Jews on the other hand did not see man as a creature of two natures, but rather as a whole body/soul complex, although they did absorb from the Near East a philosophy called 'angelology' which included a descending order of heavenly beings. And they had already accepted the personification of abstract ideas, e.g. Wisdom and the Word. Is John in his Gospel (ch.1) trying to counter this personification of 'qualities'?

Gnosticism really means 'knowledge' -the 'we know' people of the New Testament. Although the 'ism' was not formulated until the second century AD, its incipient ideas had been around much earlier, e.g. the so-called wise of Corinth, the challenge to the supremacy of Christ at Colosse, the emphasis in 1 John upon the humanity of Christ, the denunciation of Jewish legalism and worship of angels in Colossians, and the 'mystery' in Ephesians.

Professor James Dunn (Unity & Diversity in the New Testament) suggests that in the Corinthian church, for example, we can see early forms of gnostic or pregnostic Christianity gaining ground. The tension between meat-eaters and vegetarians, the 'we know' people, the pride of 'we know God and are known by Him', the desire to manifest the showy spiritual gifts, the claim that having been given knowledge they were already perfect, already raised – all these point to later Gnosticism. So, although only half-way through the first

century, the threat is there, not from outside the church but as part of the spectrum of Christianity itself.

To give you some idea of how quickly these ideas permeated the church, here are three thumbnail sketches from sis. Sheila Harris's lectures on the Beginnings of the Church:

'Basileides - who came from Syria, lectured in Alexandria from 120 - 140AD. He taught that the supreme Godhead was unknown and that 365 heavens descended through a graded order of being, of which ours is the lowest and last. The descent from the Supreme Being to the God of the Jews, the Demiurge, involved confusion, which necessitated the coming of the first-begotten Mind, Christ, to bring deliverance by teaching and healing. He was removed without suffering at the crucifixion, when it was Simon of Cyrene who really died. But only the 'spiritual' understand these things.

Valentinus - who taught in Alexandria and Rome about 160 AD, produced a fantastic cosmology of the descent from the Supreme God to the Creator. His philosophy was essentially dualistic, concentrating upon the dichotomy between body and soul, matter and spirit, in which matter is always evil. There is however a spiritual element in some men, which seeks release from the bondage of the body, and a redeemer Christ, was sent to effect this deliverance. He (Valentinus) rejected the Old Testament doctrine of creation and taught that Christ only seemed a man. There was no reality in Christ's death and resurrection.

Marcion - who was born at Sinope on the Black Sea, the son of a bishop, in 85 AD, taught in Rome where he set up schools and churches, and was eventually excommunicated in 144 AD. His clear and incisive mind saw the great difference between the Old Testament and the New. He believed there were two Gods, one a God of justice and judgement and the other a God of love and compassion. He rejected allegory as a way of bridging the gap and expurgated the New Testament of all Jewish elements. He therefore taught that the only genuine Christian texts were the letters of Paul and the Gospel of Luke, excluding the birth narratives and the Old Testament quotations. A rigorous moralist, he insisted upon celibacy and the rejection of wine and meat in his communities. However extreme he may have been, he did have a clear concept of the doctrine of grace.

The fundamental questions raised by Gnosticism, then, which have continued to engage the Christian church ever since, are - the nature of God, of Christ and of the world. Obviously there was a need for a definitive statement of the faith, and hence the canon of the New Testament was established, to which apostolic authorship provided the authority.'

But men love to hatch their own statements of faith, and ultimately through Augustine, an avowed Platonist, the doctrine of the Trinity was born.

Plato's influence is still with us. Those of you who, when young, were fans of C.S. Lewis's Narnia books may or may not remember the last one of the series, 'The Last Battle', where all the goodies die and enter a blissful Narnia, and all the baddies go into darkness. The professor tries to explain to the children the new Narnia they are then seeing, which they could not see before, and he says: 'That was not the real Narnia, it was only a shadow or copy of something in Aslan's real world. Of course it is different, as different as a real thing is from a shadow or as waking life is from a dream. And he added under his breath, 'It's all in Plato, all in Plato: bless me, what do they teach them at these schools!'

So here we have a modern Christian agreeing with Dean Inge and Nietzsche and Augustine, that Plato was a Christian before Christ.

On the face of it, some of Paul's writings could be construed as an acceptance of gnostic ideas, and indeed the Gnostics later claimed him as their apostle. They took such statements as: 'So we look not on things that can be seen but at things that cannot be seen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are not seen are permanent', as support for their philosophy, and it should be a warning to us not to pick out a verse here and a verse there to bolster a pet theory.

Eventually, as we know, the gnostic philosophy did infiltrate the primitive church: flesh and spirit were sundered: flesh was bad, spirit good. And so developed those ways of life and philosophies that brought men and women again into bondage to priest-craft, that debased the relationship between men and women: that took away the liberty that is in Christ, and that negated the perfection of the work of the Lord who bought us, once for all. We must not separate the spirit of man from his flesh: a human being is an entity, body and spirit combined, and the whole self has to be offered in holiness to our Lord and Saviour.

'May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.'

Margery McGregor

**The birth and rapid rise of the Christian Church
therefore remain an unsolved enigma
for any historian who refuses to take seriously
the only explanation offered by the Church itself.
(C.F.D Moule)**

Of Sun-worshippers and Popes

Like most polytheistic and pagan Romans, Constantine had a favourite deity cult, that of Apollos the Sun God. His mother Helena was a convert to the Christian faith but it is not known if that was a factor in Constantine's decision to adopt Christian symbols on the shields of his army as he marched to attack Maxentius in Rome. 'Christos' became one more name among the many 'Gods' in his pantheon. Constantine had no rights by birth to be emperor. The position would have to be won by the sword and his mother would not approve, as Christians at this time were still against violence of this kind. No doubt this was a major reason why Christianity was repressed by warlike Roman emperors; it was treasonable! All this would shortly change however.

Due mainly to tactical blunders by Maxentius, Constantine was victorious, his enemy drowned in the Tiber and he took over the most powerful throne in the world in October 312 AD. Constantine would no doubt be impressed by the powers of his new 'God'. His victory was good news for Christians throughout the empire as they were no longer to be repressed and persecuted. Christianity was now officially tolerated, for Constantine could hardly repress the religion of his mother. Anyway, he was no doubt grateful for his surprising victory. Although Constantine continued as 'Pontifex Maximus', head of the pagan state cult, he instituted a period of religious toleration exemplified by his signing of the edict of Milan in 313. It was to be many years however before 'Christianity' was adopted as the state religion of the Empire. (380 AD)

Constantine looked favourably on the Christian religion and began to style himself 'Bishop of Bishops', although he continued to mint coins with the image and superscription of Apollos and dedicate temples to this same deity in Constantinople. He did however use public funds to erect Christian churches in Palestine. As many rulers were to do later in history, he looked at the Christian religion as a potential force for unity within his empire; unlike the Cults of Rome this new religion was truly international! Unfortunately, the Christians themselves were far from united, doctrinal divisions having reached the point where blood was being spilt. One of the hottest issues was the nature of Christ himself. Some followed Arius in believing that Jesus was a human being whereas others had come to view him as in some way part human, part divine. To this latter group the Arians were heretics. Whatever the theological arguments, it did not suit Constantine to have such a situation persist.

The protection and support of Constantine was crucially important to the Bishops of the various Christian communities at that time as his power was huge and dreadful. He hit upon the idea of calling all the Bishops together for a council to define once for all what all should believe. Despite his great power the suggestion was not welcomed, the Bishops no doubt suspicious of a pagan

warrior who had murdered several members of his own family including his second wife, but free transport and a little 'persuasion' resulted in an attendance of 300 Bishops. Only a handful of Bishops came from the western section of the church and the most notable absentee was Sylvester, the Bishop of Rome. In 325 AD the pagan emperor presided over this 'Council of Nicea' in the great hall of his own palace bedecked in all the trappings of his office.

No doubt this pagan warrior would have been not a little mystified by the to and fro of debate but he allowed discussion to go on until it became clear that the Arian position was preferred by the majority of those present but that agreement was unlikely. Perhaps to show that he was not to be dictated to by the assembled Bishops, he expressed his preference for the anti-Arian position and declared that that was the position which he, as head of the empire, would support. He may also have felt that the power which had helped him to the throne had to be a 'God' in his pagan way of thinking. Those who refused to accept this position were sent home, the others agreed a form of words which accepted Jesus as 'of one substance' with the Father. Nothing was settled however, the various communities of Christians were independently minded and the two doctrinal traditions existed side by side for centuries. It was inevitable however that, with the increasing domination of the Church by the State, the Arian 'heresy' was eventually eradicated by force.

Approaching death (AD 337) Constantine did eventually decide to be enrolled for instruction as a Christian. This was done rather secretly out in the east, near Helenopolis, in the Villa Achyronia and, as a final irony, the baptism was conducted by the Arian bishop Eusebius !

In all the early centuries of Christian history there is no evidence to suggest that the many Christian communities around the world accepted the Church in Rome as having any authority over them. The role (or lack of it) of Sylvester in this story is surely significant in demonstrating that even by the fourth century the Bishop of Rome was not regarded as 'Pope' nor his views particularly significant. Why, if all the church regarded Sylvester as the infallible successor to Peter, was he not even involved in the council? The driving force for the domination of Rome in religion was the State which came to completely dominate and corrupt the true religion of Jesus Christ. The State could claim to be acting in all its many evil exploits, as the agent of Christ, while the corrupt Church enjoyed the protection and support of the State.

The story I was taught at Catholic school of the conversion of 'St. Constantine' turns out to be a pious myth devised many centuries later to conceal some of the uncomfortable implications of the story. How many of those who accept the 'Trinity' today as a touchstone of orthodoxy realise how this idea was elevated to that status ?

Ian Cockcroft

(Based upon information in 'Vicars of Christ' by ex-Jesuit priest Peter de Rosa.)

What do you think of Sundays? Here, in a fictional presentation, Julia Booth explores the mixed feelings of various characters to what is probably a typical Sunday to many in our community.

A Sabbath made for me

The Lovedays were full of the joys of Spring! It was Sunday, always their favourite day of the week, but for Sister Loveday a particularly special one because this time she didn't have to cook. No, soon they would be off on their regular visit to another ecclesia, where Brother Loveday's exhortation and lecture would be well-received and they would be sumptuously entertained in the interim. It was a fair journey but not an unpleasant one and they made an early start, remembering to pack Penelope's flute and Sebastian's trainers, etc. and, of course, the dog. It would be relaxing at the Downwoods'; they remembered from a previous visit that there was a piano, it was a nice area to take Benjy for a walk and the house was homely. They felt so grateful that Penny and Seb. were a credit to them, and that they seemed to enjoy ecclesial life as much as they did, as well as all the social benefits of the 'speaking circuit'.

The Downwoods, however, were not finding the Lord's Day to their liking at all - indeed, no Sunday ever proved to be a day of rest but this was the worst kind. The children were never able to organise themselves properly for the 10am Sunday school (they didn't really enjoy it, so they always played up) and their rooms would be declared disaster areas by Monday morning. Right now, though, Sister Downwood had the dinner to prepare. She thought she'd done most of the work on Saturday night, as always, but there still seemed too little time to get it all just right for entertaining the guest speaker and his family. They might in theory be happy with bread and jam, but that was not at all what they would be expecting!

Brother Downwood was not much help - he was too concerned about his presiding duty, which made him nervous and edgy, and then there was an elderly brother to pick up en route to the ecclesia. It was lovely to be in a position to help him every week, but it meant a fifteen minute detour and an even earlier start to the day. Then there were the Lovedays - they were so knowledgeable and energetic and, to be truthful, a bit bossy. The family were very nice but, well, superior, and entertaining them was stressful. You felt they would notice everything that wasn't quite right, especially the children's rooms! Sister D. knew she would be exhausted by the end of the long day from a combination of duty and anxiety, so she braced herself. It crossed her mind (fleetingly) that if the Sabbath was made for man it most certainly was not made for woman, not at any rate in the present scheme of things, and Monday, even with its disaster areas, seemed a welcome prospect.

Old brother Hopewell was reminiscing. He did a great deal of that

nowadays, hampered as he was by failing sight and arthritic hands and feet, but now he was ready and waiting for the Downwoods to take him to the meeting and he sat by the window, watching all the vehicles heading for Sainsbury's car park. He couldn't make up his mind about Sunday trading; long gone were the days when he might have refused the chance of much-needed cash in order not to profane the Sabbath. It also seemed ages since he'd worked at all, and everyday now was a day of rest for him - he had all the time in the world to reflect on the work of Christ, and Sunday arrangements were just an opportunity to get out of the house. After all, he enjoyed ecclesial fellowship just as much at home, when kind friends regularly called round and sometimes broke bread with him.

He thought how busy everyone seemed to be nowadays, and to what end? What exactly is 'the Lord's work' and is it really the Lord who makes so many demands? Bob and Meryl Downwood always had cheerful smiles for him but never appeared to have a moment to themselves, and what about today's visiting speaker? Everyone had heard of Brother Loveday - he travelled here, there and everywhere, lecturing at bible schools, fraternal gatherings and young people's groups as well as ecclesias, and he sat on various committees, too. The family were obviously coping well, but it was evident that something was missing from their lives.

Perhaps it came as a surprise then to hear what Matt Loveday had to say that morning:

'...For Jesus Christ', he said, 'the Sabbath epitomised everything that provided mankind's well-being - feeding, healing, forgiving - and peace of mind. It made absolutely no demands upon anyone at all, except the priests, whose job it was to make known the words of Ezek 20:12 - "I made the keeping of the Sabbath a sign of the agreement between us, to remind them that I, the Lord, make them holy." (GNB) In fact, the actions of feeding, healing and forgiving which Jesus chose to perform on the Sabbath day are the very works conditional to our own salvation.

We are all familiar with the Sabbath-day incident of Jesus and the disciples plucking ears of corn, but it has been pointed out how Jesus insisted on this occasion that he is not only Lord of the Sabbath but greater than the temple. He was referring of course to the apparent discrepancy within the law which required the priests to work on the Sabbath day, and thereby he drew their attention to the true nature of their job. As the necessary sacrifices were doubled, the priests had extra work, and this reminds us of God's provision of manna in the wilderness.

The risen Christ, our great High Priest, works ceaselessly to provide our spiritual food, but let us not forget that our daily bread only comes from man's hard labours, even when we remember to ask God for it and thank Him for it.

Let us remember also that the Sabbath was for unpaid workers as well as wage earners, servants as well as masters, working beasts as well as man. Don't we, the Lord's servants, earn our rest by giving rest, food by feeding, healing by healing, forgiveness by forgiving, meeting individual needs as we pray God will meet our own? But if we're tempted to dictate how others should live, let us recall that the 'Bread of Life' bade his servants beware the leaven of the Pharisees who placed Sabbath observance above his law of love; he also upbraided those who sought favouritism and greater rewards, and he gently rebuked Martha's frustrated outburst upon Mary...

At the end of the day, when their guests had gone and the debris from teatime had been cleared away, Meryl slumped in a chair and listened to a lone blackbird singing softly and melodiously from the top of their fir tree. Perhaps it hadn't been such a bad day; everyone had been genuinely pleased to see her at the meeting, the Lovedays had been very grateful for everything and the first fifteen minutes of Matt's exhortation had been excellent. Her thoughts had drifted when he mentioned Martha however - they reminded her of the dinner and made her feel guilty. Afterwards, they had spent a pleasant enough afternoon in good company and nothing had gone wrong, but now she felt tired and confused and if she was like Martha - troubled and anxious about unimportant things - it wasn't out of choice; circumstances made her so. Peace was what she'd wanted and it had escaped her. She had made a huge effort to be what she thought others wanted her to be, and this was a burden far heavier than Jesus Christ's. It seemed that only now could she hear his soothing voice reaching out to her - in the song of that blackbird.

As dusk fell, old brother Hopewell reflected on the day's events. He, too, had dined at the Downwoods' (as he often did on Sundays) and pretty well slept the afternoon away in a cosy armchair. Not for him was dog-walking or in-depth discussion on the implications of the 'Millennium'. There was no chance of a quiet chat with Meryl today, though; what a 'Martha' Matt Loveday's wife had turned out to be, endlessly doing and talking and fussing and trying to be helpful! They were all very kind; each had something different to give and he only wished he could repay them. But then he remembered again the risen Christ, who has given us everything - more than we can imagine - and expects nothing in return but love.

Julia Booth.

Make not that wearisome
that should always be welcome.
(Thomas Fuller)

As a community, do we listen to the views of our sisters? Do we allow them and encourage them to express their views? Or do we prevent them from doing so and so discourage them from having views? Do we take into account the extent to which some sisters feel deeply offended by the 'theologies' used to justify the way they are treated? What do you think?

PRIDE

Power, justified in their eyes
by The Book.

'Let women keep silence...'

Ironically we watch
ourselves demeaned.

Offensive, seemingly -
Not just weaker vessels
but unclean.

'Let women keep silence.'

Rosalind Lomas

BONDED

'Neither male nor female.'

Equal - not the same.

But even now
beneath submission's veil
her buried talents die.

Did He not die
that we should *all* be free?

Eileen Edward

Jesus and the Jewish Nation

What did Jesus want and expect to accomplish for Israel by his ministry? Did he achieve his aims or was he prevented from doing so? Ron Coleman explores these issues in the light of ideas first put forward by G B Caird in his Ethel M Wood lecture of 1965 (with the same title). They have since been developed by N T Wright in his Jesus and the Victory of God. 1996

To understand properly the life and work of Jesus it is necessary to go right back to the beginning. All four evangelists agree that the gospel began with the mission of John and his baptism. It may be difficult to think of John's message as gospel (good news) since he predicted a crisis which he described as 'the wrath to come'. The woodsman was about to cut down the unfruitful trees, the farmer had his winnowing shovel in his hand ready to separate the wheat from the chaff. However, the object of winnowing is not to collect chaff to have a bonfire, but to gather the wheat into a granary - the bonfire is incidental. The crisis that John envisaged would determine which Jews should belong to the true Israel. It was no use relying on descent from Abraham, for 'God is able from these stones [*ebnayya*] to make children [*benayya*] for Abraham.' It was conduct which would decide who were to be members of the true Israel. John was summoning the nation to repentance and the sign of that repentance was baptism.

Why then did Jesus come to be baptised? This has caused considerable difficulty, partly due to confusion with (the later) Christian baptism. It seems however that Jesus submitted to baptism, not as a sign of any change in his life, but to show that he was involved in the national life of his people, and was concerned with national policy. What did being 'a chosen people' involve? What did Israel have to do to justify its role as a holy nation in a pagan world? John had made a start in answering that question, but Jesus proceeded to develop a deeper and wider understanding as to how a people of God should behave. The voice from heaven, and the descent of the dove, confirmed his acceptance by God and his authority as His son.

The three synoptic gospels suggest that Jesus spent a comparatively short time in Judaea after his baptism, and that the real ministry began in Galilee. But the Fourth Gospel makes it clear that although Jesus and his disciples did visit Galilee from time to time, he continued to preach in the lower Jordan valley for a considerable period. He was thus at one with John the Baptist in warning the nation that it was facing a crisis, and with even more effect. For John's disciples reported that Jesus was baptising, 'and everyone is going to him.' (John 3:23). John characteristically refused to be upset by this and confirmed that he himself was no more than a precursor of the Messiah. However when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining more adherents

than John he returned to Galilee. This makes it clear that Jesus continued to address the whole nation in the same way that John did. If we appreciate this we may perceive some deeper aspects of his mission that otherwise might escape us.

It has generally been assumed by us that the Kingdom of God he preached was the one that he will establish at his Second Coming. Apart from this being unlikely at a time when there had been no hint of his departure, if we examine what he said we shall be forced to conclude that Jesus was referring to things that were happening at the time he was preaching. As early as in the first chapter of his gospel Mark tells us: 'After John had been put in prison, Jesus went to Galilee and preached the Good News from God. "The right time has come," he said, "and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News." (Mk 1:14,15)¹ And Jesus continued to refer to the nearness, or indeed the presence, of the Kingdom. 'I tell you, there are some here who will not die until they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power.' (Mk 9:1) 'No, it is not Beelzebul, but God's Spirit who gives me the power to drive out demons, which proves that the Kingdom of God has already come upon you.' (Mat 12:28). 'So Jesus said to them, "I tell you the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the Kingdom of God ahead of you."' (Mat 12:21). "'And", added Jesus, "the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce the proper fruits."' (Mat 21:43) 'But the time is coming and is already here, when by the power of God's Spirit people will worship the Father as he really is, offering him the true worship that he wants.' (John 4:23)

Strenuous efforts have been, and continue to be, made to support the belief that these were references to the ultimate culmination of God's purpose with the world. But as George Caird has said:

The debate between those who hold that Jesus declared the Kingdom of God to have arrived and those who hold that he declared it to be [merely] imminent is reducible to its simplest terms when we recognise that the parties to the debate have differently identified the referent. If Jesus was referring to the final vindication of God's purposes in the reign of justice and peace, where the righteous are to banquet with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Mat 8:11; Luke 13:28,29), it is mere nonsense to suggest that this was present on earth when Caiaphas was High Priest and Pilate Governor of Judaea. On the other hand, if Jesus was referring to the redemptive sovereignty of God let loose into the world for the destruction of Satan and all his works (Mat 12:28, Luke 11:20), it makes nonsense of the whole record of his ministry to argue that for him this lay still in the future. And we have only so to state the matter

¹ Quotations are from the Good News Bible translation.

to see that on various occasions Jesus referred to both.²

When we consider the way in which the disciples were instructed to conduct their missionary work we find confirmation that the gospel was about something that could come about immediately. The disciples were to travel light and travel fast. They were not to take with them anything that was not absolutely necessary. They were to greet no-one on the road. This was not because Jesus disdained good manners, but because the usual civilities would take up more time than could be spared. They were to eat anything that was put in front of them and not waste time in enquiring whether the food-laws had been complied with. Nor should they persist in any place that was slow to give them a hearing. They were to go out into the street and say, 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. But remember that the Kingdom of God has come near to you.'

Jesus could not possibly have envisaged that Kingdom as the one we now look forward to, since that will include people from every age. Jesus is here speaking of a kingdom which could include whole *groups* of people, for example all the people in a particular town. He went on to mention individual towns as particularly undeserving: Chorazin, Bethsaida and, worst of all, his own adopted hometown, Capernaum. If Tyre and Sidon, or Sodom and Gomorrah had seen the mighty works that these towns had witnessed, he said, they would have repented. The disciples were not evangelistic preachers sent out to convert individual people. They were couriers proclaiming a national emergency.

What was the reason for the haste? It seems clear that Jesus was expecting the sifting and judgement that John had predicted to come about soon. He was working against time to prevent the end of Israel's world. Israel was at the cross-roads and must choose between two conceptions of its national destiny.

When the Pharisees asked him for a sign (Mark 8:11-13) Jesus replied (Luke 11:29-30) 'How evil are the people of this day! They ask for a miracle, but none will be given them except the miracle of Jonah. In the same way that the prophet Jonah was a sign for the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be a sign for the people of this day.' He went on to explain — 'On Judgement Day the people of Nineveh will stand up and accuse you because they turned from their sins when they heard Jonah preach; and I assure you that there is something here greater than Jonah!'

It is clear of course that the 'Judgement Day' is an imaginary assize and this is confirmed by the accompanying illustration. 'On Judgement Day the Queen of Sheba will stand up and accuse the people of today, because she travelled all the way from her country to listen to King Solomon's wise teaching;

² *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*. G B Caird 1980 p 12

and I tell you there is something here greater than Solomon.' It is the whole nation that needs to mend its ways, not merely individuals. This is confirmed by Jesus' condemnation of the teachers of the law. 'For this reason the Wisdom of God said, "I will send them prophets and messengers; they will kill some of them and persecute others." So the people of this time will be punished for the murder of all the prophets killed since the creation of the world.' (Luke 11:49-51). This cannot be a reference to individual responsibility at the Last Judgement. It is the whole nation which is at fault. Through the teaching of John and Jesus it had been given an opportunity to break with the past. If it refused this chance it must answer at the bar of history for the accumulated guilt of the nation.

The situation was even more tragic because initially it seemed that the nation would heed the warnings. This was when two missions of the disciples (the first of the twelve and the second of seventy-two) were sent out, with the emphasis on hurry. (Luke 10) The latter seems to have been very successful for we read 'The seventy-two men came back in great joy. "Lord", they said, "even the demons obeyed us when we gave them a command in your name." Jesus responded: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."' (vv 17,18) Further on, we read that Jesus was filled with joy by the Holy Spirit and said, 'Father, Lord of heaven and earth! I thank you because you have shown to the unlearned what you have hidden from the wise and learned. My Father has given me all things.' And he went on to congratulate the disciples: 'How fortunate you are to see the things you see! I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see, but they could not, and to hear what you hear but they did not.'

At this point things seemed to be going well. But a little later, (Luke 12:54-59), there is a change of mood and a realisation that victory had not yet been won. For here we have first the parable of the weather signs and then that of the defendant in court. When a small cloud appeared over the Mediterranean, weatherwise Israelites knew that it foreboded rain. If the wind veered round to the south, they expected heat. And so it would turn out. But now, when storm clouds were being driven along by racing winds on the political horizon, they were oblivious to the danger. Jesus was inviting the nation to repent of the national pride which saw its future as a people of God in terms of privilege and worldly greatness. And he then went on to point out that an insolvent debtor would bend every effort to settle his case out of court, rather than end in the utter ruin of imprisonment, when he would be unable to earn any money to secure his release.

Then follows the parable of the fig tree (Luke 13:6-9), quite clearly about national failings, not those of individuals, for the fig tree was a symbol of the nation. The tree in the parable had had no fruit for three years and its owner told the gardener to cut it down. He responded, 'Leave it alone sir, just one more year; I will dig round it and put in some manure. Then if it bears figs next year

so much the better; if not then you can cut it down.' There could be no clearer indication of how Jesus regarded his primary task. But as time went by his hopes continued to fade and increasingly his message becomes more despairing and his view of the calamitous future starker. We have the picture of Jerusalem surrounded by avenging armies, the prediction that not one stone of the temple would be left on another and the words to the weeping women - 'if the Romans do this when the tree is green' - that is when the victim is innocent of political offence - 'what will they do when the tree is dry', (when all Israel is tinder, ready to be ignited by the first spark).

