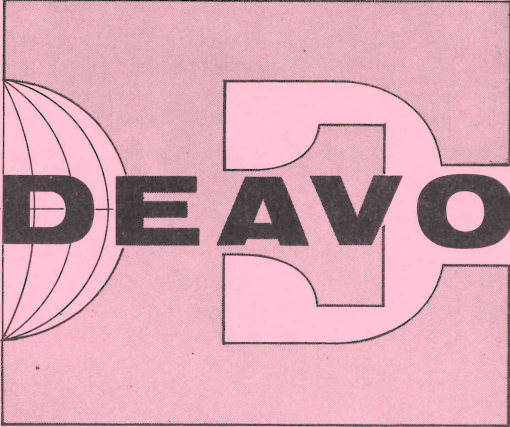




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EDITORIAL.

In our search for progress towards harmony among Christians, we very soon come up against the question of creeds. The Christian Church from quite an early date felt it necessary to have some compendium of beliefs. It would seem too that these statements were associated with baptism. This however was not from the beginning. 'The Apostle's Creed' despite the tradition that each phrase was uttered by each of the apostles in turn starting with Peter - "I believe in God the Father Almighty" was certainly not apostolic - It developed over a long period of time. There is no creed as such in the New Testament. A baptismal formula is of course present - "Go forth therefore and make all nations my disciples; baptise men everywhere in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20 NEB).

The Orthodox Church, which became the Roman Catholic Church, felt itself obliged to add to this simple formula and narrowed the path to exclude heretics - Were they wise?

The first simple Roman Creed* became enlarged to the Nicene Creed and finally to the so called Creed of St. Athanasius with its awful condemnation:- "which faith except everyone do keep, whole and undefiled without doubt he shall perish everlastingly". Arius rejected the co-equality of Father and Son, and in the conflict that followed in the church thousands perished but we hope, in the mercy of God, not everlastingly.

* The Roman Creed was very similar to the comparatively late Apostles' Creed but omitted the ambiguous phrases - "He descended into hell" and "Communion of Saints".

CONSIDER HIM

by Jack Crawley.

Kirkegard wrote "Jesus is the paradox that history can never assimilate" and certainly history has never worked harder in its attempts to change the character of the man revealed in the gospels into somebody more in conformity with what it would like him to be. To those who would grow like him he is the visible expression of an invisible God, who has changed aimless lives into lives full of a lively hope. He has brought them from darkness to light; from being without God to the possibility of living with God. He has not only, by giving his life, made it possible to obtain redemption and reconciliation to God, he has, by his way of life, demonstrated to all the fullness of the character of God. But for Jesus we should not have known God.

Because of Israel's idolatry, the Old Testament of necessity reveals more of the severity of God's judgements than of the fulfilment of His glory. Israel's constant backsliding inevitably produced the punishment of God, and His compassion, His rich mercy, a love quite beyond the imagination of man were never fulfilled in Israel, although they were there if Israel had only reached for them. Jesus has shewn and offered those riches to those who have no merit, no possible initiative that they can originate, to reconcile themselves to the Creator of all things from Whom they have become estranged by sin. The Old Testament promised this glory for in Abraham were all nations of the earth to be blessed, but it was unable to achieve fulfilment until Jesus came, in the fullness of time, when the time was ripe.

He came to an Israel that deeply yearned for a Messiah - a king who should restore at once the might of David's kingdom - give them the heathen for a possession - dash the nations in pieces like a potter's vessel: a Messiah who should restore the lordship that Israel thought it her right to exercise over other nations. For were they not the chosen people, a nation of privilege called by God to be a peculiar people? Was it not their divinely appointed right to subdue and rule others, they argued? But in thinking thus they sadly neglected the responsibility that should have accompanied their privilege. They thought themselves downtrodden under Roman yoke now, but their time would come when the nations would have to bow the knee to their king and kiss him lest he be angry. This is how Jewish hopes ran when Jesus started his ministry: and when he entered the synagogue at Nazareth and read from Isaiah (Luke 4 18) all were thrilled at his reading, and as he sat down ALL bare him witness because he had, by his

reading of these gracious promises, implied their impending fulfilment both in himself as Messiah and in Israel as the chosen race; or so his hearers thought. He could not have chosen a more welcome portion of scripture to read to this downcast race and they gladly applied these benedictions to themselves alone. Here was confirmation, if that were needed, that God was going to save them despite their idolatry and backsliding, simply because they were Israel. So all bore him witness and marvelled at his gracious words; they no doubt sat back expectantly, hoping for further soothing words to bolster their pride. But they were in for a shock. Far from confirming that their Jewishness automatically entitled them to God's favour irrespective of their morals, Jesus shocked them to the core with his next words: "But of a truth I say unto you: there were many widows in ISRAEL in the days of Elijah when there came a great famine over the land: but unto none of these was Elijah sent but only to Zaraphath in the land of SIDON unto a woman that was a widow. And there were many lepers in ISRAEL in the time of Elisha the prophet: and none of these was cleansed but only Naaman the SYRIAN".

