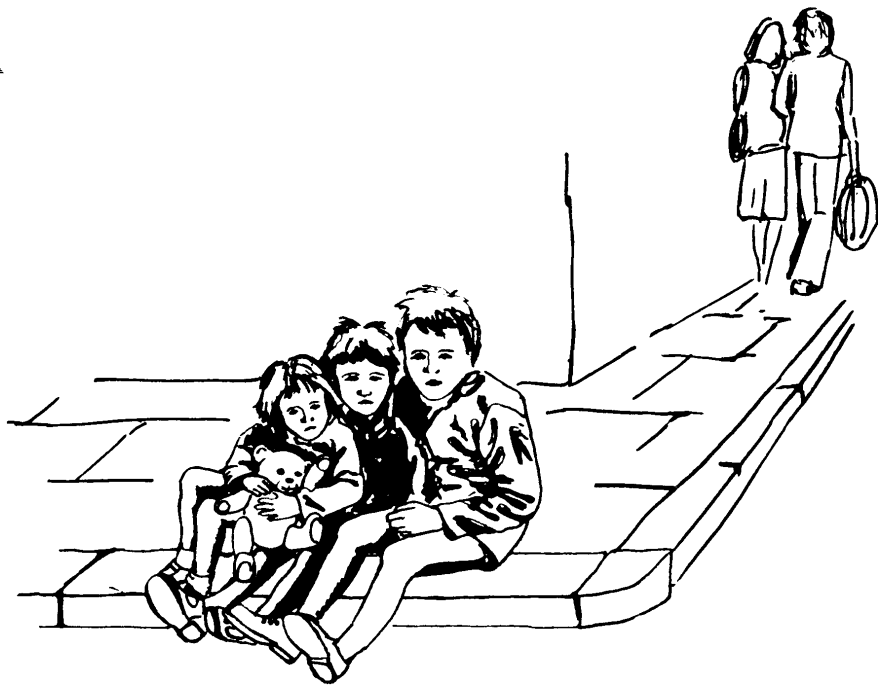


ENDEAVOUR

magazine



1979/3

25p

THE ENDEAVOUR MAGAZINE

No. 60

1979/3

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EDITORIAL.

In the western world, we put the highest values on the individual self. Every man is entitled to his own rights, his possessions, his vote. It is his own business whom he makes as his friends, who he chooses for his wife and though man and wife may say at marriage that they have become one flesh, they know very well they did not! They remain individuals, though within the marriage relationship they may have much in common. Because this is our experience we immediately assume that it is everybody else's concept of living or, if it isn't, it ought to be !

This attitude makes it very difficult to understand people of other cultures, who frequently have different views of relationships to each other and indeed to God. Indeed we may easily get a wrong understanding of relationships in the Bible as the Jews had a different understanding of their relationships than we do today and we indeed today have a different understanding than, for instance, the Buddhists.

At the other extreme to western individualism comes the situation of some African village tribes, who live a much more communal life where the children call all the adult males father! The person who has actually sired them is apparently unimportant.

When we look at the Jews as we have their record in the Old Testament, it is apparent that they had little idea of life after death and considered that their immortality was assured as a family through their descendants.

It was important for Abraham to have a son. The strength and cohesion of the family was all-important.

Moses was told - 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Israel the God of Jacob, both sent me unto you.' Again when Achan sinned Joshua made an example by destroying his whole family including sons and daughters. Indeed later Ezeheiel proclaimed that a son was not responsible for his father's sin but the 'soul that sinneth it shall die.' Though this was surely better justice, it nevertheless in no way destroyed the family bond.

It is with Daniel and Isaiah that we get the first clear references to life-after-death. Jesus however pointed with authority that God was the God of Living not the dead. He was the God of Abraham Isaiah and Jacob. It was Jesus too that revealed that in relationships after death things would be different. 'In the resurrection they neither marry or are given in marriage, but are as angels in heaven.' (Matt.22:30). Jesus too entered the family idea of the Jews to embrace a much wider family of all believers.

These somewhat disconnected thoughts are to try to emphasise that we are all dependant on each other. We cannot love without someone to love. Love calls forth a response and a relationship develops. How deep these relationships is depends much upon the individuals. Such depth is what the Gospel is about for 'God us love and he that loves has the testimony that God through his spirit dwells on him.' We see this situation in perfection only in Jesus Christ but we must aspire to it.

"He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God"

(John 4:16)

J.H.W.

THEOLOGY

PAUL III

The Preaching of Paul

The full implications of the acceptance of the Gentiles into the early Jewish - Christian community was not realised in Jerusalem. It was quite possible for the first converts to accept Christ and still remain nominally Jewish. In fact this was the case, they met to celebrate the Lord's Supper and also continued to worship along with fellow Jews in the Temple at times of prayer. The Gentiles were too far away from Jerusalem to have any effect upon the mother church; consequently, the Jerusalem church remained unmoved in its strongly Apocalyptic hope of the coming new age at the parousia of Jesus. Problems were to arise when Jewish - Christians entered the Hellenistic churches. Table - fellowship was evidently not discussed at the Apostolic Assembly of A.D. 48, and it caused a bitter confrontation in the church of Antioch between Paul and Peter (Gal.2:11-16). To accept the Gentiles into the Christian church meant, in its fullest sense, Jews eating at the same table as the Gentiles, and the breaking down of previously held traditions of piety.

