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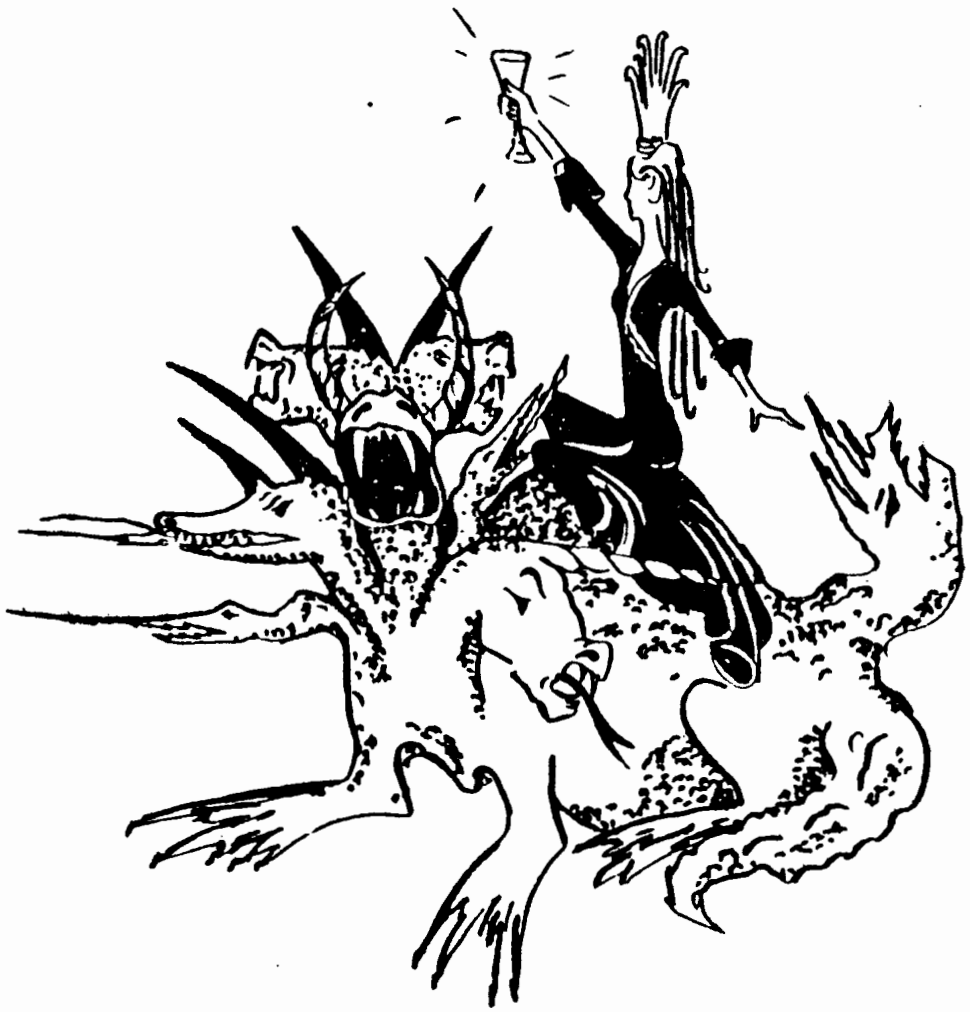

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THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF DIVINE GLORY

Alexander Solzhenitsyn in one of his short prose poems meditates on "Reflections". He shows how while the stream is fast and flowing the reflections of sky and trees and banks are broken and intermittent. The sunlight is broken and scattered into a million sparkling drops. It is only when it has flowed into some still quiet lake or broad, calm estuary that its mirror-like smoothness reflects perfectly the image of tree and sky and sun where the ripples have ceased.

Man wants to see a clear image. He likes his world mapped out and defined. He wants his life planned, programmed and prepared. This he feels is his security and his sanity, to know where he has come from and where he is going. For then he feels the master of his destiny, the lord of his creation.

But how often this image fails. We live in a world of disappointed hopes and frustrated desires. We are continually challenged by the unusual, the unexpected, the unforeseen. The image is broken, the dream shattered, the hope foiled. And perhaps we start again to build a new picture.

But Solzhenitsyn shows it is while the river is flowing that the reflection is broken. Only the still pool shows it clear. So the breaking of our dreams,

the shattering of our images, the failure of our hopes is the proof that we are alive, moving, flowing towards a fuller, deeper, truer wholeness than we could have envisaged before. It is the continual challenge to rethink, rebuild, renew that proves we have not yet arrived

To try to fit life into a set, fixed pattern is a sign of stagnation. The fleeting glimpse of meaning, the sudden sparkle of truth, the unexpected response of sympathy or understanding, the breath of insight and flow of Spirit that bursts surprisingly into our hearts and minds as we open ourselves to God's guidance and grace are sure signs that we, like Abraham, are going, we know not whither, following the broken, disjointed flashes of light towards its ultimate source.

(Sheila Harris)

THEOLOGY

BABYLON THE GREAT

by

David Pitt-Francis.

This article is concerned with the identity of the "Harlot" city "Great Babylon" described in the seventeenth chapter of John's Revelation. The description is both compelling and repelling. It contains powerful symbols that have attracted a whole range of interpretations from one limited to the ancient City of Jerusalem through pagan Rome to the attempts of the "Fifth Monarchy" men of Cromwell's time to identify it with the sins a Papal Rome.