There can be no doubt that Jesus predicted the fall of Jerusalem and that it was the consequence of the rejection of his own teaching. But what was the logical connection between the crucifixion and the fall of Jerusalem? It would be wrong to think that Jesus was portraying his Father as vindictive. Rather we must suppose that Jesus regarded his teaching not just as religion for individuals, although it was primarily that, but as a national way of life which the nation could only reject at its own peril. He laid his finger on the paradox that the Pharisees in their way, and the Zealots even more in theirs, were bending every effort to preserve their nation, but what they were doing was the sure way of losing what they valued. 'He who will save his life shall lose it.' Jesus uttered this paradox more than once, but it seems to apply particularly to the nation. If they wished to save their national life they must lose it in the service of God's Kingdom, following the precepts he had taught them.

Instead, the nation continued on its collision course with Rome. 'The nation' does not of course mean every individual. But the general climate of opinion did nothing to restrain the fanatics who thought that the right thing to do was to challenge Rome. It may be inevitable that we should think that the precept 'Love your enemies' is about personal relationships, and so it is; but it obviously applies over a wider field. Of course the Zealots were far from being the only problem. The Pharisees for their part were bending every effort to maintain their national integrity, but their preoccupation was with ceremonial and outward show, a sure way of losing it. 'He who saves his life shall lose it' fits them as well as the Zealots. If they wished to save their national life they must lose it in the service of God's kingdom. This surely justifies the strictures that Jesus heaped upon them, although he himself did have much in common with those Pharisees who were followers of Hillel. They were not entering the kingdom and, by making the majority of their fellow-countrymen feel like hopeless sinners by their ritual law, they were preventing those who were trying to enter.

It was all this which provoked the anguished cry of Jesus: 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets, you stone the messengers God has sent you! How many times have I wanted to put my arms around all your people, just as a

hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not let me! And so your Temple will be abandoned. I assure you that you will not see me until the time comes when you say "God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord." (Luke 13:34,35)

What would have transpired if Jesus had been heeded and the nation had repented so that he did not have to go to the Cross? There is indirect evidence in Acts (very much a pro-Gentile book) which portrays the church in its early years devoid of concern for the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles. The first Christians were constant attenders at the Temple and appeared to be good Jews. The Pharisees, under the influence of Gamaliel, were at first content with the situation. When, later, Cornelius came into the picture, and the church faced for the first time the prospect of having Gentile members, it was astonished. 'Then God has given to the Gentiles also the opportunity to repent and live!' (Acts 11:18) Does not this seem strange when in the Gospels we find Jesus saying and doing things which implied the universality of the gospel? When he spoke about 'the Son of Man' in the prophecy of Daniel, he was calling up a picture of the figure which Daniel had seen coming on the clouds of heaven, to whom 'was given authority, honour, and royal power, so that the people of all nations, races, and languages would serve him. His authority would last for ever, and his kingdom would never end.'

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem he drew attention to the vision of another prophet who foresaw one who 'will make peace among the nations: he will rule from sea to sea, from the River Euphrates to the ends of the earth.' And when Jesus went on to cleanse the Temple court, he justified what he was doing by quoting Isaiah 56:7: 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.' (Mark 11:17) He frequently spoke of Gentiles favourably — the Queen of Sheba, the men of Nineveh, Naaman the Syrian, the widow of Zarephath, the people of Tyre and Sidon, and even those of Sodom and Gomorrah. Why did not the early church appreciate that their mission should include the Gentiles?

There was a variety of beliefs among the Jews at the time of Jesus about the ultimate destiny of the Gentile nations, and one of these was that some of the Gentiles would have a place in God's kingdom of the future. But it was not thought this would be brought about by Jewish missionary work among the nations. It was something the Lord would do. When the Day of the Lord arrived Israel would first be restored to the righteousness that was proper for the chosen people, and Jerusalem would become a holy city from which the voice of authority would issue to the world. The redeemed Jewish nation would then act as a beacon, drawing all nations to Jerusalem to join in the worship and service of the only God. This was derived from the messages of Isaiah (2:2,3) and Zechariah (8:23), and so at this early time the infant church believed that the return of Christ (which they expected would be soon) would convince their own

nation of the ghastly mistake it had made, and it would be converted. In the meantime they were continuing the work of Jesus with their own people. This is important because it helps us to understand the initial reluctance of the early church to admit the 'Godfearers' (Gentiles who had accepted Jewish belief but had not converted to Judaism) to membership by baptism alone. The time for the Gentiles they thought had not yet come. But if Jesus had been accepted by his people he could have led the nation to a fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies.

The then belief that the coming of the Kingdom depended on the conversion of the Jews is important as an explanation of what Jesus had hoped to accomplish through his ministry, and the reason why he spoke of the Kingdom as imminent, or as present in embryo, and why he was so bitterly disappointed when this proved not to be the case.

It also helps us to understand the true significance of the Cross. This has almost invariably been explained as enabling God to forgive sins in a way that was not open to Him previously because it was literally a sacrifice. But Jesus died because otherwise he would have betrayed his belief, and teaching, that the nation had to repent and forsake its mistaken ways. This was *like* a sacrifice but not *literally* one. It is clear from the Old Testament that sacrifices were offered as tokens of true repentance. It is not that sacrifices in themselves enable God to do what He could not do otherwise. Since Jesus had never sinned he had not to offer a sacrifice on his own behalf. In reality his death was a criminal execution, regarded by the Sanhedrin and Pilate as a political necessity and by Jesus' followers as a miscarriage of justice. But because it was *like* a sacrifice, something offered to God to be used as a service in His purpose, the comparison is a powerful one. That it was only metaphorically a sacrifice in no way diminishes the reality of the Cross. As Leslie Weatherhead said about Jesus: 'His shrinking from the Cross was in no sense selfish or merely personal. It was caused by his sudden realisation of the awfulness of human wickedness as a thing that even he could not deal with in a lifetime on earth. It would take even him an age-long ministry of self-renunciation to achieve man's redemption.'³

We should not think that if Jesus had succeeded in redeeming Israel God's work with mankind would have then come to an end. It is rather that the journey to the end would have been a shorter one under His guidance. Otherwise we would have to regard the centuries that have actually elapsed since then as purposeless. We can see the value of the things we have learned in the difference in our perceptions of the natural world. The prophets regarded bliss as sitting under one's own vine and fig tree and that the natural world would be so changed that, for example, lions would eat straw. Or, alarmingly, that the

³ Leslie Weatherhead. *A Plain Man Looks at the Cross* 1945 p105

moon would be as bright as the sun and the sun seven times brighter than now. (Isaiah 30:26) Today we value the complexity and the marvel of the world as it is, now we have learned to understand more about it. It often seems to be forgotten that the growth of science received its initial impetus from the beliefs of such as Newton, that since it was God's world it was our duty to try and understand it. But the journey is not yet finished. One of the wisest pictures of the future and what it might contain that I have seen, is by the Swiss doctor, Paul Tournier, who likened resurrection to birth. 'The child comes to term in his mother's womb, not knowing anything more about what he will find when he is outside and opens his eyes on life'⁴, which is an analogy of what it will be like to know as we are known.

Ron Coleman

⁴*Learning to Grow Old* 1971 Eng Trans. 1972 p 236

Habit

The story is told of a young man watching his new bride prepare a ham. She cut off each end of the ham before placing it in the pan to bake. 'Why do you cut the ends off the ham?' her husband asked.

'My mother always did it that way,' was her reply.

'Why?'

'I guess it lets the juices out, so you get.... I don't know,' she finally admitted.

Some months later they were at a family get-together. The subject of the ham came up, and the bride's mother said that her mother had always cut the ends off. So they all went to ask grandmother why she prepared hams that way.

'When I got married,' grandmother explained, 'I had only one pan to bake in. An ordinary-sized ham wouldn't fit in it, so I cut the ends off. It just got to be a habit.'

Some things are too important to be left to habit. We owe it to ourselves to understand our faith and grow in it at every opportunity. It is an ongoing task, and it is, for me, an essential part of what it means to lead a Christian life. Notice that when Jesus was asked, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' he quoted Deuteronomy 6:5, but with an interesting addition, according to Mark 12:30: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The phrase 'with all your mind' is not in Deuteronomy. I don't think Jesus' inclusion of it here is accidental (cf. Rom. 12:2).

(A.A. Bell Exploring the New Testament World.)

Fallen Angels

I am sure that I am not the only one to have difficulty with the idea of Jesus going to preach to the spirits in prison referred to in 1 Pet 3:19. Paul Wasson presents us here with, amongst other things, a very plausible solution to that problem. What do you think?

The New Testament contains a number of obscure references to the fate of certain angelic beings who, it is indicated, committed sin and 'left their first estate' and were subsequently imprisoned in chains and darkness until the Day of Judgement. The two passages which have most to say on this theme are 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. Neither in these passages, nor anywhere else in the New Testament, is any attempt made to explain the background to this story, partly because the interest of the writers lay solely in the moral to be drawn from it, and partly, we assume, because their first readers were already acquainted with its background.

The allusions are in fact to a Jewish legend found in apocalyptic writings and based upon the mysterious narrative in Genesis 6:1-4 concerning the 'sons of God' who took to themselves human wives and fathered a race of giants. The same narrative then goes on to describe the universal wickedness of mankind followed by the Deluge, but does not make it clear whether or not this wickedness was caused by these sons of God and their giant offspring. The passage reads like a fragment from a longer story.

Although the rest of the Old Testament has nothing more to say on these prediluvian events, the literature of Judaism written between the two Testaments reflects a considerable interest in the story. Based on Genesis 6:1-4, visionary books, such as 1 Enoch and Jubilees, weave an elaborate story around these errant sons of God and their ruinous descent to earth, for these books consistently understand the term 'sons of God' to refer to angels, members of the heavenly host, and generally speak of them as the 'Watchers' (as in Daniel 4:7,13,23).

1 Enoch 6:6 narrates that they were two hundred in number, who, under the leadership of Semjaza descended upon Mount Hermon in the days of Jared, a name whose root meaning relates to the verb 'to descend'. Jubilees 4:15 indicates that it was God Himself who sent them to the earth in order to instruct mankind 'that they should do judgement and uprightness on the earth'.

Once on the earth however, they had plans of their own. Not only did they take human wives and fathered the race of giants, but also instructed mankind in such mysteries as astrology and enchantments, and in the art of war and the manufacture of weapons. It was even they who taught mankind the use of pen and ink; 'and thereby many have sinned from eternity to eternity and unto this day' (1 Enoch 69:9). As for their oversized offspring, like cuckoos in a nest,

they consumed everything that men could provide for them: 'And when men could no longer sustain them, then the giants turned against them and devoured mankind. And they began to sin against birds and beasts and reptiles and fish and devour one another's flesh and drink the blood. Then the earth laid accusation against the lawless ones' (Enoch 7:3-5).

God's response to this state of affairs was to cleanse the earth with the Flood, while the Watchers who had initiated the evil were bound by seven archangels and cast into a dark and terrible abyss, located, according to Jubilees 5:6, in the depths of the earth, and, according to 1 Enoch 10, in the valleys of the earth. 'Bind them fast for seventy generations in the valleys of the earth, till the day of their judgement and of their consummation, till the judgement that is for ever and ever is consummated. In those days they shall be led off to the abyss of fire: to the torment and the prison in which they shall be confined for ever. And whosoever shall be condemned and destroyed will from thenceforth be bound together with them to the end of all generations.' (10:12-14)

At the end of this period they are to be taken out to an even more horrible place, bound in great iron chains of innumerable weight (54:3-6) and 'cast for ever into a great fire there which burnt and blazed, and the place was cleft as far as the abyss, being full of great descending columns of fire'; and here they will be imprisoned for ever (21: 10).

But Enoch, who narrates these visions, is also given an active part to play in the proceedings. It is he who is entrusted with the task of reading out to the culprits their sentence of condemnation (12:4). It is also he who acts as mediator when they appeal against their sentence, imploring him to draw up a petition on their behalf (13:4). But his intercession is to no avail. The sentence remains: 'You shall have no peace' (16:4). Their final judgement before the throne of the 'Head of the Sheep' i.e. the Messiah, is described in chapter 90: 'They were judged and found guilty, and went to the place of condemnation and were cast into an abyss, full of fire and flaming and pillars of fire' (vv.20-27).

Underlying this legend is the conviction that the forbidden arts, evil and violence came among mankind through a violation of nature; the physical union of the angelic and the mortal. The Flood and the imprisonment of the rebel angels was God's response to a disruption of the proper order of things. Their sin was not that of pride, or usurping the authority of God; it was the opposite, they debased themselves; by taking human wives they assumed a lower status than the angelic.

Other books of the period draw on the same legend, invariably to draw moral lessons from the angelic fall. In the 'Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs' (late 2nd cent. B.C.), a scathing attack is made on the propensity of women to use their beauty to lead men into fornication: 'For evil are women, my children, and since they have no power or strength over a man, they use wiles by outward

attractions that they may draw him to themselves. (And whom they cannot bewitch by outward attractions, him they overcome by craft. . . by means of their adornment they deceive first their minds, and by the glance of the eye instil the poison, and then through the accomplished act they take them captive). For a woman cannot force a man openly, but by a harlot's bearing she beguiles him. Flee, therefore, fornication, my children, and command your wives and your daughters, that they adorn not their heads and their faces to deceive the mind, because every woman who useth these wiles hath been reserved for eternal punishment. For thus they allured the Watchers which were before the flood; for as these continually beheld them, they lusted after them, and they conceived the act in their mind; for they changed themselves into the shape of men, and appeared to them when they were with their husbands. And the Watchers, lusting in their minds after their forms, gave birth to giants, for the Watchers appeared to them as reaching even unto heaven' (Testament of Reuben ch. 5, Charles' Translation).

In this passage there is a distinct change of emphasis. No longer are the Watchers the main culprits, it was the women who were at fault for deliberately flaunting their beauty before the angels. Hence they are used to underline the importance of women not flaunting their beauty in public. In a later chapter in the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, the angelic fall is invoked in a warning against those who deliberately change the order of nature: 'The Gentiles went astray, and forsook the Lord, and changed their order, and obeyed stocks and stones, spirits of deceit. But ye shall not be so, my children, recognizing in the firmament, in the earth, and in the sea, and in all created things, the Lord who made all things, that ye become not as Sodom, which changed the order of nature. In like manner the Watchers also changed the order of their nature, whom the Lord cursed at the flood, on whose account He made the earth without inhabitant and fruitless' (Testament of Naphtali 3:3-5).

This interpretation of Genesis 6 was by no means universally accepted among the Jews. The Rabbis, who could not attribute carnal passions to angels, understood the term 'sons of God' (*Bene ha-Elohim*) to refer to sons of human judges. It is only in the apocalyptic books, not the writings of the Rabbis, that this legend can be found. The Christian tradition from an early date identifies the sons of God with the descendants of Seth, as distinct from those of Cain.

The Jewish story is based on Genesis 6. But many of the details are drawn from elsewhere. In Isaiah 24:21, 22 we read that: 'It shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days they shall be visited.'

We can readily see the similarities between this passage and the fate of

Enoch's Watchers, shut up in a great prison until the final part of their sentence is carried out. Significant parallels could also be drawn between this legend and the Greek story of the battle between Zeus and a race of Titans recorded by Hesiod in his 'Theogony'. In both stories the offenders are overcome, bound in chains and cast down to an underground prison to await their final doom. Hesiod describes how the henchmen of Zeus launched rocks from their strong hands: 'and overshadowed the Titans with their missiles, and hurled them beneath the widepathed earth, and bound them in bitter chains when they had conquered them by their strength for all their great spirits, as far beneath the earth as heaven is above the earth; for so far is it from earth to Tartarus . . . There, by the counsel of Zeus who drives the clouds, the Titan gods are hidden under misty gloom, in a dank place where are the ends of the huge earth.'

The Jewish authors seem to have drawn upon the Greek story using it to elaborate upon the rather scanty narrative of Genesis 6. Even in Jude and 2 Peter the vocabulary reflects the Greek story rather than Genesis. Hesiod speaks of Tartarus, of chains, of gloom. The same terms occur in Jude's account of the angels being 'kept in everlasting bonds under darkness.' 2 Peter says that God 'cast them down to Tartarus and committed them to pits (or chains) of darkness, to be reserved unto judgement' (2:4).

The writers of the New Testament make no attempt to explain the story or identify the Sons of God, but quote it almost in passing, in order to draw a moral lesson from it. Peter puts them alongside the generation of Noah and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to illustrate God's power to save the few whilst judging the many. Jude 6 uses the story in a similar way to illustrate God's condemnation of those 'giving themselves over to fornication and going after strange flesh', and mentions them between the Israelites in the wilderness and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. In the wilderness the Israelites had 'committed whoredom' (Numbers 25:10), the 'sons of God' lusted after human women (Genesis 6:2) and the men of Sodom, in their depravity, had demanded the angelic messengers sent to Lot that they might 'know them' (Genesis 19:5). Three groups who went after strange flesh; three groups who brought upon themselves divine judgement. The object of Jude's concern is 'certain men crept in unawares, ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness (v.4) . . . filthy dreamers (who) defile the flesh' (v.8). Hence his emphasis when citing examples from the past of God's judgement upon that class of sinner.

The book of Enoch also throws light upon a much misunderstood passage in 1 Peter 3:19: 'By which also (i.e. by means of Christ's death and resurrection v.18) he went and preached unto the spirits in prison who sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah.' Much obscurity hangs over the interpretation of this verse because it is generally assumed that the verb 'preached' refers to a message of salvation. In

the Middle Ages this passage became the basis of a Christian myth called the 'Harrowing of Hell', in which Christ descends to the nether regions between His death and resurrection and offers hope and liberation to the saints who lived in Old Testament times. This, however, is not Peter's meaning. The verb 'preached' is in fact a purely neutral word meaning 'to make proclamation', 'to act as herald', and is so used in Revelation 5:2. It could just as easily refer to a message of condemnation. And this is how Peter uses the word. He is alluding to Enoch's mission to read out the sentence of condemnation to the imprisoned Watchers (i.e. 'the spirits in prison'). Why does he bring their fate into a passage about the victory of Christ over the powers of evil? Because his immediate readers were a community who faced persecution and death for the sake of discipleship and Peter therefore reminds them (v.18) that Christ too suffered martyrdom, but rose again. By His death and resurrection He was therefore qualified to fulfil the role of a 'second Enoch', proclaiming defeat and condemnation over the spiritual forces of evil, of which Enoch's 'Watchers' in the days of Noah are an apt symbol and prototype.

Thus his readers may not fear the violence and the evil directed against them, for Christ's death and resurrection has qualified Him to proclaim the final defeat of all the powers which oppress God's people. In v.22, Peter expands the scope of Christ's triumph to include the whole range of hostile powers. The overall thrust of the passage is the same as the 'more than conquerors' section of Romans 8:31f or the reference in Colossians 2:15 to Christ having 'spoiled principalities and powers'.

The Apostle Paul makes very little use of the legend. His emphasis is upon 'angels, principalities and powers' who are still at work in the world. They are not the same as the 'angels who left their first estate', whose malevolence has already been curbed. But there is some overlap in the two ideas. In 1 Corinthians 6:1 he combines with Daniel 7:22 the fate of rebel angels when he speaks of the folly of brother going to law with brother: 'Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world . . . know ye not that we shall judge angels?' The elect too, will share in Christ's triumph over the powers of evil.

Many of the passages in the synoptic Gospels about demons and unclean spirits appear to have their basis in the same circle of ideas. In Enoch's visions evil spirits came forth from the bodies of the giants, and these were not destroyed by the flood, but were allowed to roam the earth and continue their malevolence against mankind right up to the Last Judgement (1 Enoch 15-17). Jubilees gives a slightly different account and narrates how Noah prays to God that the evil spirits who were afflicting his sons should be imprisoned to curb their malevolence, but Mastema, the chief of the spirits (i.e. Satan), intercedes and at his request God allows one tenth to roam freely on the earth. The rest are sent to the place of condemnation (Jubilees 10:9).

This was only one among several explanations for 'demon possession' among the Jews. And it helps to explain the point of the question which the 'legion' of unclean spirits ask Jesus: 'Art thou come to destroy us before the time?' (Matthew 8:29). When Jesus describes the fate of the 'goats' in the parable of the Last Judgement, He says that they shall be 'cast into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matthew 25:41), echoing the fate of Semjaza and his companions in 1 Enoch 54. A similar picture occurs in Revelation 20, in which 'that old serpent which is the devil and Satan' is bound by an angel and confined in a bottomless pit for a thousand years.

What is significant about all these allusions to angelic powers of evil is that they are never mentioned except in a context of their defeat and condemnation. This is one of the ways by which the New Testament sets forth the truth of Christ's overthrow of evil; by drawing upon language familiar to a first century audience. We know that the stories are fictional, but fiction can be used to convey truth, just as the Lord Jesus used fictional stories in His parables to teach His audience. Whether or not the writers of the New Testament believed in the reality of these 'angels that sinned' we do not know and it makes no difference one way or the other; they are a symbol of that which has turned mankind against God, and therefore of that from which, by His death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus has liberated His people.

Paul Wasson

The unexamined life
isn't worth living.
(Socrates)

A wise man changes his mind sometimes,
a fool never.

Ruth

Jennifer Cockcroft here makes a personal attempt to get under the skin of each of the eight main characters in the book of Ruth which she describes as 'one of the greatest love stories ever told'.

'Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.'(Ruth 1:1)(AV)

In an attempt to work out exactly when in the time of the judges this happened, I used Paul's speech at Antioch to help me. He said: 'And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.' (Acts 13:20) This prompted me to add up the periods of rest and unrest in the times of the Judges which, to my surprise, came to exactly four hundred and fifty years. Estimating the time-lapse between the birth of Obed and the reign of King Saul to be fifty-odd years or so, this takes us back to the time of the Philistines whose tactics, as we know, were to starve people out of their lands by destruction and fire. Hence the move to Moab which, in my opinion, was intended to be a temporary one.

Moab was fertile, a land of plenty. It would relieve their hunger and quench their thirst but there were dangers. God had commanded the Israelites to keep away from the Moabites. 'Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all their days for ever' (Deut 23:6) 'Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.' (Deut. 7:3-4) Temporary though the move may have been, death was permanent for Elimelech and his two sons. They never saw Israel again.

1. Elimelech ('God is King')

Elimelech was the head of the household with a wife and two sons to support so, when famine broke out in the land of Israel, he took the decision to move to Moab. Elimelech was not to know that he would die there and never set foot again on his native land where God indeed was King. He was not to know that his sons would marry foreign women. In fact, there is nothing to suggest that the move was intended to be a permanent one, only temporary, until the famine was over when God would once again bless Bethlehem, 'the house of bread', with bread. Finally, Elimelech was not to know that, despite the fact that both he and his two sons would die outside of his homeland, leaving no children, yet his name would nevertheless be kept alive in Israel and be associated with the one, redeeming name of Jesus, through the daughter-in-law he never met, Ruth.

2. Naomi ('Sweetness and delight')

Naomi was a widow when her sons married foreign wives. We do not know how much of a problem this was to her but I think that we can rightly assume that she was content to live in Moab until the famine was over in Israel, even if that meant waiting ten years or so, by which time her two sons had died in their prime, childless.

Those ten years were crucial. During that time, Naomi became so close to Ruth and Orpah that it was a wrench to leave them when the time came for her to go home, once the famine was over. She began the journey with them but it was not long before her conscience dictated that she should give these two young women one last chance to return to their own homes and families. Orpah took it and went back to Moab. Ruth refused it and clung to Naomi. So Naomi came to Bethlehem with Ruth the Moabitess, causing no small stir!

Naomi was very preoccupied with all the misfortune that had befallen her. Not only did she blame it on God but she suggested that her name should be changed to Mara ('Bitterness'). Perhaps it was a cover-up for bringing a foreign daughter-in-law home and a Moabitess at that! Perhaps the truth and reality of her family's disobedience and faithlessness to God now hit her as she faced all those faithful people who had stayed in Israel to brave the hardships of the famine! Perhaps it was because she realised that she had to take on the full responsibility of her family's actions! Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion were no longer there to share the blame. Naomi had to act tough. From that moment she changed, becoming determined and alert, cunning even.

When Naomi heard of the great kindness which Boaz had bestowed on Ruth, she devised a plan which met with her daughter-in-law's approval, a plan which was not without excitement and risk. A secret meeting was to be arranged in the middle of the night between Ruth and Boaz, so secret that not even Boaz was to know about it, a liaison which though dangerous could end with marriage! Ruth was to wash, dress up and cover herself with perfume and to surprise Boaz in the dead of night after he had been eating and drinking, when his resistance would be at its weakest. Nothing untoward would happen but the ball must be set rolling and Boaz made to act quickly! After all, he had shown a tremendous regard for Ruth and she for him and he was a near kinsman, when all was said and done, so why not? How much God had to do with it I do not know. The record does not say.

There was one problem however, in the form of another kinsman who was nearer to Naomi than Boaz! Whether Naomi knew of him we do not know. Ruth was told about him by Boaz. However, Naomi was confident all would be sorted out that day and she was proved right. The kinsman in question refused to marry Ruth which meant that Boaz was free to take her and to redeem Mahlon's property, making Naomi the happiest woman on earth, especially

when, later, Ruth bore Boaz a son, Obed. So, it was a good job after all that Naomi did not change her name to Mara, for sweetness and light followed her to the end of her days.

3. Mahlon ('Sickly')

Fancy calling a first-born child 'Sickly'! Whatever possessed Elimelech and Naomi, or the women and the neighbours, to do it? It's hardly an inspiration to any child! We do not know how old Mahlon was when the family moved to Moab but it must have been a culture shock for the young lad! We do not know how the move affected his faith and belief in God who had caused them to leave home because of famine. It must be hard to trust a God who makes you starve!

No doubt Mahlon was aware that he was breaking God's commandment when he married Ruth, a Moabitess, but when you are in love it's hard to say no. Besides, his father was dead and therefore not around to prevent him. Naomi probably felt too weak and upset to deprive him of the happiness she missed. Mahlon did not become a father – perhaps he knew why – but at least he remained married for ten years and had the opportunity to talk to Ruth about the One True God of Israel before that same God took him away. When Mahlon died he opened the way for Boaz ('Lord of strength'), through whom his name would be kept alive along with his inheritance in Israel.

