

ENDEAVOUR

magazine

GOOD NEWS BIBLE



*The Lord is my shepherd;
I have everything I need.*



Spring 1978

No. 56

20p

THE ENDEAVOUR MAGAZINE

No. 56

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MY LORD AND MY GOD

"What think ye of the Christ? whose son is he?" This obtuse question Jesus put to the Pharisees and it foreshadowed the great question which all sincere Christians must ask themselves and unfortunately it has so troubled Christ's church that it has led to bitter controversy and persecution among Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant alike, none having been exempt.

When Servetus died at the hand of Calvin, his last words from the flames were, "Hear O Israel the Lord thy God is one God."

Today a group of leading protestant theologians of liberal outlook have published a controversial work entitled, 'The Myth of God Incarnate'. This book is carefully reviewed in this issue of Endeavour and consists of a series of essays dealing with different aspects of the subject.

Let us consider the word 'Myth' as an introduction.

Probably the commonest meaning of 'myth' is a story that is fictitious, usually involving supernatural beings or events. However, theologians tend to use the word 'myth' in a different sense, namely a narrative or description in simple language that explains a "truth". Thus, God being so much beyond human concept has to be thought of in some symbolic or mythological way. However, the authors

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TAKING A FRESH LOOK II

Today, in society, there is a trend towards examining values, institutions and traditions which have existed for centuries. How will our community come through this, especially when our young are receiving an education which teaches them to be critical and examining? Will they expose weakness in our Christian armoury which perhaps we may have blindly received from our fore-fathers without thought or question? Can we help our young in their problems of morality with carefully thought out reasons for the moral stances we take, or do we duck down, cowardly, behind a verse which we throw out to them, this response only showing our own incompetence and inability to face up to the problem of morality with the young? There is a great difference between the Christian who knows that such an action is wrong, and the one who understands why such an action is wrong and is sufficiently in touch with the pressures and circumstances with which the young are faced, so that wise counsel can be given to them with adequate reasoning, especially on matters which are not clear cut. Can we cope also with the objections that the educationist may produce? Have we given it good attention for ourselves or do we hide behind experts? Can we cope with the variant objections the theologians or philosophers raised? Do we know what they are? Do we read of them, or do we put a ban on them as the R.C. church did to their congregations on banning the reading of the Bible for themselves? There is still a belief that works which are not Christadelphian in origin should not be read. Contribution from Theology and Philosophy are generally taboo to us. Perhaps mainly because they question the promise of our Biblical interpretation, querying our doctrine of inspiration and revelation, although this is not wholly true; what in fact the more reasonable scholars do is to qualify what it means by inspiration.

If we have 'the truth' then it will stand against all objections which come along, but if there is some area of our thinking which may be open to interpretation then how shall we ever know unless we are prepared, with OPENMINDS, to evaluation everything in which we believe? Gone are the days when we could,

consciously or unconsciously, condition our young to be in the mould of their Christadelphian grandfathers. And if by suppression we can still produce such a person, they are mostly strangers to the modern world. This may boost our own spiritual ego in seeing ourselves as exclusively the children of God, wholly separated from the evil world, but it will not serve us as preachers whose heart's desire is to bring back the lost sheep. We need to understand people to be able to save them. We need to be touched by their infirmities as our Master was and is before He can work through us and gather in the rich harvest.

It is then, in my belief, that the time has come when we must consider our stewardship to our Master, and examine critically but constructively our tradition. I see (and this may be challenged) the primary function of the church to be its preaching mission. I see relatively little value in our ecclesias if they are not giving the voice of Christ to the world. If no people are coming to our meetings, which would be an alarming situation, we should ask, "why?" I am not suggesting there should be a mass revolution or a change for the sake of change, but am saying that, for the furtherance of the gospel, some of our inherited tradition, which served its purpose well when it was established, has now outlived its usefulness. I say this not because our older brethren do not still gain much from what we do - the way we worship etc., but I say this in the light of the fact that our community attracts few converts in a time when many, especially the young, are searching for a meaning in life, and are joining other communities. Those who are involved with the young and are experiencing with the Lord's blessing, a measure of success are continually meeting with difficulty when the time comes for a commitment to be made to Christ through baptism. Preaching will be to no avail unless we examine what we are hoping to bring people to; remember too the words of Jesus (Matt. 23:15). It is hoped that these strong comments will help us to see the importance of taking a fresh look at what we do. It is spiritual conceit which conveniently justifies an inattentive world with such words as that people do not come to us because it is a sign of the times. It is spiritual humility which asks is it that, the leaflet contribution is too cold and commercial, or is it that the lecture, was unmoving or boring. If at the end of a special effort we cannot honestly say, "The Lord is working through us," then we must conclude that something must be wrong. It is, therefore, in the view of the writer, that unless we make some critical and honest evaluation and examination of our attitudes and activities, unless we can be bold enough to call obsolete parts of our tradition which are no longer of value, unless we amend our preaching message to conform more closely to the New Testament gospel, and that unless we modify and vary our form of worship

so that it becomes more immediately meaningful to the young who enter our church as it is to those who by long continual practice have become attuned to our present form of worship, then we cannot become an active living church which can again experience the Lord powerfully walking amongst us.

Some may object to this on the grounds that coming to Christ is a long term objective and we should not expect to gain spiritual heights overnight. I disagree. I feel that such an attitude displays an almost superstitious fear to evaluate, and to question a worship which does not meet its aims. "If a brother loses heart, it is always the brother who is at fault," is the attitude which prevails; even the person concerned is convinced of this. This is not an attitude which demonstrates our Christian love for each other. Whilst it is true that coming to Christ, learning his ways and becoming a committed Christian is the work of a lifetime, if at our meetings we cannot rise to great spiritual heights of devotion and dedication, especially for those with the enthusiastic flame of youth, then from where can we receive such strength? For the elder brethren the wrench from orthodoxy is most difficult but, nevertheless, the wrench must be made for the sake of the gospel just like it had to be made for Paul. The young must be patient and bear long in this, and in tender love must appreciate that those much older cannot move as fast as they themselves and that often the wise counsel of restraint has saved many a young person, who may be over anxious to race, eyes closed, into areas of danger. The change must come by continual communication in more fervent, communal and personal prayer and guidance of the principles of Jesus.

