

ENDEAVOUR

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The KD 600
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1980/1

25p

THE ENDEAVOUR MAGAZINE

No. 61

1980/1

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EDITORIAL

Many will think that the editor has given too great a prominence to 'The Myth of God Incarnate' and indeed continues to press on with 'Incarnation and Myth - The debate continues. What are his excuses? The majority of the readers will no doubt feel - Well we never did believe that Jesus was God Incarnate - so what? Still it should give some satisfaction that many of the most capable theologians in the protestant church now reject the Trinity and this particular aspect of it. Secondly, it should have materially contributed to bringing the protestant denominations and sects closer together.

But what is its value to us as potential readers either through these Reviews in Endeavour or preferably by reading the two books?

To the editor its value is to derive a better picture of Jesus and as he is our acknowledged Master this cannot help but be of value. Although it is common in learned societies in other disciplines to have conferences on particular subjects, where papers by prominent experts in the field are presented and where these are followed by valuable discussion on a critical basis; unfortunately this is a lot less common in theology and when conferences are held they are less frequently well recorded in written form.

Most theology is presented in obtruse journals, for written discussion only and thus reaches only few specialists in that field.

Here the discussion is thrown for open discussion to a much wider public and generally in language that is intelligible. Nevertheless,

Buddhist Literature

Is Buddhist Literature indebted to the Old Testament?

Earlier this year, the present writer sought to show, in a (1) series of articles in Glad Tidings, that the scriptures of the world's main 'alternative' religions lacked, among other things, the consistency, compactness, moral value and authority of the Bible. The articles were not, in general, directed against the religions themselves, many of whose devotees lead exemplary lives, but against the scriptures which the devotees use, some of which are fallible, tedious and presented in an unauthoritative fashion.

Yet, the great religions must account for their popularity in some way, and as God did not leave Himself without witness, it is useful to ask whether these scriptures have, at some past time, 'borrowed' from a fund of wisdom to be found in the Bible, so that the greatness of Biblical writings has, to a small extent, 'rubbed off' on to them.

It is, of course, easy to find the influence of both Old and New Testaments in the Koran, which specifically mentions Moses, David, Ezra, Miriam, Mary, John the Baptist, Jesus and others. Indeed, the (2) confused accounts of the Tower of Babel and the birth of Christ make (3) the Koran a rather amusing 'alternative' in places, but we are, at least, able to trace in the Old Testament, the source of the Koran's popularity and greatness.

Buddhist writings are different, for Buddhism sprang from Hinduism, and the 'world-view' and salvation-concept of Buddhism differs markedly from those of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Indeed, from a religious standpoint the only link is an indirect one, - found in the teachings of the Gnostics who influenced the Church in the early centuries of our era.

Yet, there is a common thread. It is not found in religious philosophy but in what is sometimes called 'Wisdom literature' the literature that spanned the period between the two testaments, and related to a period when East and West were temporarily united from a communications standpoint after the conquests of Alexander the Great.

The most unpretentious of the Buddhist writings is the Dhammapada, (the path of teaching). Though this text is ascribed to Buddha (c.540 B.C.) it probably dates from a later period, when Greek influences had affected India, and India had in turn been affected by the Greeks. It contains twenty six small chapters containing series of wise-sayings and short proverbs. Some of these are, in style, very similar to passages in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. and could have been indirectly derived from them via the later pieces of Wisdom literature (e.g. Wisdom of Solomon and Ben-Sira- or Ecclesiasticus) that circulated in the Greek period. It would, of course, be possible to argue that the Wisdom literature borrowed from Buddhist sources, were it not for the fact that parts of the book of Proverbs, for example, the Thirty Wise sayings (4), are known to be very much older.

In a paper of this size it is not possible to examine many examples of similarities, but let us look at a few.

1. "If a man were to conquer in battle a thousand times a thousand men, and another man were to conquer only one man, himself alone, he would truly be the greatest of conquerors (Dhammapada 8:4).

This is similar to :

"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32).

2. "As a solid rock is not shaken by the wind, so wise men are not moved amidst blame and praise". (Dhammapada 6:6).

There is less similarity, in this case, with :

"He only is my rock and my salvation - my fortress: I shall not be greatly moved" (Ps 62:2)

- but some of the imagery is similar, and of course, in turn forms a basis of the parable of rock and sand, with which the Sermon on the Mount closes.

3. A whole series of passages in Dhammapada 16 begin with the words: "From enjoyment arises grief....." a sentiment similar to that of Ecclesiastes 4 and 5.

Further, the passages relating to the effect of anger in Dhammapada 17 bear some relationship with Proverbs 26 and 27, which are known to be much older.

There are, of course, many other similarities. Passages such as "to obey is better than sacrifice"..... and

"a day in your courts is better than a thousand"
seem also to be echoed in the Dhammapada.

If these passages are indeed quotations, even at third or fourth hand, from the Old Testament, we can at least, to some extent account for the strength and popularity of this well-known Buddhist scripture.