4. Chilion ('Wasting away')

It would appear that Chilion was the younger son, because Mahlon is named first, but his name is no better, worse if anything. I shall never understand why parents agree to call a child 'Wasting away'! However, perhaps both brothers were sickly and it may have been hoped that the move to Moab might result in a health cure for them.

Like Mahlon, Chilion would have to make new friends and learn a new language in a strange land but at least there was plenty of food. We do not know how much opposition he and his brother met with when they married Moabite women but they must have loved them since they stayed together for ten years before God took them away. I wonder whether Mahlon and Chilion died together or within a short time of one another because, if they did not, then the survivor would have had to go in to his brother's wife and what would Ruth and Orpah have thought of that?

We do not know how much Chilion talked to Orpah about his God, or she to him about hers, but there was a strong bond between them. The family was a strong unit. When Chilion finally wasted away and breathed his last, Orpah was left in a dilemma. At first she did not know whether to follow Naomi or to return to her own family. Chilion had certainly made an impression!

5. Orpah ('Stubbornness')

It would appear that the Moabites were as bad as the Israelites for naming children. How could parents call a new born baby 'Stubbornness'?

How could that command love and respect from their children? Besides, it misrepresents a lady who showed courage, love and loyalty to a family who came from Israel, whose God took away her husband at an early age and who deprived her of children! She loved Chilion. She loved Naomi. She loved Ruth. She wept like they all did but, in the end, Orpah chose to return to her family and who can blame her for that? Orpah had to go home alone. She had lost everyone and everything: a husband, a mother-in-law, a sister-in-law, a brother-in-law and her husband's inheritance... and there were no children. Of all the characters in the story of Ruth, Orpah is the one I feel most sorry for. I only hope that the God of Israel dealt kindly with her to the end of her days. Who knows, she or her family may have been instrumental in persuading the King of Moab to allow David's parents to stay in Moab for a while! (1Sam 22:3,4)

6. Ruth ('Sightly, comely')

We know nothing about Ruth's immediate family. We are told that she met an Israelite with whom she fell in love, Mahlon. They married and about ten years later he died leaving Ruth a widow and childless. We are told nothing more than that, so we can only speculate on the times that Ruth and Mahlon spent together.

I think they must have talked a lot and shared some very interesting conversations. Mahlon may well have regarded Ruth as a lovable foreigner but I feel sure that Ruth would be quick to point out that the two of them came from the same family tree, he through Abraham and she through Lot his nephew! For all we know it could have been Mahlon's one ambition in life to take his bride to Israel but he could not or would not because of the famine or his illness or both. This would also explain why Ruth was so keen to leave her own country when the famine was over in Israel. Perhaps Naomi epitomised all the hopes and dreams she had shared with Mahlon! Whatever the reason, Ruth was determined to go. 'Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest will I die and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.' (Ruth 1:16,17) And so they went to Bethlehem.

I wonder what went through Ruth's mind as Naomi reached home. Why was Naomi so negative? Why was she the talk of the town? Could it be that she, Ruth, was an embarrassment to her because she was a Moabitess who had borne no children? With such thoughts and feelings Ruth set up home with Naomi in Bethlehem.

It was the beginning of barley harvest. Ruth worked hard in the fields and soon attracted the attention of Boaz who favoured her. She could not understand why, since she was a poor foreigner and a Moabitess at that, but she thanked him for his kind words and deeds. One day she gleaned an ephah of

barley. Ruth must have been very strong to carry all that, for an ephah was large enough to hold a man!

She worked in the fields all summer. The sun must have tanned her skin, making her more beautiful than ever, so that when she visited Boaz in the middle of the night, all washed, dressed and perfumed, Ruth must have looked a picture! The moonlight would have enhanced her beauty. She was not afraid to say who she was. Ruth told Boaz everything. Boaz praised her for coming to him rather than to younger men. He offered her love, protection and great kindness, the sort that only older men can give in whom there is a rare beauty. As their great, great grandson was to write after them... 'the hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.' (Prov. 16:31).

Ruth must have been very shocked to hear of the existence of a nearer kinsman, presuming of course that it was the first she had heard of him. Those remaining hours of the night must have seemed endless, as must those hours in the early morning when Boaz contacted the man in question. How wonderful then to hear the news that she had been rejected by the one but accepted by the other! 'So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son.' (4:13) So much love in so few words! In those precious intimate moments Ruth and Boaz opened the way to Jesus, the Son of Man, the Son of God.

7. Boaz ('In him is strength and quick-wittedness')

'And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, "The Lord be with you." And they answered him, "The Lord bless thee."' (2:4) What an introduction! What a man! What must have shot through the heart of Ruth when she saw and heard him! Was it love at first sight? Or was it an admiration and respect that grew and blossomed into love as time went on?

Boaz was a mighty man of wealth who belonged to the family of Elimelech. He was loved and respected by his workers, of whom he took great care. Ruth the Moabitess was both a worker and a member of his family, so she was doubly honoured. Ruth's love for Naomi attracted him! Her love for Israel touched him! Her reverence for God moved him! He heaped kindness upon kindness on her and Naomi interpreted it as love. Boaz called Ruth his 'daughter' which suggests that he was an older man, but then it could have been a term of endearment or a token of love.

One night Ruth was persuaded by Naomi to wash, dress and perfume herself and go to the threshing floor where Boaz would be that night. She must wait until he had finished eating and drinking and then go and lie at his feet. Later when Boaz awoke he was startled by Ruth and frightened. However his mood soon changed when Ruth made herself known. Boaz was won over and he commended her for what she had done. Then the memory of that nearer kinsman haunted him! He must be dealt with at once!

Although Boaz arranged to meet him promptly, the impression is given to us by Naomi that Boaz was slow to come to terms with the problem, which is why she encouraged him this way! Boaz determined to sort out the matter first thing in the morning. He fulfilled what was expected of him to the letter, but who can tell what was in his heart when the nearer kinsman responded: 'I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself, for I cannot redeem it.' (4:6) Boaz must have been overjoyed! Ruth could now become his wife. 'So Boaz took Ruth and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the Lord gave her conception and she bare him a son.'

Boaz lived up to his name, for truly in him was strength and quick-wittedness. Something tells me that he and Ruth lived happily together for the rest of their days.

8. The other near kinsman.

'And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit, there is a kinsman nearer than I.' (3:12) This is the first we hear of the other near kinsman but what a time to tell us, when Ruth and Boaz are falling in love! We are not told his name, (I wonder why?) but we meet him the very next morning in the presence of ten elders at the gate of Bethlehem. Boaz offers the parcel of land to the man who accepts, until he hears that Ruth the Moabitess is part of the deal. Then he withdraws with the excuse that it could mar his own inheritance.

I think the real reasons were ones that he did not wish to voice, all of which, to my mind, were virtuous. Perhaps:

1. He did not want to break God's Law by marrying a foreigner. He'd sooner break a lesser law by passing on his right of redemption to another man.
2. He did not want to die an early death like Mahlon and Chilion. He valued his life too much.
3. He could have been happily married anyway and did not want to get involved with another woman.
4. He did not want to deprive Ruth and Boaz of one another since it was obvious that they were in love.

Boaz probably anticipated the motives behind his actions which was why he did not bring Ruth along. This relative did not deserve to be spat on (Deut 25:9). Neither was it in Ruth to do such a thing; she was a Moabitess, not a Jewess! Above all, Boaz did not want to be hypocritical, for it wasn't in his nature. Whoever this man was, he comes over to me as just and God-fearing. 'Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, "Buy it for thee." So he drew off his shoe,' (4:8) and so completed the transaction. That is the last we hear of him, but who was he? According to the rabbis the near kinsman was Elimelech's brother and Boaz' uncle but, whoever he was, he played a very important part in the story of Ruth. Had this man agreed to marry, then the Book of Ruth would have become a tragedy and not one of the greatest love stories ever told. I think there

are times when Love transcends the Law of God. When this happens God winks at it. I also think that God blessed three people in particular that day: Ruth, Boaz and the other near kinsman. Ruth and Boaz would know their scriptures like we do, better if anything, but how acquainted were they with their own contribution to the following verses? The mind boggles!

'I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre will rise out of Israel' (Num 24:17) and

'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, UNTIL Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.' (Gen 49:10)

Ruth adopted the land of Israel as her own and very precious homeland and so God adopted her. Apparently God was not as bothered about racial purity and involvement with Gentiles as some Jews were and some still are. But would Ruth ever know that through **her** God would send his Son, the ultimate Redeemer? Boaz had indeed redeemed Ruth, but through **her** Jesus would come to redeem the whole world. 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.' (Rom 3:23,24)

No doubt Ruth will be there when the Lamb meets his bride and will remember how her love story contributed to his.

Jennifer Cockcroft.

*The vile, the lost, He calls to them,
You trembling souls, appear!
The righteous in their own esteem
Have no acceptance here.*

*Approach, you poor, nor dare refuse
The banquet spread for you;
Dear Saviour, this is welcome news,
Then I may venture too.*

*If GUILT and SIN afford a plea,
And may obtain a place;
Surely the LORD will welcome me,
And I shall see His face.*

*William Cowper
1731-1800*

Paths Old and New

Ian McHaffie remembers two journeys into the past, and some lessons he learned from them

Paul and Barnabas preached the Good News in Derbe and won many disciples. Then they went back to Lystra, to Iconium, and on to Antioch in Pisidia.(Acts 14:21 GNB)

How far was it from Derbe to Antioch? Over 100 miles according to the map. How did Paul and Barnabas travel? Presumably on foot! Then it was another 100 miles to the coast. The distances are passed over in a single sentence. We could do it in a few hours by car, but by foot? People in the past were accustomed to long walks. Alan Witcutt tells of his grandfather, Archie Mackay, who used to walk from Motherwell to Strathaven, about 13 miles uphill, exhort and lecture at the ecclesia there, and then walk back.

Two years ago, in 1997, I thought it would be a good idea to do a long walk, to get some feeling for what it was like in the past. My idea was a walk along the line of the Roman Wall from the Forth to the Clyde: about 40 miles. I was not sure if I could do it, not being accustomed to much walking. Averil, not happy at the prospect of my walking on my own, said she'd come too! I agreed - happy with her companionship - but I secretly thought, 'That's done it. We'll have to give up after the first few miles.'

We planned well ahead but on the day we had decided to start, it was pouring with rain. I was all for calling it off. 'Let's start tomorrow instead,' I suggested. Averil said, 'No! Let's go!', and so we set off. We started at Bo'ness on the Forth and walked 10 miles that day. I wore walking boots with double socks whereas Averil insisted on wearing ordinary shoes. We did much the same for the next three days, until we reached the Erskine Bridge on the Clyde, where the Antonine Wall finished in Roman times.

Two things soon became very obvious. Firstly, I had trouble with my boots constantly, and kept taking them off and adjusting and refitting them. Averil, by contrast, wore her ordinary shoes and had no problem at all! Secondly, Averil - who had had a hip operation some years ago - might be slower, but she could keep going. My scepticism about her progress had been totally unfounded and this made me think that I should not be so quick to prejudice what others are capable of doing.

Buoyed up by our success on the Antonine Wall, we thought in 1998 of walking some of Dere Street, the Roman Road built about AD 80 from York into Caledonia by Agricola the Roman governor of Britain. Again we managed about 40 miles in four days. Day one went fine, from Inveresk near Musselburgh on the Forth and south to Pathhead. We had Bed and Breakfast there. Averil was

more tired than I, but both of us were all right. Day 2 also started fine. I could walk faster than Averil, but we both made good speed. I had a heavy pack, but that was OK, and Averil had her stick for going up hills. Three things Averil doesn't like on walks are fences, bulls, and bogs. I don't much like bulls either, but fences and bogs don't worry me. I can climb fences no bother, and with my boots and my ability to jump from one dry clump to another, I can get across boggy ground without getting wet or falling in. I've always been moderately proud of my athletic ability to jump and climb! However, after jumping off a few walls looking for signs of the Roman road, I developed a sore left knee. I remember hurting it when I was a teenager running up stairs in flats in Leith Walk when I was billing. Then a few years ago it got sore when I walked along Hadrian's Wall with pupils at school. But this time it was much worse. For most of the second day, I used Averil's stick and we completed the last half mile, me limping along with the stick and Averil carrying my heavy pack on her back!

Now, some obvious lessons:

'Pride leads to destruction, and arrogance to downfall.' (Prov 16:18)

'Do not think of yourself more highly than you should.' (Rom 12:3)

The lessons apply in spiritual terms, not just physical. We are all weak, and can be cut down by circumstances. There is no place for us, therefore, to look down on another as if we are immune, as if we can do better. There is no place to look down on others as less spiritual than we are, or less good in God's sight. 'Whoever thinks he is standing firm had better be careful that he does not fall.' (1 Cor 10:12) I was brought down to earth with a bump and learned a lesson in humility.

Equally, we need to help each other to overcome difficulties. I was only too grateful to have Averil's help in carrying my load - quite literally. Gal 6:1-4 is very apt:

'My brothers, if someone is caught in any kind of wrongdoing, those of you who are spiritual should set him right; but you must do it in a gentle way. And keep an eye on yourselves, so that you will not be tempted, too. Help to carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will obey the law of Christ. If someone thinks he is somebody when really he is nobody, he is only deceiving himself. Each one should judge his own conduct. If it is good, then he can be proud of what he himself has done, without having to compare it with what someone else has done. For everyone has to carry his own load.'

We can't go the Christian life alone. We need each other. In hospital, people are grateful for cards from the meeting. We each have individual problems, but others have been there before, and can understand and help. This is exactly what is expected of us as followers of Jesus: 'Help to carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will obey the law of Christ.' (Gal 6:2) We have to ask for help, or our need may not be known. We shouldn't suffer in silence,

when help could be offered and helpfully received.

But it is also true that in some respects we cannot receive human help for 'Everyone has to carry his own load.' (Gal 6:5) This became literally true for us when we were crossing bogs. Normally, I would have held Averil's hand and helped her and did to begin with. But when my knee had become very sore I could scarcely hobble across myself and certainly couldn't support Averil. Sometimes, we have to do things on our own, without the human help and companionship we would like to have ... yet we are never entirely on our own: God is always there in the background.

'Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful Father, the God from whom all help comes! He helps us in all our troubles,' (2 Cor 1:3-4) but this trouble has value: ... 'so that we are able to help others who have the same kind of troubles, using the same help that we ourselves have received from God.' (2 Cor 1:3-4b) When you have been through something, you can help others in turn. My sore knee will in future make me have greater understanding and sympathy when with pupils who have sore knees, next time I take them along Hadrian's Wall. In deeper terms, those who have suffered tragedy are in a position in turn to help others similarly afflicted.

On our third day, not managing to find a suitable bandage, I tied a sock round my knee with safety pins and managed to continue. More lessons came to mind:

(a) We were walking along an old dismantled railway line. Things looked smooth on the map - long, easy, straight but all overgrown. We couldn't be sure of what was ahead of us. Life's like that. There are some easy stretches, some hard. Once we had to turn back and make a detour: there was a field of corn across the old railway! Persevere and you'll get there in the end.

(b) The power of nature reminded us of the power of God. Disused roads soon become overgrown. Plants force their way through tarmac. Railway tracks have grass three foot high! Nature dwarfs human things and, from a distance, human things look small. Edinburgh looks minuscule from Soutra. The earth is just a globe in the sky when looked at from the moon! How great is God by comparison!

(c) Driving in a car you miss the small things, the beauty of nature, the detail of creation, the prettiness of flowers. These are all good reasons for leaving the car behind from time to time.

(d) On our normal high-speed travel we miss contact with life, growth, death, the cycle of the year, - so obvious when walking through the countryside and seeing, for example, lambs, sheep being sheared and dead animals.

(e) Batting a path through undergrowth makes it easier for someone else, just as setting a good example can help others. We were able to read the Bible at each

B & B – but didn't need to carry it with us. Why not? Because there were Gideon Bibles in every B & B. Thanks to the Gideons for their good example and their practical help! We were reminded to be grateful in other ways too: beside our route we saw man-hole covers, telephones, electricity cables, gas pipes, water pipes, drains. People have built these services up over centuries, beginning with the Romans and their roads, roads which also helped the Gospel to reach us.

On the fourth and last day, we arrived at our destination: the Roman Fort at Newstead near Melrose, once the most important fort in Scotland, but now hidden under a field! On the site is the small town of Newstead. It was advertising 'Open Gardens Day', with funds raised being shared between Amnesty International/Trimontium Trust. We were pleased as we are supporters of both. The Trimontium Trust is a local history society. It runs an exhibition on the Romans and a series of lectures which we enjoy attending. These fit in with our historical interest and our school work, and fill in some of the background to the Apostle Paul and his journeys, and the world in which Jesus lived and worked. Amnesty International on the other hand is a world-wide organisation which appeals to our religious and moral interests, and after we returned home, two things reinforced those interests. Firstly, I looked through our post and being on holiday had time to read my copy of the Amnesty International Monthly Magazine. I was struck by the contrast between the conditions people suffer from oppressive regimes or from miscarriages of justice, and the freedom and safety we had enjoyed on our peaceful and pleasurable walk from Edinburgh to Melrose. Secondly, and connected, I was struck by the message of Isaiah last Sunday morning. I was presiding and the exhorting brother quoted several sections of Isaiah. And there the message to those who seek to follow God is clear: Isaiah 58:6, 58:9b; Isaiah 59:15-16.

'The kind of fasting I want is this: Remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of justice, and let the oppressed go free.'

'If you put an end to oppression, to every gesture of contempt and to every evil word...'

'The LORD has seen this, and he is displeased that there is no justice. He is astonished to see that there is no one to help the oppressed.'

God works in many ways; but one of those ways is through people who stand up for what is right and in an evil world seek to carry out His will. The message of the Bible, repeated time and time again, is that true religion is concerned with how we treat other people. God protects and cares for those who are downtrodden, and one of the ways He does it is through those who put this protection and care into practice. So we went home from the Breaking of Bread and did as Amnesty International asked: we wrote letters on behalf of various named individuals, whom Amnesty considers to be unjustly treated,

imprisoned or tortured, and appealed for their release. Writing a few letters is no great deal, but when lots of people do this, it does seem to have an effect.

Finally, there are two short passages which back up the lessons from our walk. The **first** is in Jer 9:23,24 where the LORD says:

'Wise men should not boast of their wisdom, nor strong men of their strength, nor rich men of their wealth. If anyone wants to boast, he should boast that he knows and understands me, because my love is constant, and I do what is just and right. These are the things that please me. I, the LORD, have spoken.'

The **second** is in Matthew 20. The Roman Wall we walked in the summer of 1997 and the Roman Road we followed last summer were both marks of the power of heathen rulers and their desire to dominate others: Jesus referred to such people in this passage:

'So Jesus called them all together and said, "You know that the rulers of the heathen have power over them, and the leaders have complete authority. This, however, is not the way it shall be among you. If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest; and if one of you wants to be the first, he must be your slave - like the Son of Man, who did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life to redeem many people.'" (Mat 20:25-28)

Let us remember our Lord who was humble, who bore our burdens, who understands us and can comfort us because he knows what it is to suffer. He appreciated nature and the world his Father created. He went ahead of us on the journey. He brought freedom from the oppression of sin, and set an example of service, love and compassion which has inspired people to follow him and to dedicate their lives to God *through* him for 2,000 years.

Ian McHaffie

Take my voice, and let me sing
Always, only for my King;
Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from thee.

(Frances Ridley Havergal)

Studies in Ecclesiastes

(Part Nine)

Chapter 5:10-20, dealt with last time, considers many aspects of the dangers and harm arising from personal riches. The following section, 6:1-9, continues that general theme but broadens it. It is fascinating to observe the development of ideas through the two sections. First, in 5:10-17, the acquisition and enjoyment of wealth are looked on as simply an aspect of human activity, and the possibility of adverse effects comes in as simply facts of life and matters of chance. But in vv. 18-20 God appears as the one who gives life and the ability to acquire and enjoy the benefits of wealth. Now in 6:1-2 the scenario of a man becoming rich is repeated in different words, and this time it is God explicitly who both grants the wealth and then prevents the owner from enjoying it, because some one else takes possession of it. Note that this time the case is heightened because the man has 'honour' (so, correctly, the AV) as well as riches, though the actual circumstances whereby the wealth (and honour) passed to another person are not described. The stress is that God gave, and then God took away and gave to another. The 'stranger' (REB, as elsewhere in this article) is not necessarily a foreigner as Qoheleth uses the word. This is then 'futility and a dire affliction.'

The following verses 3-6 take up a different kind of blessing. Many children and a long life were traditionally in Hebrew thought considered signs of God's favour on the person; see, for example, Deut. 7:13 and the cases of Abraham (Gen. 25:7-8) and Job (Job 42:16-17). But, continues Qoheleth, if a man has no enjoyment of life despite these blessings, and even receives no burial, then his case is worse than that of a stillborn child. Such a child has no experience of anything and is born only to non-existence. As such it has no expectations and no disappointments. In contrast, to have the outward marks of God's blessing, but not to enjoy them is a great frustration. And the lack of burial—something extremely rare in Hebrew life—would be the final mark of humiliation. So, the conclusion is, to live 2000 years without enjoying them is worse than being a stillborn child, since both have the same end. This is incidentally further proof that the author has no sure concept of a life after death.

The remainder of the chapter, vv. 7-12, reads like a summing up of all the points made up to this point, and certainly ch. 7 seems to begin afresh. The author's frustration is expressed first in the psychologically very perceptive observation that people strive most to satisfy their physical needs, though these needs cannot be permanently satisfied but need constant replenishment. This pungent remark is of course an exhortation to the spiritual life and to the cultivation of wisdom. But the author then asks what benefit wisdom has over folly, and what benefit the poor man has (obviously in contrast with the rich

man) for all his experience of life. The REB's 'for all his experience' abbreviates the Hebrew, which is rendered literally in the AV as 'that knoweth to walk before the living.' The point is that living as a poor person exposed one to many risks from which the rich were protected by their well-built houses and their servants. This situation still persists in many societies. Poor neighbourhoods are often crime-ridden and those living in them learn to avoid some of the risks. But, argues Qoheleth, even this meagre advantage in the battle of life is of no ultimate use. Wise man, poor and fool alike share a common end.

V.9 adds a point to the previous observation on wealth. It is better to enjoy what you have rather than fantasize over better things you may never acquire.

Vv.10-12 reach the fundamental conclusions. They begin with the maxim 'Whatever exists has already been given a name.' The name here is not simply an identification tag, but is a hypostasis of the being. Thus in the Garden of Eden all the animals were brought to Adam to receive their names (Gen. 2:19-20), in other words to be assigned their functions and places in the Garden. This section then, begins by affirming that the status quo on earth is fixed and immutable. Humanity has its place, and cannot argue with God. One must not, the author continues, imagine that human argumentation can change the ordering of the universe. So the facts of our existence make it difficult to prescribe a correct course for human conduct during the brief spell we pass here on earth. As to whether there could be something after this life, the author has no knowledge. He does not affirm here that there is no future beyond death, but he insists that he does not know.

Wilfred Lambert

CREATION

Booklet

In recent issues of *Endeavour*, Wilfred Lambert has written a series of three articles on **Creation** dealing with some of the problems of understanding the first three chapters of Genesis. He has used his first-hand knowledge of the documents and of comparable literary traditions from Israel's neighbouring cultures in order to help us to make sense of these chapters. These articles were published in December in the form of an A5 booklet of twelve pages. It is still available for sale at the price of £1 including postage.

Cheques should be made payable to *The Endeavour Magazine* and orders should be sent to Les Boddy, 14 Meadow Drive, Healing, Grimsby. DN41 7RU
(Tel: 01472 882376)

Bookshelf: Don Carson's *Exegetical Fallacies*

In the previous issue of *Endeavour*, Wilfred Lambert concluded a book review with a plea for a higher standard of biblical exposition in our community. This is a timely challenge to us as we look to the problems and opportunities that the new millennium will bring, should our Lord remain away. It would, of course, be unreasonable to expect works from Christadelphian authors (or, at least, the vast majority of them) to rival the contributions of professional commentators in terms of breadth of scholarship and attention to linguistic detail. Most of us who write and speak on biblical topics are, after all, amateurs. By this I mean that it is very rare for Christadelphians to pursue courses in universities or Bible colleges where aspiring preachers and teachers can (theoretically, at least) acquire a professional grounding in the history of theological debate and become versed in various methodological approaches to Bible study.

Etymologically, an amateur is a lover. Although this sense of the term is largely absent from modern English, traces of it still remain in certain sporting events (such as the F.A. Cup) where amateurs motivated solely by their love of the sport occasionally make it through to the final stages and play on equal terms with the professionals. Despite their inferior skills and reputations, these amateurs sometimes prove superior to professional opposition because the skills they *do* possess are successfully combined with a high degree of passion, enthusiasm and commitment. It is to be hoped that all Christadelphian exposition of Scripture is amateur in this noble sense of the term, i.e. grounded in a deep love of God and His Word.

Unfortunately, amateurs can too easily become amateurish, i.e. their efforts can be clumsy and uninspiring, more likely to elicit groans of disappointment rather than cheers of approval. If amateurs are aware of their shortcomings and do not pretend to be what they are not, their amateurishness will be far more readily tolerated. But when amateurish amateurs take themselves too seriously and prize their imagined abilities too highly, the results can be somewhat embarrassing.

How can we, as amateurs, avoid amateurishness in our handling of God's Word? Some things are obvious: we must approach the object of our study prayerfully and with reverence; factual assertions should be checked against reputable sources; we should read broadly so that we are aware of the diversity of opinions that exist on a particular subject, if we have no knowledge of the original languages in which the Bible was written, it would be best to avoid entering into debates that depend upon linguistic arguments; and we should not present as certainties what may simply be suppositions on our part. This is really just common sense, but it is amazing how often common sense deserts us when we put pen to paper or open our mouths to discuss the Bible.

There is, however, an extremely helpful little book which I would strongly recommend to all those interested in 'rightly handling the word of truth' (2 Tim. 2:15, RSV), and it is to this that I now (somewhat belatedly) turn.¹

Don Carson's eclectic survey of exegetical fallacies covers four main areas: (i) Word-Study Fallacies; (ii) Grammatical Fallacies; (iii) Logical Fallacies; and (iv) Presuppositional and Historical Fallacies. In each chapter he lists a number of typical errors into which both scholarly writers and popular preachers can fall. His examples are drawn from a wide range of sources (including his own work) and, although there is nothing here from Christadelphian authors, one would not, I fear, have to venture very far in our literature before finding numerous examples of the kind of mistakes he exposes.