This must have been a terrible shock to their chauvinism. The Jews were an intensely proud race (they still are) possessed of indomitable courage in adversity: in many ways a wonderful people prepared to undergo hardship and suffering in the name of their nation and who, throughout all their trials maintained their faith in themselves as being superior to the rest of humanity. They were proud and independent.... and that was their failing. They had Abraham for their father, a man chosen by God to leave the nation he lived in and beget a chosen people, but in their nationalism they had forgotten the wonderful moral qualities of Abraham, his faith, humility and slowness to aggression. They had forgotten his affection and unselfish concern for the few righteous souls in Sodom, his generosity, meekness and love of peace and a never failing courtesy and reasonable disposition. Abraham was courageous and warlike when the occasion demanded, but he preferred talk to war. He was a humble man in the scriptural sense, which is to recognise God's omnipotence and man's impotence, man's utter dependence upon God for all he has. In this sense Israel were no longer humble. They had made a racial discrimination of their calling, forgetting that in them all nations were to be blessed.

When, therefore, Jesus reminded them that a Phoenecian widow and a Syrian leper had been favoured by God's grace they were furious. This was not the kind of talk they wanted from their Messiah: they wanted fighting talk, uplifting encouragement, not criticism. So in their blind fury they attempted to destroy Jesus, but he passed through their midst and escaped.

This early incident in Jesus' ministry is typical of more to come in which they would be offended in him. The poorer people heard him gladly at first, but the religious leaders, the very people one would have expected to welcome him, became more and more disenchanted with his message. He was so unlike what they had expected and wanted. He was too lowly for them. John the Baptist was more like the kind of prophet they expected the Messiah to be for he was more in the tradition of Jewish prophets. His dress was modest - garments made of rough camel's hair; his diet frugal - locusts and wild honey, and above all his manner of living and preaching, warning them, "O generation of vipers to flee from the wrath to come," was more like the prophet they expected. Had not Elijah asked for a sign from heaven and not one of the prophets of Baal had escaped death at his hands. Forty two little boys in Bethel had mocked Elisha and had been mauled by bears in response to the prophet's curse. That was the kind of miracle they expected and would have recognised. "They desired that Jesus would shew them a sign from heaven." They were blind to the fact that his life was full of signs from heaven; signs of positive goodness, that every day shewed people being healed of incurable sickness; the dead restored to life and above all, the gospel of grace was daily being preached.

Jesus, unlike John, enjoyed good food and drink; he mixed freely with the common people, even the hated publicans and despised sinners. He did not discriminate, but gave his time, energy and the warmth of his affection to all types of people. The Samaritans, hated by all Jewry, he chose in his parable to shew that all kinds of men are capable of doing good. The only people he scathingly denounced were those who thought themselves righteous; He had no time for the very people who should have welcomed him, the religious leaders. But he did not ostracise them; they had their chance but rejected him. He even ate with Pharisees, accepting an invitation to Simon's house (Luke 7:36) where a woman of low morals came weeping and anointing Jesus' feet with ointment, at which Simon typically said, in his heart, "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman toucheth him; for she is a sinner". Once again, Jesus disappointed their expectations; a true prophet would have denounced such a woman and sent her packing. How could a holy man of God allow himself to be touched by such an immoral person? Every man in the room at Simon's banquet thought he had the right to look down on this woman and treat her with disdain. No doubt a hum of gossip and hard words were to be heard from all sides and we can imagine the sudden silence when Jesus quietly spoke, saying, "Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee", and in his unique fashion told the story of the two debtors.

In this manner, he quietly reminded Simon that he too was a debtor to God, even though he thought himself ten times better than the woman. There was no respect of persons with Jesus, all being sinners in God's sight. There is none righteous; no one can earn salvation or lift a finger to help himself. It is all a matter of God's grace; it is all one way; from Him to us. Jesus had not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance and there could be no repentance for those who thought themselves righteous: the prerequisite of forgiveness is the conviction of sin; the deep feeling of estrangement from God and the desire for reconciliation. The woman bowed before him in the depth of this feeling, but it was foreign to Simon. We can hear the grudging, reluctant agreement with Jesus in Simon's reply to his question as to which of the two debtors loved most, "I suppose that he to whom he forgave most".

Jesus came unto his own and they received him not. Unto the Jews he was a stumbling block. When they saw him there was no beauty that they should desire him: he never fulfilled their expectations. In their interpretation of Messianic prophecy, they had gone astray; they had selfishly appropriated to themselves all the prophecies that appealed to their nationalism and, sadly, had overlooked those which were of far more eternal value, the promises of a saviour for who would with compassion take on men's infirmities, share their sorrows and judge the poor with equity: a saviour who, far from condemning sinners, would "become sin for them" although "he knew no sin": saviour who would not quench a 'smoking flax' nor break a 'bruised reed', but with kind, yet firm, encouragement would say, "Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more". Can we imagine that sinful woman ever again returning to her sin after such forgiveness?

The question inevitably arises in the minds of those who look for his return "How shall we stand? Will he find in us the faith that he implied would be missing? Shall we recognise him? "The Jews did not and they were ardently expecting him. He was quite unlike their expected Messiah: they had misread prophecy; imparted to it a bias in their own favour. In their complacency they had expected a respecter of persons who would save them because they fulfilled certain external conditions. If we are only nominal, external, Christians, can we expect any different?

Jesus hasn't changed since he left the earth. He is still the understanding, compassionate, saviour who has a feeling for our infirmities. He is our living advocate who, by his death, brought us back to God, now our Father and Friend. "We die with him daily that we may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of our own,

but that which is of God by faith. We live as he liveth in us."