1. The Bible and Its 'Rivals' (Glad Tidings issues 1137-1141).
2. Sura 40:37-8.
3. Sura 19:16.
4. Proverbs 22:17 -24 21.

The Influence of Platonism on Christianity

The essence of Platonism is the search for an ultimate reason, an unchangeable source of meaning which lies behind and beyond the outward appearance and endless variety of objects with which the world presents us and which by their very diversity, size and number, superficially resist any attempt to reduce them to a simple and basic element. Yet the earnest belief of the Greek philosophers and Plato in particular was that there was an ultimate source of being to which all were related and which provided to each object its essential meaning. This being was moreover invisible, intangible and imperceptible by the senses, being wholly the object of the mind; yet they believed it was the true being and more real and true than anything perceived by the eye. An understanding of this can most simply be afforded by a consideration of common nouns. If we think of chairs, and let our minds range for a moment upon the various types that exist, armchairs, deck chairs, wooden chairs, folding chairs, etc., we are baffled by their variety of style, colour and substance, yet to them all, we attribute the word, chair, which in essence simply

means 'something to sit on.' But when we apply this word to the objects in question, then they become meaningful, intelligible and connected by the common purpose which they all serve. Yet this purpose is not something that we see but the concept or idea of 'chairness', that to Plato is the true purpose of the objects and moreover is linked to a whole world of ideas which culminates in one ultimate essence and source of reality which is an unchanging and eternal being of goodness.

However far fetched that may sound to our severely practical and factual way of thinking, the implications are not far to see. This philosophy inevitably lays more emphasis and importance upon what is not seen than upon what is. It tends to reject as inferior or even bad, the physical and the material side of existence and leads to a picture of man as a creature of two worlds, body and soul, of which the latter is by far the more important, for it is permanent and incorruptible, whereas the body is temporary and corruptible. So man is taught to ignore the body and seek the things that are not mortal which belong to an unchanging and eternal realm. For true reality is an endless cycle of being, stable and permanent and to this we should aspire.

These ideas began to pervade the Greek speaking world during the three hundred years before the birth of Christ and the attractions and allurements of Greek thought began to penetrate into Palestine as the Jews become a part of that great Graeco-Roman world. Its appeal with its theatres, plays, sport, literature and its enticement of the aesthetic senses by means of art, architecture and sculpture was powerful and dynamic. Yet the thought of traditional Judaism was wholly different. Jewish faith was rooted in history and experience. They traced their religious origins from Moses and trusted in the God who had acted on their behalf in the waters and the desert, in the plagues and the oppression. Their faith was based upon physical, palpable facts. Moreover they did not see God's purpose as an ultimate absorption into an eternal cycle but rather as a dynamic plan leading to a consummation, an end of time in which God's glory would be manifest. Also they did not see man as a creature of two natures, body and soul, but rather as a whole body-soul complex in which the mortal, human life was the vehicle through which God's blessing was granted and God's glory revealed.

So these two great cultures met and at times conflicted, under the Maccabees with bitter and deadly hatred. But the persuasive power of Greek thinking had come to stay; perhaps after all it had something to say. In the New Testament we can see the impact of these two ideas, sometimes opposed, sometimes linked and in the Fourth Gospel superbly united.

One implication had to be resisted however. Anything that would underestimate the supreme reality and importance of Christ's human life was a direct challenge to the whole essence of the Gospel. In the first epistle of John we read the incipient dangers of Docetism, a philosophy which denied that Christ had come in the flesh. In the epistle to the Colossians again we can detect the beginning of the Gnostic heresy which, based on Platonism, put Christ low on the ladder of creation by virtue of his human existence. But says Paul, 'This is not so; he is the beginning of creation the firstborn of every creature.' Christ's humanity is the foundation of the Gospel. The importance of the body, the total human being must be asserted, otherwise the sufferings of Christ are an illusion. So Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 15, it is the body - the full human being, that will be raised, as was Christ.

But Paul was brought up in a Greek environment and moulded by it. So he does recognise that man has two natures, a human, physical one and a higher, spiritual one and he knows well the conflict between them (Romans 7). He longs to live in the higher nature of spirit but the fleshly mind drags him down until he experiences the victory of the Spirit. Moreover in II Corinthians 4:18, he acknowledges in a truly Platonic passage that the true vision of the believer is set upon the things that cannot be seen; "for the things that cannot be seen are eternal." This true reality for Paul is Christ himself and the life of the Christian is directed towards this light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus, whom "having not seen we love." So the Christian, like Plato should be living in an unseen world which is more true, more real, more glorious than the human life of his mortal existence.

But it is in John's Gospel that we see the blending of the two cultures more perfectly. Once thought to be essentially rooted in Greek thought, it has more recently been appraised as an essentially Hebrew document. And indeed it does present Jesus in a fully historical framework of place, time and experience, of weariness, weeping and distress. Yet that historical, human character is no less than the Light of the World, the

source of all other light, the Word made flesh, the Way, the Truth and the Life. Behind and indeed through the human flesh shines the glory of the Eternal Father. In him time and eternity meet, human and divine are united and the ultimate breaks into the immediate, the limitless into the limited. We need both history and eternity and this book lies athwart the stream.

But sadly the story did not finish there. As the Church began to absorb into it more educated intellectuals, they sought to clarify this relationship between time and eternity, Jesus and God, in more philosophical terms and to dwell upon their essential unity. And ultimately through Augustine, an avowed Platonist, the doctrine of the Trinity was born, which is in essence a philosophical statement of the fundamental, eternal relationship between Christ, God and the Holy Spirit.

But is it clarified by philosophical dogma? Surely John has taken us far enough to see the divine through the human, to find God in man. That is where Platonic thinking would take us and leave us there with the mystery unsolved and the challenge unanswered and consequently ceaselessly provoking us to further vision and fuller adventure to discover the eternal in the temporal and the infinite in the finite. And this is the search that Plato started and with which every believer is faced, if he is prepared to look for God in everything.

As Herbert's poem says :

" A man that looks on glass
On it may stay his eye,
Or if he chooseth, through it pass
And thence the heaven espy."

We ourselves choose whether we shall look at the glass or beyond.

Sheila Harris.