After the assembly Paul was free to venture out again into the mission field with the highly prized support of the mother church. Paul's zeal to preach Christ to the ends of the world has rarely been equalled. Rapidly he moved through the middle of Asia Minor as described in Luke's itinerary record. (Acts 16:1-10). During this journey Paul falls ill probably with malaria, (1) and is sufficiently delayed to establish the Galatian church there (Gal.4:13 - not mentioned in Acts). For Luke, the Holy Spirit is the guide for Paul. Paul swiftly moves through Asia, the Spirit restrains any preaching campaign, and the Spirit of Jesus denies him the road to Bithynia (Acts 16:6-7). Paul, according to Acts, receives a vision of a man of Macedonia who calls him to cross the waters and help them (Acts 16:9-10). From Troas Paul sails to Macedonia and sets up a church there at Philippi, and then another at Thessalonica. Coming south into Achaëa because the Jews there had stirred up the civic authorities against him, Paul enters Beroëa and finally comes into Athens. Many scholars reject totally the Acts record of Paul's preaching activities in the middle of Areopagus, and believe Paul to have experienced complete failure at Athens. (2) Paul remains quiet about any success there in Thessalonians (I Thess.3:1 cf. Acts 17). Next, Paul comes to Corinth where he establishes what becomes perhaps his favourite church (Acts 18:1-17). We can imagine the immensity of Paul's achievements when it is

considered that only two or three years had passed since the assembly of 48 and the end of his first stay at Corinth in the spring of 51 (if we accept Eorinkamm's dates (3)). What can account for Paul's driving spirit? Why did he press onward from town to town settling only for very short spells? For Paul, the time undoubtedly was very short. The imminent parousia* of Jesus was expected and there was no time to waste.

The Christ of Paul's faith was so visibly working in his mission that he considered that there was no need for intensive preaching in a concentrated area but instead if he preached Christ in the great centres the gospel would take root of itself and grow. So that after Athens and Corinth his eyes are set on Rome. Indeed he might have been contemplating a quick visit there as he entered Macedonia (Rom.15:22). This would explain his hurried journey through Asia. Rome would be a good stepping stone to Spain. Hence the probable reason for the writing of the Roman letter - an introduction to gain acceptance from a church to which he was unknown but which was at the centre of the great empire. From here he would complete his mission to the end of the Western World. If he could bring Spain to Christ, the one-time persecutor would have made an acceptable offering to God - the conversion of the gentile world through God's grace.

This was not to be. His great task was frequently held up - problems were arising, opponents were following him to the churches he had founded. However, but for the occurrence of these problems we may never have had the valuable sources of Paul's life and theology - Paul was a preacher not a writer. His letters were a necessary evil - they were the cause of much grief and delay. But what was this confidence that enabled Paul to move on so quickly to the next town leaving his infant churches unprotected and ill-organised and in the hands of inexperienced self-appointed leaders? It is to the credit of Paul's faith that he placed implicit confidence in the Lordship (Kurios) of Christ, the exalted one over the cosmos (Phil.2:6-11) in whose care Paul's churches resided. (4) In time, and in Paul's own experience, his standpoint was proved to be illfounded, as was also his strong expectancy of the imminent parousia. Paul did not give up nevertheless, he modified his view in the light of these experiences where it was necessary, though never at such a cost that should jeopardize the principles of Christ. None of the problems or persecution by his opponents detracted him from his faith in his Lord but serve as an illustration of the resolution and adaptability of the mind of the greatest Christian theologian.

* Greek 'presence' 'Second Coming'.

The Collection

The Jerusalem church, by comparison with Hellenistic churches, of the Diaspora was very poor. This was no doubt of great concern to Paul but charity was not his only reason for the care and time which he spent in organizing relief for the Jerusalem church. Here was a wonderful opportunity for the gentiles to demonstrate in a practical manner the universal brotherhood of Christ by making a goodwill offering to their suffering brethren in Judea - Jewish Christians who were still reluctant to embrace fully the gentiles into fellowship. At the close of the Apostolic Assembly Paul had been requested to 'remember the poor' (Gal.2:10 - not preserved in Acts). He was more than eager to fulfill this request - here was an opportunity to strengthen his link with the mother church. So Paul continually reminds his churches to be ready for the annual collection (I Cor.16:3-4, II Cor. 8:1-6, 9:1-5, Rom. 15:25, 26f). In his last fateful journey to Jerusalem Paul personally accompanied those who were to bring the money. He feared that this visit was to be dangerous; when he wrote to the Romans he asked for their prayers:- "that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints." (Rom.15:31). Paul does not only fear the militant Jewish uprising but he also shows concern that the Jerusalem saints may not receive the gift of his churches. Acts preserves the impending danger and growing hostility of this time. It was Passover and becoming aware of a plot made against him Paul takes the long route through Macedonia so avoiding the voyage to Syria (Acts 20:3-4) with the scheming pilgrims. Other hints of danger are preserved (Acts 20:22-35, 21:4, 8:14). But if Paul was aware that danger awaited him at Jerusalem, and that such enmity was aimed at him personally, why did he still go? Why not send some trusty companions with the money? Luke provides no satisfactory reason. We can only speculate here with the reliable guide of Romans. Paul had to meet the elders personally for fear that the offering may not be accepted - such a rejection would have seriously handicapped Paul's further intentions to enter Rome and plan his mission to Spain. As always, for Paul, the Church was one. Paul desperately needed the support of the mother church. He therefore intended to set before them his Spanish programme for their approval. (5)