We shall next examine briefly two aspects, our teaching and our worship. It is hoped discussion will result. (This will be in our next Issue)

G.W.R.

THE ENDEAVOUR MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTIONS

Great Britain £1 per annum, (Students 50p), single copies 20p. (post free)
Canada, USA & Australia \$ 2.00 (air mail \$ 3.50). South Africa R1.50.
Great Britain, Europe & South Africa (also articles and correspondence)
The Endeavour Magazine, 150 Chessetts Wood Road, Lapworth, Warwickshire, England.
Canada & USA. The Endeavour Magazine, 108 North Orchard Road, Linthicum Heights, Maryland 21090 USA. Australia & New Zealand, The Endeavour Magazine, 2 Kilorn Av., Kilsyth, Victoria 3137, Australia.

REVIEW

The Myth of God Incarnate

The book, 'The Myth of God Incarnate' consists of a series of essays written by seven British theologians and edited by John Hick who is H.G. Wood Professor of Theology at Birmingham University.

The aim of the writers is set out in the preface. They are convinced that another theological development is called for in this last part of the twentieth century to follow the adjustments which were made in the nineteenth century in response to the enlargement of human knowledge. These enlargements were:- that man is part of nature and has emerged within the evolution of forms of life on this earth, and that the Bible was written by a variety of human beings and cannot be accorded a verbal divine authority. They believe that the need today "arises from growing knowledge of Christian origins, and involves a recognition that Jesus was 'a man approved by God' for a special role in the divine purpose, and that the later conception of him as God incarnate, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity living a human life, is a mythological or poetic way of expressing his significance for us." Besides seeing this as a matter of truth, they say it has important practical implications for our relationship with the peoples of the other great world religions. They believe that making adjustments to Christianity in the past has made it possible for many inhabitants of our modern, science-oriented culture to be Christians today, and in the same way these later adjustments will make belief possible for our children's children.

The first essay is 'Christianity without Incarnation' by Maurice Wiles, Regius Professor of Divinity and Canon of Christ Church, Oxford. He asks whether an incarnational faith, i.e. belief in Jesus as fully man and fully God, the Second Person of the co-equal Trinity is essential to Christianity. He deals with the question in three sections - (1) Is it a proper question to ask? (2) Is it necessary? (3) Is it constructive?

Under the first heading he argues that the concept of Christianity without incarnation could be viable in the same way as there are acceptable doctrines of the Eucharist without transubstantiation, belief in the authority of Scripture without belief in its inerrancy and belief in the incarnation without belief in the virgin birth.

In the second part, he argues that a sensible question is only asked if the accepted position is unsatisfactory or puzzling, and points out that there are unsatisfactory things about the doctrine of the incarnation which arise from a consideration of its origin, history and contemporary affirmation. He says that the New Testament writers were interpreters of Jesus not just reporters of his Teaching or church doctrine, and all stop short of the assertions that characterise the later doctrine of the incarnation. He sees the doctrine as an interpretation of Jesus appropriate to the age in which it arose. As far as the history of the doctrine is concerned, he feels that the church has never succeeded in offering a reasoned account of Christ as both fully human and fully divine, but he does not claim "that one ought to be able perfectly to fathom the mystery of Christ's being before one is prepared to believe." Contemporary believers in the doctrine stress that Jesus had no knowledge of a kind different from ours and that he had no idea that he was the Son of God incarnate. In this way he was fully human, but with this view, the idea of incarnation has changed and the writer asks whether some concept other than incarnation might better express the divine significance of Jesus.

The third part deals firstly with a looser sense of incarnational faith in which the conviction is expressed that the physical world can be the carrier of spiritual value. The writer states that such a belief would still be possible without a belief in the incarnation as defined in terms of the Trinity. He also states that the significance of Jesus as a model for human life is not directly affected by the way in which his relationship to God is understood. The primary importance of Jesus for Christians, however, has been "the conviction that he is the one in whom we meet God, the one through whom God has acted decisively for the salvation of the world." Even here, the writer says, absence of incarnational belief would not destroy the mediatorial function of Jesus and, "it would still be possible to see Jesus not only as one who embodies a full response of man to God but also as one who expresses and embodies the way of God towards men."

The writer then considers the changes which might follow an abandonment of the doctrine of the incarnation and states that the most likely one would be towards a less exclusive insistence on Jesus as the way for all peoples and cultures.

The second essay, 'A Cloud of Witnesses', is by Frances Young who is lecturer in New Testament Studies at Birmingham University. She says that the traditional formulations of the nature of Jesus in terms of a unique divine incarnation are the product of witness and confession in a particular historical

environment, and goes on to give the New Testament witness. She discusses the various New Testament titles for Jesus and says that they existed before the Christian era and were adopted and modified by the Christians. None of these titles was claimed by Jesus himself except that of 'Son of Man'. However, New Testament teaching on the nature of Christ is not confined to the titles he bore, but each gospel and all the other writings present different pictures of him. She concentrates on Paul's presentation of Jesus and says that nowhere is Jesus called God, but he does God's work and is God's special supernatural agent who acts because of God's initiative. Ultimately he is to give up his delegated authority so that God will be all in all. She does believe in the pre-existence of Christ as the 'man from heaven' but says that his Sonship to God is not expressed in terms of divine nature but as the result of divine creation and election and his own perfect obedience in doing God's work. In him we become sons of God and she says that it is our incorporation into Christ which is the centre of Paul's living faith. She draws several interesting conclusions from her studies; namely that the New Testament does not provide directly revealed information about the divinity of Christ and that the doctrine of God incarnate is read into rather than out of the Pauline epistles. She finds it more than remarkable that all manner of men found their salvation in Jesus and that though Jesus is distinguished from God the Father all confessions of him show that he stands for God.

In the second section of her essay she deals briefly with the subsequent history of the development of the doctrine. She states that the Christian theologian of the first few centuries was faced with two questions - (i) How is the exalted Jesus whom we worship as Lord, related to the one and only God? (ii) How is God related to the world? The first question was a problem to the Jewish Christians brought up on the monotheism of the Old Testament, whilst the second was more of a problem for those who were influenced by Greek thought involving the existence of a Supreme Being impassive and unaffected by externals. There were many lines of thought on the subject and she mentioned particularly Arius who defined God as the ultimate source of everything and who himself derived from no source. He said that the Logos derived his being from God and was therefore not God in the absolute sense. "The Son of God was the first-born of all creation through whom God created the world and revealed himself: in the incarnation, he brought knowledge of God to men, and conquered the sin and evil which held men in bondage." Athanasius opposed the Arian view and argued that the Logos 'became man in order that we might become 'god'', and if this is so, he must have been God himself or he could not have endowed men with divinity.