This paper presents the view that Babylon is really a symbol of the unredeemed world - the antithesis of New Jerusalem, which represents the ultimate redeemed community. If this is true, any specific references, such as those to Pagan or Papal Rome, have to be explained.

Thus, the article first presents reasons for believing that Babylon represents the world, and then it explores the relationship between Babylon and the great river Euphrates. A summary of Babylon's location then follows, together with a footnote on the "Beast of the Abyss" which Babylon is said to ride.

Though it is logical to think that Babylon represents the world in general, as the spiritual enemy and persecutor of the people of God, there are problems in doing so, for the prophecy contains hints of an existing "Roman" application, and this has to be explained.

The obvious reason for such identification with Rome is that Rome was the centre of the world of John's day. But unlike other cities, it could offer citizenship to the inhabitants of other cities. Being a "Roman citizen" did not involve living or having originated in Rome. But it was bestowed by Rome on favoured inhabitants of other cities, just as the citizenship from heaven was bestowed on members of the Church (Phil. 3:20). It was to Philippi, where Paul shamed authorities by arguing his own Roman citizenship (Acts 16: 12 & 38), that Paul wrote, stressing the importance of the citizenship that is from heaven. Though some Christians, like Paul, where Roman citizens, they could not behave as citizens of the world, but in Paul's day one could not have all the privileges of the citizenship of this world without also being a Roman citizen.

The second reason for the use of obvious Roman references in this vision derives from the fact that the Apocalypse appears to have been written as an answer to the Jewish apocalypses that circulated at the time of the writer.

Their current theme was that the enemy was Rome, and readers had to be weaned from thoughts of a political enemy, to think of the world in general. So, although the prophecy is against a "Roman" Babylon, it does not relate to a city on the banks of the Tiber whose armies had broken the siege of Jerusalem. Instead, it relates to the "citizenship of the world" as the direct opposite of the "citizenship that derives from heaven.

The evidence that Jews had used the cipher "Babylon" to mean Rome at the time is quite overwhelming . The Jewish "Sibylline oracles" used (1) Babylon in this context. In the Apocalypse of Ezra a feathered eagle (2) is introduced and explained as being the fourth of Daniel's "kingdoms"(3). The context suggests that the writer identified the fourth of Daniel's kingdoms with Rome. Prophecies against Edom had been applied by some apocalyptic writers to Rome, because of a similarity in writing the words in Hebrew and because Herod's kingdom (that of an Idumaean, or Edomite) had been upheld by Rome. There had also been cryptic references to "Kittim" associated with Rome. Both names were, of course, associated with Babylon. The Edomites had conspired with the enemy during the (4) Babylonian captivity and thus, the cipher "Edom" became equated with Babylon as an indicator of Rome. The use of "Kittim" derived from the Habakkuk commentary (5). The original Habakkuk prophecy wrote of the "Casidim" (Chaldeans) but the Hebrew word is similar to "Kittim", - a Biblical name for people living in the Mediterranean area and for Romans in particular.

Indeed, there is little doubt of a prior "political" identification of Babylon with the actual city of Rome by Jewish apocalyptists, but that is not the message of Revelation. It is directed against a spiritual "city" of Rome which, like Roman citizenship, was to be found everywhere when the Apocalypse was written.

Reasons for the Interpretation

The first reason for believing that the city of Babylon means the spirit of Rome associated with the citizenship of the world generally is that Babylon

(1) Sibylline oracles 143;159.

(2) See 2 Esdras chapter 12.

(3) Daniel 7:7-14.

(4) See Obadiah and Psalm 137 & interpretations in the War document and Habakkuk commentary in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

(5) Habakkuk Commentary (Dead Sea Scrolls) 1:6. "I raise up the Chaldeans (Babylonians).... This refers to the Kittim (Romans)".

and Rome were insidious and pervasive. Babylon survived all attempts at conquest. It fell to Assyrians, Persians and Greeks but remained a cultural centre for many centuries afterwards. The area of Babylon was even a source of civilised learning when the old city had been replaced by the city of Seleucia. With the impact of the "stone" of Christianity on the "image" of Babylon, to use the analogy of Daniel, the pagan colossus that it represented was shattered, but the whole world is littered with the rubble of Babylonian civilisation and in John's day the city with the largest number of "citizens" of that world whose very relevance was shattered at the crucifixion was Rome, though the actual city only housed a small proportion of them.

"Now is the judgement of the world;

Now shall the ruler of the world be cast out". (John 12:31).

Secondly, it is clear that the descriptions used (when applicable to Rome) related to pagan Rome, and would be quite irrelevant to the present world, if Rome were not itself a symbol of the world generally. The spiritual meaning of Babylon had, in other words, to be explained to contemporaries in terms of an existing enemy identified by the Jewish apocalyptic writers. At the time of writing, some Jews expected Nero to return at the head (6) of a confederacy of ten Parthian satraps to destroy the existing city. Nero was the "sixth" emperor of Imperial Rome. Five emperors had already fallen. After Nero, three emperors reigned for very short periods, but never obtained full control of the empire. Then Vespasian ascended the throne, and Jewish apocalyptists appeared to recount the emperors (excluding Caesar) to make Vespasian a "sixth". When Titus ascended the Imperial Throne, many Jews believed that he would rule for a very short time because of his "crime" in destroying Jerusalem. Thus Nero was expected to return as the "eighth" king in the sequence.