This detour into a seemingly insignificant detail reveals the heartfelt concern to keep the unity of the Church both Jew and Gentile (Gal.3:28) -

a church full of imperfection. Paul contended with the Jewish Legalists on one battle front and the Corinthian Enthusiasts on another. He became aware that his adventurous preaching to the Greeks would offend his Judaizing brethren, so also would he learn that some converted Greeks would mis-spend their "liberty in Christ" and thus move into the dangerous areas of moral depravity and require his firm correction - in all this the Church remains one - the Body of Christ. Acts closes its record with Paul entering Rome bound as the prisoner for Christ. I Clement implies that Paul reached Spain (I Clem. 5:4-7 - Acts 19:21). But in all probability the apostle to the Gentiles whose apostleship was questioned to the end of his life, even by his own churches became a martyr. He who once persecuted the church of God but who later bore in his body the marks of Jesus he who in following his Lord, loved to the uttermost rested in the hope of the Resurrection, because his life was hid with Christ in God. It was during the persecutions of Nero in the beginning of the sixties, that Paul's life was to end.

D. Lines.

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- (2) Dibelius M. op. cit., pp. 27-83
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PHILOSOPHY

Man-God Perspective II

5. Certainty For most of us, one of the interesting things about our beliefs is how sure we are that we are right and others wrong; not some of the others but all of them! In a measure it is necessary that we have confidence in our own judgement, life would not be possible without it. The rightness model has been built up as a way of getting it right and the gradual process of learning, reflecting, trying out ensures that it gets established in our sub-conscious minds as customary and right. This is especially true in a community where things are held in common and jealously guarded against change and dilution. I was slightly shocked when I read in 'Patterns of Sectarianism' :-

"The sect is not an interest association and rational criteria cannot be applied to its practices and beliefs, nor in many circumstances to the specific techniques that it adopts in furtherance of its end. The sect cannot adopt policies and methods with reference to rational or economic criteria alone: its goals are in large part super-terrestrial, and the criteria of success and of efficiency employed in the world are inappropriate to it." (1)

The danger of the isolation from rational criteria (even if only partial) is to reinforce the convictions of exclusive rightness, for example, it does not matter that no-one is interested in what we preach (rejection of idea that something might be wrong with our preaching) it is only to be expected in these latter days (reference to super-terrestrial criterion gives justification). The over-emphasis of our own rightness effectively devalues the people to whom we wish to talk. Have they got a view, a rightness or world model of their own? Of course they have, and it is, accumulated in a similar way to ours. They also, the religious ones that is, usually think they are right though the degree of dogmatism and tolerance varies!

There are areas of the world and circumstances where the good news of the Kingdom of God gets a hearing just for being spoken and people divide themselves for or against God by their attitude to the Gospel preached. We may imagine it is so in England and other 'Western' countries today but I am not convinced. There are many different groups and organisations representing the gospel of Jesus Christ and in a way one can see them as in competition for the allegiance and support of men and women. Now competition is not necessarily bad. If the gospel preached was the same and only the manner of presentation different their efforts would be complimentary to the greater glory of God. It is to the extent that they see themselves as mutually exclusive that difficulties arise. To choose between theism and atheism is fairly straightforward, even though some find it difficult today. To

give a fair and sympathetic hearing to all the branches of theistic belief and thereby make a rational choice is, for most people, impossible. Time, place, family, disposition all play a part, in practice, in narrowing down the choice. There is nothing like equality of opportunity in access to religious belief. Let us remember that each belief system indeed each person's rightness model, has an internal consistency which makes perfectly good sense to the believer be he Anglican or Jehovah's Witness or whatever. For many human and perhaps some divine reasons the existence of Christian believers with significantly different doctrinal positions is, absolutely inevitable in our world. What also seems inevitable to me is that we as individuals cannot know for sure where lies the truth. We can never be quite sure, going back to the 'wood and trees' analogy, that we have climbed sufficiently high to see the wood as God would see it.

6. Language When we talk to someone it is critically important, if we really want to get through, to learn his language. Different models and belief systems have different meanings for often the same words and symbols. In a short introductory text for A level and college students entitled 'The Study of Religions', over half is devoted to 'questions of understanding' and particular attention is given to words, imagery and the different concepts of time. The author writes "we have to make a particular effort to step out of our own world and see things from the perspective of a different world if we are to understand the concepts of other religions." (2) There is, of course, more than one reason for trying to understand other religions of which trying to understand their concepts (from which their rightness model is constructed) is an initial part. One might have to live with them, legislate for them or try to convert them. The degree of understanding we would need may be different in each case. It is an interesting feature of the modern scene that serious academic attempts are made to 'understand' religions. In the book quoted earlier two schools of thought are distinguished in the academic study of religion, and I quote:

"One has argued that the study of one religion is a lifetime's work for a professional researcher.... The other school of thought maintains..... a comparative approach. This usually involves the study of particular aspects of belief and practice in a number of religions..." (3)