Frances Young says that Athanasius' position is problematical for two reasons - (i) A real son is not needed to produce adopted sons, and (ii) because of the definition of divinity generally assumed, the incarnation becomes logically impossible. "If the Logos is inherently perfect and incapable of change, progress or suffering, he is no more able to mediate than the transcendent God himself." There was much controversy over these problems and she goes on to say, "If space permitted, we could go on to document the fact that the course of doctrinal controversies was shaped not merely by the inherent quality of the arguments used, but by personalities and politics."

The third section of the essay is a personal testimony in which she discusses coming to terms with evil, suffering and sin. She says that the Christians of the early church lived in a world in which supernatural causation was accepted without question, but for the majority of people now, in the Western world, supernatural causation is incredible. Yet many are still believers in God's providence in their lives and so she argues that as Christian believers we work with two models - the scientific model "which finds explanations of phenomena, behaviour and events in terms of natural causes" and mythological or symbolic models "which, however inadequately, represent the religious and spiritual dimension of our experience." Salvation and atonement are the core of the Christian message and she says that for her, 'experience of suffering, sin, decay and 'abnormality' as a constituent part of the world, would make belief in God impossible without a Calvary-centred religious myth." "Faith demands a doctrine of atonement, and atonement means a conviction that God has somehow dealt with evil, with sin, with rebellion; that on the cross, God in Christ entered into the suffering, the evil and the sin of his world." She then says that if such a faith is to have any grounds it appears at first sight that Jesus on the Cross must have been God, but to make the equation Jesus = God confuses the two models and makes myth into a science besides not representing fully what Christian tradition has claimed. She finds herself driven to tell two stories - one "of a man who lived as the 'archetypal believer', who lived and died trusting in God" and the other a story of God "being involved in the reality of human existence with its compromises, its temptations, its suffering, its pain, its injustice, its cruelty, its death." Thus, she can say, "I see God in Jesus" and "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself."

In her conclusion, she discusses the Trinitarian doctrine of God and says that it made it possible to believe in a God who was both transcendent and immanent. She says that pure monotheism is liable to become belief in a static and remote First Cause almost irrelevant to the religious life. Trinitarian theology was a

constant warning against over-simple theologies, blasphemous in their attempts to pin down the Being of God.

The next two essays, 'Jesus the Man of Universal Destiny' and 'The Two Roots of the Christian Myth' are by Michael Goulder, Staff Tutor in Theology in the Department of Extramural Studies at Birmingham University. In the first essay, he points out that men and women of destiny arise when communities and nations reach a crisis. In the case of Jesus, we have a man whose community's creative history was at the parting of the ways - the legalism of the Pharisees, the violence of the Zealots and the opportunism of the Sadducees were different denials of that creativity and Jesus proclaimed a more excellent way; the way of self-giving love. He saw himself as the Son of man, prophesied in Daniel, who would inaugurate God's kingdom. Jesus' death was, historically, a high probability as the end of his life of self-giving love. Speaking of the resurrectional appearances of Jesus, he suggests they were visions, rather than the miracles accepted by the early church, arising from the psychological needs of people such as Peter who had denied Jesus.

He says that the things he has said about Jesus might be acceptable to a humanist but for a Christian, Jesus was destined by God to establish the community of selfless love in the world. Some see God in constant interaction with human living whereas others see him in a creative and sustaining relationship to the universe but without interacting with it. He set the world on its way but did not interfere with it. He suggests that one race had a sharper religious sense than others and it was on Jesus an Israelite, that the destiny of initiating the universal loving community fell.

In the second essay, he suggests that there are two roots to the Christian myth of Jesus as God the Son - what he calls the Galilean eschatological myth, taught by Jesus and the early Christians, and the Samaritan gnostical myth. He tries to trace Samaritan influence in the New Testament writings and on the main stream of Christianity. He suggests, for example, that the epistle to the Hebrews may have been addressed to Samaritan Christians because the sacrificial argument in the epistle is drawn from the Tabernacle not the Temple, the Samaritans only having the Pentateuch for their Scriptures. He says also that the heroes of faith mentioned in chapter II are, with the exception of the appendix, all mentioned in the Pentateuch and Joshua. He argues that we can see the position which would be likely to arise as a result of an encounter between Samaritan theology and Christianity and states that we have evidence for this in the New Testament.

He argues that Samaritan theology would tend to contribute five things to the Galilean interpretation of the significance of Jesus:- (1) Wisdom and knowledge as the primary fruits of conversion rather than faith and love (2) the myth of Jesus' pre-existence in the Godhead and of his incarnation (3) a 'glory' ministry instead of a Son of Man ministry with Moses as the type figure rather than David (4) a minimising of the Cross and Resurrection (5) a realised eschatology rather than a future one. He suggests that these five tendencies were the beliefs of Paul's opponents and the source of the disputations which led to the synthesis of classical orthodoxy.

Frances Young has contributed another essay, 'Two Roots or a Tangled Mass' and in it she considers the various Greek and Roman myths of the birth of gods and the deification of men. She discusses how far Jewish thought was coloured by these Hellenistic myths and considers particularly the views on the death of Moses, and the disappearances of Elijah and Enoch. She also discusses the role of angels and compares their appearance among men with the Greek stories of the descent of gods. Philo, a Jew roughly contemporary with Paul, has many writings which are a mixture of Jewish and Greek thought. He speaks of a transcendent God related to the world through a mediator, his Logos, who is a second being to God in whose image man was made. His writings were preserved by the church and provided the inspiration for a sophisticated Christian philosophical theology. Philo did not identify his heavenly Logos-Man with a particular historical figure but Frances Young says that both he and Paul were influenced by the personification of Wisdom in the book of Proverbs. In conclusion, she says that what she had tried to do is show that the cultural atmosphere of the ancient world, both pagan and Jewish, was conducive to the development of the idea of incarnation in the early church.