Revelation has already been shown to have quoted at times from the apocalyptic literature of its day, which it was intended to counteract. Charles (6) has shown that some of the seventeenth chapter contains evidence of quotation from a Hebrew (or Aramaic) source. The source may have been written at the death of Nero, when after the "short while", as originally applied (i.e. A.D.69) he would return to storm Rome. But this did not happen, nor was the modified prophecy fulfilled for the Greek version of the book was probably completed at the time of Domitian when Titus would have reigned sufficiently long to

(6) See particularly R.H.Charles: Revelation (I.C.C.) Volume II pages 68 - 72, and 76 - 87.

have proved the local fulfilment (to Roman emperors) to have been entirely false. The myth of Nero's return (as envisaged in the pseudo-apocalypse from which John quoted) must have therefore been used with something different in mind, something that would remainrelevant for many centuries to our own time, - long after the expectation of Nero's return had faded from people's minds.

A third reason for extending the symbol beyond Rome to the whole world is that description does not completely satisfy the description of the literal city of Rome. While it is true that the figure of a seven-hilled city is used, the same as one used elsewhere to describe Rome (7), the figure is only used because Rome was at that time the head and centre of the civilised world. Thus, the description is not only of - 'a seven-hilled city'; but - ' a city on many waters' (Rev.17:1)

The phrase "on many waters" is, of course, taken from Jeremiah's description of the original city of Babylon (Jer.51:13), which spanned two rivers, contained many canals, and had access via the Persian gulf and Indian Ocean to the largest "ocean" in the world. But Rome, as a city, was not "on many waters". Literally, Rome lay (and lies) near the mouth of the Italian Tiber, through which alone there is access to the Mediterranean, - a relatively small sea.

Fourthly, Rome never has had or will have hegemony over all nations. In the prophecy the city "Babylon" is depicted as holding a cup, of which all nations are made to drink. This is an allusion to Jeremiah's prophecy against the original Babylon (Jer.25:15-16) but in that prophecy many of the nations who were to receive God's wrath had not been captivated by Babylon. Here, the two symbols are brought together.Babylon's hegemony "over many waters" is to be described of Jeremiah's "all nations" who would drink the wrath of God. No nation has had universal dominion. Thus, the symbol can only mean the world as a whole.

The fifth reason for the universal interpretation of the symbol is similar. Babylon is described as:

"mother of harlots and abominations of the earth" (Rev. 17:5).

(7) Horace: Carm. Sec 7, Virgil,Aenid 6:782, Ibid: Georgics 2:534.

This implies that Babylon would be the source of all the world's moral corruption. The description was not a true picture of the original city of Rome. The Romans had been comparatively puritanical, but were corrupted by the abominations and harlotries of the orient, via that Hellen istic amalgam of east and west that followed the conquests by Alexander. Further, the harlot-symbol of this prophecy is not simply an Old Testament description of Babylon. It is also used by Isaiah against Tyre(Is.23!17) Thus Apocalyptic Babylon would seem to be an "amalgam" of all the corrupt citites of the world.

Finally, Babylon is said to have shed "the blood of prophets and saints and of all who have been slain on the earth"(Rev.18:24).

This description extends beyond the original description: "the blood of the saints, and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (Rev.17:6).

It must not only include the latter description, but also the blood of those Old Testament prophets who were slain by unredeemed Israelities, and of all who have ever been murdered. This can make Babylon nothing other than a cipher of the whole of unredeemed mankind.

Thus Rome and Babylon are both ciphers for the City of the World - the City of the Unredeemed. Babylon means the whole of the "Image" of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, (Dan.2:34-5), shattered in theory when Christ overcame the world by his faultless life, and splintered it into fragments, flung far and wide. It rides on a sea-beast that is the amalgamof all this world's authority. Yet, it is also "Rome" in the sense that worldwide Roman citizenship was, in the days of John, the nearest approach to the citizenship of this world. Not all "Roman citizens" were necessarily citizens of Babylon, for some, like Paul, had already " come out from her" (Rev 18:4). A citizen of Babylon is any unredeemed citizen of the world, - any person who cannot claim citizenship from heaven (Phil.3:20).

Babylon and Euphrates

The river Euphrates was the literal boundary of the covenanted land. As the covenanted land represents the spiritual "territory" of the New Israel, it is logical to regard Euphrates as the boundary of that spiritual territory, the "nominal" dividing line between the institutional Church and the world (Gen.15:18). On the one side of the river, so to speak, are those bodies that claim to be Christian, while on the other side of the river are those that do not claim to be Christian. It is significant that as the literal city of Babylon

spanned the river Euphrates, and influenced both sides of it, so the spiritual city of Babylon (the world of the unredeemed) also spans the technical and nominal distinctions that may exist between Christian and non-Christian. In other words, Babylon spans both the "Christian" and non-Christian banks of the river. Its perversion of human life, morals and religions has no respect for what appears to be Christian and what does not. Whether professedly Christian or not, most of the "kings of the earth" (the rulers of the world) have been tainted with the prostituting influence of human civilisation.