To know him; to be like him; to see him as he is, should be the obsession of our lives. All else is of secondary importance. Should we not be careful lest, whilst we are fretting about signs of the times; the political situation in the Middle East; the identity of the merchants of Tarshish and kindred abstruse subjects, we lose sight of our priorities?

PROPTIATION

by Ralph Lovelock.

It is probable that no single theological theory built upon a single word has done more violence to the true nature of God than that based upon the unfortunate translation 'propitiation' in Romans 3;25. Even the N.E.B. has preserved the 'idea' behind the term when it translates - "God designed him to be the means of expiating sin by his sacrificial death".

Around the turn of the century, Adolph Deissmann, in his volume "Bible Studies", categorised this passage to be the source of an error which "of all the errors to be found in exegetical and lexical literature one of the most popular, most pregnant with results, and most baneful". In a later article contributed to the "Encyclopaedia Biblica", he amplified the details contained in the Study. This article will attempt to present the facts in a simple manner, but for full details Deissmann should be consulted, and for refutation of the theological dogma which has been built upon it, John McLeod Campbell's work "The Nature of the Atonement", which precipitated the split of Campbellites from the Baptist body, should be consulted.

The centre of Mosaic worship was the Ark of the Covenant, a box with three ritual objects within, and closed at the top with a golden plate upon which reposed two golden cherubs, between which Yahweh dwelt with his people. The Hebrew term used to describe this plate can be transliterated into our alphabet as 'kapporeth', and is translated as 'mercy seat'. The Hebrew term comes from a root meaning 'to cover', and constructionally it was a lid sealing the interior of the Ark; from this has come the false idea that through Jesus God would 'cover over' our sins, pretending that they were not there; the derivation of the Hebrew however is from a verbal form which came to mean 'wipe out', and there is little doubt that the meaning associated with the term during the O.T. period was 'means of propitiation', and it is very probable that the modern Arabic legal term 'kaffarat' meaning 'propitiation' is derived from

it.

When the Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek (the LXX), which was the O.T. used widely by the Christian Church at a later date, a Greek term 'hilasterion' was used to translate 'kapporeth'. In its N.T. use there is still some controversy as to whether it is used as an adjective, or as a noun derived from the adjective, but the main ideas involved are not affected by this issue. Etymologically, the Greek term means 'propitiatory' or 'propitiatory thing'; there is no single use known in which it can be understood as 'propitiatory sacrifice' as implied in N.E.B., but one papyrus concerned with theology uses 'hilasterios thusia' when a propitiatory sacrifice is intended, thus adding the Greek term for 'sacrifice' as not implied in the other word. A later lexicographer gives as two synonyms of this term two others meaning 'that which purifies' and 'altar'; this indicates that in secular Greek the root idea is propitiation or purification, but that a religious use of an altar to obtain this object by sacrifice was one recognised method of purification. This means that unless we can find definite evidence in O.T. uses for the implication in the one term for either 'covering' or for 'sacrifice', we have no grounds for assuming this meaning in the N.T.

In Ex. 25:17 (16 in LXX), where the constructional details of the tabernacle are described, the box which formed the ark together with the contents have been noted, and then the cover (mercy seat) is translated by two Greek terms which mean 'propitiatory covering' thus indicating that to the translator the term for 'covering' had to be added when the physical form was considered because 'cover' was not implied in 'hilasterion'. In all further references, it is the object 'mercy seat' which is in mind, that is its ritual function as the means of acquiring purification from sin, and not its physical function as that which formed the top enclosure of a box containing the "tokens of the covenant"; in any case, it was these tokens of covenant which were 'covered over' by the lid, and not the sins of the people, which sins had been banished into the wilderness upon the 'scape-goat'. In the Hebrew O.T. there is no single passage which specifically implies a 'covering' when 'kapporeth' is used; it is always the mercy seat as a central object in ritual worship which is involved, and its function as the place and means for the obtaining of forgiveness for sins which is in mind. It is, of course, after sacrifice that such forgiveness was obtained, but the mercy seat was neither the location nor means of offering that sacrifice, only the location and means of obtaining forgiveness after the sacrifice had already been offered.

In the first five verses of the ninth chapter of Hebrews the Tabernacle is described and this term is used for the mercy seat; but it is the "ordinances of divine service" which are under discussion, and the position of the Tabernacle as a "sanctuary" which is specified, and thus it is its ritual function, and not its construction, which are involved. Since other passages associate the term with the Atonement, it is interesting to recall what that function was; it was the place where the glory of God reposed, and from which it shone forth; it was the place where man met with God, and obtained the complete absolution from sin; it was the location where the blood (symbolising the life) of a ritually clean animal was brought into the very presence of God, and was instrumental in obtaining that absolution. The epistle does not in this place associate Jesus with the mercy seat, but in 1:3 he is the 'shining forth' of God's glory, and in 10:19-20 the blood of Jesus is that which has opened to us direct access to God within the sanctuary, a play upon the tearing of the curtain on the day of crucifixion. Both of these ideas were present also in the outlook of Paul; in 2.Cor.4:6, the glory of God is to be seen by us in the face of Jesus, and in Eph.3:12 we have access to God in Jesus. These ideas at least, therefore, must have been in the mind of the N.T. writers when they associated the term with Jesus.