Geology and Genesis

Anyone who is interested in the natural sciences inevitably has to consider the various kinds of rocks which occur. Rocks have such a fundamental influence on the vegetation and scenery. As their outcrop varies considerably one is led to ask why. Even two adjacent mountains may be composed of entirely different kinds of rocks. The rocks are often layered, and the layering may even be seen to be crumpled up, or broken. While it is possible to imagine rocks being laid down in layers at the bottom of the sea, it is only reasonable to ask how they are now high up the side of the mountains, and what happened to them in the process.

These were the kind of questions the early geologists were asking. In attempting to provide solutions, problems were raised as people realised the theories did not accord with the ideas which had previously been conceived from the creation accounts in Genesis.

The early days of geology had many theorists, who often did not even go out to look at the rocks, but formulated their theories on the formation of the world, and refused to consider anyone else's theories, or evidence which conflicted with their own. By the end of the eighteenth century, two main schools of thought had developed. Much of the later thinking was based on their ideas. One group was based in Edinburgh around a doctor, James Hutton, the other followed a German geologist, Werner.

Werner's group believed all rocks had been laid down in regular layers around the world like successive onion skins, crystallising out of an original primeval sea. His local landscape supported his ideas. What we now recognise to be the high temperature rocks formed at depth, like granite, were said to have formed first.

The next layers were the slates and shales, containing the first evidence of fish. The land animals appeared and survived or otherwise between intervals of catastrophic advance and recession of the sea. The sea finally retreated to its present position leaving an eroded system of layers. Volcanoes were thought to be present day occurrences fired by coal deposits which melted local rocks to produce lavas. All the other rocks

were held to be sedimentary, that is, laid down in water. Because of this association, Werner's followers were called, Neptunists.

Hutton and his followers believed that many rocks came from an originally molten source, so they were called Vulcanists. Hutton identified examples of places, where rock, such as granite, had squeezed in between the sedimentary layers and so was obviously of later origin. This of course did not agree with Werner's theory of granite coming out of solution first, and other rocks later.

Werner's sequence could well have happened within a short period of time. But Hutton's required a far greater time, for in the layered rocks he saw the processes which are still at work. All the time, the effects of frost and dissolving rain, help to break up the rocks. Pieces of various sizes are washed away, ground up, and deposited elsewhere.

Hutton made the famous statement which is much quoted, that "the present is the key to the past". We can see now, how very gradually, in some places the coast is being eroded away. In other places sand is being blown onshore and the coastline is moving outwards. The weight of suspended sediment being brought down in rivers indicates a gradual wearing down of the mountains. Earthquakes, such as along the West coast of South America, indicate the gradual uplift of the land and also of sediments which were once at the bottom of the sea. But it is all very gradual. We are unaware of most of the processes. No one can remember mountains having become smaller during their life-time. Only the occasional earthquake or landslide provides visible evidence of change.

So Hutton wanted to allow for great periods of time to elapse, and it was upon this that much of the opposition to his findings was based.

Continuing into the nineteenth century there was a great accumulation of knowledge, and people began to put together their understanding of the correlation of Genesis with scientific knowledge.

Many deeply sincere Christians saw the newly emerging knowledge as an excellent illustration of the wonder and majesty of God. A typical book, full of fascinating, if not now so accurate, information is Samuel Kinn's. "Moses and Geology". He identifies fifteen events of creation in the first chapter of Genesis and writes about each one, demonstrating the order in which the world took shape. For example,

when talking about the creation of the heavens, there is a chapter on the universe, discussing stars, sunspots and comets.

While some of his information is no longer accurate, he himself is aware of the changing state of knowledge and says

"Should some of the links in the chain of evidence not appear quite perfect to all my readers, they may rest assured that the time will come when the advance of science will remove every difficulty, and make scepticism synonymous with ignorance. For the Word of God must prevail."

While he was quite willing to allow long periods of time between successive phases of creation, this belief that science will eventually achieve certainty, is not something I ever like to see stressed too strongly. Such evidence would perhaps be better brought forward as an illustration rather than a proof.

Going back from Samuel Kinns in 1889 to Dr. Thomas in the first edition of "Elpis Israel" in 1849 we find he does not have any problems with the length of time either. But his approach was different from most others, more in line with the current ideas of the Seventh Day Adventists.

Dr. Thomas thought it was possible that there were other worlds and other races which existed before Adam. During the six days of creation the world was being re-formed following the destruction of the previous world when the angels were "driven back to their habitation" which was destroyed, and the world became "without form and void".

In using this explanation, Dr. Thomas places all geological events before the Genesis creation. In the second chapter of "Elpis Israel" he said "Fragments however of the wreck of this pre-Adamic world have been brought to light by geological research, to the records of which we refer the reader, for a detailed account of its discoveries..."

Robert Roberts writing much later in "Good Company" in 1890 expresses this view slightly differently. He is discussing an article by a person who is advocating that the world is flat, with which he does not agree, and says,

"The writer takes it for granted that the Bible teaches that heaven and earth were created 6,000 years ago. This is a fallacy long since exploded. What the Bible teaches is, that the present human order of things upon the earth, commenced 6,000 years ago."

now go on
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of erosion and uplift with "no vestige of a beginning - no prospect of an end."

In the last century the emphasis was on describing rocks, and many of the early geological maps are still remarkably accurate. The emphasis now is on explanation. Everything is based on theories, some more plausible than others, but an agreeable aspect of such explanation is that earthquakes and volcanoes do not just "happen" or occur at random. A world-wide pattern, and the plate-tectonics theory in particular gives an explanation which shows that the world functions as a whole. Last century people said "This is how it was," and marvelled at that. This century people say "This is how we think it is, and even possibly will be".