West of Euphrates, in the land covenanted to Israel (but never completely owned by it) was the Arabian desert, - the wilderness. This is also appropriate in the analogy between Israel and the Church. For the ' wilderness" is associated with unredeemed Israel, whose corpses fell there, who could not enter the "promised land" because of unbelief. Great Babylon thus dwells "in the wilderness", for her "west-bank" territory would be associated with this wilderness, and nominally include it. In a broader sense, Babylon dwells "in the wilderness" because she disregards, to a large extent, the boundary (Euphrates) between what is nominally Christian and what is not.

Summary

Babylon dwells in the following places.

1. She dwells "on many waters" as having rivers and canals including Euphrates and access to the sea.

2. She dwells "on many waters" representing "peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues" (Rev.17:15).

3. She dwells on 'Euphrates" ignoring the technical distinction between the "Israel" of the New Covenant (the Church) and the unconvenanted land (the world).

4. She dwells "in the wilderness" (Rev.17:3) because she disregards the distinction between "Christian" and non-Christian, to the extent that many claiming Christ are ultimately unredeemed, - because she spans the river.

5. She dwells "in the wilderness" because on the covenanted side of Euphrates is the great Arabian desert, and a part of this wilderness is itself associated with those who were nominally members of Israel, but "fell in the wilderness", an apt symbol of the unredeemed Christians.

8. She also rides the "beast," the whole unredeemed world, the oppressor of the people of God, - the composite of all those political enemies that trampled the Old Israel.(8).

Appendix

The Beast of the Abyss

There is some distinction between the beast of this chapter and those of chapters twelve and thirteen. They are a triad, representing, in symbol, the whole "enemy of the saints" during the pre-Christian, Christian and post-Christian periods. The beast of the abyss is in essence, the whole composite political mechanism that has been the spiritual enemy of the people of God throughout history. Thus, Babylon rides the devil. She is seated on the reality behind the mythical Babylonian seven-headed sea-monster. This beast of the abyss is thus also universal through time and space, as far as human history is concerned. The beast is said to be a source of wonderment to:

"all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's Book of Life" (9). For the whole of mankind, there are only two alternatives. The choice is between the "lion-head" of Babylon and the Book of Life of the Lamb, - who is also the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Thus, the writer takes us beyond the scope of his immediate present. He gives a new spiritual meaning to the Jewish apocalyptic myth about the fall of pagan Rome, for he makes the beast of the abyss, on which Babylon rides, involve the whole world. The body of his beast affects:

"all ..... whose names have not been written in the Lamb's Book of Life". Though the beast of the abyss has affinity with all three of the beast phases (dragon, sea-beast and false prophet), and is a composite of them, it most closely resembles, the sea-beast of Revelation 13, and thus contains characteristics nearest to those of the "sea-beasts" of Daniel 7.

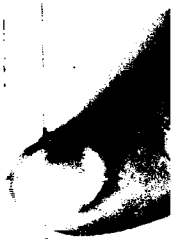
(8) Combining all the elements of the beasts of Revelation chapters 12 and 13, which, in turn, combine all the elements of all Daniel's beasts in Daniel chapters 7 and 8. Thus, this beast becomes a cipher for all the world's political authority, in and throughout all time.

(9) Revelation 17:8

He is the antithesis of Christ Himself, and is therefore 'antichrist'.

Christ "lives, was dead, but is alive again" (10) whereas the beast is described as one:

"who was, is not, but shall ascend out of the abyss" (11). In a parodied replication of the life, death and ressurrection (and hinted ascension) of Christ.



This enigma is similar to that which was explained when dealing with the sea-beast. In His Life and death, Jesus not only "bruised the (12) head of the serpent" in fulfilment of the Genesis prophecy, but in (13) theory dealt a death-blow to the "lion-head" of the Babylonian serpent.

For His first Advent, and the advent of Christianity into the world crumpled an existing order of pagan godlessness of which Babylon was the head. From the time of His very resurrection He received:

"all authority.....in heaven and in earth" (Matt.28:18).

Thus, even though "Babylonian" paganism had only been partially smitten by the influence of Christ's teaching, its type of rulership ceased to be relevant. Jesus put an end to the delegated authority of "the kingdom of man" by changing its emphasis. He instituted a Kingdom, which is "not of this world" (John 18:36)

(10) Revelation 1:18
(11) Revelation 17:8
(12) Genesis 3:15
(13) Revelation 13:3

REVIEW-GOD INCARNATE.STORY AND BELIEF

Ed. A.E.Harvey. SPCK 1981.

(paperback.104pp. £3.95)

The publication in 1977 of "The Myth of God Incarnate" produced a flood of angry letters, and the publication of an equally intransigent": "The Truth of God Incarnate". A group of Oxford Dons, not wishing to rush into bitter recriminations on one side or the other, commenced a long series of conferences to consider dispassionately the very real points advanced by both sides. This has resulted in the publication in 1981 of the above volume,which can be considered not to be motivated by pride in their own university, since a don of Cambridge, reviewing it in a major theological periodical,has given his own opinion on it as "... a careful and dispassionate discussion. It will surely become standard reading for students of contemporary Christology".