It is the passage in Rom.3 which has given rise to much philosophising about the Atonement, but the context of the use should have indicated that no idea of a placatory sacrifice was in Paul's mind:-

v.21 In v.22 we are told that the Law and Prophets bear witness to the justice of God, but that which is about to be discussed, while also bearing witness (bringing to light), is doing so quite independently of law. The sacrifices of the O.T. were a central part of the Law, and if the Atonement bears witness independently of Law, then it is difficult to see in it a ritual sacrifice.

v.22 "it is God's way of righting wrong, effective through faith in Christ for all who have such faith". A sacrifice is that which man offers at his own cost to God, but this is God's initiative and not man's, and it is faith in Christ, not an offering to God, which is the sole requirement from man. It is also a putting right of wrong; the wrong is human sin, and it is God who 'rights' it, not who is placated by an offering.

- v.23 In sinning all fall short of divine splendour, so that by implication the justification of v.24 is a banishing of sin with a consequent inheritance of divine splendour.
- v.24 This justification is accomplished by "God's free grace alone", and since it was God present in the person of Christ (see 2.Cor.5:19) who himself acted to liberate man, there is not the slightest room here for any placating of God by another.
- v.25 The 'propitiation' associated with the death on the Cross is effective through human faith in Christ, not through any action or reaction upon God himself - a refuting of the whole concept of normal sacrifice.

It was the use of 'blood' which has led so many to associate the propitiation with a sacrifice, but the fundamental difference between the blood of Christ and that of a sacrifice should have warned against this identification; the sacrifice (see Heb.10:1-10) could never right the wrong, remove the sin, and it witnessed to this by the fact that blood (life) must never be consumed by man; the blood of Jesus, on the other hand, (see John 6) must be continuously consumed by man to maintain 'life' within him; this fact, which caused offence during the Ministry, marks a fundamental distinction between the death of a sacrificial victim under the Law, and that of Jesus.

The other occurrences of the term are in 1.Jn.2:2 & 4:10, and the N.E.B. bears witness to the context ruling out sacrifice here when it translates in both passages "remedy for the defilement of our sins", placing it squarely as the means whereby we are cleansed from sin, and not the offering made on behalf of sin. Vincent Taylor (The Atonement in New Testament Teaching - page 151) suggests that John was explaining the meaning of the term as used of Christ, and correcting a misunderstanding already beginning to grow around it. His phrase is worth quoting - "this usage is in harmony with Johannine theology as a whole, in which all the emphasis lies, not so much upon what Christ does, as on what He is in Himself, the Word of God, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the immediate object of faith, the spiritual food and drink of believers who enjoy eucharistic fellowship with Him".

Two other terms fail to be noted in this connection, because both have been used as support for the idea of a God who required to be appeased; these are 'wrath' and 'sacrifice'. It is true that Christ is spoken of as a sacrifice on our behalf, but in the most direct reference it

is not the propitiatory sacrifice for sin, but the much more significant death of a lamb through whose blood the angel of death passed over the dwelling of those associated with it - "As Christians you are unleavened passover bread; for indeed our passover has begun; the sacrifice is offered - Christ himself". (1.Cor.5:7). There is consistent reference in the N.T. to the fact that only Christ himself is able to save us from sin - yet Paul can exhort us to make the same kind of 'sacrifice' which Christ made, "In a word, as God's dear children, try to be like him, and live in love as Christ loved you and gave himself up on your behalf as an offering and sacrifice whose fragrance is pleasing to God," (Eph.5:1-2) and can make an obvious extension of the same principle when he says, "Therefore, my brothers, I implore you by God's mercy to offer your very selves to him: a living sacrifice, dedicated and fit for his acceptance, the worship offered by mind and heart," (Rom.12:1). Just as Paul could say that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, so (Phil.2) when he considers the 'sacrifice' of Christ, he can both exhort us to let this mind be in us, and promise that God Himself will also be in us - "You must work out your own salvation in fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you, inspiring both the will and the deed, for his own chosen purpose," (and in another place can say that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself he has entrusted us with the message of reconciliation it is as if God were appealing to you through us," (2.Cor.5:18-21). The purpose of the death of Christ is specifically stated not to be that of propitiation - "his purpose in dying for all was that men, while still in life, should cease to live for themselves, and should live for him who for their sake died and was raised to life," (2.Cor.5:15): in other words, the means of cleansing us from sin, not an offering to placate an offended God!

The question of 'wrath' is a little more involved. There was vast difference in the patterns of thought between the Hebrew and the Greek; Courtenay James (The Language of Palestine - pp.8-9) expresses it thus - "The Semite and Greek represent two very different races; they do not think in the same manner, and it follows that their linguistic forms will reveal corresponding varieties ... The Greek was philosophic and his language academic; the Semite was imaginative and his language pictorial. The former was deductive, the latter intuitive". This difference is well illustrated in the derivation of the two terms for 'wrath'. The Hebrew term shows the 'pictorial' nature of their thought; it is concerned with the external signs of inward anger, especially facial ones such as nasal contortion and

rough breathing. The Greek term on the other hand derives from roots concerned with the natural impulses of the creature, and its main meaning is the emotive feelings arising from internal disposition as a result of external aggravation or exitation. Thus the Greek, like ourselves, thought of a person racked with the emotions of anger and vengeance: the Semite thought pictorially of the visual results of wrath upon the life of the recipient - the suffering which another's vengeance can bring; the alienation between two persons, and the distortion of the tranquil state.