The first part of the book has been devoted to Testing the Sources of the myth and the second, shorter section, is concerned with Testing the Development of the myth. The first essay in this part is by Leslie Houlden, Principal of Ripon College Cuddesdon and is called 'The Creed of Experience'. He says that there are many pictures of Christ in the New Testament and, whilst many Christian generations have seen these as contributing to a harmonious whole, modern Christians have tended to subject them to careful analysis. At one time the titles of Jesus were taken as the basis of analysis but now the individual writers are used and an attempt is made to see how they conceived of Jesus and through him of God. As their personal vision and experience of God increased so they used new language to express their belief. Later, or at the same time, a new ordering and systemisation of knowledge occurred and so the writer says that

theological creativity can be divided into two stages, experiential and credal. Paul belongs more to the first stage and the writer of the Pastoral Epistles to the second.

When statements about Jesus are made in the credal mode they are largely based on inherited tradition rather than fresh conversion, and formulas are used rather than new ways of expression. Belief after the credal mode may be destroyed by the conclusion that a descriptive, factual statement about God is disallowed whereas belief after the experiential mode may lead us to where man most deeply responds to God. He asks whether the centrality of Jesus for all that concerns man's understanding of God is an allowable equivalent for the statement of the Nicene Creed or if the deep and intimate involvement of God with the world is an allowable interpretation of what is at stake in the statement that 'the Word was made flesh'. He says that for many, wedded to the credal approach, they are not.

The next essay is 'The Christ of Christendom' by Don Cupitt, University Lecturer in Divinity and Dean of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He believes that the classical doctrine of the incarnation does not belong to the essence of Christianity but only to a certain period of church history now ended. He describes the beginning of the questioning of the nature of Christ by Charles Gore (1853-1932). Gore could not see how the incarnate Lord could be fully human and both omniscient and ignorant. He put forward a theory known as the kenotic theory in which Jesus partly renounced some of his divinity when he became man. Don Cupitt believes that social and political changes have been partly responsible for the breakdown of the 'orthodox' view of the nature of Christ and were also responsible for its rise.

He goes on to say that the history of the doctrine of Christ is interestingly represented in the history of Christian art. Prior to Constantine, the church opposed the representation of Christ in any way, but the period of the development of icons of Christ coincides with the period when Christianity became extensively paganized in its faith, worship, organisation and social teaching. Christianity came to be modelled on the Emperor cult.

He believes that the way the dogma of the incarnation came to be defined had damaging effects on the belief in God. First, he says that the assertion that deity and humanity are permanently united in one person suggests a conjunction and continuity between things divine and things of this world. This is in direct contrast with the teaching of Jesus who saw a disjunction between the things

of God and the things of men. Second the orthodox doctrine asserts that the divine and human were indissolubly united from the moment of Christ's conception. " This appears to assert that the union of God with man was miraculously accomplished by God independently of, because prior to, the struggles and suffering of Jesus' earthly life, which thus became peripheral ." Third, he says that Jesus can be directly worshipped as God without risk of error or blasphemy if in fact the fullness of God is permanently incarnate in Jesus. He suggests that this orthodoxy could be a remote ancestor of modern unbelief because it began the process of shifting the devotion from God to man. In this connection, he states that the phrase 'Mother of God' is blasphemous. Fourth, if "in the incarnation God himself has permanently assumed human nature and can legitimately be depicted as God in human form "then eventually the pagan notion of a deity as a superhuman person will be restored.

After discussing the artistic representations of God the Father he concludes that the doctrine of the incarnation (1) substituted for the disjunction of things divine and human a world view which stressed continuity, authority and due obedience; (2) weakened appreciation of Christ's human work; (3) created a cult of the divine Christ which let Deity fade into the background and (4) when God the Father was reaffirmed he was envisaged as an old man.

The eighth essay on ' Myth in Theology ' is by Maurice Wiles. He says that the term 'myth' was only introduced into theology in the nineteenth century. David Friedrich Strauss, a nineteenth century theologian, distinguished three main kinds of myth - historical, philosophical and poetical. He defined historical myths as " narratives of real events coloured by the light of antiquity, which confounded the divine and the human, the natural and the supernatural." Philosophical myths are " such as clothe in the garb of historical narrative a simple thought, a precept, as an idea of the time." Poetical myths are " historical and philosophical myths partly blended together, and partly embellished by the creations of the imagination, in which the original fact or idea is almost obscured by the veil which the fancy of the poet has woven around it." A distinction is also made between the conscious and unconscious origination of myths. A third issue arose concerning the relation between myth and miracle. The mythic approach " provided a way out for those who were unable to accept the miracles as literally true accounts but who were unhappy to choose between unmiraculous miracles and lying evangelists."

In the second part of his essay, Maurice Wiles discusses the use of myth in more recent theological writing. He says that a great deal has been written about the demythologizing controversy precipitated by Bultmann's essay but he does not

add to it. Of the Old Testament, he says it is " a collection of literature of a kind that includes a good deal of mythology and for whose interpretation an understanding of myth is essential." He says the New Testament is not so straight forward and modern commentators give the meaning of the story in the thought of the gospel writer.

He says that there are four basic Christian myths - the creation, the fall, Christ's incarnation and work of atonement, the resurrection of the dead and final judgment. Critical opinion would speak quite readily of the first two and last as myths, but would hesitate to apply the term to the third. On the other hand, some would question the use of myth for the creation, fall and eschatology particularly when comparing the Old Testament with the related mythology of the near Eastern peoples.

In the third part of his essay he discusses the application of 'myth' to Christian doctrines other than the incarnation. He says that the creation myth would be religiously inappropriate or false if the universe were a wholly self-contained and self-evolving system in no way dependent for its existence on anything other than itself. If, on the other hand, it is dependent on a transcendent, creative source, then the myth would be appropriate or true. He discusses also the myths of the fall and resurrection and says that we cannot check up on the latter and also there is a great variety of belief felt to be consistent with the myth.

He makes the statement that there must be some ontological truth, something concerned with the essence of things, corresponding to the central characteristic of the structure of a myth. In the case of the myth of the incarnation, he says that the ontological truth may be the fact that it has been seen to be that which makes possible a profound inner union of the divine and human in the experience of grace in the life of the believer now and more broadly in the life of the church. The difficulty of this approach is linking the incarnation with the historical figure of Jesus. He suggests that to affirm the incarnational myth in relation to Jesus we should have to be able to affirm " that his own life in its relation to God embodied that openness to God, that unity of human and divine to which the doctrine points and also that his life depicted not only a profound human response to God but that in his attitudes towards other men his life was a parable of the loving outreach of God to the world." We know in fact that these are firm traditions about Jesus. The linking also depends on the historical relationship between Jesus and the experience of grace in the lives of the believers.