The chapter on Word-Study Fallacies provides useful warnings for those of us who appeal to etymology and 'root meanings' (as I did earlier in my comments on the word '*amateur*'). As Carson points out, 'we cannot responsibly assume that etymology is related to meaning. We can only test the point by discovering the meaning of a word inductively.' (p.31) He asks, for example, whether '*apostolos*' necessarily carries the meaning of 'one sent', whether '*monogenes*' always has the sense of 'only begotten', and whether there is any intrinsic semantic distinction between '*agapao*' and '*phileo*' (both translated in English Bibles by the verb '*love*'). The author also reminds us, among other things, that different New Testament writers may use the same words in rather different ways and that it is fallacious to assume that one writer's usage will necessarily illuminate another's. If this chapter is the longest in the book, it is because word-study fallacies are so common. As the author puts it:

'many preachers and Bible teachers know Greek only well enough to use concordances, or perhaps a little more. There is little feel for Greek as a language; and so there is the temptation to display what has been learned in study, which as often as not is a great deal of lexical information without the restraining influence of context. The solution, of course, is to learn more Greek, not less, and to gain at least a rudimentary knowledge of linguistics.' (p.66)

Although Carson states that his study 'is not a highly technical discussion', neither is it of an introductory nature, being 'designed for seminary students and others who take seriously their responsibility to interpret the Scriptures' (p.22). Some of the chapters therefore contain material which

¹ D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1984). A second edition is now available, but, unfortunately, I have only had access to the first edition. While on the subject of bibliographical information, I should point out that a new edition of Larry Hurtado's *One God, One Lord* (discussed in the previous issue of *Endeavour* has recently been published by T. & T. Clark (Edinburgh, 1998).

depends (for example) on a working knowledge of New Testament Greek. This is particularly true of the chapter on Grammatical Fallacies. Here the author points, among other things, to the false conclusions that can sometimes be drawn from the use of the aorist and the presence or absence of the article in the Greek text.

Despite their rather forbidding titles, the chapters on Logical Fallacies and Presuppositional and Historical Fallacies are more accessible to the general reader than those which deal with words and grammar. Given the vastness of the categories, Carson can do no more than cover a few of the bases. The general exhortation is to read carefully (i.e. try not to make the text say more or less than it actually does); to construct arguments precisely (i.e. not to make unwarranted assumptions or jump to unprepared conclusions); to avoid selectivity in the evaluation of evidence; to eschew unthinking appeals to 'authority'; and to be aware of our own socio-cultural (let alone theological!) prejudices when approaching the Bible.

The four chapters outlining specific fallacies are all useful, but perhaps the most thought-provoking part of the book is the Introduction in which Carson emphasizes both the importance and danger of his study. The importance first of all:

'This study is important because exegetical fallacies are painfully frequent among us — among us whose God-given grace and responsibility is the faithful proclamation of the Word of God. [...] We are dealing with God's thoughts: we are obligated to take the greatest pains to understand them truly and to explain them clearly. It is all the more shocking therefore to find in the evangelical pulpit, where the Scriptures are officially revered, frequent and inexcusable sloppiness in handling them.' (p. 12)

One need only replace the words 'in the evangelical pulpit' with 'from the Christadelphian platform' for the message to be brought uncomfortably close to home. The following words require no substitution; they are immediately applicable to our own community.

'It is all too easy to read the traditional interpretations we have received from others into the text of Scripture. Then we may unwittingly transfer the authority of Scripture to our traditional interpretations and invest them with a false, even an idolatrous, degree of certainty.' (p. 14)

Carson is refreshingly candid as to the potential dangers of his book: 'persistent negativism', he rightly states, 'is spiritually perilous', being 'highly calorific nourishment for pride'; 'Spiritual one-upmanship is not a Christian virtue' (p. 19). But then neither is ignorance (p. 20). We need to adopt the humble position of *learners* (to pick up the theme of the editorial in the previous issue of *Endeavour*), aware of our own limitations, yet committed to the loving correction of bad or weak arguments.

Sometimes such arguments may be put to us by those who do not belong to our community. But we are just as likely to encounter them within the Christadelphian world. Which brings us back to our starting point. If we are honest, not all the arguments advanced in the name of our community are water-tight and some are decidedly leaky. The new millennium would be a good time for each of us to take a critical look at our heritage and review what we find in relation to biblical principles distilled from honest exegesis.² In part, this will mean examining what those from other Christian backgrounds are currently writing and saying. Examining, that is, with an open mind, rather than operating on the assumption that such people *must* be wrong since they do not belong to our community. Where necessary, we need to be prepared to acknowledge fallacious or tendentious arguments and to publish new perspectives that may emerge from more careful exegesis.

To answer a question posed in Les Boddy's December editorial, there are certainly things we can learn from other denominations, both in matters of faith and practice, just as there are no doubt things they could learn from us. But, if we dismiss other believers as 'so-called Christians' and the churches to which they belong as 'apostate Christianity', it is unlikely that we shall view the learning process as anything other than a one-way street. And this, I think, could prove deleterious to our spiritual development, as there can be few more potent generators of exegetical fallacies than a closed mind.

Paul Cooke

²Cf. John Thomas's 'Rules for Studying the Scriptures', quoted by Ruth McHaffie in the December 1998 issue of *Endeavour*.

To love money unfairly gained is wrong
and to love money fairly gained is shameful.
(Epicurus)

How much better to get wisdom than gold.
To get understanding is to be chosen
rather than silver.
(Proverbs 16:16)

Book Review

Jack Balchin, *Sitting with Job. Reflections on the Man and the Book.*

Pp. iii + 202. 1998. Rhoswel Books (Rhoswel Lodge, Weston Rhyn, Oswestry, Shropshire). £5.00.

This book began as four lectures to the Christadelphian Oxford Conference in 1997, which are now expanded into 15 pp. of introductory matter, seven chapters (104 Pp.), 35 pp. of notes to the chapters, and an excursus of 42 pp., with concluding list of charts and Bibliography.

The last item illustrates what is quickly discovered from reading even a few pages, that, unlike many recent Christadelphian writers, this one had read and digested a wide range of standard works on the subject by non-Christadelphian authors as well as the few Christadelphian productions. He has made independent use of them all and is to be congratulated on the general sobriety of his conclusions. He writes lucidly and forcefully, always following the wording and contexts of the book under study so far as they are clear. There are of course many difficult passages in the book due to obscure wording, and where appropriate the author indicates the doubts or refrains from pressing any conclusion.

No opinion is offered on the authorship and date of the book, though the '30 centuries' which slip out on p.106 seem to imply a preference for a date of composition about 1000 B.C. The general structure of the book as a whole is pressed into service with perhaps a few too many charts documenting it. The importance of this matter, however, is not to be doubted, and from it (and from other reasons) it is concluded that there is some disorder in the present text of the book toward the end of the rounds of speeches, in chs. 27-28. The speeches of Elihu are accepted as an integral part of the book, despite the passing over of him in the rest of the book. Elihu, it is argued, essentially repeats some of the arguments of the three friends, adding a few new emphases and points. He means well though much of what he says is wrong. As to the general answer of the book to the problem it has raised, the author follows the book. No direct answer is given to the question why the innocent Job suffered. The greatness of God is such that puny man should not challenge his maker.

For some students of the book the problem of this lack of answer is alleviated in some measure by Job's occasional glimpses (as claimed) of future life by resurrection and of help from the Messiah. 'I know that my redeemer liveth . . .' in ch. 19 is the best known of the passages. The author devotes the whole of his 42 pp. Excursus to the topic 'Resurrection Hope and Messianic Expectation.' He is certainly correct that the contexts of all the claimed passages and the general argument of the speeches of Job, and indeed of the whole book, strongly oppose the idea that Job had some inkling of these ideas. The passage in ch. 19 is extremely obscure, and the A.V. rendering imposes a

very explicit interpretation on words which do not bear it. For once the A.V. is not translating the words that stand but is adding substantially to them. The author's case could be strengthened by noting that the N.T. nowhere quotes these passages, which would have been very useful in arguments with Jews if they were then accepted as referring to the Messiah and resurrection. While some Church Fathers, from Clement of Rome at the end of the first century A.D. and later, do use the passages for this purpose, there are others who do not, though they quote Job on other issues.

Thus the content of this work can be recommended for those wanting a guide to the study of this difficult book. But we cannot pass over the form and other external aspects as the book appears. The lectures were given in August 1997, and the book appeared in 1998. A longer gestation period was needed. The author states that his book is not 'a verse-by-verse commentary...only a running commentary at best' (p.5). Even that claim could be questioned and perhaps 'Studies in Job' would have been a better title. All the matters a commentary of this size could cover are in fact covered, but not in the sequence of the book. The speeches are dealt with by speaker: those of Eliphaz first, etc. This has its benefit of bringing out the character of each speaker, but is not so helpful for those studying the scriptural book in its own order. The page of contents gives the pages of the chapters of the modern book, but does not indicate which chapters of the ancient book are covered by the modern chapters and the running headings along the tops of the pages give the modern chapter numbers only. The result is—to take the extreme case—that any reader interested in the passage in ch. 19 of Job has to refer to three places in the book—none easily located—to find the author's material. The typography too is out-of-hand. There is too much underlining and boxing of headings, and much inconsistency. Also afterthoughts are inserted in the text within square brackets. A good copy-editor should have worked with the author to prepare the MS.

While the material generally is sound and worthy of study, details of course can be challenged. The author discusses whether the book of Job is drama without defining or making clear what he means by the term. On p.6 it is asserted that the name Bildad 'may combine Bil (cf. ba'al = Lord) and Adad,' but the middle consonant of ba'al cannot simply drop, and the meaning of the name is not certainly known. On pp. 102, 109 and elsewhere it is claimed that Leviathan in old Canaanite myths was 'a seven-headed sea dragon' and that it 'swallowed the sun at the time of an eclipse.' The seven heads depend on a doubtful interpretation of an Ugaritic passage, and there is no ancient evidence to support the swallowing of the sun. On Syrian seals from the first half of the second millennium B.C. Baal is shown spearing Leviathan, who is there a twisting snake, exactly as he is described in Isaiah 27:1.

Wilfred Lambert

Letters to the Editor

From Bill Davison:

May I please reply to Ron Coleman's comments on 'Are the Jews still God's people and witnesses?' to which he gives an emphatic 'No'.

Despite the fact that the Jews were responsible (along with the Romans) for the crucifixion of Jesus, which opened up the way of salvation to Gentiles, nonetheless, they remain God's chosen people:

Isaiah 45:17 - 'But Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation; you will never be put to shame or disgraced, to ages everlasting.'

Further, I think our brother is ignoring the historical fact, that the Jews have returned to Eretz Israel in fulfilment of Bible prophecy:

Ezekiel 37:21-23 - 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land ... I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God.'

Over the years, I have spent a fair amount of time in Jerusalem, discussing with Rabbis the implications of the Return to the Promised Land, and the next event to them will be the Coming of HaMashiach. for which they are waiting in considerable expectancy.

This we believe will be the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Return of the Jews to their Lord, is inseparably linked with the Return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Land. He is coming as King of the Jews (and Gentiles) to reign from Jerusalem. and to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. We too should be waiting in high expectancy for this event:

Matthew 23:39 - 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

Ron's reply:

Bill Davison does not seem to realise that his quotation from the New Testament is fatal to his argument. Jews generally, particularly in Israel, are no nearer saying about Jesus 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord' than they were in the days of his earthly life. If this is a sign of Christ's return why should 'We be waiting in high expectancy for this event'? Neither in Israel or elsewhere do the Jews generally show any sign of expecting Jesus to return. Israel relies more on its nuclear capability than on God for its national survival. Bill Davison's friends can only be an insignificant minority.

It is often overlooked that there was no barrier to the Jews returning to

their own land in the time of Christ. They were exceptionally well treated throughout the Empire by the Romans at this time, as Bo Reicke showed in his book *The New Testament Era* (1968). In grateful repayment for the assistance rendered by Antipater and his troops (together with the Jewish population in Alexandria) when Julius Caesar was besieged there (BCE 48-47) he granted a series of privileges which were continued by his successors.

'In many places within the framework of their synagogues, the Jews were allowed to exercise their own jurisdiction, hold communal banquets and establish communal financial institutions - in short, to enjoy a legal and commercial, religious and social, freedom of movement that was exceptional in the Greek cities ... and in the Roman Empire because of the law against association promulgated in 55. One should not overlook the significance this freedom was later to have for the spread of the Gospel, which took place in and through the synagogues of the Diaspora, including their membership and adherents. No wonder that when Caesar was assassinated in 44, of all the foreign nations the Jews mourned at his grave with special fervour.' (Reicke pp 88, 89)

The reason why the Jews did not wish to return to their own land was that they were happy and prosperous where they were. (*Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, J C M Barclay. 1996, pp 1, 2). In any event the land of Israel could not have supported them for there were more than twice as many Jews in the diaspora as in Palestine. (There were about a million in Alexandria alone.)

It does not seem to be appreciated that the idea of setting up a national home in Palestine did not originate with the Jews.

'Traditional Jewish thought held that Zion would be restored only when the Messiah would arrive. On the basis of such verses as Psalm 147:2 ('The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers together the outcasts of Israel'), it was envisaged that the Ingathering of exiles to Zion (prophesied in Isaiah 43:6 and elsewhere) would only occur after the Advent of the Messiah. Until the early nineteenth century ... the view prevailed that the people of Israel should wait until the Advent of the Messiah before returning *en masse* to the Land of Israel; this advent itself would come about only with the spiritual return to God (teshuvah - repentance). (*Jerusalem for Christian Zionists*.. Margaret Brearley p 181; in *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*. Ed P L Walker 1992)

What brought about the change in this view, and the consequent growth of Zionism, was the anti-Semitism of the second half of the nineteenth century,

Our traditional view that the return of Jesus would be to rescue Israel from the Gogian invasion prophesied by Ezekiel is now incredible. There was no divine intervention to save the 6 million Jews who perished in the holocaust,

a greater number than the present population of Israel.

Bill's reply

'I agree that the Jews are not expecting the advent of Jesus, but religious Jews worldwide, are looking for the coming of Messiah, whom we know to be Jesus. When the disciples were wavering in their faith, as to their eternal well-being, Jesus reassures them: 'You which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Matthew 19:28). The location of rulership is the Promised Land, with the disciples presiding over the regathered tribes of Israel. The regenerated world is spoken of not just in the Old Testament - Isaiah 1:25 - 2:5, 11:1-16, 65:17-25; but also in the New Testament - Romans 8, 19-23, Revelation 21:1 - 22:5.

Prior to his ascension, the question is put to Jesus: 'Lord, will you at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?' (Acts 1:6). I think that Jesus' reply implies that self-rule will be restored to the nation, when he returns, but: 'it is not for you to know the times and the seasons' (Acts 1:7). Contrary to the teaching of Replacement Theology, that the Church ('New Israel') has replaced the Jews as God's people, the Kingdom will be restored to them, the only question is when, and not even Jesus knew the answer to that (Luke 13:32)!

Brother Ron says, 'It does not seem to be appreciated that the idea of setting up a national home in Palestine did not originate with the Jews.' That is quite true, but God Himself originated the idea: 'Hear the word of the Lord, O you nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd does his flock' (Jeremiah 31:10). God will not welch on His promise, because he 'loves Israel with an everlasting love' (Jeremiah 31:3).

Editor

It is evident that both of the above contributors arrive at different conclusions on this matter, both on the basis of their understanding of the Scriptures and of events that have happened in history. What appears to lead them to different conclusions are the wider issues of the interpretation of both the Scriptures and of history. We all need to be cautious about saying what we think God might have in mind for the future, given the following facts: that the Jews were not very good at foreseeing God's plans; that the first disciples were also slow to appreciate where Jesus was leading them; and that the last two thousand years have been littered with false expectations and our own community has not been exempt from this phenomenon.

If other readers would like to contribute to the discussion, please send your letters to the editor.

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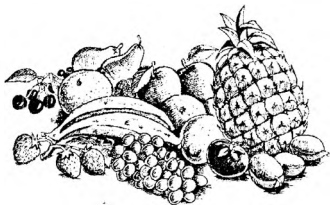
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*The fruit of the Spirit is love,
joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness,
goodness, faith, meekness, temperance:
against such there is no law.*

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No 102

The Endeavour Magazine

For Christian Thought and Action

December 1999

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Sacrifices

Recent issues of two Christadelphian magazines have contained articles on the use of animal sacrifices again after the return of Christ. It is difficult for many of us to accept this idea, not least because the New Testament appears to have nothing to say about it. The major issue would seem to be how we understand the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. This is explored in some detail with particular reference to prophecy in Ron Coleman's article on '*The Old Testament in the New*', later in this issue. Here, the question of sacrifices will be the focus of this editorial.

To begin with, there are clear discontinuities between the two testaments. Sacrifices themselves present us with a clear example; what was in some sense appropriate in O.T. times is no longer so. Even the Jews have had to learn to live and survive without them. The use of weapons in pursuit of the purpose of God is another clear example. O.T. saints believed that they were doing God's will by killing their (God's) enemies but, following the teaching of Jesus, we refuse to do so. The coming of Jesus has brought a clearer understanding of how God intends to achieve his purposes and it does not involve his people in the use of human methods and weapons. The death of Jesus on the cross was meant to show us that 'sacrifice', of a different kind to that practised under the Old Covenant, was to be the way that God would win the victory over evil. God having given such a clear demonstration of this by the death of His Son on the cross, it is difficult to believe that this revelation was meant to apply only to the 'times of the Gentiles' and that we should expect literal animal sacrifices and the possible use of arms by God's people both to be reinstated at the return of Christ. That this is most unlikely to be the case is suggested by the New Testament writers who, to a man, show no knowledge of such a development in the purpose of God, even though there was more than enough opportunity for them to share such wisdom with their first readers and with us. Was this discontinuity truly meant to be just for a season or was it meant to be forever? I think that all readers of this magazine will be agreed that neither animal sacrifices nor the use of weapons of war will form any part of life in eternity. The point at issue is whether it is reasonable to expect another reversal with regard to these matters at the return of Christ. It seems to me that it is somewhat hypocritical to accuse other churches of being unfaithful to Christ because of their willingness to take up arms now, in pursuit of a holy war, when we are prepared to contemplate taking up arms ourselves at the return of the King of Love.

An examination of the passages in the N.T. referring to the return of Christ shows that they make no mention of such an outcome. The defendants of this view never quote Jesus, Paul or Peter in support of their case because they cannot. This fact alone should excuse anyone for being suspicious that there is some special pleading going on here. Virtually all the evidence put forward in

support of future animal sacrifices and of possible use of arms in the service of Christ comes from the O.T. Once again, it is clear that the issue is that of continuity /discontinuity between the two testaments.

Now, it is easy to demonstrate that many people of Jesus' day found him difficult to understand. His fellow Jews had access to the same scriptures that he referred to and so how is it then that they were apparently unable to understand him? Didn't all Jews believe the same things? Apparently not, but they all studied the same scriptures and had their different views about how God would fulfil his promises to them. It is clear that Jesus' understanding must have been different otherwise why didn't they all follow his lead? The only sensible reason that can be given for the fact that Jesus had to spend so much time teaching about the Kingdom of God is that his views were so different from those of his compatriots that he had to keep teaching about it, in the hope of finally getting through to them. If Jesus' view had coincided with that of his compatriots and could have been read simply, in a literal manner, from passages of the O.T. that they were all familiar with, then there would have been no need for him to be so insistent about what they would effectively have already understood.

On the contrary, it is clear that his views **were** different and that he had a difficult task trying to persuade even his own disciples. The Gospels are full of evidence suggesting that their understanding came only slowly and he warned them that there was much more for them to learn that would only become clear after his death, resurrection and ascension. Luke makes it clear that some of this re-education happened on the road to Emmaus and during the forty days that Jesus spent with his disciples teaching them about the Kingdom of God before he went to his Father. We can be sure that he was not simply making them reread their scriptures in the same sense that they had always done so. Luke makes it clear that Jesus had to show them how to understand the scriptures as **he** did. There were many ideas circulating among the Jews as to how God would bring in His Kingdom, how He would reign, and Jesus wanted his disciples to share **his** view. His statement to Pilate saying that 'his Kingdom was not of this world' should be sufficient warning to us that we need to be careful not to assume too quickly that we understand what he meant, especially if it leads us to gain our understanding from O.T. passages that Jesus never refers to and we simply read them in a matter of fact way assuming that we have understood them as he would. If that is what we do, we do it without confirmation from Jesus that we have truly understood his mind. Our approach should be to let Jesus speak for himself and so tell us what **his** understanding of the kingdom is and not force on him our own understanding of O.T. kingdom passages when we have no direct evidence to confirm that that truly reflects his own mind.

The problem of understanding the O.T. continues in the book of Acts. In chapter 13, speaking to the Jews of Antioch in Pisidia, Paul says of the people

who live in Jerusalem and their leaders that 'they did not know that he (Jesus) is the Saviour, nor did they understand the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath.' (v. 27) The leaders and people of Jerusalem no doubt **did** feel that they understood the prophets, as Saul no doubt did before he met his Lord, but there is clearly a Christian understanding of the prophets that not all Jews would be prepared to embrace because it did not match up to their expectations based on **their** understanding of the O.T.

The same issue raised its head in Galatia. Assuming that Paul's critics were Jewish converts to Christ, it is clear that they presented Paul's Gentile converts with an argument based on their understanding of certain passages from the O.T. and which they hoped would persuade the Galatians that in order to be fully and truly children of Abraham, in order to be heirs of the promises, they still needed to be circumcised as Abraham had been. Paul, however, had his own understanding, culled also from O.T. scriptures, but which was so different that he called their 'gospel' a false gospel, no gospel at all. It might well have been good news for Jews, for it effectively pressurized Gentiles to become Jews in order to be true sons of Abraham, implying that the blessings of God were still to be kept within the family, excluding Gentiles unless they agreed to join the family and take on what was nothing less than a Jewish way of life. Paul was insistent that the time had come, (here is another discontinuity), when it was no longer appropriate to continue maintaining the distinction between Jew and Gentile. He advised his Gentile converts that they should not be persuaded, even by arguments from the O.T., perhaps especially by arguments from the O.T., to throw in their lot with the circumcision party in order to obtain a status which, in his eyes, they already shared and enjoyed to the full as a result of their faith in Christ, and only by their faith in Christ. He told them that if they were in Christ (as they were in his eyes) then they **were (already)** children of Abraham and **would** receive what God had promised, (Gal.3:29), despite what others had no doubt been telling them, that they would be excluded if they were not circumcised.

Here, incidentally, is another discontinuity. Circumcision was appropriate before the time for faith came (Gal.3:23) but not any more and particularly not for Gentiles. Those who wanted them to be circumcised, were trying to force them to do so in order to show off and boast about external matters. They do it, says Paul, only so that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ, (6:12). For Jew was persecuting Jew and largely because Christian Jews were fraternising with Christian Gentiles. If the Gentiles could be persuaded to be circumcised and so become Jews, there would be less reason for the non-Christian Jews to engage in persecution. Paul was adamant for he said: 'I will boast only about the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ [and not about circumcision]; for by means of his cross [and not by circumcision] the world is dead to me, and

I am dead to the world. It does not matter at all whether or not one is circumcised; what does matter is being a new creature.' (6:14,15). Paul had earlier asked the Galatians if they had received God's Spirit by doing what the Law requires or by hearing the gospel (**his** gospel, not that of his opponents which was not good news for Gentiles) and believing it. (3:2) For Paul, his Galatian church had already become new creatures in Christ by receiving God's Spirit as they responded to the gospel. The Spirit was the guarantee that they would receive what God had promised and they had no need of any other guarantee, least of all circumcision, which would involve turning back to those 'weak and pitiful ruling spirits' of the old order. (4:9) And yet, if we are to follow the O.T., understood in a particular fashion, not only will we have animal sacrifices again, the possible taking up of arms, but also a Levitical priesthood and circumcision. And all this apparently under the rule of the Prince of Peace, the King of Love who went to the cross to rescue mankind from precisely such shadowy forms of service to God. There surely has to be another way of understanding the O.T. which does not involve us in proposing a state of affairs which would be an embarrassment to Jesus, as he is revealed to us in the N.T., not to say an insult. These discontinuities that we have noted are surely not meant to be temporary.

As far as sacrifices are concerned, the letter to the Hebrews should clinch the matter. The argument seems to be that Jewish Christians should not turn back but go forward. (Heb.6:1-3) Jesus is presented as better than the angels, Moses and Aaron, the new covenant as better than the old, and a new priesthood is needed with new 'sacrifices' to accompany it. The old is presented as having been temporary and the new as permanent. If ever there was an opportunity to remind the first readers and us that there would, of course, come a time when Jesus would have to reinstate an essentially old covenant, levitical priesthood with accompanying animal sacrifices together with circumcision, then here it is, but the opportunity is not taken. Nor is it taken in the book of Revelation where it would have been even more appropriate to give us such a reminder. To argue that it is not done because it is already clear from the O.T. that these things would be reinstated is to beg the whole question when the silence of the N.T. suggests another answer, that it illustrates in several different ways, that Jesus brought to an end the old order and brought a new understanding of how God was going to continue fulfilling his purpose with mankind. There is no hint anywhere in the N.T. that this would involve taking retrograde steps by reintroducing what Jesus put an end to on the cross. We need to let Jesus tell us how to understand the O.T. and not let our understanding of the O.T. force views on Jesus for which we have no evidence.

What do our readers think?

Intimations of the Cross

We are exhorted to have the mind of Christ. But however sensitively and reverently we attempt to probe the inner depths of the Master's mind, we can acquire only a glimpse of his intimate thoughts and intentions, inspired continually by his prayerful contact with his Father. The temptations in the wilderness give some insight into a possible interpretation of his mind – the awareness of power, potential and possibility and already the confidence in deliverance from death.