If it is a religious group close to our own, say a neighbouring Christian sect or church we might reasonably expect to need less than a lifetime. The main point, I would want to make is that a serious and sympathetic study of language and concepts is necessary if we wish to truly communicate let alone assess another's belief system,

We may not quite agree with Norman Pittenger (Cambridge theologian) that 'Religious language is always allusive, analogical, symbolic, indicative, not absolutely precise and exact (as we suppose, perhaps mistakenly, that scientific discourse must be)'(4) but we have to admit that the most important words, concepts and their meaning are non-literal. Words like God, spirit, salvation, grace, eternal life, are examples. Even straightforward literal things like law, the bread and wine of the last supper, the blood of Christ, baptism have meanings for Christians which are far from literal. It is, of course far easier for groups isolated from one another to develop different meanings of phrases for non-literal concepts than for literal ones. Take the Devil for example. The new testament clearly uses the concept but without explanation. Now we Christadelphians interpret the Bible so as to make the Devil a figurative personification of the lust of man. The standard 'reformed' standpoint makes the Devil a supernatural figure, a head of the angels that fell. (5) These two views are, on the face of it irreconcilable even though the data is identical in both cases. Both for their respective adherents are based on specific 'clear' verses in the Bible plus the general teaching of scripture. They are different non-literal meanings attributed to the false accuser, the Devil, a religious concept for which there is specific scriptural authority. As a matter of fact, it seems to me that the false accuser is certainly greater than an individual, one might say superhuman. The will, spirits of all worldly people exert a malevolent influence, perhaps even telepathically on believers. We know that mind forces can do remarkable things, things that even today seem 'supernatural'. Perhaps the reality behind the expression the Devil should not be too neatly wrapped in naturalistic terms. Perhaps we should not be too dogmatic about our rightness model. Perhaps we can learn from other sincere believers.

J. Maycock.

To be continued.....

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SOCIAL LIFE

The Choice

Nature of the Problem

There are some 100,000 children in England, Wales and Scotland requiring care each year. These come mainly from broken homes, but unmarried mothers or indeed married parents who cannot cope with their situation, also provide their quota. These children become the responsibility of the Department of Health and Social Services in England or the Social Work Dept., in Scotland.

It is the basic assumption of the Social Services that every child has a right to a family of its own but the achieving of this aim however is by no means easy. All would agree that the natural family is normally the best for any child's development, so in the event of a family breakdown the first aim will be for the children to be restored to their own family if this is at all possible. In the meantime the child or children will be put in short term foster homes or in a family Children's Home, while a Social Worker discusses the problems with the parent or parents.

Let us take an example, a mother, Cynthia, has been deserted by her husband who has gone off with another woman. She is left say with three children, Robert, Betty and Susan aged 7, 5 and 4. She tries to cope at first, though feeling desperately miserable, her income has dropped drastically as she is now dependent on Social Security alone. She is helped a little by her mother but after twelve months she has reached rock bottom the electricity has been cut off due to outstanding accounts and food is reduced to bread and soup and a few vegetables and fish and chips.

In desperation she rings up a coloured man she has met a few times at the 'local' where she has gone for some relaxation and to drown her sorrows. After a few weeks he asks her to move in with him as he is divorced. However, he has two children of his own, boys aged 8 and 10 and there is no room for Cynthia's three children. What is she to do? Starve in the cold at home or give up the children and have reasonable security?

Cynthia makes the desperate decision - goes to the Social Services and asks them to get her children adopted. She cannot live with the situation and desperately wants them to be taken immediately. Ronnie, her friend, has a nice rented house and a reasonable job and her immediate problems are resolved.

Betty, Susan and Robert stay for a week at a reception centre and by luck a short term foster home is found. The social worker hopes, she says to the foster parents, that it will only be until Christmas in a few weeks and she

will get the problems sorted out. The mother visits the children once a week and on a few occasions the children go to Granny. The visits usually end in tears as mother leaves. Granny is now not talking to her daughter as she has 'deserted' her children.

The social worker discusses all the alternatives with the mother. Can Ronnie get a bigger house? Not very likely. Certainly not in the short term. Housing Departments have waiting lists. Mother still insists she wants the children adopted.

The Social Worker discusses the options with her Area Officer who counsels waiting a few weeks longer to see how mother settles down with Ronnie.

Christmas arrives and the children want to go home to mummy and relationships with the foster parents get out of hand and they decide they can no longer cope and the children are moved to a family Children's Home where they meet seven other children of various ages and temperaments, while the Social Worker tries yet again. She visits the mother, who still insists that they will be better adopted.

The Social Worker asks for a Case Study by the adoption unit of the Social Security Department and writes her report.

The Chairman has these options before him:-

- (1) Have the children adopted by a young couple who are willing to have them.
- (2) Have them fostered or adopted by the Grandmother.
- (3) Keep them in the Children's Home to see if Cynthia's attitude changes.

Pat, the Social Worker thinks the mother still loves the children and may find some solution in time.

There are difficulties with all the alternatives. The first - adoption - is a slow process, as all adopters have to be carefully vetted after which they are put on a list for the type and ages of children they desire.