In conclusion, he discusses the objections which can be raised to considering the incarnation as a myth. These are:- (1) The incarnation has frequently been seen as the primary doctrine that differentiates Christians from others (2) Myth to some people means something delusive - a kind of mirage leading people

astray. (3) The question whether a myth can continue to function as a potent myth once it is acknowledged that it is not literally true.

The last essay by John Hick is entitled 'Jesus and the World Religions'. He asks, "To what extent is the exaltation in Christian faith of the man of Nazareth into the divine Christ, the only begotten Son of God, Second Person of the Holy Trinity, a supreme example of this projection upon Jesus of ideals to answer our spiritual needs?" He argues that the Nicene definition of God - the Son incarnate is only one way of conceptualising the lordship of Jesus, the way taken by the Graeco-Roman world of which we are heirs, and that in the new age of world ecumenism it is proper for Christians to become conscious of both the optional and mythological character of this traditional language.

He compares the exaltation of a human teacher into a divine figure of universal power - Gautama, the founder of Buddhism. He came to be thought of as the incarnation of a transcendent pre-existent Buddha as the human Jesus came to be thought of as the incarnation of the pre-existent Logos or divine Son. The difference between Jesus and Gautama which justifies the ascription of divine attributes to one and not the other is the resurrection of Jesus. He says we cannot ascertain today what the resurrection event consisted of, but it must be doubted that the contemporaries of Jesus saw it as guaranteeing his divinity.

He discusses the Nicene creed and says that it is far from anything that the historical Jesus thought or taught. Of the fourth gospel statements such as "I and the Father are one", he says that they cannot be attributed to Jesus himself and he says that the three synoptic gospels give us three sets of communal memories of Jesus. For himself, he sees Jesus as being intensely conscious of the reality of God; a man of God living in the unseen presence of God and addressing him as, abba, father. He evidently believes in the healing power of Jesus because he says, "He was so powerfully God-conscious that his life vibrated, as it were, to the divine life and as a result his hands could heal the sick."

He then goes on to ask how Jews came to worship a human being thus breaking their unitarian monotheism. He says that within Judaism itself the notion of a man being called Son of God had a long tradition behind it and he quotes Ps. 2.7 and 2 Sam. 7.14. He also quotes the annunciation statements from Luke 1.32 and asks how we are to understand the language of divine sonship. He says that the king mentioned in these passages is Jahweh's son by adoption, and that the stories of the virgin birth in Matthew and Luke are the only places where the Lord's anointed is thought of as being physically God's son. Christian theology made the transition from Son of God to God the Son although he says that the idea was present in John's gospel.

He thinks that the deification of Jesus came about partly as a result of the Christian experience of reconciliation with God.

He discusses the orthodox view of the two natures in Jesus, namely the human and divine, and says no attempt was made to interpret the idea. Thus, he says the real point and value of the incarnational doctrine is to express a valuation and evoke an attitude. It is therefore not a theory which can be spelled out but a mystery and as such is best expressed by saying that it is a mythological idea. He uses 'myth' in the sense of a story which is told but is not literally true or an idea or image which is applied to someone or something but which does not literally apply, but which invites a particular attitude in its hearers. "That Jesus was God the Son incarnate is not literally true but is an application to Jesus of a mythical concept whose function is analogous to that of the notion of divine sonship ascribed in the ancient world to a king."

The Son of God, God the Son, God incarnate language implies that God can be adequately known and responded to only through Jesus. This implies that the doorway to eternal life is Christian faith and so the rest of the world has not been saved. It suggests that God is the tribal deity of the Christian west. John Hick goes on to say, "It seems clear that we are being called today to attain a global religious vision which is aware of the unity of all mankind before God and which at the same time makes sense of the diversity of God's ways within the various streams of human life." He says, "All salvation, within all religions, is the work of the Logos and that under their various images and symbols men in different cultures and faiths may encounter the Logos and find salvation." By 'Logos' he means God-in-relation-to-man and says that the life of Jesus was one point at which the Logos has acted and is the only point that savingly concerns the Christian. "The specifically Christian gift to the world is that men should come to know Jesus and take him into their religious life. We too, in turn, can be spiritually enriched by God's gifts mediated through other faiths."

The epilogue is by Dennis Nineham, Warden of Keble College, Oxford. He questions whether it is still possible to think of Christ as unique if the traditional modes of expressing his uniqueness are no longer possible or suitable for us to use. If Jesus was literally divine then the unique perfection of his humanity was a legitimate deduction. In many cases, however, his perfection has been used to support the doctrine of the incarnation, so some other support for the perfection of Jesus' humanity is necessary. Historically, it cannot be proved up to the hilt because we only have records of a short period of his life. Nevertheless, it can be argued that "No one would have brought crucifixion upon himself as Jesus did, unless his behaviour and teaching had offered a novel and almost total affront to the wickedness

of those who crucified him," and also, "no one doubts that a figure very remarkable, morally and in many other ways, is required to explain the appearance of the early Christian church and the writings it produced."

He says that the whole point of his essay is to ensure that those who claim the uniqueness of Jesus and speak of 'the new humanity, the man wholly for others' or 'the man wholly for God' are fully aware of the problems involved in making and justifying any such claims. He goes on to say that it is impossible to justify any such claim on purely historical grounds and also that the cultural gulf which separates us from Jesus and his times makes the meaning for us of moral perfection and being the 'man for others' significantly different from the meaning for Jesus and his contemporaries.

He then discusses three different kinds of knowledge about Jesus - historical, historic by which he means knowledge which has direct significance for the present, and faith - knowledge by which he means knowledge dependent on the acknowledgement of Jesus as both Lord and Christ.

Don Cupitt gives a final comment and he ends by saying "How can we depend upon the uncertainties of historical tradition for our knowledge of, and our power to attain, a history - transcending truth? Here the doctrine of Christ and the doctrine of man coincide; for this is not just a problem, but the human condition itself."