The calm approach by the authors is evidenced by their choice of title. Emotive terms such as 'Myth' and 'Truth' have been eschewed, the main subject being neither one nor the other, but the central basis of Christianity, the facts and nature of'God Incarnate', the subtitle also pointing to the basis and reaction concerned - 'Story and Belief'. No axiomatic preconceptions are involved, and the main consideration is firmly based on the incontrovertible existence of the biblical claim to divine incarnation, whatever our reactions to the Bible may be :-

> "For in him the complete being of God, by God's own choice, came to dwell".
>
> (Col. 1:19) NEB.

The book contains nine chapters, each dealing with a consideration of a different issue concerned in the controversy, two by the editor, and seven by other scholars, each a recognised authority in the field dealt with. It contains no 'padding', and the content is so wide-ranging and detailed, that this review must give only the titles of each chapter, a summary of the argument advanced, and the author's own statement of his personal stance from consideration of the 'for and against' data advanced in the chapter.

So far as the reviewer may be considered biased on one side or the other,he would make quite clear his own position. He considers the 'inspiration' of the Bible to be a fact, but one which must rest on a careful study of the whole Bible and its claims; and not, as is usually the case, one which

considers the personal wisdom of the one judging to be so reliable that the Bible must be considered, not in its own light but in that of his own presuppostions (not based firmly on the Bible), of what God would do if He were inspiring a particular biblical author. The reviewer also considers the above N.E.B. translation of Col.1:19 to be a fair representation of the normal Greek text (such as that of the Oxford edition of Souter); also that any attempt to add to its implications either by text or circumvention, or to detract from it by removal makes any attempt to study Christology to be pointless.

Chapter 1, Christian Propostions and Christian Stories

Early creeds were propositions intended to refute damaging propositions about the nature of God. They were expressed in vocabulary become specialised in topical controversy and are truly meaningless to most men in our day due to lack of relationship of our vocabulary with this long dead controversy. The reason for Christian efforts in our day to affirm essential belief lies in the field of our own topical controversy.

This controversy rests on two vital aspects :-

(1) The uniqueness of Jesus, not merely his 'difference' from the normal man.

(2) The personal involvement of God in his 'creation'.

The creeds concerned only the first of these two, and necessarily fail for today by not considering both aspects together, as they were both contained in the one 'man'.

God's involvement with creation was always defined in the Bible as through the medium of the Spirit, in the O.T., in Jesus and in the N.T., indeed, from the claims of the N.T., also through to our own times. The unique importance of Jesus as revealed in the N.T. is centred on his 'resurrection', and if the operation of the Spirit has been, and still is, the medium of action, why has the resurrection such a central and vital importance?

Jesus found that the only possible way in which he could teach about the God who was not amenable to human sight, was by means of stories (parables)

about human experience for which there was an adequate vocabulary. So also, the whole of the teaching in O.T. and in N.T. is by means of 'Stories' stories also about human experience of Jesus, and of those men to whom he committed his ministry beyond death. It can be objected, of course, that the damaging gnostic teaching was also in stories, but in their case stories based on theories about God, and not about human historically verifiable facts of experience.

It is essential that the correct form of story be adopted, and the bulk of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of this as a modern problem. In conclusion, the author defines his personal reaction to these stories, and about the detailed discussion about them :-

> "In particular, the unique relationship between Jesus and God, and the continuing involvement of God in the destiny of men, are Christian convictions which will not readily be shaken and which will not be denied expression merely because they can no longer be formulated in a set of logically related propositions".

Chapter 2, Some Thoughts on Narrative, Myth and Incarnation

While a fair proportion of the Bible is not bare 'narrative', the narrative forms the 'backbone' on which the remainder is supported. The narrative may be defined as 'story' rather than as 'history'. History seeks to give all relative details concerning the matter in view, while story is the retailing of facts concerning some small area of the whole. Thus details may be given of some local happenings in one small part of Palestine, while ignoring not only the Syrean politics which affected it, but even events in other parts of the same country.

The story is always 'interpreted' in terms of the popular outlook of the period and locality. So also, the purpose of the story is not to elucidate the relationship to other coincident events at that time, but to relate to present problems in connection with the future life. In other words, it was related to give "present faith and future hope" by telling "the reader where events were leading".

A discussion of problems raised by this nature of Biblical narrative, is followed by one on the nature of 'Myth'. The technical significance of myth, as used by Bultmann, is a statement in non-historical terms (not based on literal happenings) of a story designed to teach some fundamental lesson having relevance to all future time. The claim is made that Bultmann's hypothesis of 'Myth' as the nature of biblical narrative is now widely discredited on the basis that all biblical narrative is based on historical realities, even if inaccurate in some details, and seeks to interpret the significance of the happening.

It is then claimed that 'Myth' is a term not applicable to the biblical claim of divine incarnation. The N.T. teaching about Jesus is in terms of the prophetic promise of a Messiah, and the 'story' is centred on the aspects of the promised Messiah which Jesus fulfilled, to the confusion of those who misunderstood the prophecies, and allowed their selfish interests to influence their interpretation.

The purpose behind the stories therefore was not the non-historical establishment of a metaphysical principal, but the elucidation of existing Messianic prophecy and hopes. Nowhere in the N.T. narrative is the 'incarnation' a basic element of the story from which the theology is further developed, but Messianic purpose as centred in the person of Jesus.