This means that the young couple who have fortuitously come into contact with the children could not have them until the children had been refused by others higher up the list.

Alternative (2) has difficulties for although Grandma and Grandpa have a largish old house, they still have four grown up children at home and are somewhat old at 55 to bring up young children.

The Chairman hears the report from Pat. Invites the views of the Children's Home officer, who says the children have settled in and seem happy enough and are visited regularly by mother and grandma.

The Chairman decides to leave the children at the home for the time being.

Grandma is not pleased that the children are left at the home and applies to foster them for which she will be paid a reasonable but not princely weekly allowance. This course the Social Security Department finally agrees to and the children are moved for the third time.

Was the decision the best one? Unfortunately one will never know. Questions pose themselves - Why did not the Grandma help her daughter at the time of her greatest need by taking one or two of the children then?

Why could not bureaucracy be overruled for the sake of the children and the young couple be allowed to adopt them and give them a new life?

The Social Services were probably influenced by the hope that the mother would eventually have them back.

This example which is by no means rare shows how seldom cases of child care are straightforward and highlights the importance of the ability of the Social Worker to make the right decisions. Wrong decisions may well mean the ruining of someone's life.

J.H.W.

THE ENDEAVOUR MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTIONS

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REVIEW

Incarnation and Myth

Edited by Michael Goulder.
S.C.M. Press Ltd. £3.50.

INTRODUCTION

'The Myth of God Incarnate' and a reply 'The Truth of God incarnate' were reviewed in recent Endeavours* This book is a collection of essays with discussions appended edited by Michael Goulder D.D. Head of Theology in the Birmingham University Department of Extramural Studies. He also contributes to the book. Though in the form of essays, this book is in fact a report of the proceedings of a formal discussion between the essayists in 'The Myth' and some of their principle critics held in July 1978 in Birmingham.

Speaking as a whole 'Incarnation and Myth' does a lot to straighten out misunderstanding and to define the principle issues that are under discussion. Michael Goulder likens it to a seven-a-side Rugby match with the Referee - Professor Mitchell acting as Chairman!

A Survey of the Issues

To extend the same metaphor Maurice Wiles* kicks off as indeed he does in The Myth. He appreciates that 'Myth' and 'Incarnation' need defining before discussing. Firstly he gives a definition of the Orthodox view:- 'This doctrine of the Incarnation expresses, so far as human words permit, the central belief of Christians that God himself without ceasing to the God has come amongst us, not just in but as a particular man, at a particular time and place. The human life lived and died have been held quite literally to be the human life and death of God himself in one of the modes of his own eternal being. These are not of course his own words as he is on the 'side' of the Myth. They are in fact the words of Hebblewaite one of the critics.

Wiles asks (1) "Is the Incarnation logically coherent?" (2) "Is it coherent with other Christian doctrine e.g. would the Eucharist be reduced to

* Issues 56, 57 and 58.

* Regius Professor of Divinity Oxford.

simply a memorial service?" (3)'What is the evidence of the New Testament?" He observes that we cannot expect the answers to be resolved from the N.T. as the doctrine was not then fully developed. Nevertheless the writer of this review feels that at least it should not be inconsistent with N.T. teaching. A more important facet is brought out.'Can we believe in the divinity of Christ in this scientific age? "

Alas, we reach the end of the essay and still do not find a definition of 'Myth'.

The Myth and Christian Faith

Brian Hebblewaite* in the first short essay puts fairly and squarely the position of the opposition to the 'Myth' namely the orthodox view today. He allows for some breadth of interpretation due to the difficulty of the subject but states that such breadth must be limited or the doctrine is lost. He is persuaded that the doctrines of the 'Incarnation' and the Trinity belong to 'the essence of Christianity'. They are, he says, as near as one can get to the heart of the revelation of God in Jesus; and the church, through its bishops, councils and liturgies, should commend its Trinitarian and Incarnation of faith.

Interpretation and Imagination

Dr. Nicholas Lash, a Roman Catholic and Norris-Halse Professor of Divinity adds his weight in an essay entitled 'Interpretation and Imagination' by saying that we have to understand the climate at the time, in which these doctrines were formulated in order to find their essence and goes on to discuss the area contained in the 'literal and metaphorical' as handled by the authors of 'The Myth' - In asking whether or not, and in what sense, Jesus could be said to be the 'incarnate Son of God'. "What sort of question are we asking?" He says. Lash continues :-

Several of the contributors to the Myth appear to assume that biblical, patristic, medieval and Reformation theologians were unaware of our (supposedly) 'sharp' distinction between 'literal' and 'metaphorical' usage and that, as a result, they talked a great deal of what we can see (even though they could not) to be arrant nonsense.

* Dean of Queen's College Cambridge.

He continues :

So, for example, John Hick asks, concerning the 'ancient language of divine sonship', whether the king was 'thought of as literally or as metaphorically the son of God', and comments: 'The question is probably too sharply posed; for the early cultures did not draw our modern distinction. He ascertains that if we distinguish between literal statements and metaphorical, poetic, symbolic and mythological statements, the Nicean formula was undoubtedly intended to be understood literally'. Then comes the coup de grace: 'That Jesus was God the Son incarnate is not literally true, since it has no literal meaning.' Thus according to Hick, the fathers of Nicea unwittingly acquitted of idiocy, they did the best they could, lacking the inestimable benefit of our sharp distinction.