John the Baptist had indeed broken up the fallow ground by calling the nation to repentance, but the prophetic visions of Jeremiah (chapter 31) and Ezekiel (chapter 36) had already prepared the way for an awareness of a deeper, higher relationship with God – personal, spiritual and individual, a cleansing of the heart and mind to create a new, indwelling spirit of love from a heart of stone. And this was the purpose and calling of Jesus, to inaugurate a new era of spiritual experience – the 'kingdom that is not of this world'.

But the way to it was not through the external reform of prophecy, the moral regeneration of forgiveness and cleansing, but rather through a new indwelling power, through the very abiding presence of God himself. And this necessitated the total offering of life – the perfect life uplifted in spirit through death and resurrection to lift others to the throne of grace. The cross was the supreme evidence of God's ultimate love for man, the redemptive power by which we turn to acknowledge our need, our weakness and our failings and so to present our emptiness for His filling of grace and spiritual fulfilment, for which Jesus came to redeem us and make us indeed the children of God, by giving his own life for us, that he may truly dwell in us through his spirit (John chapters 14,15 and 16. Ephesians 3. Romans 8.).

Sheila Harris

But in our time Jesus Christ, who was crucified and died,
rose again and, ascending into heaven, began to reign;
and on account of what was proclaimed by the apostles
in all nations as [coming] from him, there is joy for those
who look forward to the incorruption which he has promised.
(The First Apology of **Justin the Martyr**, 42., 155AD)

Theories of atonement stand or fall by the concept of God implicit in them, and if their expression is at variance with the nature of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, they must be rejected.

(**Frances Young**)

Jubilee 2000

It is about forty years since the 1959/60 World Refugee Year led some in our community to try to raise our awareness of the basic needs of many people in the poorer countries of the world and to challenge us to do something about it. The first issue of Endeavour published an article looking back on W.R.Y. and commenting that the need is still there. It is still with us today and Joan White now tells us of a new initiative with similar aims.

About five years ago, when people were first seriously thinking that the year 2000 had some celebratory significance, and before most of us had heard of a proposed 'Millennium Dome', a letter appeared in the Guardian. It proposed that Jubilee – another word being used regarding the significant year 2000 – had not only Christian but also pre-Christian significance, and therefore any celebration of this millennium would best be marked by following the pattern of the Old Testament Jubilee by cancelling the debts of the world's poorest nations. The interest being paid on these debts to the World Bank and the IMF is so crippling that, as things stand, these poorer nations are unable to climb out of the spiral of increasing poverty and debt. Meanwhile, the world's rich nations continue to take all the interest due.

Over the following months, people from many religious and caring backgrounds came to feel committed to the idea that these debts must be relieved – and thus JUBILEE 2000 came into being, the campaign getting under way in 1996. Its inauguration as a publicity agency began in Birmingham in 1998 when about seventy thousands of caring people met to demonstrate the strength of feeling behind this new movement. At this time, the leaders of the G8 industrialised nations were in Birmingham for several days of meetings and policy-making. Jubilee 2000 believes that these nations hold the key to debt relief and so the vast crowd of their supporters formed a human chain several miles long around the G8 Summit Meeting to call on them to break the chains of debt. Petitions were presented to them containing millions of signatures. The chain was formed at about 3pm accompanied by the blowing of horns (jubilee and otherwise!), clapping, the ringing of all the City Centre church bells and much other joyful noise. The City Police acknowledged that despite the thousands of cars, coaches, and folk from every part of Great Britain, they had not one associated unlawful incident to deal with.

Petitions pressing for the cancellation of debt continue, and this year saw a similar hugely moving demonstration/celebration centring in Cologne as the G8 Heads of State met there in June. 35,000 were there, trying to persuade these leaders to give countries who have no chance of repaying their debt a chance to start afresh in the new Millennium.

So – how much was achieved? Well, as one would expect, they did not drop the whole debt! But progress was made: a \$70 billion reduction in the total debts of the poorest countries and an agreement to sell ten million ounces of IMF gold stocks to help finance the debt reduction package. A World Bank spokesperson is quoted as saying: ‘The pledges made by Clinton and Brown would not have happened without the Jubilee 2000 campaign. It is one of the most effective global, lobbying campaigns I have ever seen.’

Since the Cologne G8 Summit in June, there have been three crucial developments. The first was a strong statement from the Pope calling for urgent and decisive action. Then Gordon Brown, at meetings of the World Bank and the IMF in Washington, unveiled a new deal for the ‘heavily indebted countries’, a \$23-billion package to back up the pledges made at Cologne. Lastly, President Clinton has formally announced the willingness of his administration to write off 100% of the debts owed to them by the world’s 36 poorest countries, provided that the necessary restraints on the possible misuse of the funds made available are in place. This announcement has been welcomed with great enthusiasm by Jubilee 2000, and they will no doubt now try to persuade the other 7 nations to follow suit.

For many people, the feeling individually of being so totally inadequate and unable to help the misery of the grinding poverty in which so many of the world’s inhabitants exist has now been somewhat transformed. Something **can** be done. Most people involved have found a wonderful sense of fulfilment in this attempting to assist God’s work in God’s world. We know that there is much more to the debt problem and the struggle of the poorer nations to compete with us, the rich nations. And we know that achieving equality and justice is not possible in man’s strength alone. Nevertheless, we are all individually moved to respond in our different ways to the many scriptural calls to **us** to love justice and mercy and to speak up for the poor and afflicted.

Many religious and other organisations feature in the list of supporters of Jubilee 2000 but sadly not our own community. If you are interested and would like to learn more about Jubilee 2000, why not write to them at:

Jubilee 2000 UK Coalition, 1 Rivington St., London. EC2A 3DT

Joan White

*Speak up for people
who cannot speak for themselves.
Protect the rights of all who are helpless.
Speak for them and be a righteous judge.
Protect the rights of the poor and needy.*

Proverbs 31:8-9

Studies in Ecclesiastes (Part Ten)

Wilfred Lambert continues his study of Ecclesiastes by considering the first 12 verses of chapter 7. Biblical Quotations are from the Revised English Bible (REB) unless otherwise stated.

With chapter 7 there is a new start in the book, both in form and content, though continuing the general trend of the writer. The form here is based on traditional Hebrew proverbs such as those found in Proverbs 10-22:16, that is short independent sayings, each with a point, but not necessarily related in content to those immediately preceding or following. They were the proverbs circulating orally which would be quoted orally when the situation called for one of them, like the English 'Pride comes before a fall.' At times the compilers of collections of this material attempted to arrange them by some principles, and one of these principles was to group together those sharing a key word. That principle lies behind chapter 7:1-14. Verses 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, and 11 all begin in the Hebrew with the word *tôb*, which unfortunately can mean either 'good' or 'better' (often with a particular nuance) and English style often does not permit its coming first in the sentence. Also v.14 has this word as the second in its sentence. This technique thus supplies the stylistic cohesion of the section, but it is clear that Qoheleth has expanded a group of popular proverbs with his own elaborations, and despite superficial diversity of thought a line of reasoning is developed.

The first verse: 'A good name smells sweeter (Heb. *tôb*) than fragrant ointment, and the day of death is better than the day of birth,' no doubt offers a common Hebrew proverb in the first half. Its meaning is not, however, altogether certain. The REB as quoted takes *tôb* to mean 'sweet', which is entirely possible, and this fits the ointment, but then it has to assume a *double entendre* in the word, since its 'better' in the second half is not in fact present in the Hebrew, but is repeated in the English from the adjective in the first half. The AV with its literality makes this clear: 'A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.' Thus only doubtful ingenuity allows the meaning 'sweet', and taking the word in its basic sense of 'good' leads to a different sense of the simple proverb. A reputation for integrity is something longer-lasting than a perfume which soon loses its aroma. But the second half of the verse is a typically provocative statement of the Preacher himself, with no explicit grounding given. However, the continuing verses supply some explication. Verse 2 argues that it is preferable to go to 'a house of mourning' than to 'a house of feasting,' an assertion on which follows the explanation that every one ends in the former – at funeral rites – so during life we

should give some consideration to the fact that death is ultimately coming. The third and fourth verses similarly stress that a melancholy mood can result in profound thought, which light entertainment will exclude. Verse 5 and 6 continue the same theme: 5 stressing the benefits of 'rebukes of the wise', 6 comparing light-hearted laughter to the noise of burning thorns on the hearth under a cooking pot: a splutter of noise of no consequence.

This is the background from which to consider the assertion of the superiority of death to birth. At birth all the vicissitudes and uncertainties of life begin. With death the account is closed. The 'name' is what survives death, cf. Proverbs 10:7: 'The righteous are remembered in blessings; the name of the wicked falls into decay.' Thus the contrast between 'name' and expensive but fading perfume is clarified in the following verses.

Verses 7-12 take up new issues, but with a hint of what has gone before. First, corruption in government is denounced as harmful to the pious: oppression from above and bribery from below. As we have seen before, Qoheleth writes as being outside the ruling classes. Then verse 8 repeats the idea that the end of something is preferable to its beginning, but this time applies it to enterprises within life: when a project is over it can be assessed, and the patient man who reserves judgment until results are clear is preferable to the arrogant who prejudge their success. This leads on nicely to verse 9, which advises against taking umbrage too easily: fools bear grudges. Verse 10 takes issue with those who praise the good old days. Qoheleth does not go to the opposite extreme of finding the present world better, rather he continues his theme known from 1:4-11 that life continues as before: there is nothing new under the sun. Verses 11-12 return to a theme well aired in chs. 4-5. that riches are of no spiritual benefit, only wisdom is. The Hebrew of these verses is difficult and in part obscure, but the problems cannot be entered into here. The REB generally gives the best sense, except that for 'wisdom profits by giving life' instead '... by preserving life' would, with the RSV, be better.

Wilfred Lambert

Conviction of ignorance is the doorstep to the temple of wisdom.
(C.H Spurgeon.)

A common South African saying relates:

When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land.

The white man said to us, 'Let us pray.'

After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible.

The appeal to scripture can be self-serving and demonic.

(John Goldingay, quoting others.)

Signs in John's Gospel.

This article was originally given as an address at the Summer School in July 1999. Margery McGregor introduced her talk with a reading from 1 John 1. She asked for this chapter to be read because, for her, it epitomises John's conception of Jesus.. He was someone John had touched, grasped his arm, perhaps held his hand when boarding the boat. Yet, as he tells us in his gospel, Jesus was the Word of God made a human being. He was the Word of Life, the unique Son.

I was disturbed recently to read in a Christadelphian magazine the following words:

'Although Jesus was able to use the great power granted to him by God to perform the miracles that he did, there is no evidence in the Scriptures that he was educated in his Father's purpose other than by His Word. Furthermore, there are only two occasions recorded when he received the benefit of direct assistance from angels. ... As for the rest of his life, we are left to reflect on the wonderful way in which he had assimilated the Word of God from his earliest years, so that through love of it and obedience to its commandments he grew to fulfil the destiny for which he was born – to become the Word made flesh.

That Jesus drew such sustenance from the Scriptures should be a source of encouragement for us knowing that his way is for us to follow. ... But we can feed in the same field as he did for he was ever grazing in the high pastures of his Father's word.'

Now I may have completely misunderstood what the author intended, and if so I apologise, but as I read that it appears that God in effect said, 'Well, boy, I've brought you into the world. Now you're on your own. Just pay attention to the Old Testament (as it will become known) and you'll be all right.' And there is almost an inference that if Jesus could do it, then so can we!!

But John is adamant that the Word that was in the beginning was made flesh and dwelt with mankind. 'And', says John, 'we saw his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father', and in ch.12 he refers that glory back to Isaiah's vision of the Lord, high and lifted up. 'Isaiah said this when he saw Jesus' glory and spoke of him.' It was not Jesus' destiny to **become** the Word made flesh: he **was** that from his conception.

So John builds his gospel round **seven signs**, and gives a specific reason for his choice (20:30,31): 'There were indeed many other signs that Jesus performed in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. Those written here have been recorded in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this faith you may have life by his name.' So let me ask you to put your imaginations to work, and to ask yourselves if, had you actually been there, these signs would have convinced you that your longed-for Messiah had come and that faith in him would give you life. It's easy

to look back with hindsight and see this and that spiritual meaning: but what would you have made of it all if you had been a disciple of Jesus then? And if there is any progression in what John wants readers to perceive in his gospel, would that have been obvious to those who trudged up and down Galilee and Judaea with Jesus? Did these signs demonstrate that Jesus is Son of God?

So to the **first sign** at the wedding feast. You've been joining in the feasting for several days, enjoying the food and drink – especially the drink! – and then the rumour begins to go round that the wine is running out, and it's no use saying 'Family hold back!' Servants begin to panic and flap, and then, without anyone going to the supermarket, you are drinking a superlative vintage. Would you say, 'Woohoo! I'm going to drink as much of this glorious wine as I can?' or 'Wow! I must ask the best man the name of this wine and get some for myself?' Or just, perhaps, if you were in the know, as the disciples were, would you think 'Who is this? What power is this? Was the wine always there? Or, how did he do that?'

John tells us that this first sign revealed Jesus' glory and that his disciples put their trust in him. How, and why? What they learned, surely, was that Jesus cared about his friends who were likely to be humiliated. Let's forget about old wine and new wine, the old law and the gospel, etc. etc. We may see these things, and a lot more, with time and hindsight. But those there would have seen a man who cared about and loved his friends. They would also have seen someone who had power over the laws of nature, for wine came from water without the intermediary of the vine. (Interesting, that, when we think of the number of times in the O.T. that the vine is indicative of Israel! I don't suppose that those at the feast would have made such a connection.) What sort of glory would we have seen: power? honour? love? Would we have put our trust in him on the basis of this sign?

The **second sign** chosen by John is the healing of the nobleman's son (ch.4), and this is another sign not recorded in the synoptic gospels. Jesus is again in Cana, while the child, we are told, is sick in Capernaum, some 20 miles away. I don't suppose that the few disciples with him (for he had not yet called the 12) were too keen that he should help one of Herod's henchmen. (Incidentally, could he have been Chuza, Herod's steward?) The disciples and we might well have turned away from such a man making such a plea, and we, too, might have felt smug at Jesus' reaction to the prayer that he would up and go the 20 miles to Capernaum: 'Will none of you ever believe without seeing signs and portents?' (But why then does John give us these seven signs to help us believe?) A second plea comes: 'My son is dying, AT THIS MOMENT!' 'Return home, your son will live.' Now, how would we have reacted to that? Would we have trusted, as the boy's father did? He subsequently made careful enquiry. He knew by experience that the power this man had made him master

of space! Like God, he spoke, and it was done. Would we have seen this connection: it was indeed a demonstration that 'my Father is working up to this time, and I am working too.' But if we had been there...? We wouldn't have known the child was healed: would we have believed, as the father did?

The **third sign** that John chooses takes place in Jerusalem – the cripple at the pool of Bethesda, 'house of mercy', which they would know while we have to look up the meaning! Now we with our hindsight can get all sorts of lessons from this sign – about Israel, wanderings in the wilderness, need for healing, etc. But what would the few disciples have seen? I think they would have seen an act of mercy in the house of mercy on someone who had suffered a long time, who perhaps did not want to be healed (did he make a good living out of begging?) and who did not perhaps deserve such compassion. I think, too, that they would have been amazed at the power which enabled him to walk immediately. After all, think of muscle wastage after 38 years, to make but one point. There is no need for convalescence, no physiotherapy. The brain is made whole as well. But the man's will was still his own, and how typical of Israel he was: when he found out who had healed him he went and told the Jewish rulers. How dreadful to make a man whole on the Sabbath! Here is something, or someone, greater than the Sabbath! Would the disciples have seen that?

For the **fourth sign**, the central one of the seven, John has chosen one common also to the three synoptic gospels - the feeding of the 5,000. This took place around Passover time in Galilee, when the synagogue readings from the scriptures would have been about the deliverance from Egypt, the trek into the wilderness and the giving of manna, bread from heaven, angels' food. I say this because here I do think that a witness of this miracle would have seen a link to Moses and his leadership, the giving of the Law, and so on. I don't think the challenge could have been avoided: here is someone who is able to give food, miraculously. 'Surely this is the Prophet!' And yet Jesus' subsequent discourse at Capernaum seemed almost designed to be off-putting.

In between the miracle and Jesus' own comments on it, John inserts the **fifth sign**, the calming of the sea, and Jesus' walking on it. I think this would have been a terrifying experience for all who were in the boat (the 12 now). Who is this, that even wind and sea obey him? He is lord over all natural phenomena. No doubt many readers will have seen Channel 4's series on The Raging Planet or the TV pictures of twisters in Oklahoma with such graphic shots of debris being hurled about like matchwood, or the tidal waves over 100ft. high sweeping inland and taking concrete buildings apart as if they were prefabs, or like a child pulling apart a Leggo toy? The storm on Galilee, of course, was nothing like that, but nonetheless lives were at great risk, and then – to see someone walking on that rough sea, and just to speak – and there was a great calm! Jesus does not, as far as we know, choose to interfere at the present

time in the course of nature; on this occasion he did. Did it drive out fear and faithlessness? His pet name for his panicky disciples was 'Littlefaiths'. What manner of man is this! Would you have felt quite comfortable with him?

The subsequent discourse seems to be a catalyst. What life do you want? This life with its food and drink, to be followed by death? Or eternal life, bread of heaven? 'This bread is my flesh - eat my flesh, drink my blood.' The disciples could be forgiven for asking, how? This was a horrifying concept for a devout Jew. Many said: 'This is a hard teaching, who can accept it?' So shattering was the challenge that many left him. Jesus turned to the twelve: 'Will you also go away?' And Peter spoke for himself and for them all: 'Where can we go? To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the holy one of God.' Peter has come a long way. If then we take Peter as a role model, for he was one of the earliest disciples, what were the steps that led to his conviction, and would we have seen those steps?

He started by seeing power over natural law coupled with the ability to help friends out of humiliation and embarrassment. From there he was taken on his journey to experience power over time and space - a miracle performed at a distance, and that for one who was not among the ranks of friends. Although Peter and the others may have taken on board the stunning fact that the spirit of God can work anywhere at a spoken command, the disciples took a long, long time to accept the fact that God has no favourites! These first two miracles brought gratitude: the third was a miracle of healing on the Sabbath day. This must have made Peter blink! Did he comprehend that this man whom he was committed to follow was more authoritative than the Sabbath with all its prescriptions? What then became of the Law by which he had lived so far? Were his foundations cracking? Yet John has picked out these miracles that we might believe and so have life. And, despite his possible problems, Peter has by the following Passover come to believe that his Master Jesus is the Holy One of God, having the words of eternal life. Jesus is unique! So what else had he and we to learn?

The **sixth sign** was the giving of sight to the man born blind. Now it has been suggested that on occasion Jesus 'chose' his miracles in order to show up some failing in his critics; for instance, the healing of the man with a withered hand was intended to highlight those who criticised his disciples for using their hands on the Sabbath (rubbing the ears of corn, remember). It would seem that this sign in John 9 also served the same purpose, for the Pharisees claimed 'We see', and were as blind as bats! But what would we have perceived? Jesus said this sign was to show God working through the one who was the Light of the world: light shined in the darkness, men preferred darkness. Did our contemporary fly on the wall, did our Peter, see that not only was Jesus Lord over all the

forces and laws of nature, time and space, not only could he create much food from little, not only were the elements subject to his word, he could also re-create living tissue, living organs, ultimately life itself? The blind man had never seen anything, but he perceived the implications. I don't suppose he appreciated the enormous extent of the miracle, in that, on the instant of his healing, his brain could comprehend and make sense of what his eyes were seeing. What he did see with his mind was that this man was from God, and without further ado he followed him.

And so to the **seventh sign**, the raising of Lazarus. I am always puzzled when I read the beginning of this narrative; when Jesus is told of Lazarus' illness, not one of his disciples seems to have remembered the healing of the nobleman's son, and said, 'Lord, you have only to say the word and he will be cured.' Jesus didn't have to be 'on the scene', we know. But, puzzling though it may be, Jesus waits until Lazarus is dead and then tells his disciples so: 'Lazarus is dead. I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, for it will lead you to believe...' So, did they understand what Jesus was going to do? 'I am glad I was not there. I go to wake him.' Thomas thought that their going would be the death of them all, not life!

Both Martha and Mary greet Jesus with the same phrase: 'Lord, if you had been here my brother had not died.' They did not know Jesus when he healed the nobleman's son at a distance of 20 miles. If Luke's chronology is to be depended on, they had not known Jesus for very long; but they had not wasted their time, either of them! When challenged by Jesus, Martha made her own confession of faith by saying: 'Yes Lord! I do believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.' (11:27) And so their faith was crowned by receiving Lazarus back from death. How should we have felt if we had been Mary, Martha or Peter, looking into blackness and then seeing a revived corpse? I don't know about you, but that thought makes my flesh creep. I think I should have been very much afraid until I heard Jesus say, 'Loose him, and let him go.' The Master I served had power over the ultimate enemy. Death was no longer the terrible tyrant. I need no longer be afraid. I am no longer in bondage.

So the composite picture of Jesus' glory shown in these signs is of one who is Lord over nature and one who loves his friends; Lord of space-time and a merciful healer, showing grace even to the ungracious; a provider of the bread of life and saviour from certain death; a giver of sight and Lord over death. The glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. We stand in awe at the glory of this Son of God/Son of Man. **Jesus Christ is Lord of all!** That in a nutshell is what John wants us to see. So let every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, and let us bow down and worship.

Margery McGregor

The Joy of Christmas

Christmas will soon be here again and I wonder if we need to do any re-thinking about its meaning during the celebrations? In our era, Christmas is a wonderful time for little children, with the expectation of presents, tinsel, fairy lights and the Christmas tree. But can we, as adults, expect to experience some of that childlike joy in our lives?

Some religious people are quick to condemn Christmas as having its origins in paganism; so who fixed the date of December 25th as being Christmas Day? Jesus was probably not born in December since, in the depths of mid-winter, shepherds would not have been in the fields watching their flocks by night! However, it was in AD 274, at the time of the Winter Solstice, which is December 21st, that the Roman Emperor Aurelian fixed December 25th to celebrate the birth of the sun; and in AD 336 the Roman Emperor Constantine adopted the same day, to celebrate the birth of the son of righteousness.

Folk talk about 'the Christmas story', but there is not one account of the birth of Jesus, but two. Matthew and Luke both speak of the nativity, but they are totally different accounts. Matthew has in common with Luke three names (Jesus, Mary and Joseph) and three places (Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth) and the time, just before 4 BC (the year Herod the Great died). But there the accounts diverge and differ in content.

Before examining the detail, I would like to touch on the opening chapters of Genesis, the interpretation of which has a bearing on what I propose to say about the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke. The question was put to me some 40 years ago: 'Brother, do you believe that the world was *literally* created in 6 days?' I was supposed to answer 'Yes' and if my answer had been 'No, I think the universe was created 4.5 billion years ago, as the result of a cosmic big bang', I would have been in all kinds of trouble, at that particular ecclesia!

Of course, there was a time when I approached Genesis expecting answers to such historical and scientific questions as: 'When was the world created? Was it created in 4004 BC as Archbishop James Usher (1581-1656) declared, or were the days of Creation six days of vision, or six fiat from God, or six long geological periods, since *yom*, Hebrew for day, seems to have an elastic meaning? How did it come into being? Where did man originate?'

With the passage of time, we come to realise that such questions are irrelevant, since the author of Genesis was a theologian, not a scientist or historian. He never intended to pose and answer this kind of question. The writer of Genesis is concerned with more profound matters: 'What kind of world

do we live in? What kind of persons are we? What kind of relationship do we have with the Creator of the world?’

It is the same when we come to the early chapters of Matthew and Luke; they do not offer plain, straightforward, historical commentary but theology. They are not so much concerned to tell us **how** and **where** Jesus was born and grew up, but **who** Jesus is; and to this question they always give the same answer: he is the Crucified One who was raised from the dead and lives on to give life to all who believe in him.

There was a time, when I came to the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke, expecting answers to scientific and historical questions: ‘How many Magi were there? Were their names Melchior, Caspar and Balthasar, as tradition has it? What did the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh represent – Christ’s kingship, priesthood and humanity? Was a population census instituted by Quirinius, the legate of Syria at the time of the birth of Jesus? How exactly did the Star work – was it Halley’s comet of 12 BC, or a conjunction of the planets Jupiter, Saturn and Mars of 7 BC? Or, was it the Holy Spirit taking on the form of a star, as it later took the form of a dove at Jesus’ baptism? Or, was it even the Shechinah glory of the Lord, His abiding presence, which once hovered above the holy of holies in the Tabernacle?’

These questions may be asked but, like those posed about Genesis, they cannot be answered, since Matthew and Luke are theologians, not scientists or historians in the 20th century sense. They are concerned with things more profound – the splendid imagery of the nativity, seen in the visits of angels, prophetic dreams, the star of wonder, the miraculous birth, the heavenly choir, climaxing in the obscure birth of a son to a carpenter’s wife to save the world from sin and death – with the crucified, risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke are not just sweet stories for little children, but are meant for adults, like you and me, to bring joy to our hearts; they are theological rather than strictly biographical accounts. For example, according to Matthew, after Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph fled directly to Egypt as refugees, where they stayed until the death of Herod, then avoiding Judaea they made their way to Nazareth. But according to Luke, after the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph went directly to the Temple in Jerusalem, and from there made their way to Nazareth. In other words, in Luke’s account there is no room for the flight into Egypt, and in Matthew’s account there is no place for any presentation of Jesus in the Temple at Jerusalem.

The two accounts of the birth can only be made one by tying oneself into knots. But the tangle disappears as soon as we realise that we are not dealing with two chronicles, which have to be neatly tied together, but rather

with two meditations on the birth of the Saviour, the Risen Lord to whom we bow in obeisance. It is pointless to try and make them a composite whole. Each author presents his own theology, standing in its own right, and it goes without saying that each is equally inspired.

Those of our friends, family, children and grand-children who as yet are not converted to Jesus probably think that the whole Christmas story sounds like a fairy tale. How can it be made real to them? I think we need to say that the writers of the nativity accounts never intended their writings to be read as scientific history. All the 'Christmassy' bits, the star, the angels, the celestial choir – all this thrilling imagery – is telling mankind that **God is in all this**.

Matthew and Luke's meditations on the birth of Jesus, are professions of personal faith. They are men who have seen the Risen Lord Jesus, and have been invaded by the Spirit of God, and speak of Jesus in the light of his triumphant Resurrection. While their accounts of the birth and infancy of Jesus are an amalgam of biography and symbol, they are based upon the historical event of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, and what Matthew and Luke wrote is an echo of that event, not a foretaste of it.