Although the N.T. is written in Greek, the patterns of thought behind it are in large manner Hebraic. If all the references to wrath are studied, it will be seen that they are concerned with the visitation on the life of the recipient, and in the references to 'anger', it is the human who is angry, not God! In fact God is consistently presented as loving men, even when they are sinners! Thus, Paul can say, "Christ died for us while we were yet sinners, and that is God's own proof of his love towards us," (Rom.5:8). It is true that in O.T. times there were many who thought of God as angry, but they were corrected by the prophets - "Have I any desire, says the Lord God, for the death of a wicked man? Would I not rather that he should mend his ways and live?" (Ez.18:23). In Isa.57 the tribulations of wickedness are spoken of as designed by God, but the personal emotions behind this purpose of visiting wrath is the loving desire that the man shall eventually return to God - even as Israel again and again returned to God in affliction, although, as Moses had foretold, Jeshuran waxed fat and kicked in prosperity.

If these references to wrath from which we shall be saved through Christ are read in the context of the loving God of the Bible, we will be in no danger of thinking in terms of placatory sacrifice, and will be ready to see much more consistent terms in which the atoning work of Christ is presented to us in the N.T.

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GLORY AND REGENERATION

(An introduction to the study of Ezekiel's
prophecy)

by Peter Cox.

The book of Ezekiel is an awesome drama of visions and acted parables. From the opening vision, of divine glory and power in Mesopotamia, to the shame of the departure of that presence of glory from the polluted temple in Jerusalem, to the return of that glory to the geometric grandeur of the restored Holy City, the prophet speaks insistently of the majesty and omnipotence of God, of the terror of His Holy Name. Ezekiel's themes are purification and regeneration. He speaks of causes and effects, of sins and their punishments, but his work as God's spokesman is to move God's people emotionally. Reasoning and intellect are humble servants, not driving masters, in his proclamations. His repetitive style is a plain medium which allows prominence to the passion and vehemence of his royal, apocalyptic imagination. He makes our hearts burn, not by the colours of rhetoric but in an anguished response to the torturing conceptions of his inspiration.

Ezekiel was a silent man, commanded to be dumb. Those exiled Israelites who visited his dwelling by the River Chebar saw him rapt in thought, burdened by his intense contemplation of the Almighty's anger and mercy, and of Israel's sinfulness. His bodily actions were exceedingly strange, and showed meanings. When he spoke they would hear only God's words. An understanding of Ezekiel's divine message must begin in the heart, and later it may ascend to the mind. For he is a prophet of conversion and renewal:

Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby
ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and
a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of
Israel? (ch.18:31).

These words come at the end of a chapter in which Ezekiel is showing, in detail, the implications of God's law for the life and attitudes of individuals: "...if a man be just.....neither hath defiled his neighbour's wife.....and hath not oppressed any.....hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked....." (18:5-7). These are words of Moses, and of the psalmists. Are they not also the words of Christ? Ezekiel, like Jesus, desires first repentance, and thus, salvation.

Those readers who select only two chapters from the book (38, 39) and build from them a political history of "the end of the world" are in danger of by-passing the principal exhortations of the prophet. They

may find only what they seek, and fail to value much of what God has said in this book. They go into a huge quarry of marble, glorious but as yet unpolished, and hew out only one limited vein of rock which happens to glint. The situation of the Israelites in Ezekiel's time made it inevitable that he should speak of international affairs. But his most fundamental concern is not with the physical destinies of nations.

His primary interest is the vindication of God's name by his people. Therefore his stress is upon their spiritual renewal without which they cannot begin to glorify God. Jerusalem and her leaders are vigorously condemned. They will not change their hearts and ways but persist in an accelerando of ungodliness which culminates rapidly in destruction. The exiles, to whom these condemnations are addressed, must learn to be chastened for their good by the salutary example of Jerusalem, and to realize that they have no earthly city where national salvation resides. Instead they as individuals must seek to serve and glorify their heavenly Father among the heathen. This will prepare the way for a new covenant, as Jeremiah also foretold (Jer.31:31-34):

But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for my holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went, and I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean : from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. (Ezek. 36:21-28).

Jeremiah and Ezekiel would only speak of the final regeneration of Israel in terms which made sense to them and their contemporaries. God therefore impels them to give visionary hope of a restored kingdom of Israel, from which the sins and degeneration of David's successors' kingdom had been purged. The remnant who were spiritually renewed would be regathered from heathen lands. Ezekiel, with lavish affection for his erring people, describes in vision a divine Utopia, measured out geometrically upon the mountains of Palestine.

Today, knowing the history of Israel after the exile, and knowing above all the gospel records of God's Son, our Redeemer, we can begin to understand the full scope of Ezekiel's later chapters. The temple was rebuilt, but not so gloriously as he saw in his vision. The land was re-peopled with Israelites returned from heathen nations, but not permanently. There was a faithful remnant in Israel, which included Joseph and Mary, Anna and Simeon, Elizabeth, Zacharias and John, and the twelve apostles. But we see very darkly even now. A literal fulfilment of Ezekiel's visions seems to me increasingly improbable. He saw, for example, the land and sea powers of Syria, Anatolia and Parthia uniting to destroy a pastoral Israel who dwelt safely in unwallled villages (38,11). We see Israel in terror, and the nations of these territories largely disunited. God will reveal himself in events, and soon, I am sure, but it is doubtful if man's speculative intellect will unlock these secrets of Ezekiel's prophecy beforehand.