In summary, he is saying that the authors of 'The Myth' are failing to comprehend the problem with which the early church was trying to grapple still less to see any sense in the answers which he admits are not without difficulties in comprehension.

The Incarnation and Modern Theology

Brian Hebblewaite next adds another comment which contributes to the orthodox concept of the incarnation.

Of course the fact that a word like 'incarnation' is used in its primary sense for a mysterious and baffling act of the transcendent God in making himself personally present and known in human form means that it is by no means a clear-cut, easily comprehensible and fully articulated concept. We do not grasp the essence of the incarnation any more than we grasp the essence of God. But the literal uses of all these special religious words inevitably include mystery. They are specifically designed to refer, literally, to that which necessarily eludes our full cognitive grasp.

Jesus and the meaning of 'God'.

Don Cupitt continues the discussion for the authors of the 'Myth'. - 'Few theologians would accept the formula Jesus is God without qualification

He then analyses very well a large number of permutations that could be comprehended in this formula.

He gives five main uses of the word God :

- G.1 Anything which becomes the object of a religious attitude.
- G2a. God as a generic term, a member of a class of divine beings.
- G2b. The monotheistic use of 'God' presupposes an exclusive concentration of divinity in a simple 'focus' and thus becomes a title.
- G3. A step lower - subordinate divinities, divinities only by permission, e.g. Angels.
- G.4 Divinity a communicable to men - Deification or participation in God by grace can be regarded as the general destiny of all God's people as discussed in John 10:33-6.
- G5. God as the proper name of an individual - Yahweh - the God of Israel. In the N.T. there is no proper name for God.

It is difficult to see how Don Cupitt separates G2b from G5. In the theme of relationship to worship he sees definitions (G1), (G2b) and (G5) as appropriate and in relation to how Godhood can be shared (G2a) (G3) and (G4)

We might think it a bit pointless to define 'is' but as Don Cupitt shows it is indeed very necessary.

- B1. The first meaning of 'is' - is identity. The individual named Jesus is identical with the individual named God. (G5) or (G2b).
- B2. Jesus is God - could mean Jesus is divine (G3) and (G2a).
- B3. Acclamation corresponding to G1 as in 'Jesus is Lord'.

Cupitt observes that the ante-Nicene fathers inclined towards a subordination view of Jesus interpreting 'Jesus is God' along the lines (B2-G3) i.e. Jesus is divine. However Nicea settled the orthodox view as - 'a very bold ingenious and highly original solution, asserting coequal persons within

the One God, Jesus 'God the Son' becomes (B2, G2B). Cupitt remarks that the 'vocabulary of the developed faith is not only very hard to understand but is also very alien to the N.T. and later - 'The difficulties both of logic and exegesis, in the traditional doctrine seem to me to be overwhelming - People say, What will you put in its place?' and my (Dr.Cupitt's) answer is, What else but the primitive faith preserved in the N.T.? Many would say that this is begging the question. However, later he is clear :-

'Jesus, in short, was a prophet who brought the tradition of prophetic monotheism to completion.'

"But is this primitive N.T. teaching?" It certainly is not Pauline teaching, which we find in the earliest N.T. documents. It is not Mark's, who sees Jesus as the Son of God. Likewise, Matthew and Luke. Cupitt then must be replying to Jesus' own words. Indeed he makes this point: In his voice the coming of God in judgment and mercy and the turning of man to God in repentance and faith are perfected and final salvation arrives in the world'.

There is little doubt that Jesus presented himself as a prophet but this was hardly the concept that the most primitive church has of the resurrected Jesus. He was at least the Messiah and according to Paul - 'declared to be the Son of God with power - by the resurrection of the dead.' The message of the early church was clear 'Jesus is Lord'. What is unfortunately less clear is what they meant by 'Lord'.

The reviewer's comment is taken up by Nicholas Lash who observes that 'it would have been more helpful for Cupitt to have analysed a formula such as 'Jesus Christ is the Word of God Incarnate.' It is easy to make this comment but surely the 'incarnation' as defined in the doctrine of the Trinity at Calcedon goes far beyond John's words in John 1:14. In the reviewer's opinion the incarnation of the 'Word of God' is very different from the 'incarnation of God'.

Is there a Doctrine of the Incarnation?

John Hicks asks a pertinent question - 'Was Jesus conscious of being God the Son? - The synoptic gospels imply No and the 4th Gospel Yes.'

He concludes that there is an enormous difference between a 'divine incarnation', which was consciously self proclaimed and a motif seized upon by his followers and projected back upon the historical Jesus. This

has to be agreed but it is a non-sequitur' to say that his followers were wrong they were in a far better position to judge than we are and were not confused by Nicea or Chalcedon!

Professor Hick firmly pronounces against the idea of two natures in Jesus - one human and the other divine - This is to 'turn the metaphor into metaphysics'. - '...the idea of divine incarnation is a basic metaphor functioning as a religious myth.

At last we have an approach to a definition of a Myth in the context of the author's debate!

Professor Hick answers Hebblewaite's complaint of a lack of reverence for tradition boldly.