Finally, what happened on that Christmas morning? Suppose you and I had been present at the birth in Bethlehem, at the lowly cattle shed, what would we have said? 'Well, what happened, was nothing out of the ordinary. There was no room in the inn for the carpenter and his young wife who was expecting a baby at any minute. Poor folk, they were hurriedly rushed into the stable, and there a son was born, and they called his name Yeshua, a fairly common Jewish name. Mind you, there were a few excited shepherds about, and there seemed to be a bright star hovering over the stable, and a kind of heavenly choir singing in the distance.'

What would Matthew and Luke say to that? 'Why not look a little deeper? Think of the wonder of the moment!' Surely the announcement that 'unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour who is Christ the Lord!' should make every man, woman and child shout with joy!

So, what really happened? The Son of God was born and the whole of heaven rejoiced. This was the decisive moment in human history. The high and holy Lord God, who created the world, was in this ordinary event, to make it extraordinary.

There was no room for him in the inn, but, in the year 2000, let us make room for him in our hearts.

Bill Davison

Joy to the world! The Lord is come; let earth receive her King.

Pictures at an Exhibition

Julia Booth explains how works of art have a great deal to say about the personality of the artists and their attitude to life. The artistic opinions of observers may well betray much about their characters too. These reflections were presented as 'A Morning Thought' at this year's Summer School.

I should like you to imagine that we are assembled in an art gallery and that our attention has been drawn to four particular works by some well-known artists. There is beauty here, wrought by the hand of man, and maybe we can find in it some encouragement to set us up for the day.

To begin with we have an oil-painting by the impressionist, Camille Pissarro. It is a landscape – one of several that he painted whilst living in the village of Louveciennes and he called it 'Chestnut Trees at Louveciennes'. Now, I am sure you are aware that Pissarro and his colleagues of the impressionist school were ridiculed and despised in their time for the new technique they had adopted in painting, but it is important to remember what they had set out to achieve – *light!* – and amongst the many pictures I would choose to demonstrate their success, 'Chestnut Trees' would be a favourite. I find it endlessly fascinating. It is almost three-dimensional, and it seems to draw you into itself.

It would appear to be late afternoon one day in autumn, and diffused sunlight from a pale turquoise sky casts a golden glow on some distant buildings glimpsed between the old, twisted tree trunks. Long shadows extend across the soft green grass, and little smudges of brown paint here and there suggest fluttering leaves. Pissarro did not attempt to copy every detail of the scene, but he did create an impression of the way light has affected it, and it has masses of atmosphere.

At first sight, autumn seems to be the subject matter of our next picture, because there are lots of fallen leaves in this one. They fill the entire frame from top to bottom, gradually diminishing in size towards the top, where you notice that there are the outlines of three tree trunks upside-down behind them. Lurking behind the larger leaves near the bottom of the picture, too, is a large, shadowy fish, but that is all. This is a monochrome study, and it is very simple, but once again the artist has certainly achieved what he set out to create – an *illusion*.

The Dutchman, Mauritz Escher, was a graphic artist who loved to experiment with three-dimensional effects, and in this particular work, called 'Three Worlds', he hasn't drawn his main subject at all, but has merely suggested its existence by other means. It is as if we are peering down into the depths of a clear pond or stream, observing the trees and sky above us only as reflections in a watery world beneath the floating leaves.

Let us move on to something very solid indeed. It is a series of

sculptures, and while each bust has absolutely identical features, they consist of such contrasting substances as marble, bronze, clay and wood. To me, these busts are all the more remarkable because they are the work of a man who subsequently became very disturbed and who is more famous for his surrealistic and, sometimes, horrific creations. Alberto Giacometti was born in Switzerland, but spent most of his life working in a cramped studio in Paris, and many of the figures that he carved look gaunt and emaciated. Not so these beautiful images of his father. As with many classical Greek sculptures I am struck by the amazing softness in the folds of skin, the eyelids, the hair and the beard, and the benign and warm expression on the face which belies the inanimate solidity of the material thus worked.

So far, then, we have seen an impression, an illusion and an image. Perhaps our fourth work of art remains, for some people, as controversial as any impressionist painting or abstract study because its subject is the Lord Jesus Christ, but a close inspection of this painting will plainly reveal that, like Pissarro and Escher, Holman Hunt set out to create atmosphere. The details are suggestive of Jesus' glorious character and not his literal form.

The title itself begs our curiosity in any case, since 'The Light of the World', as the painting is called, does not immediately bring to mind the actual context, which is based on Christ's words in Revelation, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock'. Nevertheless, this Jesus, arrayed in kingly attire, carries in his left hand a lantern; his expression is one of patient waiting as he knocks gently at a ragged door, the haunt of bats and overgrown with weeds. It is night, but about the figure of Jesus there is a soft radiance, and there is an air of expectancy, too; will the occupier of the house invite his Lord to supper?

Although God made man in his own image, no statue of a man ever gave glory to God - only to man himself. You cannot carve in wood or stone the nature of God's spirit, and it is no wonder that God forbade the attempt. In the man Jesus, however, we do see God. As we imagine we look into his eyes, we are peering into unfathomable depths of light. No form is visible, but we can feel God's presence; it permeates the atmosphere, expressing itself in everything beautiful that declares his creative power, and in every person whose heart is open to the influence of his mind.

It has been said that the light often plays tricks, but the fact of the matter is that our own eyes can deceive us; we can sometimes see things that are not really there or fail to see those that are. Every optical illusion is a reminder that we can give too easy credence to outward sight, but it would also seem that many of us have lost the ability to wonder, unless we are faced with something new or spectacular.

For instance, we know that many artists have favoured the rugged coasts of Brittany and have travelled there specifically to capture the beautiful but

fleeting changes of colour from dawn to dusk. But the Vendée region of France also claims to have a unique quality of light, and so does Provence, and so do certain regions of Italy. In fact, some friends of mine returning from a month's holiday on an Australian sheep farm were so intent on trying to convince me that the quality of light out there is beyond anything I have experienced, I became deeply suspicious!

I remember, about sixteen years ago, standing on the temple mount in Jerusalem, gazing at a sky so velvety-blue that it seemed you could feel it, and I really believed I had never before seen it such a colour. However, during one of our recent hot summers in Britain, I sat in my back garden thinking about the brilliance and depth of the celestial blue above me, and I wondered very seriously if, in Israel, I had been mistaken. I also remember the scene on a clear June evening as I gazed out to sea from a glistening white shore in Wester Ross. The sea was a transparent turquoise, but beyond the highlands and islands it seemed to touch the sky in a continual kaleidoscope of changing hues. You cannot be in Scotland and Brittany at the same time, so who can compare them?

Then there is my friend who lives in the heart of the Cambridgeshire fens. She declares that the lack of hills in this flattest of flat countryside is more than compensated for by the huge expanse of visible sky, and the eternally wonderful quality of the light!

You see, everything is not always what it seems, and neither do we necessarily notice the reality of our surroundings. We can consider architecture, for instance. Escher attempted, by way of experiment, to draw a very tall building at close range, on the basis that from a position level with its centre you could see the whole thing - which, of course, is impossible. Normally you would need to look separately upwards and downwards to take in the complete picture. However, the result is not difficult to imagine. Instead of having straight, parallel sides, the building tapered inwards towards both the bottom and the top, bulging slightly in the middle, as if it had been constructed with a curve. What is so interesting about the experiment is that it was precisely this curve which certain architects of ancient Greece deliberately built into the lofty pillars of the Parthenon.

The Parthenon is, indeed, an illusion - if ever that could be said of such a solid structure! Allow me to quote from the Berlitz guide to Athens:

'The columns swell gently at the middle and lean slightly inward, the floor surface is convex; astonishingly, nowhere in the temple is there a straight line. All the subtly curving departures from true vertical and horizontal give life and rhythmic movement to the stone and (the architectural stroke of genius) magnificent symmetry.'

Artistic expression, whether it be in painting, architecture or whatever, will always have a great deal to say about the personality of the artist, about his

own attitude to life and about the spirit of the age in which he lives. But the artistic opinions of the passive observer may well betray much about his character, too.

One of the most alarming characteristics of our own, postmodern age has been highlighted by Tom Wright, the Dean of Lichfield, who takes its attitude to the world of art as exemplifying its general detachment from reality. The intentions and, indeed, the integrity of authors, poets and painters and so on are dismissed as irrelevant or non-existent; in an atmosphere redolent of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud all of an individual's motives are constantly under suspicion, one's roots are yanked out of the ground and religious houses are built on sand.¹

But the light of the knowledge of Jesus Christ shines brightly everywhere even in this darkness, and illuminates his Father's handiwork. God may be invisible to us, but doesn't the whole of his artistry create an impression of himself? It has been said of the word 'Paradise' that it conjures up an image of divinely ordered, natural beauty untouched by the chaos of human greed. Certain it is that the unseen source of love, mercy, justice and truth becomes visible in precisely those things which reflect his glory, and the image is only marred when man fails to do the same.

'God so loved the world', says John, 'that he gave...' Yes, he gave, and he still gives, and he will give, freely – a concept quite alien to the world of the postmodern man where, says Tom Wright, there's no such thing as a free lunch, never mind a free gift of such magnitude.

Holman Hunt appreciated the eternal reality of Christ's love and mercy, and so do we, but we shall let the apostle Paul have the last word. If Escher delighted in the fact that there is much more to nature than appears on the surface, certainly Paul had several perspectives in mind when he considered the wonderful work of Christ.

'I pray that you may have your roots and foundation in love,
so that you, together with all God's people,
may have the power to understand how *broad and long*,
how high and deep is Christ's love.
Yes, may you come to know his love
– although it can never be fully known –
and so be completely filled with the very nature of God'.
(Eph. 3:17-19)

Julia Booth

¹ See *The Myth of the Millenium*, Chapter 3, Tom Wright, Azure Press, 1999, £3.99.

The Old Testament in the New

As we are nearing the end of a century and of a millennium this is an appropriate time to try to make an assessment of the place that prophecy should continue to occupy in our outlook. In this article Ron Coleman explores something of what the New Testament says about Old Testament prophecy, for it is Old Testament prophecy that bulks largely in our consideration.

Christadelphian origins

It is often forgotten that the Christadelphian faith did not begin with a concentration on prophecy. That was an afterthought. There were three streams of Christian tradition which flowed from the 15th and 16th centuries. The first was the old Roman Catholic which however had learned lessons from the Reformation and had got rid of some of the former fancies and abuses. The second stream was the Protestant, followers of Luther or Calvin. In this group were various national churches such as the Anglican and Scottish. The third stream was that of the Anabaptist, those who rejected infant baptism in favour of believers' baptism.

Prominent among the Anabaptists were the Socinians who took a more radical view. They argued that reason was important in deciding belief and they originated in Poland, because that was about the only area in Europe where freedom of religion was then possible. An Italian who emigrated there and took the Latin name Faustus Socinus was one of their leaders and in consequence they became known as the Socinians. But within a few decades Jesuit activity in Poland made life there intolerable and they were scattered throughout Europe, and this had the effect of influencing some other churches.

Perhaps the strongest of the Socinian beliefs was rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity, particularly that the Holy Spirit was a separate personality in the Godhead. They believed in conditional immortality and rejected belief in hell-fire and eternal torments, the existence of evil spirits, demons and a supernatural devil, Satan. More subtly they rejected substitutionary beliefs about the Atonement. At a more practical level the Socinians were opposed to participating in politics and in war. So it is not difficult to see where our main doctrinal beliefs came from.

However when Dr. Thomas emigrated to America he perforce came into contact with the Adventists. It was not that the study of prophecy was confined to America but that it was much more in evidence there. There had been a great upsurge because of the French Revolution. This had seemed to be a tremendous catastrophe signalling that the end was near. Studies of the time-prophecies of Daniel were intensified and it was worked out by one group led by a Baptist

minister, William Miller, that 1843 would see the Second Coming. Nothing happened, of course, and it was then realised that the correct date should have been 1844 because there was no year zero, a similar mistake to thinking that the 21st century will begin on 1 January next. But nothing happened in 1844 either.

Dr. Thomas was well acquainted with Miller and had arguments and discussions with the Millerites. Prophecy and the Second Coming lends itself more readily to preaching than doctrinal differences and the former was taken up avidly by the Doctor. The Millerites survived through the efforts of Mrs. Ellen White and are now the Seventh Day Adventists numbering about 7 million. They are 'Seventh Day' because they decided that worship should take place on Saturdays rather than the first day of the week, an indication of the effect of concentrating on the Old Testament.

Conditionality

The cardinal error in using OT books to predict when Christ will return is to forget that prophecy is conditional. This is made quite clear by the story of Jonah. Jonah's message *seemed* unconditional – 'Yet 40 days' – but when the Ninevites repented the disaster was averted. The same was true about Hezekiah and Isaiah's message. The principle is laid down clearly in Jeremiah 18 in the parable of the potter's workshop. Whenever a piece of pottery turned out imperfect the potter would take the clay and make it into something else. God says that this is the principle behind His actions. If He says He is going to build up a nation but the nation disobeys Him the prophecy will not be fulfilled. Equally, if He says He is going to destroy a nation and the nation repents he will not carry out his intention. This principle applies even when it is not spelled out. It must therefore apply to the prophecies of Daniel and Ezekiel which are the mainstay of present-day, imminent prophecies of the end. In fact, conditionality is explicitly stated in Ezekiel 43 v 9. That the prophecy wasn't fulfilled in OT days doesn't mean that it still remains to be fulfilled.

Matthew and the fulfilment of prophecies.

Most of us would take that for granted. But not many of us take the trouble to examine carefully what NT writers actually say about the fulfilment of prophecies. Matthew is the evangelist who mentions fulfilled prophecy most frequently. On ten occasions he comments about something that has happened 'that the word of the prophet might be fulfilled.' If we look at some of these we will find something significant.

The first one, familiar to everyone, is in chapter 1 v 20. Matthew has just told us that an angel had appeared to Joseph in a dream, to tell him how the child that Mary was expecting had been conceived, and what his mission would be. Matthew then comments: 'Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, "Behold a virgin shall be

with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel.”

That is the AV, but if we look at Isaiah 7:14 we can see that Isaiah was not looking into the far future but at his own time. Syria was attempting to capture Jerusalem aided by the forces of the northern Kingdom. King Ahaz of Judah had declined an invitation to ask God for a sign but the prophet deflates him by saying that God will give him a sign anyway: ‘A young woman who is pregnant will have a son and will name him Immanuel. By the time he is old enough to make his own decisions the lands of the two kings who terrify you will be deserted.’

The GNB like most, if not all, recent translations has ‘young woman’ instead of ‘virgin’ because that is what the Hebrew says. However, the LXX translated it into Greek as ‘virgin’ and Matthew quotes that. What excited him was the idea that a new born baby was to be called ‘God is with us’, which seemed like a pre-echo of what was about to happen in his own time.

The next editorial reference by Matthew is in chapter 2, vv 14 & 15. This recounts that after Joseph had been warned by an angel of the danger to the young child, he and his family left hurriedly for Egypt where they stayed until Herod died. Matthew’s comment is ‘This was done to make what the Lord had said through the prophet come true, “I called my Son out of Egypt.”’ This is a quotation from the prophecy of Hosea chapter 11 v 1: ‘When Israel was a child, I loved him, and called him out of Egypt as my son.’

But those words are not a prophecy; they are a poetic statement of fact by God about the Exodus. And it continues, ‘But the more I called to him, the more he turned away from me’ which of course is totally untrue about Jesus, who anyway was little more than a baby at the time. Nor was the presence of the Holy Family in Egypt in any way like the Egyptian captivity of the nation. There were about a million Jews living in Alexandria at this time and Mary and Joseph would feel perfectly at home there. Whole quarters of the city were Jewish.

Three verses further on in Matthew 2 there is another OT reminiscence. Matthew says about the slaughter of the boys in Bethlehem: ‘In this way what the prophet Jeremiah had said came true. “A sound is heard in Ramah, the sound of bitter weeping. Rachel is crying for her children; she refuses to be comforted, for they are dead.”’

This comes from an oracle in Jeremiah 31:15, part of a prophecy addressed to the Jews in captivity telling them that God will show mercy to them and bring them home. On their journey back they will pass Ramah, the place where Rachel was thought to have been buried. Jeremiah pictures Rachel in the tomb weeping for the fate that has befallen her descendants, a poetic reference which would touch the hearts of his readers. But for the parents of the children in Matthew’s time there was to be no such happy ending

Three verses further on in chapter 2 there is another reminiscence of the

Old Testament. Joseph had wanted to return to Bethlehem from Egypt but in a dream God told him to go instead to Nazareth. 'And so what the prophets had said came true: "He will be called a Nazarene."' Commentators are at a loss to locate the passage which Matthew is quoting here. Various suggestions have been made; for example, that it is a play on the Hebrew word *nezer* which means 'a branch' and so it is a reference to the branch that would grow out of the roots of David, but all the suggestions seem so obscure that it must remain a mystery.

John the Baptist.

Up to now we have been considering fulfilments peculiar to Matthew, but in verse 3 of chapter 3 we have one common to all four Gospel writers – the coming of John the Baptist. Says Matthew: 'John was the man the prophet Isaiah was talking about when he said "Someone is shouting in the desert; prepare a path for the Lord, make a straight path for him to travel."'

Actually this was not a prediction by Isaiah. It was the voice of God addressing His heavenly council. Commentators say that the word 'Comfort' is plural and could not have been addressed to the prophet. The AV and Handel's librettist got it right with 'Comfort ye'. Nor is the voice in Isaiah 40 '*in the wilderness*'. It is a demand for a road to be made *through* the wilderness on which God could travel bringing His people back to the land from which they had been exiled.

I think that this particular quotation makes the difficulty clearer than the others I have mentioned. Matthew is not saying 'Here is a prediction that has come true'. He is saying, 'This is something similar to what I am recording.' Writers frequently do this. They remember something with an emotional association that can be transferred to the new situation, even if it does not fit exactly.

This often happens today. There is a phrase 'to the manner born' which is usually about somebody in a high and privileged position. When however Hamlet said 'though I am native here,/ And to the manner born' he meant that he was just an ordinary Dane. And when he goes on to say 'it is a custom/ More honoured in the breach than the observance' he doesn't mean that it is a custom more frequently broken than observed, as it is usually made to mean. He means that it is a custom that is a disgrace to Denmark and they would be better without it. Here is an instance of how the magic of Shakespeare is frequently called on to light up something different.

In Isaiah 40, the voice crying in the wilderness is announcing that God has pardoned His people and is travelling back from exile with them. That is why the voice says: 'Prepare in the wilderness a road for the Lord.' The reason for the road is that 'The Sovereign Lord is coming to rule with power, bringing with him the people he has rescued.' But John the Baptist's voice was *in the wilderness*, or near to it, and he was not bringing a message just of hope, but also

of the need for repentance.

Midrash

This is something frequent in NT quotations of the Old. Often they don't quite fit. But we may not like to say this. After all, the writers were inspired men. But they were men of their own time and their outlook was governed by the Jewish custom of the time. And they would be familiar with Jewish exegetical procedures which would seem quite natural to them. For there was often felt to be a need for an explanation of the meaning of Scripture. It was called *midrash* and would contain suggested additions or even changes to the text to remove difficulties. This is illustrated by the Septuagint. The NT was of course written in Greek and when it quoted the OT it usually (though not always) quoted from the LXX. But the LXX had characteristics that did not always convey accurately the meaning of the Hebrew original.

Since it was made for the benefit of Jews living among Gentiles there was a tendency to soften passages about God that made Him seem too human or passages that showed up national heroes in a disparaging light. For example, in Matthew 12:3, we are told how the Pharisees criticised the disciples for picking and eating ears of grain in the field they were passing through. Jesus defended them, 'Have you never read what David did at the time when he and his men were hungry? He went into the house of God and he and his men ate the bread offered to God even though it was against the Law for them to eat it.'

If we look this up in 1 Samuel 21 we find that the band of warriors was an invention of David's. He *pretends* that he had arranged to meet them and therefore he needed a lot of bread. The author of Samuel saw nothing wrong in this but, by the time the LXX translation was made, David had become an ideal figure. He would not tell a lie and so the LXX changed the story accordingly. It must be the case that Jesus himself saw no objection to the alteration or, if not, at least that Matthew and Mark saw nothing wrong with it.

Another example of the difference between tradition and reality can be found in the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 10. Paul is drawing a comparison between the situation of the Israelites in the desert and the Corinthian church. He compares the rock from which Moses drew water for the people with Christ – or rather he says that the rock *was* Christ – 1 Corinthians 10:4 'And did all drink the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them and that Rock was Christ.' There is nothing in Exodus about the rock following the Israelites. It was Jewish *midrash*, an addition that reinforced the feeling that the readers would have. Paul the Pharisee would be familiar with it and has adopted a piece of traditional interpretation.

Earlier in this same chapter (1 Corinthians 10) Paul says that the Israelites were all under the protection of the cloud and all passed safely through the Red Sea. In the cloud and in the sea they were all baptised as followers of

Moses. But of course there was no literal baptism; it is just a figure of speech. **This is just like...**

Returning to Matthew, we come to chapter 4 verses 12-14: 'When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison he went away to Galilee. He did not stay in Nazareth, but went to live in Capernaum, a town by Lake Galilee, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali. This was to make what the prophet Isaiah had said come true: 'Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, on the road to the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who live in darkness will see a great light. On those who live in the dark land of death, the light will shine.'

Whatever it was that the gospel writers had in mind (for both Mark and Luke refer to it as well) it couldn't have been that Isaiah had foreseen Jesus going to Capernaum at this juncture. Actually he had spent all his adult life in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali until he went south to commence his mission. Nazareth was just as much in Galilee as Capernaum. All they are saying in fact is: 'The situation is just like Isaiah's prophecy.'

The same is true for something which perhaps looks a bit more like a prediction. When Jesus said in Mark 7:6, about the fuss the Pharisees made over washing their hands, 'How well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites', he is not suggesting that Isaiah was gazing over eight centuries. He is saying 'Isaiah might well have been prophesying about you.'

Matthew remains in Isaiah for his next fulfilment quotation in chapter 8 vv 16 & 17: 'When evening came, people brought to Jesus many who had demons in them. Jesus drove out the evil spirits with a word and healed all that were sick. He did this to make what the prophet Isaiah had said come true, "He himself took our sicknesses and carried away our diseases."'

This comes of course from the best known of all Isaiah's prophecies, chapter 53 v 4: 'But he endured the suffering that should have been ours, the pain that we should have borne. All the while we thought that his suffering was punishment sent by God.' That is the GNB. The AV probably touches us more: 'Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem him smitten of God, afflicted.'

However there is no suggestion in the gospel accounts that when Jesus healed people he actually physically felt their pain in himself. Nor is it true that 'Many people were shocked when they saw him; he was so disfigured that he hardly looked human.' If we think that prophecy is a description of future actuality this is a considerable problem. And so are the earlier descriptions of the Servant in chapter 49 which seem clearly to state that it is the nation that is the servant. 'Israel you are my servant, because of you, people will praise me.' And there is much more which seems difficult to understand. Scholars have debated endlessly what was in mind. Was it to be the whole nation, or a

remnant? And how was it to come about?

I think it is the case that the prophet himself did not know the answers, as though he had published an advertisement 'Wanted, a servant of the Lord', accompanied by a job description. But in the end there would be only one applicant for the post. I mention this because it confirms that prophecy is not history written in advance as it has so often been claimed to be.

But now let us move a little further on in the New Testament, to the book of Acts, where we find an incident that will take us a step further in our quest. In chapter 15 we have an account of the Apostolic Conference in Jerusalem. This met to consider a question which threatened to cause a deep rift in the early church. What was the position of Gentiles who had accepted the apostolic preaching and had been baptised? Ought they not to have been circumcised – in effect to make them Jews first of all?

Peter addressed the assembly, urging strongly that there was no need for circumcision. Barnabas and Paul supported him and reported the miracles and wonders which they had experienced on their missionary journeys. It fell to James to guide the conference to a decision. He did so by quoting two verses from Amos chapter 9: "After this I will return", says the Lord, "and restore the kingdom of David. I will rebuild its ruins and make it strong again. And so all the rest of mankind will come to me, all the Gentiles whom I have called to be my own." But when we turn to Amos 9 (v 11,12) we find quite a different story: 'The Lord says, "A day is coming when I will restore the kingdom of David, which is like a house fallen into ruins. I will repair its walls and restore it. I will rebuild it and make it as it was long ago. *And so the people of Israel will conquer what is left of the land of Edom and all the nations that once were mine, says the Lord who will cause this to happen.*"'

How could James possibly regard this as meaning 'all the rest of mankind will come to me, all the Gentiles I have called my own'? The answer is that James is not quoting the Hebrew Massoretic text but the LXX. How did it come to be so markedly different? The only possible answer is that Jewish scholars, years after the original translation had been made, felt that the Hebrew text couldn't be right. So they changed it. An example of *midrash* which many years later had a happy outcome in that the apostles were persuaded to open the door to the Gentiles.

There is a supreme irony in that the original prophecy itself in Amos was fulfilled literally. "After some early expeditions to Galilee to save the Jews there from attack, the Hasmonean rulers conquered Galilee and added it to their kingdom. They also conquered Idumea, the ancient kingdom east of the Dead Sea. John Hyrcanus forced the Gentile Galileans and the Idumeans to convert to Judaism – the only forcible mass conversion in the history of Judaism. In the time of Jesus Galilee contained many Jews whose ancestors had only been

Jewish for about a century.” (*The Jews in the Time of Jesus* p 63. Stephen M Wylen. 1996)

What kind of Messiah? Psalms 110 & 2

Let us now consider a reference to the OT by Jesus from Psalm 110 which is recorded by all three synoptic writers. The fullest account is in Matthew (22: 41-46). He relates how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus had resoundingly answered the Sadducees over the fact that there was to be a resurrection. Jesus then seized the opportunity to put a question to the Pharisees about the Messiah (at a time when they would be in a receptive mood).