The people who objected to Hutton did not like having their concept of man's importance displaced. One can very easily feel of no importance in a world with no clear cut beginning or end.

David Dineley in "Earth's Voyage Through Time" written in 1973 has a concluding chapter in which he predicts the future of the physical universe when the sun's energy will be exhausted. The earth will first be fried and then frozen . its life over the sun will be dying..... Eventually the light of the sun will be extinguished.... Life on earth will have ended long before this. Be it through natural causes, or man's interference, life will have ceased long before this distant point in time.

Earth, the spacecraft that has travelled so far and so long, will perhaps for a short period in her middle age have carried a cargo, scarcely a crew of living things. She will have travelled from the unknown to the unknown and en route for a brief span her voyage will have held the attention of one species of her inhabitants, and he may have got the story quite wrong."

The last sentence is some way removed from the confident assertion of facts that last century's writers would have used. But is that all that man is, "a cargo, scarcely a crew, of living things?"

This is far distant from the idea of man being the highest point of creation. In Psalm eight there is the idea both of man's apparent insignificance, and yet also the knowledge that with faith in God man is important. There is a comforting assurance in the words "What is man that thou art mindful of him..... Yet thou hast made him little less

There are problems in trying to link too closely the Genesis account with scientific facts in our present state of knowledge. Robert Roberts, in discussing how we perceive the sun, and how people previously understood it, says "The Bible is written for man, and therefore adapts itself to his point of view and the proximate aspects of things."

Moving on to this century, C.C.Walker in "The Word of God" published in 1926, makes some interesting suggestions modifying some of Dr.Thomas' ideas, particularly on successive creations. C.C.Walker very much more favours the idea that the whole of creation is actually being described.

"It is very evident from geology that such upheavals have been many in the earth's remote past but there does not appear to be any evidence at all that some 6,000 years ago an existing cosmos was reduced to such chaos as is described in Genesis 1:2."

He continues with an extract from "Elpis Israel" in which Dr.Thomas uses the word "unquestionable".

Dr.Thomas' respect for the Word of God is altogether admirable, and his succeeding exposition concerning the Sabbath day thoroughly scriptural and beautiful, but the foregoing is by no means "unquestionable". It is in fact mis-interpretation, going quite beyond the text of the Word of God.... The record of Genesis covers "the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens" (Gen. 2:4)"

The point has often been made that the Bible is not a scientific textbook and it would seem to be a mistake to try and draw very close parallels, rather we should take the simplest most obvious and basic message that God is the creator of all things, but from our "proximate view" we are in a sense seeing "in a glass darkly."

Quite apart from its interest value it would not be desirable to ignore science as its ideas have influenced people's thinking to a great extent, and present problems we cannot ignore.

To return to Hutton at the end of the eighteenth century, one of the main reasons he was so much attacked and his ideas opposed was because he honestly said that as far as he could see the world continued in cycles

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than God." While it hardly does to have an exaggerated idea of one's own importance it cannot be helping people if they feel that their brief span of life on earth is of no importance whatever.

To conclude I would like to go back to the 1850's to Hugh Millar who was much quoted in his time. In his "Testimony of the Rocks" he suggests that when God had finished His work of creation, and rested on the sabbath day, then began the spiritual work of the redemption of man. He develops the idea of a "divine fiat" going forth producing increasingly complicated organisms.

"And finally last in the series, the "divine fiat" went forth, and responsible immortal man, came into existence. But has the course of progress come, in consequence, to a close? No. God's work of elevating raising heightening - of making the high in die progression succeed the low - still goes on. But man's responsibility, his immortality, his God - implanted instincts respecting an eternal future, forbid that that work of elevation and progress should be, as in all the other instances, a work of creation. To create would be to supercede. God's work of elevation now is the work of fitting and preparing peaceable imperfect man for a perfect impeccable future state."

He continues to elaborate on the theme of increasing perfection, and sees the human period as the "period of a fellow-worker with God, created in God's own image." As there is never a repetition of the same thing being recreated all over again, he is looking forward to the next advance.

"The geologist, in those tables of stone which form his records, finds no example of dynasties once passed away again returning. There has been no repetition of the dynasty of the fish, of the reptile, of the mammal. The dynasty of the future is to have glorified man for its inhabitant; but it is to be the dynasty - "the kingdom" - not of glorified man made in the image of God, but of God himself in the form of man".

Even allowing for Hugh Millar belief in the inherent immortality of man, there is a world of difference between the view of man as a "fellow-worker with God" and man as a mere "cargo".

It seems preferable to move away from the idea of "proving" spiritual truths with our imperfectly understood knowledge of the

physical world. We live in an incredible world - a world in which the more we discover, the more we find how everything has its place. But if our faith depends on man's understanding of the physical world, it is not as securely founded as if it were based upon spiritual truths. Obviously of course, our understanding of God is also imperfect and we hope to add to it during our lives.

Everyone probably has their own concept of the world and what it means to them. No one likes to have the security of their ideas threatened. This was why so many of the early geologists were violently opposed. But to have been so upset by scientific ideas seems to imply an insecure foundation to faith. Just as we know that we cannot always do everything as well as we might, and have faith that God understands this, so too we should be able to know that God has not created a nasty alien unfriendly world. For, if God has made the world as it seems to be, taking a balanced view of current theories, then it has been made that way for a purpose.

Heather McHaffie.

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REVIEW

Incarnation and Myth-2

Edited by Michael Goulder. S.C.M. Press Ltd.,
1979 - £3.50.