'And it may be that some of us do not have the reverence for tradition that we ought to have. Whether or how far this is so must be for others to judge. But let us not entirely forget the opposite danger that we - the Christian community through the centuries - having created a formula which has no literal meaning, should then bow down before it as a divine revelation which is too deep for us to understand and which it is impious to question!'

Hebblewaite argues his theory to the effect that God emptied himself to become 'man' in Jesus, termed 'kenosis'* Cupitt remarks that the emptying must be very effective as even Jesus did not know that he was God incarnate!

Professor Hick plays an important card when he winks out from O.C. Quick (a Kenoticist) the following:

'In so far as Dr. Temple says that the Kenotic theory has a mythological appearance, we may indeed not only agree with him but go further in saying that it is inevitably expressed in terms of myth. For myth is the only language we can use about supremundane realities.'

Professor Hick has here firmly fixed the yoke of Myth on the shoulders of the opposition. However this is not in itself a strong argument against incarnation. For example, Paul Tillich speaking of R u dolf Bultmann -

* Gk. emptied - the word used in Phil. 2:7.

'Even when he (Bultmann) says that God has acted in Jesus in order to confront us with a possibility of a decision for or against authentic existence - this is a symbolic or mythological way of speaking.'

However, it is Hick's argument that they are not just using kenosis as a Myth but as a metaphysical idea. That is - it is not just that Jesus acted in a way as if he was God who had emptied himself but that God has indeed emptied himself in becoming Jesus.

Paradox and Mystification

Michael Goulder points out in his usual pleasantly provocative style by stating that one cannot shelter behind a contradiction by calling it a paradox, even if you have the excuse that the discussion is in a field beyond complete human comprehension.

Against Professor Moule he cites his (Moule's) definition of incarnation - 'It is a unique and distinctive identification of God's "Word" with Jesus.....in Jesus.....the Logos became a man of flesh and blood.'

At first sight Goulder remarks this statement seems reasonable - 'The Logos became a man' like 'X became a Zambian citizen' but a vast difference is apparent if the Logos is defined as a pre-existent metaphysical entity i.e. is not flesh and blood. This is a 'mystification'. There is no possible identity between the two. Goulder points out that John provides a continuity in the 'I am' saying but states that Moule does not want this.'

At last Michael Goulder turns to the Virgin Birth but alas not to discuss the N.T. records but only to confound Mascall and Wessels on the manner of the virginal conception. One would have thought the two birth stories would have been prime N.T. evidence for the discussion. Can it be that the two Rugby sides have expurged the Virgin Birth from the rules?

Wessels apparently endeavours to interpret the Virgin Birth in terms of a miraculous provision of a Y chromosome to fertilize the ovum of Mary causing a parthenogenesis conception. This is however no more than 20th century reading of the birth stories in Matthew or Luke. For prior knowledge of his pre-existence Mascall presumes communication with Mary his mother in relation to his conception and with God his Father. Michael Goulder acknowledges that this would give some continuity albeit

tenuous. He is not however very impressed, if God miraculously supplied a sperm or chromosome in his view this would only produce one personality not two consciousnesses in Jesus.

The reviewer would agree with this but nevertheless this does not in itself reduce Jesus to just a prophet albeit The Messianic Prophet. In Goulder's own words such a fusion 'constitutes potential new human-being, with a slowly developing consciousness reflecting its complement of genes and chromosomes and its environmental experiences.' Surely such could produce a man, a human-being, with divine characteristics. The problem is surely to say whether this did indeed happen or whether it was the result of grateful Christian wishing to elevate their Messiah. I believe we must be very careful before we dogmatize and be quite prepared to say we do not know - the evidence appears to be conflicting. May not Matthew and Luke in the birth stories be expressing in mythological terms the exceptional nature of the Christ. There are indeed difficulties here in that the accounts differ in Matthew and Luke and Mark seems to know nothing of it. On the other hand the difficulties are multiplied if we take the accounts literally.

Against Goulder and Cupitt, Hebblewaite comes back by saying that their analogies are but too human - There is no question, he says, of two natures in one being. Although it is beyond our comprehensive nevertheless Jesus was 'the vehicle and expression of the eternal Son.'

At this point Frances Young slips out a trump card

'If Jesus was an entirely normal human being, no evidence can be produced for the incarnation.

If no evidence can be produced, there can be no basis on which to claim that an incarnation took place.'

We cannot help but agree that this is true but we are not in a position to say that Jesus was an entirely normal human being. We might think this is the easiest solution but it is certainly not the opinion of John or indeed of Paul or Mark. All the evidence shows that physically Jesus was in every way a human being but who is to say what his mental and spiritual characteristics were? We can only examine the slender evidence that is available to us.

Nicholas Lash counters Frances Young by saying that:

'If it is part of the definition of a 'perfectly normal human being' that there can be no evidence that he embodies and discloses, in his humanity, the presence and character of God, in a manner and to an extent that most of us do not, then:

either no prophets or holy men are 'perfectly normal human beings';

or there can be no grounds for reasonably affirming that any particular individual is a prophet or holy man.'

Myth & Truth in Scientific Enquiry

This section of the book concludes with an essay by a biological scientist entitled "Myth and Truth in Scientific Enquiry." In it John Rodwell subjects the authors of the Myth and their critics to some lessons in logic with the help of Karl Popper. Its value will depend very much on the standpoint of the reader but it undoubtedly disciplines us to consider our motives in the search for truth and the criteria by which we judge it.

to be continued

J.H. Weaving.