The author's conclusions are that myth is not relative as arising out of the human attempt to understand the fulfilling of divine purpose in the person of Jesus. He says :-

> "...the priority lies with the question of Messiahship. This, if right, could lead to a recognition that incarnation is not absolutely central to the basic strat of the New Testament..... For me however this would lead to the other question: what sort of value do we give to the assertion that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah of Israel's expectation, and thereby to the traditions of the Old Testament..."

Chapter 3, Truth in Christology

Although in almost every sphere of living we speak of this or that as being 'true' and feel completely clear in our mind of what we mean, if we then try to define what we mean by 'truth' in the abstract, separated from every

and any practical asignment, it is found to be an impossible task. The multitudinous disciplines of human life impose an equally numerous set of criteria to the 'meaning' of the term, but the fact that in every one of them we automatically seek for the truth as a ground for our attitude to our acceptance and action within it, suggests that there must be some common meaning to the term for us personally.

An attempt to define truth for all spheres except the formal logic of mental activities such as mathematics is suggested as:-

> "We think we have attained to truth when we know things are they really are, or when they are disclosed to us as they are without distortion or concealment".

This exclusion of mental logic restricts the definition to 'material truth'.

The exclusion noted above implies that truth has at least two dimensions which are independant of each other. Its nature will be related both to the sphere of activity, and also to the 'person' making the judgement which is an essential forerunner of an acceptance as true. Many a line of poetry will be accepted as revealing a fundamental truth of experience which is unrelated to its verbal analysis, and in a manner which would not apply in the case of a bare statement that William the Conqueror first landed at Hastings in 1066. This personal dimension implies that only a person capable of appreciating the issues involved can accept as true some concept, and in the case of 'Christ' Paul has laid down a rule that divine things cannot be 'known' in the full sense except through the activity of the Holy Spirit within us:-

> "...only the Spirit of God knows what God is. This is the Spirit which we have received from God...so that we may know all that God of his own grace has given us".
>
> (1.Cor.2:11-12) NEB.

There follows a detailed discussion of the implications of the above, followed by a suggestion that in the context of the subject under discussion the fundamental factor of 'Christology' is that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners". The discussion then narrows to this sphere of mental activity, and even here it is pointed out that so wide a subject as the nature of Jesus generates three types of truth:-

(1) Historical assertion, that Jesus was crucified on Calvary.

(2) What Jesus was in the divine sphere of "the things which are not

seen, but which are eternal".

(3) The processes of reflection and criticism,where we need the guidance of The Spirit.

No overall personal attitude of the author is offered in his excellent summary of the complex issues covered in discussion.

Chapter 4. Imagination and Belief

"The Gospels are narrative that purports to be history" - With these words this chapter opens and an intricate discussion evolves in which the implications and nature of the Gospels are examined. The first factor to be considered is that claims to an historical basis cannot be tested by recourse to external records. It is certain that Jesus initiated a Palestinian sect, and that he died on a Roman cross; to this extent the historicity is certain, but there is no historical test of the veracity of the character so minutely presented in that narrative. Based on the life and death of an actual man it is, but the test whether it is an autehntic personal life, or a mere imaginative creation of the mind, must rest on other criteria.

The Gospels are of course more than mere history; they are in every sense of the word greater than mere records, they are 'story' in a sense that the Cambridge Histories never were, accurate though they be. They deal with the personality and character of the people involved in the narrative, much as a good novel does in our own day. The test of great fictional stories is whether they align in our imagination with our own personal experience so that we can live ourselves within their pages.

It is imperative therefore that imagination must also play its part in our acceptance of the Gospels, if they are to lead to personal 'belief'. No one has ever questioned the greatness with which they convey the characters and tradegy of their records. The main reason for the criticism they have aroused is that some of the content is so far beyond our personal topical experience of life and tradegy, that they cannot be true. This amounts to a pre-judging of the very issues which theywerewritten to raised, and beyond all else it is clear that the writers intended that their record should not be that of a central purely human life.

The imagination which makes a novel live in our mind relies on agreement with our own experience and observation of human life. Without questioning whether the claims of Jesus were correct or mistaken, this criterion suggests that the character presented is authentic. One startling clash with all our sense of reality occurs only in the final stages - the resurrection from the dead This was obviously unexpectedby his disciples, formed no part of their normal experience or fictional imagination, and a master of literature who could have created out of his own imagination the character of Jesus, would not have seriously marred his creation with such an unreal end.

The author ends her analysis with her own reaction to the story :-

"The human imagination, as much as the human heart or the human mind, has a full part in the whole activity of believing, and it is especially the imagination's sense of appropriateness and of completion that in my view, allows it to accept the last episode of the Gospels as the story itself requires us to do".

To be continued.....

(Ralph Lovelock)

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STUDY -1-

THE KINGDOM

Biblical references to "The Kingdom of Heaven" or "The Kingdom of God" are often hard to understand. Perhaps a clue may be found in the Lord's Prayer....."Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done....." The various meanings of "The Kingdom" in the Bible are connected with the idea that the Kingdom is the place where, or the time when, God's will is done.

It would be presumptious for one of us to claim to know God's will, or to know why God created the Universe. But that is a question arising for anybody thinking seriously about any religion. The Christian doctrine, with its roots in the Old Testament, leans towards the theory that we should love God and love our fellow creatures, that being God's purpose for the Universe.