4. Do all Christian Doctrines Stand and Fall Together?

A. Incarnation and Atonement.

(1) Evil and Incarnation by John Hick.

I cannot resist saying that Prof. Hick is an expert on evil! * This essay introduces the fourth section of the book, which is intended to meet the criticism that it is valid to discuss one doctrine in isolation. John Hick observes that it is necessary to weigh carefully the religious value of the doctrine of the Incarnation. He does this by relating its teaching to the problems of evil-disease-death...hatred...injustice. He might have done well in including moral value as it seems somewhat one-sided to consider only the negatives; surely the doctrine, if adequate to describe the actual event will be predominantly positive. His approach is essentially an existential one and its considerable value lies in the fact that it relates theology to the practical realities of life.

He points out that Jesus taught the love of God and brought men and women into a new and reconciled relationship to God and all this before his death'. He instances the parable of the Prodigal Son. Prof. Hick quickly reviews some of the early doctrines of the Atonement - vicarious sacrificial, - 'We have killed God's son but by him we are forgiven' - each of these doctrines, to be generous, must be highly mythological. In fact inconsistent if the victim is not a real man but God himself - who indeed cannot really die and would presumably be conscious of this.

In criticising the doctrine Hick generously puts the opposition's view in the best light.

"Now it might be suggested that God reconciles us to this

* Evil and the God of Love by John Hick, Fontana 1968.

painful creative process by coming into the process himself and sharing with us in its stress and suffering. In Christ, it might be said, we meet God himself - or more strictly, God the Son - born as a human child, living a human life, and subjecting himself to the pains and agonies of the world that he ordained. God loved us enough to become one of us, and thereby to reconcile us to himself and to the pains and pressures of his creative work."

He acknowledges that this sounds good but dismisses it on the ground that God has always, long before Jesus lived, known of the world's suffering and has always participated in 'every pain and joy, every hope and fear... of all his human children'.

He notes the argument that God is 'impassable' and thus incapable of feeling his creatures' pains and feelings. He counters this by observing that if he is essentially impassible then he could not become incarnate! Again he pleads the cause of the Incarnationists - 'Could it not be that God has always suffered with the suffering of his creatures and always been hurt by their sins but that the Cross makes the divine suffering visible as an event in human history?'

Having pleaded the cause he argues against it. The Christ event was unique in place and time and therefore only available to a minority. What about China and India?

Hick then attacks the Incarnationists stronghold 'Kenosis'^{*} - 'In Jesus the Second person of the Trinity God had emptied himself of his deity.' To some extent the reviewer feels that here Prof. Hick has begged the question by saying

"Neither the intense christological debates of the of the centuries leading up to the Council of Chalcedon, nor the renewed christological debate of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, have succeeded in squaring the circle by making intelligible the claim that one who was genuinely and unambiguously a man was also genuinely and unambiguously God."

* Greek - To empty

Hick condescends to say that ideas of the Incarnationist can be quite useful as 'metaphors' - Jesus was 'love' incarnate, in this respect incomparably greater than any other human love but possibly stopping short of the absolute perfection.

(ii) Prof. Charles Moule replies : 'The edifice that Prof. Hick has erected is not a New Testament creation. I do not suppose that Prof. Hick ever thought it was! "

His second point is more apposite - The fact that God acted uniquely once in the Christ event does not conflict with Him having always acted as a God of Mercy.

(iii) Incarnation and Atonement - The Moral and Religious Value of The Atonement

Brian Hebblewaite stresses that Christ's revelation and personal knowledge of God argues for him being the Son of God. Turning to the Atonement he states that soteriological* considerations require us to think of Jesus as coming into the world from the side of God. This was God's act after all.

He quotes Moule for saying that it is the conviction of Christ as a living presence that differentiates Christian awareness of God from all other. He tries to illustrate his defence of the orthodox position by quoting verses from hymns such as

"Hark, hark! the wise eternal Word
Like a weak infant cries,
In form of servant is the Lord,
And God in cradle lies."

I do not think however that this emotional appeal will impress the authors of the Myth.

(iv) Incarnation and Atonement.

Francis Young agrees with Brian Hebblewaite to the extent that only a suffering God is morally credible in the face of the World's ills. But stresses the following points :-

1. "God suffered and died is a particularly striking

* The technical term for salvation studies.

example of the problems posed by religious language. On the other hand, there is a sense in which the death of God is an obvious nonsense, so that, however complex the difficulties of precisely distinguishing between literal, metaphorical, analogical and other kinds of language, all would agree that the statement - 'God died' cannot be straightforwardly and literally true. On the other hand, to attempt an explanation (e.g. that God qua God cannot die whereas God qua man can), or indeed to try to state the 'core belief' conveyed in these 'mythological' terms (e.g. that it simply expresses graphically God's sympathetic involvement in his creation - though, of course, it does mean at least that) is immediately to undermine its impact and (I suspect) to reduce its essential meaning."

It seems to me, (Francis Young), that theology is on a false path when it attempts to give definition to this sort of language.

"So 'God suffered and died' is not to be emptied of content or explained away, but is to be affirmed together with the acknowledgement that it cannot be regarded as a simple statement of precisely what was the case. We are using the language of 'religious myth'."

2. Francis Young counters the idea that if God suffered on the cross he has felt and understood human suffering by pointing out how much more relevant it is if God suffers not only with the death and suffering of a human Jesus but with all his creatures that suffer and die.
3. According to the Marcan account the 'presence of God' - 'God incarnate' was experienced by his absence. This can only have consistency if Jesus was human. ('Why hast thou foresaken....?').
4. The cross particularizes God's concern and involvement in all human suffering and was no different in kind that any other similar incident of suffering.
5. 'Cross and resurrection are inseparable motifs' but 'if resurrection becomes the proof that Jesus was divine or that God was incarnate in him

it immediately redresses the reality of crucifixion and death. -
If the death is taken really seriously then God's power to transform
may be discerned within the tragic situation.