The purpose of prophecy, including Olivet and Revelation, is to move our hearts, not to outline future history. Let us then briefly survey Ezekiel's book for its positive teaching. I see it as a loosely symphonic work in five movements. The first section is vividly orchestrated, complex and full of splendour - a whirlwind from the north, living creatures sparkling like the colour of burnished brass, the likeness of the firmament the colour of terrible crystal, the noise of wings like the noise of great waters. We recall the majestic statuary in the Assyrian Galleries in the British Museum, but Ezekiel's vision adds the power and movement of the divine genesis of the universe to the static impressiveness of Babylonian art. The greatness of God, the numinous awe of the Almighty, are passions which must be fundamental in man if he is to hear and heed Ezekiel's message. The terror of the Creator is manifest in Babylonia: it is not safely remote from the exiles and their captors, it is not far away in Jerusalem or Sinai, but a force which moves to any part of the peopled earth. The glory is described in familiar terms, the cloud and fire of the exodus from Egypt, the thunder and lightning of Sinai when Moses received the Law. Now the flutes and trumpets fall silent, the

kettle drums rest, and the lower strings sound menacingly, rebuking the rebellious children of Israel, and commanding Ezekiel to be not a priest, but a prophet:

And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. (3:11)

At the fourth chapter we begin the large-scale second movement of the work. It contains a succession of themes, each expanded with important developments, and all linked in mood and message. The sufferings, the wickedness and punishments of Jerusalem are presented in acted parables, in visions and divine proclamations. We may consider just one example, from chapter 12. The prophet has perhaps built a model, in clay or sand, on the ground outside his dwelling by the River Chebar. The picture of Jerusalem which he drew on the tile (chapter 4) has been given tangible, if miniature, substance, like a child's castle on an English beach in summer. During one day Ezekiel gathers his belongings together in the modelled city. In the evening, with his fingers, or a trowel, he makes a hole in the wall of the clay city, and simulates the action of taking his staff out of the city, through the breached wall, by night. This parable expresses his main theme - related obviously to the condemnations in previous chapters of the city's wickedness. The theme is developed. Israel must flee from Jerusalem because the city will be destroyed. God's might will be revealed, and his holiness satisfied, not only by destroying the heathen (the subject of the next movement) but by using them to punish this sinful nation and city.

Say, I am your sign; like as I have done, so shall it be done unto them: they shall remove and go into captivity.... And they shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall scatter them among the nations, and disperse them in the countries.....Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth? Tell them therefore, Thus saith the Lord God; I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel, but say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision. For there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel. For I am the Lord: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall

be no more prolonged; for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord God.

(12. vv. 11,15,21-25).

God's command, that man serve Him, and venerate His awe-ful name, will be upheld by punishing disobedience, whether heathen or Israelite. But subsequently, in the fourth and fifth movements, we see how God's holiness is also to be manifested in a new heart and a new Israel. For the present, though, the exiles must realize that they can no longer look to Jerusalem for salvation. It is a cauldron (chapter 11) in which the wicked are burnt. But the exiles, upon whom Israel's future depends, must repent and become the sort of men and women who can individually receive God's mercy - since Israel, as a nation, has not fulfilled the Mosaic covenant:

The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die....Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.

(18,20-21 & 30-32).

The prophet is reasoning with the people, but what God requires is a change of heart rather than a change of mind, an emotional and spiritual transformation.

The third movement is a scherzo, tempestuous and full of violently dissonant chords. In these chapters (25 - 32) Ezekiel shows that the pride of nations, and their rejoicing in humiliating Israel, will surely be punished:

Do not rejoice when your enemy falls,
do not gloat when he is brought down;
or the Lord will see and be displeased with you,
and he will cease to be angry with him.

(Proverbs 24:17-18 NEB).

Arrogant defiance of divine principles will come to its inevitable, calamitous end: "They shall know that I am the Lord".

The remaining chapters of the prophecy are really one long movement concerned with the regeneration of Israel, but chapters 40 to 48 may be detached. The fourth movement then (33-39), is a mingling of warnings and exhortations which recall materials from the earlier movements. In it we shall perhaps remember most strongly the menacing sonorities of the lower voiced brass instruments, a terrible summons to judgment (38-39). The poet Milton, whose inspiration is so strongly Biblical, seems to express the spirit of these chapters when he describes the host of fallen angels in Hell:

..... all the while
Sonorous mettall blowing Martial sounds:
At which the universal Host upsent
A shout that tore Hells Concave, and beyond
Frighted the Reign of Chaos and Old Night.
All in a moment through the gloom were seen
Ten thousand Banners rise into the Air
With Orient Colours waving : with them rose
A Forrest huge of Spears : and thronging Helms
Appear'd and serried Shields in thick array
Of depth immeasurable:

(Paradise Lost 1, 539-549)

In this movement, too, we must not miss the opulent and pleasing harmonies of promise and renewal (34:10- 36:8,37:1) which are more characteristic of the closing pages of the work, and more important:

For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I,
will both search my sheep, and seek them out
I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the
high mountains of Israel shall their fold be :
there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a
fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains
of Israel.