In the story of the Garden of Eden we have a picture of such a Kingdom set in the distant past, where God's will was done. In the O.T. prophets there recurs the idea of a Kingdom, introduced by a Messiah, some time in the future. See, for instance Isaiah 11 and 65, and Ezekiel 34.

In the N.T. we find more references to the Kingdom. In St.Mark's Gospel for example the Kingdom is something that arrived with Jesus (1:15) also something that was to come and would be seen (9:1)), also something that each person can receive or refuse (10: 15), also something towards which we try to find out way (12:34), and finally it is what awaits us after death (14:25 or Matt 26:29). We must resist the temptations to say that the author was confused about the nature of the Kingdom, the apostles understood the teaching of Jesus better than we do. Rather, we should say that we find it hard to see exactly what the gospel writers meant. It was to St.Paul that there fell the task of teaching Christianity to people separated (as we are) by space, by language and by culture from the world of first century Palestine in which Jesus lived and taught. How did Paul try to explain "The Kingdom"? It is something (I.Thess. 2:12) in which we should join, and Paul uses the metaphor "body of Christ" to explain what he means - that the work once done by Jesus with a human body now is to be done by a different kind of body, with Christ as the invisible head and us as the limbs.

In II Tim.4:1 the word "Kingdom" is used for judgement day,"... shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his Kingdom..." (though the word "at" in the A.V. might perhaps be replaced by "by" according to Dr.A. Marshall). The contrast between these two aspects of the Kingdom reflects

Continued on page 22.

Vivian Jackson has responded to the article in the last issue entitled 'STUDY' She has written the following excellent essay, without the use of commentaries.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

A careful examination of passages in the New Testament relating to the Kingdom of God demonstrate that it is both a present possession and a future inheritance.

When in Matthew 3:2 John the Baptist proclaimed that 'The Kingdom of God is near", possibly John was referring to the person of Christ. The arrival of Christ in a sense ushered in the Kingdom of God. Christ by his own example established a way of living and a pattern of life to be followed. The disciples and many others of that time took up his challenge and so extended the Christian community. In effect then the Kingdom of God had arrived.

This concept is also supported by Jesus' words recorded in Luke 17:21. when he asserted that "The Kingdom of God is within you". Men will not be able to say, "Here it is" as though clearly observable signs mark the coming of the Kingdom: Christ bids us to examine our own inward and spiritual lives to recognise that the working of God is already a very real presence. The living God is inextricably part of us if we would only respond to Him.

However, in the following verses in Luke and in numerous other passages in the New Testament, the Kingdom of God is also presented as a dramatic feature of the future. Jesus warns his hearers that his return will be seen; that it would be a welcome and timely relief to the suffering and hardship that people would ensure during that age. He warns against false teachers, treachery towards one another within families and scenes of humilation to be endured by the faithful. Only the man who is truly selfless will survive. Because his coming will surprise the world - now is the time to prepared for that event. The Christadelphian maxim "Christ is coming. Are you prepared?' certainly appears to have a solid foundation in the Gospel writers.

We are also given some clues to a future "coming" of Christ in Matthew's Kingdom parables. Some of the parables and illustrations of Christ presented by Matthew e.g. Matt. 13: 24-30 wallow enthusiastically in the notion of a judgement. God - the supreme arbitor has two separate and quite distinct

destinations for the "sheep" and the "goats". Woe betide those who are destined to spend their eternity "weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth".

Surely there is something sub-human in the idea of an eternity of suffering, indeed does this not conflict with the loving Jesus - the very essence of the gospels? Yet Christ seems to be quite emphatic when he remarks "I never knew you," to the self-righteous in Matthew 7:21-23. There certainly appears to be strong grounds for a type of judgement. Possibly an eternal separation from God contributes a "judgement" - yet it is difficult to imagine that Christ would condemn anyone to a period of physical or mental suffering.

Though there are many areas of doubt, clearly the most important issue is recognizing "the Kingdom within". We cannot bring the Kingdom any closer by sitting worrying about it, or planning a timetable of events for when Christ returns. How we live our lives <u>now</u> is paramount. Within each person is the potential to live a Christ-like life to turn into a practical and philosophical lifestyle the ideals which he demonstrated.

Vivian Jackson.

This article has thrown up several issues - the major one being the tension between present and future aspects of the Kingdom.

Vivian Jackson will be using commentaries in her next essay to see whether they can throw light on this and other problems. Readers are invited to comment on the essay or alternatively to write an essay of their own.

J.H.Weaving

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Editor,

I've been following John Maycock's series of articles on philosophy in recent issues with great interest. While I agree generally with him I feel impelled to raised a query on one aspect of the latest article "Truth and Error". In this he seems to make no distinction between Reality and Truth and treats them as though they were the same thing. Surely Reality is what exists whereas Truth is a correct apprehension of perception of what exists?

In Section 3.3 ("The Unity of Truth") he states: "If we believed that God is creator and sustainer of our universe, all truth must in some sense be God's truth." This is axiomatic about "that which exists" since clearly, if

God created it all, then it is all his. Statements about that which exists may however be either made by God, in which case they are of course "God's truth", or by men. If these latter statements are true the facts that they are statements about things that God has made does not transfer them from the category of man's truth to God's truth.