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LETTERS

Dear Editor,

I offer some thoughts on the letter from your lady reader in the issue 1979/2. How can we not find ourselves having the problems before us if we are at all sensitive to suffering?

I recollect how in 'The Brothers Karmazov,' Dostoevsky has his character Ivan, say that the world of our experience is not worth the tears of one poor, tortured child. Ivan says this to his young brother Alcosha, the priest, adding that it is not that he does not believe in God: it is His world that he cannot accept, so he would hand back his entrance ticket.

It is on record that Prof. A. Einstein posed, but did not resolve, the question of a possible alternative world. Is there not behind all such objections, the feeling that the objector would arrange things differently were he to be in the Creator's place? It would be interesting to note, in such alternative worlds, the preferences of us objectors-turned-creators.

A solid fact is that we cannot stand in the Creator's place (though we do have a part in creating the world of our time and what follows). Are we not co-workers together with God? (1) It is time-wasting to complain, "Why has the Creator made me thus?" (2) There remains only the course of accepting what we cannot erase and refashion, and then to give all our attention to the wonderful and ultimately inscrutable fact that we exist at all. Paul, quoted above, had echoed Jesus' saying "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" (3) There is no suggestion in the records that Jesus questioned the world presented to him. He simply concluded, "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work" (4) In those words Jesus revealed his awareness of the painful course of his own life and its closure, when the opportunity for creative living would have passed. He had concluded that this was the only way for him to face the world and find satisfaction in living in it. He saw the travail of his soul and was satisfied (5) Disciples are thus shown how consciousness of being part of the one body of mankind means to suffer with it; and how consciousness must pass into action. Other relevant comments by Jesus appear in his correction to the view that the slain Galilaeans (6) and the men upon whom the tower at Siloam fell (7) were more wicked than any others. Beyond this he did not go except to note how death comes to all, and life is the opportunity to be fruitful.

Jesus made it clear that the scriptures were the guide to his thought and his commitments. He would have absorbed the general tenor of Proverbs with its advice to follow the path of wisdom, work and morality for a good return in this life and to be acceptable to the Lord. He would have seen in his own experience the truths in the modifying observations of Ecclesiastes, - that the race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong: (8) nor do men remember the wisdom of the man who delivered the city. (9) Jesus would have rejoiced with the Psalmist when his spirit was lifted up and would have sorrowed with him when cast down. In accepting the Creation of which he was part, and would be the agent of development, he was saying in effect, "I begin with God". He did not ask how he could make the Creation reasonable to the mind of man.

The philosopher Spinoza had Jewish antecedents and training, and his writings reveal the Hebrew outlook. He has been described as the noblest and most lovable of the great philosophers, concerned with religion and virtue rather than science. (10). His own life was "a magnificent attempt to practice his beliefs." His thought began with God. Nothing could exist outside God, and nature was a unity with God. (11) Evil belongs to the finite view. For God to be, is for God to act, and God acts as he is. In Psalm 8:1 the context requires us to see God expressed in his handiwork, not above it in some misty, unknowable sphere. If the world of human experience is God revealed in truth and love, then there is no point in postulating alternative worlds.

As to the matter of correct belief in relation to the redeemed as part of the one problem of existence. Since it is enormously difficult to reason about our own fitness in the eyes of God, it is hardly in our capacity to know the true place of others in the body of mankind as part of creation in any final sense "knowing", being at peace, would seem to have its secret in what John includes in his epistles, 'Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God: and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God' (12) This "knowing" still does not mean that we know as God knows. A definition of existentialism has been offered. (13) It is that our knowledge and experience is always incomplete, due to our very brief lives in the span of the whole of existence, "There have always been loose ends" - an important recognition in view of "the persistent yearning in philosophic minds, at least, to grasp the whole - and it eludes us."

R.G. Moulton (14), in his comprehensive study of "Job" points out that the man who suffered so much, and wanted an explanation, was led to the thought that if "evil" coming upon man was to be wondered at, then the good that he experienced, together with much that was against reason was just an inscrutable and should, at least, be an equal source of wonder.

The quest for certainty spawns any number of dogmatic frameworks intended to bind the faithful to an identical belief pattern. The novelist, Joyce Cary (15), explains how, if a novelist allows a dogma, stiff and formal, outside the man". He goes on to say, "laws dogmas, philosophers are not made for individuals. They are guide books: they cater for the average or nothing. How can a made, seeking his own way through the unique world of his individual experience, walk on the party line? He must be true to himself or he will not give truth to others: the only truth he can give is his own experience.

J.T.Murrell.

References

- (1) Cor 3:9
- (2) Rom 9:20
- (3) Matt 6:27
- (4) John 9:4
- (5) Isa. 53:11
- (6) Luke 13:2
- (7) Luke 13:4
- (8) Eccles. 9:11
- (9) History of Western Philosophy: Bertrand Russell
- (10) Spinoza: Ethics.
- (11) 1 John 4:7
- (12) Andrew Cruickshank's Scottish Bedside Book.
- (13) The Literary Study of the Bible.
- (14) Set Essays.