The above is briefly and largely by quotation is Francis Young's case.

The reviewer feels that there is a great deal of power in most of what Francis Young states. However it seems rather pointless to say that the orthodox position is fine providing that we take it as a 'Myth' (point 1), when it is perfectly obvious to us and Francis Young that the orthodox never did take it as a Myth and contrariwise the authors of "The Myth" take the incident of the Atonement as the death of a human being and Francis Young is very silent on what she understands by resurrection used in the sense that Paul accepts it namely life after death and as Easter is unique in this respect as the only evidence in the N.T. or O.T. of life after death, this surely makes the Atonement unique and different from other deaths though it is not proof that Jesus was divine or God.

B. A Wider Framework

Leslie Houlden addresses his essay to the criticism that the Incarnation cannot be discussed in isolation. He takes the plunge "What about the Resurrection of Jesus" - However his means of defence is attack - "What do the critics understand by 'resurrection' anyway?"

The Presence Of Christ

Leslie Houlden shifts the grounds somewhat by saying that the 'resurrection' sometimes seems to mean to many not so much the occurrence itself but its consequences - Jesus' continuing presence'. He sees the 'resurrection' as the link between the historic Jesus and the present Lord which Christians felt necessary to make a tidy continuous picture but he points out the dangers of subjectivity in this 'religious' outlook - Catholics use Mary, Buddhists - the Buddha.

Though Leslie Houlden starts boldly the reviewer feels that he has given insufficient weight to the historic references to the resurrection. Michael Goulder (1) recognises that something happened after the death of Jesus that resulted in putting new life into his followers and hence the Christian Church. - What was it? Are the resurrection stories literal? If not where do they fall down? - If mythical - What is the truth that the Myth enshrines? The questions do not seem to be answered.

The Incarnation as the Foundation of the Church

The author Stephen Sykes, Professor of Theology, Durham University, carefully avoids the direct challenge of the authors of 'The Myth' by saying that contrary to their statement there is no such thing as the traditional doctrine of the incarnation. He then states that the burden of proof lies on the shoulders of those who seek to make Christianity without Incarnation plausible.

If one is not prepared to define incarnation it is hardly fair to ask for proof that it is invalid. The Prof. appreciates this and hopes the 'Mythers' won't take it as discourtesy. However to make it perfectly clear Prof. Sykes states that he is not prepared to defend, or presumably to accept the definition of say Chalcedon*.

The argument the Prof. seems to demonstrate is that the Incarnation is part and parcel of the Church which he says 'claims to teach what is true' - but which church the Orthodox or Arian - the Protestant or Catholic? If he had proposed that the incarnation was part and parcel of the Gospel it would seem to be a stronger argument. He clears his position a little but not logically in the reviewer's eyes by saying that his position is an Anglican stand, surely this is first, far removed from the formulation of the doctrine and secondly as there are a great variety of anglican views the defence of one would not establish a consistent church theme, which is the basis of his thesis. Unless he is prepared to reduce Christianity to a small sect.

In his third section he states his thesis :-

'The incarnation is, in the first instance, an event in a story which renders who God is in concrete form. It is not a story which illustrates something which we otherwise already know, nor is it a story which is archetypal in the human consciousness. Rather it is a story whose meaning cannot be rendered otherwise than by the narration. It is, literally, indispensable.

A story is, essentially, character and event in inter-action. The story in the context of which incarnation is an event, contains all the elements of story grammar; a setting, a theme, a plot and a resolution. The setting is human history, the theme is the rescue of mankind

* The 4th General Council of the Orthodox Church which finally proclaimed the dual nature of Christ.

from destruction, the plot is the entry of God into the contest, and the resolution is man's judgement and final redemption. In the case of the incarnation the setting involves statements about the characters involved in the story (God himself, Mary and Joseph, Jesus and his contemporaries). The theme is implicit in the intention expressed by the sending or coming of the Son of God. The plot connects the birth with the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The resolution is the final nature of human destiny, and is the outcome of this particular story, not of any other possible story."

This is surely a circular argument. First conceal the rabbit in the hat and like the conjurer producing it at the end.

Namely the quotation above purports to be a story which renders who God is in concrete form'. If we agree to this we concede his point but the Gospels purport to be the Good News of the Kingdom of God taught and enacted by God's son not God incarnate.

The evidence that is called upon to support this is that :-

The way in which the constant narration of this story has lodged itself in the church's teaching and worship must constitute a prima facie reason for supporting that in the form of this story God himself has addressed man.

There has never been any final, or single resolution of this difficulty.

I do not think this will impress many as no one doubts that Jesus was, at minimum inspired by God as His greatest prophet and thus in a real sense man is addressed by God' vide ' Thus saith the Lord God of Isaiah.'

Stephen Sykes sees the difficulties of an Incarnational theology - Even John had problems he admits. There have been a series of attempts of greater or lesser sophistication and degrees of success at mitigating the coherent difficulties - Nicea - Chalcedon, but, . . . none of the 'expository documents'... constitute one single orthodox definition of the incarnation.

In the end this implies that the problem is too great for definition - an argument often brought forward but though this is certainly true for man's concept of God, it does not justify him in erecting a concept of his own and expecting everyone to bow down to it!