(34, 11 & 14)

The final movement is largamente, for full orchestra augmented with the celestial organ. Steadily Ezekiel builds the New Jerusalem and

maps out the New Israel. High sounding violins suggest the beatific vision, and move our hearts with inexpressible desire. The vision, I have suggested, is not amenable to speculative and ingenious interpretation by men, but should edify our hearts. Its meaning is locked in the wisdom of the Almighty and will be opened to us by Him when our Saviour returns to the earth. The New Heavens and New Earth will be radically different from the modern world. Our world is constructed upon foundations of nationalistic pride and greed, upon international usury. The divine kingdom, founded on love and humility, will certainly not be political as we normally understand that term, and its character can hardly be graspable by the corrupted minds of fallen mankind. So we must live and work, in hope and in faith, trying to put on the mind of Christ, until God terminates the domination of wickedness that prevails today. The beauty of our hope is found in brief essence in three verses of scripture, one from Ezekiel's apocalypse, and two from Christ's:

And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine. (Ezek.47: 12)

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Rev.22:1-2)

Note

I should like to acknowledge the sources on which I have drawn. Because of its respect for the integrity and inspiration of scripture the Commentary by John Taylor (Tyndale Press, 1969) was by far the most helpful. D.Stalker's Commentary (SCM Press, 1968) is fairly up-to-date, and critical, and gives a useful account of earlier writer's views. The notes of the Standard edition of the Jerusalem Bible are succinct and informative. I have found, too, that comparing AV, RSV, NEB and Jerusalem texts has often provoked thought and helped me understand.

TOWARDS A SEARCH FOR TRUTH

"If we are to know Christ better, we must apply ourselves more diligently to regular study of the Bible, both privately and with others, it's the only way". This remark was made recently at a Bible Class and prompted one young person to say - "Well there is little chance of my ever knowing Christ very well for I read very little and do not have the aptitude for the sort of serious study that would be entailed". This young person would not be alone if the following is anything to go by.

Research has been done into people's reading habits and it was established that magazines were the most popular reading matter with newspapers a close second. Books take third place with novels, whilst philosophy and theology came very low down on the list and the Bible lower still. We may wonder why this is so when we are told that more copies of the Bible are sold than any other book. The research mentioned however was not a survey of book sales, which can be misleading but research into people's reading habits and was established by asking people what they read. Most homes can produce a Bible but there are very few where it is read with any regularity. Another important fact that arises, is that there are many people who do no reading at all and this does not include the many thousands of people in Great Britain who have left school unable to read or write.

Now what are we to make of this information, does it reflect the average person's intelligence? Most people would agree that reading broadens the mind, it is certainly something which educationalists encourage. Radio and television undoubtedly have been responsible for much of this decline in reading and there are many daily programmes on both these media designed to keep one in touch with what is going on in the world around us. So one can certainly be well informed these days without reading.

We are all familiar with the so called light-reading and the heavy stuff and the Bible undoubtedly falls into the latter category. People like J.B. Phillips and William Barclay have done much to bring the Bible into the hands of many more people, for which many will be grateful, certainly words like eternal grace, everlasting mercy and Holy Spirit are not words found in weekday conversation.

We know the New Testament constitutes only a very small portion of the teachings of Jesus. There are many who call themselves Christians who feel that "truth" is something to be found only within the pages of scripture and for this reason understandably their Bible has become

very precious to them and much study is applied to its pages in the pursuit of this "truth", inevitably in all sincerity they will encourage others to do likewise. If one does think that the Bible alone holds the answer to questions about God, the world and our own place in this vast scheme of things, then it must be acknowledged that very few persons are coming into contact with this source. Is this important and how does it match our own observations of those around us?

We must be scrupulously honest here in attempting to answer this question. My own observations have lead me to conclude that on the whole there is no evidence to suggest that persons who are Bible students have any special quality that sets them apart from others. For instance, I do not find them more spiritually minded. This is not stated in any condemnatory sense and it would be very helpful if others would contribute their views on this, so that we may have the opportunity of exploring certain possibilities together. We should not be held back by the fear that we shall make the Bible any less important than we have always thought it to be, on the contrary we shall enhance its value. If we turn to an English dictionary we find that 'truth' is defined as - accuracy, agreement between the intended subject matter of a word or sentence on the one hand and the nature of the fact to which the word or sentence refers on the other. From the Greek we have (1) Objectively - the reality lying at the basis of an appearance, the manifested veritable essence of a matter. (2) Subjectively - truthfulness, sincerity and integrity of character. From the Hebrew - sustain, support - the root meaning, which is most clearly seen in the adjectival participle is rendered firm, solid, reliable, faithful, trusted, perceptible.

Does the above do justice to what is known as 'truth' amongst us? We are concerned with the 'truth' which designates the whole field of religious and moral life.

In the Old Testament 'truth' is contrasted with error, falsehood, lies. With reference to God it shows the quality of his nature or will.

In Corinthians 'truth' denotes 'truthfulness' and throughout the New Testament the ontological aspect is emphasised.

We find in John's gospel Jesus with the title of 'truth', not for what he is, but for what he does, "as one who has told (or shown) you the truth".

These positive qualities of "truth" emerged from Jesus as 'love' and this is the word that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 13. Jesus showed forth this love (or truth) to its fullest extent and it was in this completeness that his uniqueness lay, he was, in the words of John's gospel "The way, the truth and the life". He sent "The Comforter" - the spirit of truth.

In Galatians Paul also refers to the 'spirit of Christ' when speaking of these qualities in others and he was convinced of the 'indwelling Christ' - "Yet not I but Christ liveth in me" (truth in the inward being).