The commonest title of the Messiah was ‘Son of David’ and behind it was the expectation that one day a great prince of David’s line would shatter Israel’s enemies and lead the people to a conquest of the nations. Jesus asked them whose son was the Messiah to be; they answered, predictably, ‘David’s’. Jesus agreed, but then quoted Psalm 110. ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit here on my right until I put your enemies under your feet.”’ Who was this mysterious Lord? We, of course realise that we have here a reference to the Divine parentage of the Messiah, and so of Jesus himself. Would this be understood by the Pharisees? Probably not, but actually it was the sort of discussion that the Pharisees took very seriously. Jesus is saying ‘It is not enough to call the Messiah son of David, a Prince of David’s line and an earthly conqueror. You must go beyond that; the Messiahship is not to be thought of in terms of Davidic conquest but in terms of divine and sacrificial love.’ This suggestion is reinforced by the fact that when the writer to the Hebrews expounds this Psalm he draws his lesson entirely from ‘Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek’. There is no mention in Hebrews of ‘He will pass judgment on the nations and fill the battlefield with corpses; he will defeat kings all over the earth’.

There is a similar situation as regards Psalm 2 which is quoted extensively in the first chapter of Hebrews “‘You are my Son, today I have become your Father.” Nor did God say about any angel, “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son.”’ Although the Psalm continues: ‘Ask and I will give you all the nations; the whole earth will be yours. You will break them with an iron rod; you will shatter them in pieces like a clay pot’, Hebrews confines its exposition of the Psalm to the significance of the passage about Melchizedek. The Writer does not mention the iron rod. Nor did Paul when he quoted Psalm 2 in his address to the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:32).

But the menacing words of Psalm 2 *are* quoted in Revelation as the words of Jesus himself. The first occasion is in the letter to the church at Thyatira (Chapter 2 vv 26-28): ‘To those who win the victory, who continue to the end to do what I want, I will give the same authority I received from my Father: I will give them authority over the nations, to rule them with an iron rod

and to break them to pieces like clay pots. I will also give them the morning star.' This is repeated in the letter to Laodicea (3:21): 'To those who win the victory I will give the right to sit beside me on my throne, just as I have been victorious and now sit by my Father on his throne.'

A rebirth of images

Austin Farrer has described the book of Revelation as 'a rebirth of images'. And here is a prime example. In Psalm 2 the Psalmist saw on Mount Zion a terrible warrior King. In the Apocalypse (chap 14) John sees **The Lamb** with the 144,000 Conquerors, whom we can recognise by the Saviour's name and his Father's name written on their foreheads according to the promise given in the letter to Philadelphia (3:12).

This military setting helps us to understand what appears to be a puzzling sentence: 'They are the men who have kept themselves pure by not having sexual relations with women; they are virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.' (14:4) John is referring to the regulations for a holy war to be found in Deuteronomy 20 and 23:9,10. In ancient Israel war was initiated with religious ceremony and soldiers were required to preserve ceremonial purity.

But how is this conquest of the world to be accomplished? We are told in chapter 12, in the account of war in heaven between Michael and his angels, and the dragon and his angels (vv 10, 11): 'Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, "Now God's salvation has come! Now God has shown his power as King! Now his Messiah has shown his authority! For the one who stood before our God and accused our brothers day and night has been thrown out of heaven. *Our brothers won the victory over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the truth they proclaimed, and they were willing to give up their lives and die.*' The meaning of this was confirmed and amplified by chapter 5, vv. 4, 5. Here we read of the scroll in the hand of God, sealed with seven seals which no one has the authority to break. John says: 'I cried bitterly because no one could be found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside it. Then one of the elders said to me, "Don't cry. Look! The Lion from Judah's tribe, the great descendant of David, has won the victory and he can break the seven seals and open the scroll."'

The *Lion* of the tribe of Judah? 'Then I saw a Lamb in the centre of the throne, surrounded by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb appeared to have been killed. It had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God that have been sent throughout the whole earth. The Lamb went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who sits on the throne.'

When the Lamb takes the scroll all those standing round the throne break into a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and break open its seals. For you were killed, and by your death you bought for God people from

every tribe, language, nation and race. You have made them a kingdom of priests, to serve our God, and they shall rule on earth.'

Then the angels, thousand and millions of them, break into a great chorus: 'The Lamb who was killed is worthy to receive power, wealth, wisdom and strength, honour, glory and praise.'

As G.B. Caird has explained,¹ what John is doing here is to *reinterpret* the second Psalm. What he *hears* is couched in the traditional messianic imagery of the Old Testament. But what he *sees* constitutes the most impressive 'rebirth of images' in the whole of the book. The soldiers are the martyrs. They are the conquerors. It is they who have won the victory.² The scroll is God's redemptive plan by which He means to assert His sovereignty over a sinful world and so achieve the purpose of creation. John proposes to trace the operation of this plan from its beginnings in the Cross to its triumphal culmination in the new Jerusalem. But the redemptive plan, initiated by the victory on the Cross, depends for its being carried through by further efforts on the part of the martyr-conquerors.

It is significant that God will not Himself break the seals of His scroll and put its contents into operation. He has set this limit to His own omnipotence; man's destiny and the destiny of all creation must be achieved by man. When the sixth seal is broken in chapter 7, we have the vision of the 144,000 marked with God's seal on their foreheads, prominent among the enormous number of the saved before the throne. The elder tells John that they are those who have come through terrible persecution and have washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb.

They are Christ's victorious army. This is the key to understanding the second account of the 144,000 in chapter 14, the army of Christ. The reason John calls them virgins is because of the military regulations of Deuteronomy, chapter 23: 9-10 and Leviticus, 15:16. In ancient Israel war was initiated with religious ceremony and soldiers were required to preserve ceremonial purity. To John this ceremonial purity was a compelling symbol of moral purity from the seductions of the great whore of Babylon. Another rebirth of images. The literal of the Old Testament has become the metaphorical in the New, and with a totally different meaning.

Ron Coleman

¹ In his commentary *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*.

² This is a recurrent theme. Those who win the victory (the Conquerors) are mentioned in 2:7. 2:17. 2:25. 3:5. 3:12. 3:21

So it was not so much a matter of prophecies finding their fulfilment, as that the hopes, ideas and events of the past fell into a new pattern and took on a new significance.

Morna Hooker.

A review of
Exploring Bible Language

by Alan and Margaret Fowler.

Whether we agree with all the interpretations and conclusions presented in this book (and the authors specifically state that they do not expect their readers to) or not, the authors have presented a refreshing challenge to look at the Bible anew. They argue cogently that many misunderstandings and misinterpretations arise from a lack of recognition of the nature of language and literature. Clearly all readers acknowledge the need to differentiate between the literal and the metaphorical and between poetry and prose. But they proceed to examine in detail specific examples of linguistic, literary and grammatical issues.

They have divided the book into four sections under the headings of words, figures of speech, style and structure of language and verb forms. In discussing the problem of words, they show that many words have more than one meaning and as our Bible has been translated from Hebrew and Greek, it is necessary to trace the original significance through the use of concordances. They cite as examples of this such words as 'forever', 'image', 'creation' etc. to throw light on the early chapters of Genesis. In John's Gospel a correct translation of the Greek resolves the question of Jesus' involvement in creation and a treatment of the Greek verb to 'remain' clarifies the teaching of John chapters 14-15.

In the second section they deal with idioms to illuminate the Biblical teaching on 'sin' and 'the knowledge of good and evil'. Other idioms are examined to help to explain the discourse with the penitent thief etc. Metaphors feature prominently in all poetry and especially in John's Gospel and words such as 'flesh', 'sin' and 'hell' are discussed. The difficult passages in Luke's Gospel of the two swords, and the parables of The Unjust Steward and The Rich Man and Lazarus are cited as examples of irony and personification explains the use of the names of Satan, the devil etc.

In reading much of Scripture it is essential to recognise the nature of poetical writing and also the existence of dramatic presentation as exemplified by the book of Job and, they suggest, the temptations and the days of creation. Grammatical rules are used to throw light on the imprecatory Psalms and the fatal spear thrust.

Although some of the discussions may appear to be special pleading to substantiate a preconception this book is nevertheless a refreshing challenge to evaluate some well known Biblical issues by means of different categories of language and literature and to stimulate thoughtful and reflective response.

Copies of this book can be obtained from: A & M Fowler, High View, Litchard Rise, Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan, CF31 1QJ at £5.00 per copy, post free in U. K. (money with order please).

In 1966 Alan Fowler also published his book entitled *A Drama of Creation*. This can still be obtained from the same address.

Sheila Harris

Jesus Christ is Lord

One of the workshops at the Summer School focused on the Lordship of Christ. The following statement is an attempt to summarise the findings of the group.

Through the writings of the apostles, we are presented with the many facets of Jesus' Lordship. His resurrection is the guarantee of His continuing care for His people, as our High Priest and Shepherd. His life provides us with examples of service, humility and shared humanity. But above all His indwelling spirit supplies us with inner strength and the bond which unites us in one body with diverse parts, while Jesus is in our midst in glory now, inspiring us to see him in the humdrum tasks of daily life and to find Him in others.

He is the 'One who was, and is and is always on the way' – revealing to us continually the supreme glory of God, active, moving and inspiring us if we allow Him.

Sheila Harris

We who once took most pleasure in the means of increasing our wealth and property now bring what we have into a common fund and share with everyone in need; we who hated and killed one another and would not associate with men of different tribes because of [their different] customs, now after the manifestation of Christ live together and pray for our enemies and try to persuade those who unjustly hate us, so that they, living according to the fair commands of Christ, may share with us the good hope of receiving the same things [that we will] from God, the master of all.

(The First Apology of **Justin, the Martyr**, 14. 155AD)

Made in God's Image

In this article, Richard Gaston explores what it means for us as human beings to be made in the image of God. Amongst other things, he suggests that false conceptions of God can leave us in as much need of salvation as those who do not know him. All scripture quotations are from the NIV.

Here to begin are some words from a pagan: 'Let us begin with Zeus, whom we men never leave unspoken. Filled with Zeus are all highways and all meeting-places of people, filled are the sea and harbours; in all circumstances we are all dependent on Zeus. For we are also his children.'¹

The apostle Paul became 'all things to all men' (1Cor 9:22) to win them to the gospel. Speaking to those gathered at the Areopagus he reminded his audience that 'The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands' (Acts 17:24); in other words, God does not live in anything we have made. Speaking of the God of Israel, Paul chose to quote from the pagan poet Aratus: 'As some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring."' (Acts 17:28). All the Greek gods were *anthropomorphic* (made in the image of man) and so it is interesting that of all the 'visible signs' (Greek: *phaenomena*) listed in Aratus' panegyric to Zeus, as quoted above, Paul should choose the fact that we are God's children and are related to him.

I want to go back to the beginning and examine two ways in which we are made in the image of God.² In the first account of creation we are told: 'Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule,"' (Gen. 1:26) a point made explicit by the Psalmist: 'You made him [man] a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the works of your hands.' (Psalm 8:5-6).

To use Elaine Storkey's phraseology: both humans and animals are creaturely but only humans are made in the image of God. What becomes clear is that man is distinct from animals in being made in the image of God and having dominion over other creatures.³

The second aspect of being made in God's image which Genesis reveals is the capacity that human beings have for relationship. 'So God created man [humanity] in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.' (Gen. 1:27). Both man and woman are created in God's image, and the passage suggests that as individuals they reveal differing aspects of God's nature. Comparison with the second account is important: 'The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."' (Gen. 2:18). Although created in the image of God man is incomplete on his own. In 1 Samuel it is recorded that the Philistines attacked Israel at Mizpah,

Samuel offered a sacrifice to God who panicked the Philistines, the Philistines were then destroyed; 'Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far has the Lord helped us."' (1 Sam. 7:12). The word for 'helper' is identical here to its use in Genesis. On this occasion it is used of God not woman, suggesting that this capacity to help is not a subordinate one but is the relational aspect of being made in the image of God.

God brings the animals to the man, seeking relationship for him. In calling (or naming) them the man asserts his need and capacity for relationship. Human beings then, have a capacity for relationships; we are human because of our relationship to God and human because of our relationship with each other. What the creation stories also point to is the fact that human beings, because of their capacity and need for relationship, exist in a state of dependency, fulfilled through meeting with God and one another.

Genesis reminds us that the story of Adam and Eve offers a paradigm for human relationships: 'a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh' (Gen. 2:24); man and woman will be united and become more like God through relationship. The Hebrew of the statement 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one' (Deuteronomy 6:4) carries the sense that God is not just unique but an undivided unity too.

The creation story continues as human beings make a mistake. They eat of the forbidden fruit and 'Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked' (Gen. 3:7). Man and Woman become aware of their differences, become *self-aware*. The Fall is essentially a violation of relationships: the Man doesn't care for his wife or for his relationship with God; the Woman doesn't care for her husband or for her relationship with God. The nature of human relationships changes, as God curses the woman: 'Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.' (Gen. 3:16). Whatever this verse means, whether desire for submission or desire to rule or sexual desire or any other possibility, the essential principle is that both aspects of being made in God's image have been violated: the capacity for unity based upon similitude in difference, and the capacity for dominion given to distinguish us from animals.

The change is made clear later in Genesis: 'When God created man he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them...Adam...had a son in his own likeness, in his own image.' (Gen. 5:1-3). Paul echoes these words, writing: 'And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.' (1 Cor. 15:49). We are reminded that after the Fall humanity was no longer made in God's image; the redemptive work of Christ offers us the promise of being re-created and perfected in God's image.

Why is all this so important? I quote from a Christadelphian author: 'Because God is male, it follows that only the brethren should do the public

instruction...'. This statement purports to assert our likeness to God but instead it marks the gap between God and humanity. As Thomas Aquinas writes: 'we are like God, but God is not like us.' To express it a different way, God is not *anthropomorphic* (made in the image of man as the Greek gods were) it is us as Christians who are *theomorphic* (made in the image of God).

I want to turn now to expand ideas of what God's image is. 'God is love.' (1 John 4:16), and as Tennyson's friend Arthur Hallam suggested, Christ is like God in being: 'the object of that Infinite Being's love, the necessary completion of his being, the reproduction of Him, without which His nature could not have been fulfilled, because he is love...the only possible thought of God on his own being, must have comprised the thought of the necessity of Christs existence.'⁴

Our knowledge of God's purpose in Christ begins in Genesis when the serpent's temptation came true: "'You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of [the fruit] your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'" (Genesis 3:4) We are like God, knowing good and evil, yet are unable to bring them into unity; because of the fall one will always dominate whilst our lack of relationship with God makes their reconciliation impossible. It is the battle Paul describes between the flesh (fallen nature) and spirit (the new creation within us). As one author described it: 'My principle anguish and the source of all my joys and sorrows from my youth onward has been the incessant, merciless battle between the spirit and the flesh... The anguish has been intense. I loved my body and did not want it to perish; I loved my soul and did not want it to decay. I have fought to reconcile these two primordial forces...so that they might rejoice in their harmony.'⁵

To know how hard this battle for reconciliation is, we need to go with Christ to Gethsemane: there Christ united flesh and spirit and at the same time restored relationship with God. God's capacity for relationship, for love, was fulfilled in Christ who, by seeking a dependent relationship with his Father, rather than seeking to dominate, restored in himself the aspects of God's image which fallen man could only strive for. God's capacity for relationship permeates the lives of his new creation: 'We love because he first loved us.' (1J.4:19)

I want to digress and consider Paul, who reminds us of the dangers of creating ourselves in our own image, rather than God's.⁶ 'If anyone thinks he has reason to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee.' (Phil.3:4-6) Paul's cultural identity left him alienated from God, frozen in a self-image that isolated him from redemptive possibility. Awareness of self in relation to God brought subjection to another form of dominion: 'Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do

it, but it is sin living in me that does it.' (Rom.7:20), which we might compare with Paul as new creature: 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.' (Gal.2:20).

The need to destroy human nature made in Adam's image extends from Paul to us: 'You were taught with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on a new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.' (Eph.4:22-4) The call is to deny self: that willingness to exercise dominion in a fallen, misplaced manner. Paul sums up Christ's work as follows: 'For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross.' (Eph.2:14-16)

Hostility is what I have identified as the desire to exert dominion over one another. In this passage Paul describes the image of God as unity which is in turn united with God in relationship. Through Christ, we are recreated in God's image.

I have suggested that to be made in the image of God is to exist with the capacity for dominion and for dependent relationship. Christ fulfilled God's capacity for relationship by displaying dependency rather than striving for dominion over his life; the difference between being *selfless* and *selfish*. As part of the new creation in Christ we are renewed: recreated in the image of the creator, able to be united both with God and with each other once more. This recreation is the fulfilment of Christ's prayer to his Father that all believers 'may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you' (John 17:21). Difference is necessary for completion, to imitate the unity that is God, but this can only be achieved when difference acknowledges dependency and not dominion. There is a sense of urgency here: we need Jesus to save us from false self-image and false images of our God; both forms of idolatry are fatal.

Richard Gaston

¹ Aratus, *Phaenomena*, ed. Douglas Kid, (Cambridge, 1997), p. 73.

² I draw here from a lecture given by Elaine Storkey on 'Men, Women and the Church' given at the University of Warwick, June 1996.

³ I take Wifred Lambert's point that our capacity to respond to God also differentiates us from animals, *Creation*, (1998), p. 5 and elsewhere.

⁴ Arthur Hallam, *Theodicae Novissima*, in *The Writings of Arthur Hallam*, ed. T.H. Vail Motten, (London, 1943), pp. 200-13, p. 204.

⁵ Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Last Temptation*, (London, 1988), p. 7.

⁶ I draw here (and simplify) on the chapter 'Not I' in Michael Edward's *Of Making Many Books*, (Basingstoke, 1990), pp. 101-124.

Loneliness and the Single Christian.

The loneliness of the single person can be devastating, especially if all your once-single friends are now happily married and completely wrapped up in each other. There is a certain amount of peer-pressure amongst all groups of people, but perhaps none more so than on the young, particularly those in our community. It is generally assumed that we will all go through the stages of having a boyfriend or a girlfriend, getting engaged, getting married and going on to have a family. If by chance you don't fit this model, then it is assumed (and usually wrongly) that there is something 'wrong' with you. This is certainly not everyone's experience or desire.

Many more single, young people are encouraged to follow a career these days, and to do this may make the above scenario unrealistic in the short-term. Is this wrong? Better surely no marriage than to endure the strife and disharmony, the anguish and despair of a bad marriage, or perhaps a marriage that just does not work out. So many pressures, completely unknown perhaps a generation ago, now put a strain on the strongest marriages at times.

The single person also experiences many pressures, anxieties and all the stresses of modern living; the cut-throat existence of modern business life will leave its mark on each involved in it. So much so that many like me, retired early, are relieved no longer to have to be part of the 'rat-race'.

Life as a single person is not all bliss. They may be spared some of the worries of the married, but worries of a different kind can mar their happiness. Depending on your outlook and personality, going to any form of meeting or gathering always on your own, does not make for ease of making friends. Many seem to be part of larger groups or, dare I say it, 'cliques', who appear to be complete with no room for any others and, because of this, often completely oblivious of the shy, lonely outsider longing to be part of such a group. Coming from a smallish and perhaps predominantly elderly meeting, as many are now, does not help the shy person with low self-esteem to make friends and find companionship. The loneliness of a person on their own in a large crowd has to be felt and experienced to be understood. I've been there, and it is very hard to break the mould. It took me several years of determined effort to make friends, but it was well worth it.

The type of gathering that you choose will also have a bearing on the success of your efforts but getting involved in some way with the gathering helps you to feel needed, to have a purpose in life. After all, we all need to be needed. It does wonders for a low or non-existent morale! Care Group Gatherings are often a good first choice, because many who attend have been where you are coming from. They have experienced life in all its richness or horrors. They know how you feel, and they care!

Mary Carrigan

In Search of Reality

You have, no doubt, heard of someone described as being 'so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly use'. The inference is that the Christian being described is not grounded in reality. My contention is that we should be so heavenly minded because that is a grounding in reality. If we are of no earthly use, then we are not heavenly minded.

Plato¹ writing in *Phaedo* puts words into the mouth of Socrates. Socrates, on the day he drank the hemlock, discussed the subject of death with Simmias and asked the question, 'Is not what we call death a freeing and separation of soul from body?' 'Certainly,' comes the reply.² Bertrand Russell writes of this statement: 'Here we come under Plato's dualism: between reality and appearance, ideas and sensible objects, reason and sense-perception, soul and body. These pairs are connected: the first in each pair is superior to the second both in reality and goodness. An ascetic morality was the natural consequence of this dualism. Christianity adopted this doctrine in part, but never wholly.'³

How does this dualism come into the NT? Well, to put it simply, there are two worlds. There is this world and there is the heavenly world. This world is the world of sin and death. It is the world into which we are born. There is also the heavenly world of 'myriads of angels, the full concourse and assembly of the first-born citizens of heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of good men made perfect, and Jesus.' This heavenly world is superior to the earthly world of sin and death 'both in reality and goodness'. As Ladd writes:

In this view, there are two realms of existence—the phenomenal and the noumenal: the changing, transitory, visible world and the invisible, eternal realm of God. Ultimate reality belongs only to the higher world.⁴

It is known that Platonic dualism underlies much of Philo's work.⁵ What evidence is there that these ideas also influence the NT writers? Well, I wish to show you that they underlie the Pauline corpus, the letter to the Hebrews, and the Johannine writings.

Paul

At this point we seem to begin a tour of some of the most difficult passages in the NT. We start with Paul in 2 Corinthians. We have some very

¹ Plato was born 428-7 BC and died 348-7 BC.

² *Phaedo*, 67d. cf. Tarrant, in Tredennick & Tarrant (trans.), 1993, p.100.

³ Russell, 1961, p.148f.

⁴ Ladd, 1994, p.269.

⁵ Philo of Alexandria was a prolific Hellenistic Jewish writer roughly contemporary with Paul.

challenging statements at the end of chapter 4 and running into chapter 5:

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling—if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. (2 Cor. 4:16–5:5)

The dualism here involves the contrast between the outward and the inward man, between the seen or temporal and the unseen or eternal, between body and soul. Williams suggests that this 'would appeal to the Greek mind, cf. Plato, *Republic*, 566B'.⁶ The body is tied to this world of sin and death and is suffering. In heaven, though, God has already prepared a replacement that is unseen and eternal. The thought seems to incorporate ideas that have their roots in Platonism.

Further development of the theme takes place in further difficult passages in Ephesians. In 2⁴⁻⁶ the Christian is described as already being in heaven.⁷

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ...

The Greek word *επουρανιος* (*epouranios*, heavenly) has caused some difficulty in the past. However, it simply means 'in heaven'.⁸ The suggestion is that the believer is already in heaven. However it is patently obvious that he or she is on the earth. How do we resolve this? Surely the passage means that whilst we still remain on earth, spiritually we are already in the heavenly world.

Hebrews

The same sort of thinking seems to be found in the letter to the Hebrews. In chapter 9, the writer describes the Jewish system of atonement in the

⁶ Williams, in Black (ed.), 1962, p.970

⁷ See also Eph.1:3.

⁸ See Traub, in Bromley (ed.), 1985, p.743.

Tabernacle, with the High Priest entering into the Holy of Holies. Then in verse 24, he says:

For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

The dualism is plain. The earthly tabernacle was merely a copy of the reality that was above.⁹ In the next chapter, we find that we can enter that real sanctuary:

Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22)

In chapter 11, we have the famous definition of faith, and it is a definition that is couched in terms of this dualism.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)

The 'things not seen' are this eternal order of things, the heavenly world. The NEB puts it well:

And what is faith? Faith gives substance to our hopes, and makes us certain of realities we do not see.

In chapter 12, we find that it is only these heavenly realities which have permanence. Verses 26-29:

At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.' This phrase, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of what is shaken – that is, created things – so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe;

Hebrews is written from a point of view that the only real and permanent things are the heavenly kingdom. The earth is temporary and inferior.

John

The last quotation from Hebrews gives us a nice lead into John. Remember, the writer to the Hebrews ended with an exhortation that, 'since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe'. In John 4, Jesus is in conversation with the woman at the well in Samaria and says to her:

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to

⁹ See Montefiore, 1964, p.137.

worship him. (John 4:23)

In Hebrews, the exhortation was to worship 'with reverence and awe', in John 'in spirit and in truth'. Or perhaps we might say 'in spirit and in reality'.¹⁰ What justification is there for this change? The word translated 'truth' in our Bibles is αληθεια. Bultmann writes:

If in philosophy αληθεια denotes true being, and if this is located in the world of ideas that is hidden from the senses and comprehended in thought, αληθεια comes to mean 'genuine reality' in antithesis to appearance. In Hellenism what truly is can be equated with what is divine or eternal, in which one must share to be saved.¹¹

The implication is that we should worship in the real world, the heavenly world. Why do I say this? Well, there is the oft-quoted verse about being in the world, but not of the world. The idea comes from John 17¹⁴⁻¹⁶:

I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

The disciples do not belong to the world of sin and death. They belong to a different order of things, which in John is called eternal life. And eternal life is about knowing the real God. John 17³:

And this is eternal life: to know thee who alone art truly God (or the real God), and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.¹²

Conclusion

Well, what do we make of all this? We tend not to think in terms of dualism. But we must find a way of living that expresses the truths that these ancient writers believed in. They wanted the Christian to see that he was living in the heavenly world in spirit, even though his or her body was trapped in the earthly world. The important difference between the two, according to Plato is that the heavenly world is 'superior in reality and goodness'. And it is this second aspect that is so important. The heavenly world has a different set of values to that of the earthly world, and it is to that different set of values that the NT writers are calling us.

In the Lord's Prayer we recite the words, 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.' It is tempting to see this as simply being a request that God will set up his kingdom as soon as possible. However, it is

¹⁰ See Moffatt translation. MacGregor, 1928, p. 105f contrasts the nature of God as spiritual, as opposed to the earthly material nature of man.

¹¹ Bultmann in Bromiley (ed.), 1985, p. 38. See also Bauer in Arndt and Gingrich (eds.), p. 38, and Strong's Concordance.

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possible to add a more immediate meaning to this petition. The word translated kingdom is βασιλεια and its primary meaning is 'kingship', 'royal rule', 'royal power'.¹³ The prayer seems to acknowledge that there is a world above where God is sovereign and his will is done. The inference is that on earth all is not so perfect. The request for God to be sovereign here might be seen not only as a request for the future kingdom, but for God to be sovereign in our lives. If he is, then we shall be 'in the world but not of the world'; we shall be so heavenly minded that we are useful servants of God and Jesus here on earth reflecting their spiritual values. When this happens then we shall glimpse true reality.