Looked at dispassionately the doctrine of the atonement is a product of the 2nd Century Church. This does not prove that it is not true but it does prove that it was not an essential part of the original story as the professor would have us believe.

J.H. Weaving.

(1) The Myth of God Incarnate - edit. John Hick. p.55.

The Kingdom of God is upon You

It is possible that every generation of Christians since Jesus himself was on earth has had reason to believe that He would return during their lifetime. Perhaps the divine intention behind the general and sometimes obscure prophecies in books like Daniel and Revelation was to give just such hope to those who read them, in whichever century of the Christian era they lived. We may well enquire how Jesus' own contemporaries were expected to interpret John the Baptist's stirring call to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is upon you". Did this mean that the principles of that kingdom were about to be demonstrated through the words and deeds of the Messiah? Did he himself know that the Master whose way he came to prepare would suffer and die and be resurrected and ascend to heaven and there remain for many centuries before the kingdom of God would be established on earth? Again, how were Jesus' hearers expected to understand his apparently unequivocal message as recorded by Mark who wrote "After John had been arrested Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: 'The time has come; the kingdom of God is upon you; repent and believe the gospel!'"? It is probable that this theme was repeated by Jesus in the hearing of his disciples many scores of times during his three and half years' ministry. We do not know how many times Jesus preached about the signs of His coming and of the end of the world but it is not unreasonable to consider that it would be a recurrent message within His testimony. It is salutary sometimes to reflect that we have available to us only about thirty thousand words spoken directly by Jesus. Everything He said (as recorded in the New Testament) could be incorporated in just three copies of Endeavour Magazine. To put it another way, if all Jesus' recorded words were read out at one sitting, it would take about three hours. A considerable part of the three hours would be occupied by reading what Jesus said in a single week - The final week of his mortal life. What of the other nearly 180 weeks of his ministry? How comparatively little we know of what He said and did during that time! There must have been scores of discussions between Himself and his disciples and we are sure that they were keen to know his precise mission and the time of its accomplishment. Nevertheless it would appear that the apostles were uncertain about this aspect of the gospel even

at the end of Jesus' ministry and at the time of His ascension. Their question to Jesus, "Lord is this the time when you are to establish once again the sovereignty of Israel?" would seem to indicate a failure to understand the meaning of the Olivet Prophecy, for example, Jesus' reply just before His ascension tends to add to the enigma because if it was "not for them to know about dates or times which the Father had set within his own control", how were they supposed to interpret not only the Olivet prophecy but the prophecies of their own scriptures (notably the Book of Daniel) which seemed to speak of times, dates, and seasons? We may go on to wonder how much more about the actual times of divine intervention the apostles knew after they were endowed with the Holy Spirit. It was said that the Spirit would lead them into all truth and yet nothing they subsequently preached or wrote seems to have been any more specific about the time of the coming kingdom than Jesus himself had been.

Paul, in writing his first letter to the Thessalonians seemed to imply that his generation would witness the return of Christ.

"For this we tell you as the Lord's word : we who are left alive until the Lord comes shall not forestall those who have died; because at the word of command..... the Lord Himself will descend from heaven; first the Christian dead will rise, then we who are left alive shall join them, caught up in clouds to meet the Lord in the air".

Paul certainly appeared to be including himself among those who would remain alive until the coming of the Lord to establish His Kingdom. However, in his second letter to the Thessalonians he warned them against the expectation that the kingdom would immediately appear. He wrote "And now brothers, about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and his gathering of us to Himself: I beg you, do not suddenly lose your heads or alarm yourselves, whether at some oracular utterance or pronouncement, or some letter purporting to come from us, alleging that the Day of the Lord is already here. Let no one deceive you in any way whatever. That day cannot come before the final rebellion against God..... Paul also wrote to the Corinthians of receiving revelations the details of which it was not lawful to utter. However, we are still left wondering how precise his expectation was when at the end of his ministry he wrote of the "garland of righteousness

which the Lord, the all-just Judge, will award me on that great Day; and it is not for me alone but for all who have set their hearts on His coming appearance." Paul certainly appeared to know at the end of his mission that the establishment of God's Kingdom was not imminent and it would seem that Peter knew that too if we judge from his words in his second epistle - "with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. It is not that the Lord is slow in fulfilling His promise, as some suppose, but that he is very patient with you, because it is not his will for any to be lost, but for all to come to repentance."

If, as a final example we consider the author of the Book of Revelation, we may well ask as we read it and try to understand it, how much John himself understood as far as its detailed Prophetic meaning was concerned.

One thing which seems abundantly clear about the preaching of the coming kingdom is that the intention was to create a sense of urgency in the minds of those who received the message. In relation to the brevity of every individual's life it is obvious that the kingdom is at hand whether he or she lives in the first, the tenth or the twentieth century. Doubtless there is some excitement in the prospect that we might actually be alive when Christ returns and perhaps be among the privileged group who never have to die. It could be, however, that such a hope has been given exaggerated importance and has led to over-emphasis on the study of times and seasons. How many thousands of pages have been written about the date of Christ's return? How many hundreds of Christadelphian lectures, especially in the first half of this century, concentrated on providing that Christ would return well before the year 2000?

As a child and then a young person who was obliged by the discipline of a well-intentioned family to sit through many scores of Sunday evening lectures (most of which lasted an hour in those days!) I formed a distinct impression that the most important tenet of the Christadelphian faith was that Jesus Christ would return to the earth within approximately forty years (a generation as referred to in the Olivet prophecy) of the Balfour declaration (the supposed cessation of the treading down of Jerusalem by the Gentiles). Because of this, baptism was urgently needed lest the Master returned before my generation had made up its mind about their faith in Christ's message.