The foregoing is an indication of the complexity of 'truth' like the many facets of a jewel.

As a lay person my observations tell me the earth is solid. It looks solid, if I touch it, it feels so, if I jump on it it seems firm, so I conclude with my limited senses that it is solid. A scientist however, would not share that view, he tells me from his specialised knowledge that the earth consists of a conglomeration of myriads of minute molecules floating in space.

Now which view is the truth? Are we both wrong, is one right and the other wrong, or and perhaps this is the most exciting possibility, are both right? Exciting because if this is so then it implies that 'truth' is something living, vital, moving, not fixed or static. I think that it is very important that we find out for ourselves whether this is so. One may consider the phrases, "our walk to the Kingdom" - a 'walk' being a forward movement, also "spiritual growth" - growth denoting movement and in some aspects change.

Perhaps we could consider together the following newly published hymn asking whether 'truth' is to be found only within the pages of our Bibles. How can we answer the question posed?

Your Holy, hearsay is not evidence,
Give me the good news in the present tense.
What happened nineteen hundred years ago,
may not have happened, how can I know?
The 'living truth' is what I long to see,
I cannot lean on what used to be.
So shut your Bibles up and show me how,
the Christ you talk about is living now.

What do we know of the 'living Christ'?; Is this the spirit of truth' or the indwelling Christ which becomes the continuance of "his work"? We know that Jesus gave us an injunction to do 'likewise' - "love one another, as I have loved you" - He who wishes to serve must be a willing servant to all. Those who have shown a response to this

injunction and show forth these Christ-like qualities are linked with Christ, he tells us this quite clearly, "In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me".

Are we fully alert to the 'Christ presence' within others? It would be wrong to expect to find these spiritual qualities fully in any one person and it may be the negative qualities of that person's lower self (for want of a better word) that confuse us.

Can the 'truth' be comprehended intuitively? Many believe that all have within them the seed of spirituality and Jesus encouraged people not to neglect this. "The Kingdom of God is within you". This will not be a journey outwards but inwards. To me they are parts of the same journey, as one goes outward into the world and becomes more aware of what it is and more aware of what other people are, so we get more understanding of what we are and what are the depths of our own being. Indeed I sometimes think we need to look inwards, to take the silence and the quietness of inner exploration, not in order to retreat from the world but in order to deal with the world better and to appreciate it more fully.

If we think we cannot change and continue to accept things as they are, we are likely to become dispirited and depressed. It must be acknowledged that for the possibility of growth one has to be rather serious, this does not mean disillusioned, which can lead to despair and cynicism but there will have to be a sense of urgency, so let us remember that the passionate search for fulfilment is the best teacher.

I am afraid that for most of us, our lives consist of a great deal of conflict and not for many the joy and peace that passeth all understanding.

It behoves us then to ask ourselves what it is we have to offer others, particularly for those who feel that 'preaching' is something that they are committed to. Is it not futile to persuade others along a path which by either temperament or degree of spiritual growth they are not fitted? There is a lack of real insight into human nature if we suppose that the way which is best for one is best for another. It is the tragedy of a narrow outlook.

Do not let us restrict 'truth' to the written word, we have indicated that it is not a proven proposition but rather an impulse that the believer actualises, so let us be alert to its many facets all around us.

If we look with seeing eyes, the answer to death and what lies beyond is told in the story of nature but this will demand a great deal of alertness on our part.* 1 Cor.15:35-44.

Finally, please do not agree or disagree with the writer, the foregoing is only intended as a sharing of thoughts from which it is hoped we can discover together, things vain, things unworthy of self, things too small on which it is not worthy of spending one's life and energy. To help each other to advance spiritually we need to have a free exchange between those with a common aim, who are intent on understanding fundamental human problems and who can blend critical caution with the tolerant spirit, which is prepared to find truth in many strange places. Such discovery will reveal 'the truth' which will "make us free" - Free individually to grow towards the stature of Christ.

S.T.A.

editorial continued

The 'creed' of the Old Testament was the ten commandments, of these it is very significant that three are about God, one about a day of rest, and the remaining five about social behaviour. It is surely a poor reflection on the Christian Church that even its simplest creed should be entirely obsessed with doctrine, biblical though its contents may be. Christ replaced the ten commandments with one - "A new commandment I give unto you - That you love one another". 'New' in the sense that the quality of love desired was the same as that with which Jesus loved humanity (John 13:34). This cannot be a commandment in the sense of the ten commandments because as was pointed out in the last issue, in the article entitled "A command to love?". 'Love', by its very nature cannot be commanded. It can however be 'believed' "With him whose last best creed is Love", to use the words of the familiar hymn. John's gospel is a theological gospel in which Greek and Jewish thought intermingle to present Christ in all his glory. A glory far above that which Jesus himself encouraged. Perhaps John looked back to the awe-inspiring epiphany at Sinai - in the words of the Old Covenant through Moses - "The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb....Thou shalt have none other God before me". Does John see in his Master's proclamation at the Last Supper just before Calvary as even greater epiphany? - "Love one another - as I love you". Is this the Word which, amidst spiritual thunder and lightning and with a voice of the trumpet waxing louder and louder, echoes through the fragments of the shattered cross cementing it together so that it can show to the world the still small voice - the Peace of God which passeth all understanding.