It has not been easy to give a summary of this book because it is difficult to read, being couched in theological language which is not commonly understood by the lay reader. The preface tells us why it has been written. Whilst we can appreciate their difficulties with the orthodox definition of Jesus as God the Son and can agree with their view that the doctrine emerged as a result of circumstances arising largely from the spread of Christianity into the pagan world, it seems to me that they are in danger of reducing the concept of Jesus to that of a mere man, however good and in tune with God he was. Thus, the uniqueness and authority of Christian belief is destroyed, and we cannot agree that other religions provide a satisfactory approach to God because, "there is none other name under heaven given among man, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4.12). Their highly critical approach to Scripture makes it difficult to understand how they can accept any part of it as authoritative, and we cannot agree with the general principle of adjusting our beliefs to suit the age in which we live, although of course, our interpretation of Scripture may change in the light of wider knowledge and the emphasis changes according to our needs.

We cannot agree that Jesus is only God's son by adoption. It is we who can become God's sons by adoption but Jesus is the unique Son of God by birth. The doctrine of the Virgin birth gives a simple explanation of the relationship between God and Jesus and only becomes complicated if we start to think of its biological and psychological implications. These are questions which have no relevance to the doctrine of salvation in Jesus and it is better to leave them unasked. The Virgin birth explains the unique character of Jesus and brought God as personally close to the human situation as was possible for Him without surrendering His position as Creator and Sustainer of the universe. The death on the Cross would have been impossible for the Creator Himself, but in it we see His love for mankind in allowing it to happen to His only begotten Son. In Jesus we see the personal attributes of God as distinct from His impersonal power which upholds the universe. It is true that the story of the Virgin birth only occurs in the gospels of Matthew and Luke but John uses the phrase "only begotten Son" several times and his gospel gives us the deepest insight into the consequences of Jesus being God's only begotten Son. Indeed, he recorded the various signs which Jesus performed in order that we "might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." (Jn.20.31).

We can agree with John Hick when he says that it is the theologians who have made the transition from Son of God to God the Son and we can add that it is a transition which is not warranted by Scripture however exalted the terms in which it speaks of Jesus. As Frances Young points out, at the end of time, Jesus is to give up his delegated authority so that God will be all in all. (Cor. 15.24-28).

In conclusion, we can say that this book has caused quite a stir in the Christian church because it attacks the central doctrine of most of Christendom. It has prompted evangelical Christians to reply and another collection of essays has been published under the title, 'The Truth of God Incarnate'.

Sheila Crawford.

THE GOOD NEWS BIBLE

by

David Pitt Francis

In the Winter 1976/77 issue of the Endeavour Magazine (1) I commented on some of the merits of the Good News Bible; its evangelical bias; its useful yet utilitarian drawings; its valuable summaries; its introduction to each book of the Bible; its use of tabulation and figure-numerals; its conversion of measurements into metric equivalents and its time-charts of Bible history.

This month another review of this translation (2) appeared in the Christadelphian magazine where it was (i) implied that the ratio between the sizes of Old and New Testaments is significantly less in the Good News Bible than in other, older translations and (ii) argued that such a difference 'can only mean that the text of the Old Testament has actually been shortened in the Good News Bible by between 11% and 22% compared with the older versions.'

The study of such ratios would normally be regarded as rather unedifying, but they contain the principal data for making this statement, and later ones, e.g. that 'the version is a paraphrase even where it is not also a precis,' that it 'takes such liberties with the text' that it 'cannot be trusted' and such statements could have a damaging effect on many who have found the Good News Bible useful in understanding the Scriptures. Thirdly, the review contains several abuses of Statistics. These three reasons prompt a full reply. Table 1 contains the 6 ratios used in the more recent review.

The writer claims to have compiled the table from 'editions of the Bible chosen almost at random.' In Statistics a sample cannot be chosen 'almost at random'. It is either random (i.e. having had an equal chance of selection) or it is not, and several of the ratios seem to reflect the author's point of view. That of the Authorised Version is typical of most A.V. O.T./N.T. ratios. Calculations using 23 editions show that most fall between 3.18 and 3.36, and those that I have shown in Table 2 (Nos. 1 and 2) illustrate this point. However, the Schofield A.V. reference Bible, which employs relatively less space on commentary than the Good News Bible employs on illustrations has ratios as low as 2.72 and even 2.56 (see Table 2: Nos 3 and 4), yet no one would claim that the Old Testament A.V. text has been shortened in either of these editions.

The Interlinear Bible is unlikely to have been chosen at random, and is a special case, where the frequency of different readings between A.V. and R.V. is greater in the Old Testament, and one would expect a high O.T./N.T. ratio because of the space needed for such differences. That given for the Revised Standard Version is not typical of most editions, and is probably taken from an early edition which relegated doubtful passages (e.g. John 7.53 - 8.11; Mark 16. 9-20) to italic footnotes. It is unwise to use such an edition to judge the Good News Bible, which includes these passages. A more typical ratio for the R.S.V. is 3.48, that given by several Collins cleartype editions and by the Common Bible. Finally, the ratio for the New English Bible is incorrect by two pages, if taken from the Common Edition as Table 2, No.6 shows, and the Collins World edition and the older 1970 Library edition of the N.E.B. have much smaller O.T./N.T. ratios as shown in Table 2, items 7 and 8. Thus, the writer has not presented typical R.S.V. and N.E.B. ratios. The Zondervan red-letter edition of the R.S.V., for example, has a ratio as low as 3.36.

Secondly, the statistics (Table 1) give the impression that, because Good News Bible and Living Bible have ratios less than 3, they are deviant, while the four others whose ratios are more than 3 are acceptable. This is a popular display strategy, analogous to marketing a product at £1.99 instead of £2. The last two ratios look much lower than they really are! For example, there is a greater difference between the displayed ratios of the Authorised and Revised Standard Versions (Table 1) (= 0.45) than between those of the Authorised and Good News Versions (= 0.36).

Thirdly, one cannot argue that the two final ratios are 'significantly low' at any acceptable statistical level from such a small sample (= 6 versions). The variability in the older versions is not (as the writer argued) 'almost entirely due to the larger proportions of the Old Testament set out as poetry in some of them.' Young (Table 2, No.9) has as much set out in poetry as any Bible but is as low as 3.29, and Moffat (with poor translation in places, but not much precis) has 3.16 (Table 2, No.10). The variability does, as I have shown in respect of the A.V., R.S.V. and N.E.B. exist in differing editions of the same translation, and results from other factors such as verse-separation, type-setting, pagination differences, and even the hyphens separating the syllables of proper names in pronouncing Bibles.