Looking back on some of my own lecture notes (of second world war vintage and now to be consigned to the dustbin'), I see how obsessively most of them concentrated on the interpretation of prophecy, the imminence of the second coming, the return of Israel to her own land and the frightful doom awaiting the nations who would seek to oppose the purpose of God in establishing His Kingdom. As an historian I found many hours of interest in the study of works like Eureka and the Prophecy of Daniel. I remember constructing charts with the help of notes from several different authors and lecturers to try to pinpoint the dates in the twentieth century which would witness crucial events in the working out of the divine purpose - 1918, 1954, 1963, 1967, 1974 - all these dates and more were identified by one mode of calculation or another and all of them were mentioned in one lecture or another that I heard from Christadelphian platforms. All those years have come and gone. It could be that there were significant events in Israel's struggle back to nationhood, associated with all of them but Messiah has still not come and it is now more than sixty years since the Balfour declaration. Was it sensible, or effective or right to raise hopes and seek to stimulate faith by this mode of preaching? I certainly thought so at the time but now I seriously wonder whether such dogmatic messages, all of which have proved to be wrong in the light of events, may have had the effect of weakening rather than strengthening faith. Furthermore they may have done harm by putting misplaced emphasis on the need to study and interpret prophecy in a narrower political context rather than in its broader implications for every Christian in whatever century he lives. Surely the essential message in the teaching that the kingdom of God is upon us involves a recognition first that God will definitely intervene one day in the affairs of the world in order to establish His kingdom in the full sense. Secondly, it is essential that the Christian believer should make this hope the mainspring of his life. Perspectives on daily problems can be transformed by taking the view that in the long run there is only one issue that transcends all others.

Whether the kingdom comes upon us as the first waking experience after the end of a long life or after a short life suddenly and unexpectedly cut off; or as a sudden revelation of Christ in the earth while we are still alive, is fundamentally irrelevant to the main question. What really matters is surely that the Christian is ready for and attuned to the kingdom when it comes. Hence the many apostolic exhortations to be ready and watchful and to repent. Paul's well known oration on Mars will come immediately to mind. "Now God commands all men everywhere to repent because He has fixed the day on which He will have the world judged, and justly judged by a man of His choosing; of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead".

Here is the essence of the gospel. We know why God is going to intervene in the world's affairs. We know to some extent how He will do it. We are less sure when it will be because the signs are of a general nature, describing the characteristics of the last days in terms which have stimulated faith and hope at all stages of the Christian era. We have only to look at the writings of Peter, and John to see that this is so. In his second letter Peter sought to establish the true perspective, as we have already seen -

"And here is one point, my friends, which you must not lose sight of; with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. It is not that the Lord is slow in fulfilling his promise, as some suppose, but that He is very patient with you, because it is not His will for any to be lost, but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come, it will come unexpected as a thief. On that day the heavens will disappear, with a great rushing sound, the elements will disintegrate in flames and the earth with all that is in it will be laid bare. Since the whole universe is to break up in this way, think what sort of people you ought to be, what devout and dedicated lives you should live." Peter's message was (in spite of the time scale) consistent with the gospel call "the kingdom of God is upon you, therefore repent". The same applies to the prophecy recorded by John in the Book of Revelation which begins "This is the revelation given by God to Jesus Christ. It was given to him so that he might show his servants what must shortly happen Happy is the man who reads, and happy those who listen to the words of this prophecy and heed what is written in it. For the hour of fulfilment is near". Plainly the terms "shortly" and "near" have to be interpreted in the light of "the thousand years as but a day" principle mentioned by Peter because Christians have been reading both Peter's and John's words for nearly two thousand years and still the kingdom of God has not been established.

If we agonise to prove that the times and seasons indicate that Jesus will return in our lifetime we may not only be disappointed ourselves but we may lead others to be sceptical and disillusioned. God has fixed the day and His Son has said of it, "Keep awake then; for you do not know on what day your Lord is to come" (Matthew 24:42). Jesus went further than that - he said "but about that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, not even the Son; only the Father" (Matthew 24:36).

All true Christians set their hearts on the return of their Master but no wise Christian attempts to identify the year (especially in public writing or preaching). To do so simply invites the situation in which the servant

says in his heart "my Lord is delaying his coming", and the scoffer says "where is the promise of his coming? Our fathers have been laid to their rest, but still everything continues exactly as it has always been since the world began."

Whatever may have been our hopes, expectations, calculations and predictions over the last half century or more, nothing need ever shake our fundamental faith that God's purpose is immutable; the last day has been fixed and appointed since the foundation of the world; and whether we live or die, our salvation is now nearer than when we first believed. In a very real sense the kingdom of God is upon us.

G. Dearden.

Editorial continued

many may find the books a bit hard work if they are not accustomed to reading theology. To those we would suggest that one essay is taken at a time from 'The Myth' or one section, namely the essay and its discussion from 'The Debate'.

The main interest to the editor is perhaps secondary. Jesus was not 'God Incarnate' - Who, (or What) was he? and Who (or What) is he now. These points are discussed by a large number of competent theologians from the two opposed angles. The orthodox, who take a Trinitarian view, and the writers of the Myth who have varying concepts of Jesus but seem to lean to the view that he was the greatest of God's prophets who had 'seen' God as none before him.

Most of our readers may well stand in an intermediate position in believing that Jesus was divine, the Son of Mary and God, while rejecting the Incarnation. How well can we defend this position? Do we tend to lean towards either of the two opposing sides? Surely we can all be exercised by studying this debate.

J.H.W.