Michael Green

¹³ Bauer, in Arndt and Gingrich (eds.), p.134. Schmidt in Bromiley (ed.), 1985, pp. 99-100.

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How might we get the opportunity?

In Luke's gospel, Jesus waited until his followers asked him for a prayer; and the reason they asked him was because

they saw what he was doing.

Something tells me there's a lesson there.

(Tom Wright, *The Lord and his Prayer*, p.35)

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In the beginning God Created.

Anonymous, Pp. 7,

c/o Paul Danks, Clevedon, Somerset.

This is a brief and strange pamphlet. Its author is not named, and it is undated. The inside back cover informs us that it has been produced and distributed by the **Appeal to all Ecclesias Committee**, of which only the Secretary's name is given: Paul Danks. The word 'Christadelphian' is not used, but the content is clearly addressed to Christadelphians.

Its arguments are not presented very systematically, so that at a first reading it is not easy to follow, but it seems to be arguing for three main points: (i) that God created the universe, (ii) that he did so by his spirit, and (iii) that he did so in a literal period of six days some 4000 years B.C.

The first two points will hardly be doubted in any Christadelphian circles so that at first one wonders why they are so stressed, but it appears that what the author is really objecting to is the idea that life slowly evolved on our planet and that the Biblical accounts can be understood in that light. So the substance of the first two points really amounts to the third, to which we shall return shortly.

That God created the universe by his spirit will not be doubted by any believer in the Bible, but in any case the passages which state this have to be balanced with the passages which say that the word of God was the means by which the universe was created. This more adequately sums up Genesis 1:1-2:3. In addition to Psa.33:6 ('By the word of Yahweh were the heavens made,' quoted on p. 1) there is of course Heb.11:3 ('... the worlds were framed by the word of God ...') and 2 Pet.3:5 ('... by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth ...'). Of these two only the latter is referred to, but not quoted, in this pamphlet (p.3), in a list of passages given apparently to prove creation rather than evolution, but its general wording makes it unsuitable for that purpose. In the attempt to stress the second point Gen.1:2 is quoted ('the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters', p.1), but the Hebrew word for 'moved' (*merahepet*) indicates a hovering presence, not creative action. There was no need to stretch the meaning of passages when the point is surely not in dispute.

So to the main point. The pamphlet begins by alluding briefly to the solar system and explains in simple terms the many concurring factors which allow life as we know it on this earth. This, it is reasonably argued, implies a divine intelligence behind it all. The third paragraph then argues that 'Moses, the writer of Genesis' could not of his own knowledge have grasped 'the correct and necessary order for Creation to take place,' so the account must be of divine

origin. While there is a degree to which this is an unobjectionable and indeed powerful, argument, in the context of this pamphlet the argument is self-destructive.

The knowledge of the universe tacitly endorsed here is not to be found in the Bible but is the result of human endeavours, from the Babylonian mathematician-astronomers c.500 B.C., down through various Greek and western scientists to present-day astronomers with their vastly improved observation techniques and equipment. The author here is relying on the scientists, not the Bible. He does not explain exactly what he means by 'the necessary and correct order for Creation to take place,' but if he is willing to use the results of science to understand the solar system, he can hardly object if others should use scientific results relating to the age of the earth. While evolution is indeed a theory to explain certain facts, these facts emerge from the study of the rocks which reveal superimposed layers of apparently great antiquity, well beyond the 6000 years quoted on p.4.

The scientific arguments presented on pp.4-5 to support the idea of creation in moments of time some 4000 B.C. hardly justify the term 'scientific'. First, the scientists who argue that sudden and vast changes in matter took place at the 'big bang' would consider this presentation garbled. Secondly, all those scientists also believe in vast periods of time for the universe to become what it is today, and they all accept the validity of the fossil record. The 'big bang' is as much a theory as evolution. It is obscurantism to pick out of current scientific theories what suits one's opinions and ignore the rest. There is no need to press the 'big bang' into service in this context. Any believer in an all-powerful God will accept that he could have created the universe in moments in c. 4000 B.C. The question is, Did he in fact do so?

The anonymous author's reply is that the Bible says so. But the Bible also speaks in terms which were long taken as proof that the earth is flat, with the sun, moon and stars moving above and around it. And those who believe in a supernatural devil also quote Scripture and insist that there is no escape from the literality of the words. This pamphlet relies on emphatic assertion to avoid such questions.

Altogether this is a superficial presentation, as confirmed on the last page where no distinction is made between creation being partly symbolic and accounts of creation being partly symbolic. The circles from which the author comes are to some extent indicated by the use of Yahweh where the New Testament uses 'Lord'. Does he believe that God allowed unscrupulous men to change the whole New Testament in this matter, and leave no evidence of their so doing, or does he think he knows better than Jesus and his church?

One final detail: *Elohim* does not mean 'mighty ones'

Wilfred Lambert

The People's Choice.
An Exposition of the First Book of Samuel.

Roy Standeven

Pp. xx + 237 + 9 unnumbered pp. of black and white drawings + 6 unnumbered pp. of indexes. 1998.

Roelian Books (17 Over Hall Park, Mirfield, West Yorks, U.K.) £5+£1.20p&p.

'Do-it-yourself' is not only a current method of getting the house painted or minor property faults corrected, but it has also spread to publishing. Whereas previously the cost of owning type for hand setting, or monotype or linotype machines, plus the amount of space needed and the noise of the machines meant that very few private persons would set up their own books at home. Today quite small and comparatively quiet printers and associated computers can easily produce a master copy of a book using a range of type faces previously available only in large printing houses. This master copy can then be used to run off as many copies as needed by any one of thousands of printers up and down the land.

Of course ability to use a computer does not always confer expertise in the best use of type faces, and there are risks in self-publishing. The traditional method of submitting a MS to an established publisher means that he will submit this MS to expert readers to judge its merits, and if he decides that it is worthy of publication he will normally ensure that it is read and prepared by a professional copy-editor to present it in the best possible way in the finished book.

The volume under review is a 'do-it-yourself' product. The address of the publishing house is the author's home. The MS emerged after use of the material in Bible Classes at Wakefield, benefiting from discussions there, and two personal acquaintances 'read the script.' The technical blemishes are immediately apparent. The title appears in quotation marks on the cover and on p.ix, but without them in the title page and the preceding page. There are some competent and helpful black and white sketch maps and drawings of landscapes by Laurie Thorp, which are listed on p.x as occurring on various pages, the first two, e.g., being given as 'page 73' and 'page 73b', but in fact they are back-to-back on an unnumbered folio between pp. 72 and 73. Then on pp. vi and viii the reader is alerted to the fact that this volume is part of a series called 'Re-Constructive Commentary' (meaning 'Homiletical Commentary'), something there to be found on the title page and the immediately surrounding pages. There is much more of the same kind, and the reviewer did not find the printing of blocks of material, even whole pages, within a dark frame in any way helpful,

and still less the massive display of exotic type faces on p.234. The sobering hand of a professional would have been helpful in such matters. While such things in no way prevent readers from following the author's arguments, they might put off readers not of Christadelphian commitment.

On a more positive note it can be said without hesitation that the author expresses himself with full clarity and conviction, and the proof-reading has generally been done well. The book is also printed on good paper, but it is only glued, not sewn and bound. The reviewer's copy was rapidly becoming a loose-leaf volume by the time he had come to the end.

In more substantive matters it is with much regret that the reviewer cannot feel enthusiasm for this volume as fulfilling adequately the intended purposes. A detailed critique is beyond the scope of a short review, so representative examples must suffice. First, the book is extremely discursive. Its 237 pages are not teeming with facts and ideas and are too often repetitive. Secondly, the author is too prone to branch off from Samuel into other parts of Scripture and deal with them in detail when they have little or even no connection with the text of Samuel. P.19 offers miscellaneous brief observations on doors, gates and closures in Scripture, literal and symbolic, because Samuel opened the doors of the building housing the ark according to 1 Sam. 3:15. On pp 82ff. the use of the ark as a magic protecting power in battle is legitimately seen as a parallel to trusting in the saving power of attendance at the Breaking of Bread without regard to the participant's state of mind. But the detailed discussion of 1 Cor.11 and other New Testament passages over five pages distracts rather than helps in the study of Samuel. And at times the parallels are strained. On p.139: 'Saul is the herder of lost donkeys. David is later to be the shepherd of the lost sheep of Israel' overlooks the fact that Saul was not a herder of lost donkeys. He was sent to find them, and in the event did not.

The constant juxtaposing of not always related Biblical passages and ideas has resulted in the oversight of much that 1 Samuel contains and of reading in what the book does not say. The man Samuel is of course one of the main topics dealt with. His annual trips around the circuit of Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah and Ramah are described in 1 Sam. 7:15-17. According to our author his purpose was to preach (p.102, and 140: 'his regular preaching circuit,') but the passage itself states another purpose: 'he judged Israel' (AV); 'he administered justice to Israel' (RSV); 'he governed Israel' (REB). No doubt being the holy man he was he would communicate his piety and faith in the course of his judicial function, but the idea of him as an itinerant preacher is not in accordance with the wording of Scripture. Several times the author asserts that Samuel founded the Schools of the Prophets. They are indeed first referred to in his time, and he was involved with them, but the book never states that he started

this institution. It could be coincidence that it is first mentioned in his time.

When dealing with Elkanah and his family and others the author takes note of their observance or otherwise of the law. On p. 8 'the law specified that three feasts a year should be kept by the males, but it appears that Elkanah went once each year . . .' is followed by a quotation of 1 Sam. 1:3 from the NKJV: 'This man went up from his city yearly . . .' Why then 'it appears'? Also on p. 10 'Under the law (unfamiliar to Jacob initially?) he married both Leah and Rachel . . .' But surely Jacob lived before Moses and the law? On p. 28, in the discussion of Hannah's vow, Num. 30:10-14 is quoted as proof that Hannah 'must have been aware' of the necessity for her husband's consent to the vow. Thus the author is much concerned that pious Israelites were perhaps not observing the letter of the law, but when it comes to Samuel that concern is completely forgotten. Deuteronomy requires that sacrifice be restricted to the one place where God would choose to place his name, and before the temple in Jerusalem was built that place was presumably where the ark was located. 1 Sam. 7:2 tells us that the ark was at Kiriath-jearim for twenty years. In vv. 9-10 Samuel sacrifices a lamb at Mizpah, and in v. 17 he builds an altar at Ramah, no doubt for sacrifice. In 1 Sam. 9:13 he presides over a sacrifice in the land of Zuph; in 11:14-15 Samuel and the people sacrifice at Gilgal; and Saul loses patience with Samuel also at Gilgal while waiting for Samuel to appear to perform the sacrifices, see ch. 13. Similarly with David and Jonathan. When a plausible excuse for David's absence from a feast with Saul on the new moon was needed, the excuse was that David had to attend a family sacrifice in Bethlehem (ch. 20). Clearly the law was lost or forgotten at this period of Israel's history, which is no surprise after their state in the time of the judges, and in view of the fact that sacrificing in many places was finally stopped only in the time of Josiah after the book of the law had been found. A 237-page commentary on Samuel should surely have looked into this.

Another serious failing of this book is its fatal fascination for Hebrew. The first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, aleph, is said on p. 33 to correspond to the English letter A. In fact it is a consonant, not a vowel, and has nothing corresponding in the English alphabet. It is asserted on p. 158 'Urim means perfection. . . Thummim means Light.' The meanings given are traditional, but no one is sure that they are right, and in any case they are the wrong way round. Urim may be connected with *ôr* 'light', and Thummim with the root *imm* 'be complete, perfect'. Nevertheless the author devotes pp. 33-35 to expounding the meaning of the name 'Samuel' from Hebrew. The first alternative given in conclusion is that it means 'Name of God', which is correct, though there is no 'Semitic root *shem* meaning "Name".' The alternative, given on the authority of Strong's concordance is that it is based on 'a primitive root meaning "to hear intelligently" and *el* meaning "strength of God".' No such root exists, and the

noun *el* meaning 'strength' is an entirely different and separate word from *el* meaning 'god'. While a proper grounding in Hebrew is needed for the understanding of such things, reference to a good English dictionary could have disposed of the assertion on p. 75 that the English address to a person of high status 'Your serenity' derives from the title of Philistine city rulers *seren*. The Philistine word is only known from 1 Samuel and it is generally considered by those qualified to have an opinion to be in origin the same as the Greek *tirannos*, from which the English 'tyrant' is derived. The frequent appeals to Hebrew in this book must be treated with extreme caution.

The conclusion is that this book was not ready for publication. While one can but respect the sincerity and devotion of the author, and admire some of the observations he makes, the book cannot be recommended as an aid to the study of 1 Sam. One hopes it does not fall into the hands of non-Christadelphian readers who happen to know something about the Bible.

Wilfred Lambert

O Brother Man

*O Brother man, fold to thy heart thy brother:
Where pity dwells, the peace of God is there;
To worship rightly is to love each other,
Each smile a hymn, each kindly deed a prayer.*

*Follow with reverent steps the great example
Of him whose holy work was doing good:
So shall the wide earth seem our Father's temple,
Each loving life a psalm of gratitude.*

*Then shall all shackles fall: the stormy clangour
Of wild war music o'er the earth shall cease,
Love shall tread out the baleful fire of anger,
And in its ashes plant the tree of peace.*

The Endeavour Magazine
New Booklet.

Christadelphia Redivivus

by
George McHaffie

George McHaffie, a previous editor of *Endeavour*, died in 1985 but this essay first saw the light of day towards the end of the 1950s after a long period of careful thought and study and some time before the first issue of *Endeavour* was published in the summer of 1961. It offers insight to the thinking which prevailed among a number of our members in the closing years of the fifties. Many were concerned about the future of our community and how it might continue to exist and develop in the changing world in which we live. George produced this essay as a basis for further discussion and circulated it in the form of 26 foolscap sheets to a limited number of his friends. It is being republished in the form of an A5 booklet of 36 pages to make it more widely available. The need for new thinking and reformation, along the lines indicated by George, is no less now in our community than it was when this essay was first written.

It contains some valuable reminders of the history of our community and how it came to have the beliefs and practices that are characteristic of it. In particular, it shows clearly our indebtedness to the Socinians. The major elements of our doctrinal stance are all examined and assessed. George tried to highlight some of what he and others considered to be weaknesses in our understanding and preaching and made serious suggestions as to how we might improve matters. The booklet finishes with a proposed summary of the beliefs and practices of Christ's Brethren called Christadelphians under the five headings. God, Jesus Christ, Man, The Church and The World. It is a challenging document and deserves to be read carefully and prayerfully for its author sought only to honour the name of Christ in our midst.

It is anticipated that the booklet will be ready for distribution in January 2000, God willing, but orders may be sent immediately to the editor on the enclosed order form. Price: £1.50, inc. p.& p.

Les Boddy

Please send your order form to:

Les Boddy
14 Meadow Drive, Healing, Grimsby.
DN41 7RU

Cheques payable to *The Endeavour Magazine*.

Still God's People and Witnesses?

This article is a response to discussion in the previous issue concerning the present and future significance of the Jews. Readers are invited to give it their consideration and to respond if they wish.

When one faces the above question in relation to natural, ethnic Israel one must first realise, accept and prepare for the fact that in the title there are two questions, not one, and each demands a different approach. In order therefore to tackle the quotation "Ye are my witnesses", saith the Lord' (Isaiah 43) in a proper manner we ask first whether Israel were indeed God's true witnessing people. Verses 22-24 of the same chapter tell us in no uncertain terms that they were not! And as time went on the situation worsened, until finally Ezekiel was given the unenviable task of proclaiming the final doom, the *coup de grâce*, on the Kingdom of Israel. His 21st chapter is terrible reading in the ears of anyone; to a Jew it has lost none of its horror: 'I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, and IT SHALL BE NO MORE.' Nothing is clearer, more final, more decisive than that.

The Kingdom of Israel, the Kingdom of God, was to be no more; it would cease to exist, until he came whose right it was. That was the **bad** news of the Kingdom of God. But, in fulfilment of the promise through Daniel, the Messiah came exactly at the right time. And, his mother was told, the LORD God would give that throne, 'no more' since the overthrow of Zedekiah, the throne of his antecedent David, to him and he would reign from it for the age. He told the scribes and Pharisees that the Kingdom of God was among them, in their very midst, and still they refused to see in him the new King of Israel. Because of their intransigent evil, leading the clamour of Israel *en masse*, 'his own' yelled in unison the way mobs still do in our streets, 'Cru... ci... fy... him!... Cru... ci... fy... him!...' Their victim had earlier told them that the Kingdom of God, with them for a mere three years or so, was going to be taken away from them again, this time to be given to a nation bearing the fruit thereof. He whose right it is had come, come to his own, and his own had received him not. But, says John, as many as did receive him, to them he gave power to become the sons of God (and daughters!). Who were/these?

At first they were those addressed by Peter whose reaction, when he fearlessly, forthrightly (well, he was Peter, wasn't he?!) and correctly reminded them that they had crucified Jesus even though they had not dirtied their hands to do so, was both immediate and emotional. 'Men and brethren - what shall we do?' No excuses, no blame-shifting, no repetition of 'the woman YOU gave me!' This time it was Nineveh all over again - '*mea culpa*', it's all down to us, what can we DO about it?' The answer was equally blunt and equally practical. 'Turn

round and go a totally new way!' Well hadn't he been obliged to do so, once he realised that there were among the Gentile dogs some of his Lord's people? Such was the force of Peter's words, both those in the famous speech and the 'many other words' of verse 40 which we are not allowed to know, that no time was wasted. Three thousand immersions in one day!

The same cause and effect occupy the next chapter, whose withering verses 14 and 15 are a heart-rending 'j'accuse!' from the one who, in the language of the waterfront, had himself denied all knowledge of Jesus. Yet when Peter writes to the Church, he addresses them – all of them, Jews and Gentiles, – as 'a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a peculiar people', who previously were not a people but now are the people of God – Lo-ruhamā to Ruhamā, in fact.

'God's Chosen People' are therefore now the Church! Are they all ethnic Jews? By no means. Try 1 Peter 4 for a good description, in its first half-dozen verses, of the sort of debauched life these folk used to live and you'll see the kind of excesses that show them to have been far more Gentile than Jewish. In fact, when, in 1 Peter 2:9, he refers to them as a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a peculiar people there is more than a hint of irony. In his reference three verses later to their having an honest way of life among the Gentiles, the word is *ethnos*, nations, so the irony is still there.

Further proof? We are spoiled for choice; even Peter, in the same letter (3:5) goes into detail about the demure manner of Old Testament Hebrew wives, even citing the example of Sarah – which no Jewess would need to be told – and pointing to the fact that the women to whom he wrote were her daughters by adoption and by behaviour. The second letter also begins by addressing all his readers as having obtained like precious faith with him, while chapter 1 closes with words he would never need to use to an ethnic Hebrew – that holy men of God spoke as they were 'hurled helplessly along' by the Holy Spirit.¹

But for proof which leaps off the page to show that not only was Jesus crucified as 'King of the Jews' but he was their new king, government and bestower of citizenship in the Israel of God, we go to Paul's letter to the church at Rome. In chapter 2, he 'takes time out' as it were, to address those in the church who were of ethnic Jewish descent. From verse 17 to verse 27 he reverses the self-gratifying rank and status normally assumed by Jewry and concludes with the bold, clear, unequivocal statement that one who is a Jew merely outwardly, in the flesh, is NOT a Jew and is in fact UNcircumcised in the only way that matters.

Later, in Rom 10, Paul the apostle writes something which Saul of

¹ The same Greek word is used in Acts to describe how, after striking sail, Paul's Rome-bound ship was 'driven', finally being wrecked off Melita.

Tarsus, the Pharisee, would have resisted committing to parchment to the extent of the cutting-off of his right hand! Although profoundly wishing that ethnic Israel could all be saved as a nation, he was compelled to admit (verses 12, 13) that there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek. And he means it – no difference then, no difference now and no difference in the day of the Lord!

This, if Paul is to make sense at all, is the reason why in Romans 11 he can say (verse 5) that there is a remnant according to the election of grace – a remnant of ethnic Israel (no doubt including many who had urgently asked 'What shall we do?' and had eagerly responded on Pentecost Day). But is there, was there, any difference between them, Jew and Gentile, in the matter of a remnant? Of course not; what percentage of the Gentiles to whom the gospel was preached turned to Christ? What percentage have ever done so?

Another question: that statement that there IS no difference between Jew and Gentile – where have we seen it before? Of course! Galatians 3! Let us examine it, a little more closely perhaps than hitherto, starting with verse 23:

*Before faith came we were kept under the law,
shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.*

Who are the 'we' of whom and to whom he writes? They must of course be part of the 'all' in the previous verse who were concluded under sin, PLUS the 'us' of verse 13, redeemed from the curse of the Law so that (v.14) the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles. This yet again emphasises the total absence of any difference between Jew and Gentile. 'Wherefore,' he says in verse 24, 'the Law was our pedagogue, to bring us to Christ.' A servant who takes the family's children to school and brings them back. But school is behind us now; we have put away childish things. That which is perfect (mature) has come! And when he did come, didn't he astonish those who were supposed to be the teachers while he was about his Father's business!

The point of all this is that the education towards which the Law was directing those Romans and Galatians etc., was not – patently, obviously not – the Law of sacrifices, which could never remove guilt even had they been offered for ever. This education concerns the law of GRACE, totally undeserved favour, totally freely given. This is a new law. It demands a new priesthood and a new covenant. The new covenant written, not on stone, but 'in their hearts..!' (Jer.31:33) A good start, but just LOOK at the end in verse 34:

'And their sins and iniquities will I remember against them no more for ever!'
And – to coin a phrase of our time which normally has a flippant connotation – 'You don't have to be Jewish!' In fact Paul, the Diaspora Jew, who could more than hold his own with any Sanhedrin and yet rightly claim Roman free birthright, went even further. Writing to the church in Galatia, he says, in those famous words we all know by heart, 'If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise!' (3:29)

How do YOU read that verse? How do you mostly hear it read? Like this, I suspect:

*'And if ye be Christ's, then are ye ABRAHAM'S SEED,
and heirs according to the promise!!'*

Now try reading it like this:

*'And IF ye are Christ's, THEN are ye Abraham's seed
and heirs according to the promise.'*

What a difference! Now we know that what makes anyone a seed of Abraham is not natural, animal descent but spiritual relationship with the new covenant via the new high priest - Jesus Christ.²

And so, weave or plait together the three precious strands of doctrine into an unbreakable rope which is the bond of truth, and you have the case proven:

1 Paul to Romans: He who is a Jew only visibly is not a Jew.

2. Paul to Galatians: IF you are Christ's, THEN are you Abraham's seed.

3 Paul to Romans. Because of unbelief the natural olive branches (ethnic Israel) were broken off and Gentile wild olive branches were grafted on.³ But the original Jewish branches can be regrafted if they believe in Christ. From then on the only branches on the tree are grafts - none has any pre-eminence over any. And ALL branches - ex-Jew and ex-Gentile - depend solely on the rootstock (Christ) for their life.

So, what shall we say regarding natural, ethnic Israel?

1. That they were God's special people, His kingdom on earth.

2. That by their devotion to His Law they separated themselves to His service and were thereby blessed.

3. That because of their infidelity and disobedience their kingdom was destroyed

² It is not always easy to know how the original writer would have stressed his spoken words. Given the background to Galatians, Paul is trying to persuade his Gentile converts **not** to yield to the temptation being put to them to complete and confirm their status as children of Abraham by being circumcised and so by effectively becoming Jews. In Paul's eyes, his converts were already fully children of Abraham because of their faith in Christ and so had no need to do anything else to claim a status which they already possessed. If this is the case, then it is perhaps more likely that Paul would have said: 'If you are **Christ's** [as you are] then you **ARE** Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise,' [and you do not need to do anything else to prove the point.] Editor.

³ 'Against nature', says the apostle - and rightly! What horticulturist would ever graft wild scions onto fruiting stock? The reverse is always applied; a wild, vigorous, disease-resistant stock is planted and tender but highly-bred, high flowering or fruiting scions are grafted onto it.

and was never theirs again.

4. That the kingdom of God on earth ceased to exist ('was no more') until he came whose right it was and is – Jesus Christ.
5. That belief in, and devotion to, Jesus Christ, under the New Covenant, is the sole criterion for citizenship of New Jerusalem and the Israel of God.
6. That ethnic Jews may well be witnesses, but only in what happens to them being the fulfilment of prophecy - not as faithful and loyal witnesses to the righteousness of God.
7. That any and all ethnic Jews in the Kingdom of God will be there by virtue of belief in Jesus as their Messiah and their faithfulness to him, not to Moses and the Law.

Yes, ALL ISRAEL (the Israel of God) SHALL BE SAVED! Our striving therefore must be to guard our citizenship of New Jerusalem with our lives – devoted to Christ!

Brian Morgan

When the prophetic Spirit speaks as prophesying things to come, he says:

For the law will go forth from Zion and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem, and he shall judge in the midst of the nations and rebuke much people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn to war any more.

(Micah 4:2,3. Isa.2:3,4)

We can show you that this has really happened. For a band of twelve men went forth from Jerusalem, and they were common men, not trained in speaking, but by the power of God they testified to every race of mankind that they were sent by Christ to teach to all the Word of God; and [now] we who once killed each other not only do not make war on each other, but in order not to lie or deceive our inquisitors we gladly die for the confession of Christ. For it would be possible for us to follow the saying, 'The tongue has sworn, the mind remains unsworn.' But it would be ridiculous when the soldiers whom you [Emperor Titus] have recruited and enrolled stick to their loyalty to you before their own life and parents and native land and all their families, though you have nothing incorruptible to offer them, for us, who desire incorruption, not to endure all things in order to receive what we long for from Him who is able to give it.

(The First Apology of Justin the Martyr, 39. 155AD)

A Jubilee Prayer

*We pray to you the God of Jubilee,
who sent your son to bring
liberation for our world,
freedom from hunger,
remission of debts,
forgiveness of sins.*

*As we prepare for your coming,
deliver us, body mind and spirit
from the grip of all that is evil.*

*May we who claim the blessing of release
have courage to live by it.*

*We pray in the name of him
who died to set us free,
Jesus Christ Our Lord.*

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