Fourthly, though one may infer from the review in the Christadelphian that older translations have higher O.T./N.T. ratios because they do not precis the Old Testament, this is again not true. The Welsh and Spanish Bibles (Items 11 and 12 of Table 2) are older translations than the Authorised Version, the

Welsh Bible having been translated in the 16th century and the Valera version in 1602, but the ratios for both versions (3.02 and 3.07) are not much greater than the Good News Bible's ratio, and a Danish translation that is older than the N.E.B. and is neither precis nor paraphrase (item 13) has a lower O.T./N.T. ratio than the Good News Bible.

It is wrong to assume that any translation can provide us with 'ideal' criteria for judging others. The most appropriate ratio would have been that provided by the originals if they had not consisted of testaments in different languages. It is not useful to calculate an 'ideal' ratio from the Greek Bible (i.e. the Septuagint Old Testament and the Greek original New Testament) for the Septuagint has missing chapters, but as item 14 (Table 2) shows, one can make a reasonable estimate of an 'ideal' ratio by using the original Hebrew Old Testament and Delitzsch's Hebrew translation of the New Testament. This ratio, using B.F.B.S. 1953 editions of identical type-size and page-size, is nearer to that of the Good News Bible (compare 2.86 with 2.89) than any other, and is actually smaller than it!

Finally, even if it could have been proved that the Good News Bible's ratio was significantly smaller than others it would not have necessarily followed that this indicated an 11% - 22% contraction of the Old Testament text, any more than that it indicated an 11% - 22% expansion of the New Testament text. The only appearances of precis are in isolated chapters of Numbers, I Chronicles and Proverbs, and in the two former cases (as in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7) the space-saving has resulted from using tabulations and printing numerals in figures, not words. As numerals are relatively more frequent in the Old Testament than in the New Testament the difference amounts to an effect of over 20 pages on the size of the Old Testament. Not only is such use of figures commendable, because the Good News Bible was intended for numerate readership, but it has precedent from some early manuscripts (i.e. characters were used instead of words to write 666 in the Chester Beatty III rendering of Rev 13:18).

It would, in fact, require only 20 pages of New Testament text to account for the imbalance of which the Christadelphian's reviewer complains. The summaries that preface each book of the Good News Bible account for at least 6 pages, for not only are they $\frac{1}{4}$ page shorter on average in the Old Testament than they are in the New, but they are also less frequent, for the Old Testament has only 39 books distributed over 929 pages whilst the New has 27 distributed over 321 pages.

Thus, though the study of O.T./N.T. ratios may, of itself, appear a little unedifying, a consideration of this recent review teaches us some interesting lessons. First, we should be reluctant to sit in judgement on translations, for the Good News Bible has many desirable features including its lack of R.S.V. Americanisms and A.V. archaisms; its clarity, tabulations, and to some extent, its illustrations render it a better teaching medium (as distinct from a basis for advanced study) than most modern translations. Secondly, it illustrates how wrong inference can be made from small samples, which are as non-random as the quotations the reviewer uses - quotations which are good illustrations of poor translation in the Good News Bible, but which one could match with poor translations of passages elsewhere in the most acceptable translations, if one looked hard enough!

Tables and References

Table 1. Ratios used by A.D. Norris in his Review.

Bible	Old Testament (pages)	New Testament (pages)	O.T./N.T.
Authorised Version	756	233	3.25
Interlinear Bible	1186	340	3.49
Revised Standard Version	1020	276	3.70
New English Bible	1166	336	3.47
Good News Bible	929	321	2.89
The Living Bible	732	276	2.65

cont'd.....

Table 2. Some other ratios used in the current article.

Bible	Old Testament (pages)	New Testament (pages)	O.T./N.T.
1. A.V. (Oxford) (pocket size) 1950	808	246	3.28
2. A.V. (Oxford) (recent edition)	906	276	3.28
3. A.V. (Oxford) (Schofield refs) 1917	982	361	2.72
4. A.V. (Oxford) (Schofield refs) 1967	982	383	2.56
5. R.S.V. (Collins) 1973	843	242	3.48
6. N.E.B. (Common Edition)	1164	336	3.46
7. N.E.B. (Collins World Edn)	784	246	3.18
8. N.E.B. (Library Edition 1970) in Two Volumes	1364	447	3.04
9. Youngs Literal Translation (All Editions)	586	178	3.29
10. Moffat's Translation	1039	329	3.16
11. Welsh Bible (translated earlier than the A.V.) B.F.B.S. Edition (1964)	917	303	3.02
12. Spanish (Valera) Version translated 1602) edition by Sociedades Bíblicas Unidas (1955)	623	203	3.07
13. Danish Modern Version (Dansk BSkab) 1952	944	340	2.78

Table 2 - continued.

Bible	Old Testament (pages)	New Testament (pages)	O.T./N.T.
14. The Hebrew Bible (The nearest approach to the original) using the original O.T. and Delitzsch's translation of the New Testament into Hebrew identical page and type-sizes (B.F.B.S. 1953)	1384	483	2.86

References

1. D. Pitt Francis 'Review - The Good News Bible' Endeavour Magazine No.52, Winter 1976/77.
2. A.D. Norris ' Review - The Good News Bible' The Christadelphian Magazine - April 1979 pp. 131 - 2.

A PLEA FOR COLLATIVE CRITICISM

by

A. H. Broughton.

Whatever we think of HIGHER CRITICISM we must accept TEXTUAL CRITICISM, for that aims to ascertain what was in the Original Scripture by reference to the existing documents.

Those documents comprise the Uncial, miniscule, and other manuscripts at present available, the writings of the 'Fathers of Christendom' who cited passages from the Scriptures in their possession or to which they had access, and the early translations of the Greek Scriptures (such as the Latin, Ethiopic, etc.)

But there are limitations of usefulness in TEXTUAL CRITICISM. As to the NT it can only provide a text that was current in the Third Century A.D., assuming that what was written in the two Codices of the Fourth Century faithfully reflect what was being read in the previous century.

Beyond that century we cannot go by the aid of TEXTUAL CRITICISM (though there are some fragments of earlier writings, known as the Papyri, but these are very fragmentary).

In the case of the Pauline writings, we know that in Paul's day there were those who 'twisted' (Gk. streblousin) 2. Pe 3:16 his words, and some forged letters in his name. If they did all that while he was alive how much more opportunity did those errorists have when he was no longer on earth!'. And so we find numerous variant readings in the existing man of the NT epistles.

So what we have to do, with the aid of COLLATIVE CRITICISM, is to bridge that gap of three centuries and endeavour to ascertain what actually was in the Original Writings.

In the case of the OLD TESTAMENT the difficulties are greater, for when the Massoretes finished their Edition of the Hebrew text (which is the basis of the AV and other English editions) they suppressed all other previous editions. Happily, we have in the SEPTUAGINT a translation of an ancient Hebrew text, and although what is available in that version has not been sufficiently and properly researched yet (owing to the fact that the Hebrew text was thought to be free of error - a very mistaken idea) it is being increasingly realised now that the Septuagint is a more accurate version of the Old Testament than is the Massoretic Hebrew.

There is in addition the Samaritan Pentateuch. The Peshitta Syriac is of doubtful assistance.

We must also take into account the fact that when the Massoretes prepared their version they preferred, where they found variant readings in the mss before them, that reading which was more in accordance, or was in accordance with, their own tradition, the very thing which we deplore.

As an example, we are told in the Massoretic Hebrew that when Isaiah saw the Lord (Is: 6.1) God's train filled the Temple. That word in the Hebrew cannot mean a retinue of attendants: it can only mean the train of a ceremonial robe. (The NASB reads "the train of His robe.") The Septuagint reads, 'his glory filled the Temple.' That is Textual Criticism, and provides the true reading. But Collative Criticism takes into account also the citation in John 12:41 which speaks of Isaiah in that vision seeing God's glory.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM provides in Deut 32:43 the phrase 'Rejoice O ye nations, with his people,' quoting the Massoretic version. And in the NT it provides in Heb. 1.6 the reading, "And let all the angels of God worship him." COLLATIVE CRITICISM would go further and cite the poem of eight lines, of which one only appears in the Massoretic Version of Deut 32, stead of the eight, and of which Hebrews 1:6 cites another one of the lines.

(Incidentally, it is of interest that in this Septuagint poem occurs the phrase which in the Hebrew would have been 'sons of elohim').

As to the corruption of Paul's writings by copyists and others, there exist also Gospels, Acts and Apocalypses that are obviously forgery, and also epistles by Peter and of others which were definitely not written by those whose names are attached. Four of these may have crept into the canon of the New Testament,

- 2 Peter, Jude and 2 and 3 John.

Among the difficulties of TEXTUAL CRITICISM, therefore, are:-

1. the limitations which Textual Critics make for themselves in confining themselves to the existing mss.,
2. The avoidance of reference to the Septuagint and to the Samaritan Pentateuch (though some Critics are now inclined to pay regard to those mss).
3. The preferring of the Massoretic Version to the LXX.
4. The Textual Critics have a Rule that in the case of variant passages, that which is the more 'difficult' is to be preferred to the other, assuming that a copyist would be more inclined to make a passage easier to understand than to make an easy passage difficult. That would apply sometimes. But we must remember that the original writing would have been easy to understand, so it could well be that the easiest of the readings is the correct one and the more difficult the wrong one.
5. Textual Critics are often faced with two readings, both of which are supported by textual evidence of equal weight. Each editor must then decide for himself which in his opinion is the correct one. Here COLLATIVE CRITICISM would step in and help.

COLLATIVE CRITICISM

First of all let us consider the Dictionary definition of the word COLLATE. NUTTALL'S defines the verb as, 'to bring or lay, especially old books and manuscripts, together, in order to ascertain by comparison, the points in which they agree and differ,'

Collative Criticism, therefore refuses to reject any word, phrase or passage, merely on the ground that it is not understood, or that it seems to be wrong.

But, whilst refusing the freedom often assumed by the Higher Critics, it does take the liberty of taking into account, not only the documents available to the TEXTUAL CRITICS, but also other relevant Scripture and information, so that where there are variant readings in the mss, this COLLATIVE CRITICISM decides between them according to the methods of textual criticism, firstly, and also according to its relevance to the context, both the immediate context and the remoter context of Scripture.

Sometimes, as in the case of 1 Cor. 13:28 ('baptised for the dead') the Textual Evidence for the passages is undisputed. That means, of course, that there are, at present, no known variants, and that the passage appears in all or almost all of the available mss. COLLATIVE CRITICISM here can only point out that the apparent teaching of the passage is contrary to known Scripture teaching, and place it in the 'uncertain' category, leaving the matter in abeyance.

In the case of Acts 15: 17, COLLATIVE CRITICISM would approve of the reading in Amos in LXX, and reject the reading in the Massoretic version. For 'will possess' (Heb: yireshu) for Edom we would read 'mankind'. Thus agreeing with the Septuagint and the citation by James from Amos.

In other words, COLLATIVE CRITICISM takes hold of all the available evidence, including the content of Scripture in general and in particular.

In the booklet, 'A COLLECTION OF THE EVIDENCE etc.', use is made first of Textual Evidence, showing from the available documents that in the early centuries there were two variant readings at Matt. 28:19 and in the latter half of the booklet use is made of COLLATIVE CRITICISM, in providing the evidence from Scripture itself that one of the two readings is definitely true and the other is definitely spurious.

Editorial continued from page 1

of the essays, as will be seen from the review, are anxious to make it clear that they do not believe that the mythological interpretation of Jesus as the second person of the Trinity is a correct concept within mythology or not.

The early church had this problem of deciding exactly who was this man 'approved by God'. They very soon decided he was the Son of God, but this does not add up to the second person of the Trinity, on equality with the Father.

John clearly saw as the Word of God incarnate (John 1:14) and this could be regarded in theological terms as a mythological expression that is expressing a deep truth in a tangible way capable of human concept. Tillich says that it is impossible not to conceive of God in mythological terms, but Tillich has somewhat extreme views which are by no means universally accepted. However, it must be acknowledged that any concept of God is shrouded in difficulties and it is hoped that our readers will read this review with interest and comment upon it by letter if they feel so disposed.

It is hoped to review the reply, 'The Truth of God Incarnate' in the next issue.