The article then goes on to say "..... if God and his wisdom are unchangingly the same, then truth should likewise be unchanging and universal." This is manifestly not the case about truths discovered by man, particularly in the world of science, where fresh discoveries constantly refine truth and fill in the details. Abbe Mendel's discoveries about genetics were true but compared with those of the double helix of DNA are like a crude outline drawing compared with a detailed photograph.

On the other hand it would be perfectly accurate to say "if God and his wisdom are unchangingly the same then reality is unchanging and universal". I think that John Maycock half senses this because he goes on to say that the universality of truth doesn't mean that we can understand fully,and that in our present state of knowledge we can only approximate to truth.

I agree entirely with the main thesis that truth revealed by God and truth discovered by man are not different kinds of truth, but I don't think we can get away from the fact that truth revealed by God may well be about parts of reality which are not accessible to man, and were communicated to prophets and apostles by means which today we would describe as ESP.

The difference between truth and reality is summed up clearly by the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead in his book 'Adventures of Ideas' in the chapter on "Truth".

> "Truth is a qualification which applies to Appearance only. Reality is just itself, and it is nonsense to ask whether it be true or false. Truth is the comformation of Appearance to Reality".

Ron Coleman.

an ambivalence in the position of every Christian, being part of the body of Christ the judge, but at the same time being one of the sinners up for judgement. Paul dwells on this contrast in Galations 3 and 4, with the analogy that an heir is treated like a slave before coming in to the inheritance; his contemporary readers would be familiar with the Roman law, under which a father had power of life and death over his children.

Judgement Day is not a popular topic with modern preachers, but it is mentioned a lot in the N.T. It is when we learn the will of God for our destinty, if it is to be punishment (Heb.12:6) or death (I John 3:15) or the Royal pardon (Eph.1:7). We are not meant to know what our fate will be, and it is unhealthy to speculate on it. To ask " Am I going to be saved?" is very close to asking "Is God going to do my will?" and that would be a dangerous and confusing thought. Perhaps the modern preachers are right to steer clear of the topic.

The life of a Christian might be described as seeking or building the Kingdom but it is, after all, no more and no less than doing each day what seems to be right.

Basil Rennie.

PHILOSOPHY

TRUTH AND ERROR

3.1 The God seekers *In the last section, I concluded that seeking God's will is the best statement of the aim of a godly man or woman. To put right something wrong in our life or our knowledge of the world,we should refer back to God, who must be the source of all truth.This objective already divides mankind into two classes; those who are willing to reach outside and above themselves for truth and those who make no real attempt to self-criticism and who refuses to consider the existence of a higher source of truth or reality.

At the beginning of the series, I described man (the term embraces woman, of course) as having a memory, a will and a faculity for the assessment of appropriate action. Memory contains that knowledge of the world we have acquired, will represents our motivation and these together give rise to action. The limitation of being human affects all life and thought but particularly important is the weakness of memory and will. Our knowledge is limited and sometimes in error and our motivation falls short through the "lusts of

*Sections 3.1 to 3.3 are reprinted from the last issue (no.64). Ron Coleman's letter (p20) refers to section 3.3.

the flesh". We will consider the character of truth and knowledge and some limitations of their attainment.

3.2 What is truth? A common answer to the question is based on John 17 v 17, "thy word is truth". Truth is "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4 v 4). We believe God has revealed himself in particular ways to achieve salvation for those who choose to respond. Inspired writers wrote down this truth from God. Does it follow, though, that nothing outside of God's word (usually taken to refer to the Bible) has any part in truth? Clearly all that is true is not normally said to be God's word. We may, then, be driven to saying that there are two kinds of truth; God's truth, which some might call saving truth, supernatural in origin and man's truth, which is natural in origin. I think that distinction is misleading, at least as far as the nature of truth is concerned. Let me propose an alternative perspective.

We can distinquish between the nature or character of truth, its content i.e. what is true (knowledge) and how we know a thing is true (criteria of truth). These three aspects cannot necessarily be kept in watertight compartments but the question 'what is truth' seems to be a question about the nature of truth itself. Greek and Hebrew ideas of truth are sometimes contrasted (1) In Greek thought, truth is said to refer to the realm of eternal reality as contrasted with the realm of falsehood or mere appearance. Plato for example thought of reality as existing in forms, inaccessible to us.We see but the shadows, not the reality. In Hebrew thought, on the other hand, truth is faithfulness and realiability strongly influenced by the Hebrew experience of acts of God which are trustworthy as opposed to arbitrary or capricious. Perhaps both of these are valid insights into the nature of truth and there are doubtless others.

Greek conceptions have been influential throughout the history of 'western' thought. In the modern era, the idea of truth has been more strongly influenced by the success of the material sciences where criteria, demonstration and proof, all seem easy to achieve. We shall note later that proof turns out to be much more difficult than anyone thought, even 50 years ago. Today it would be acceptable to most people to start off with the definition:- truth is a statement of what is, in fact, the case. The statement (or proposition) has given rise to the idea that truth in this form (propositional) is detached and different from the idea of personal truth. Descartes and the thinkers of the 18th century Enlightenment developed a conception of truth in which ideas and judgements of the mind correspond on an objective way to the realities they represent. Although Descartes himself retained God in his system, his successors made truth independent and autonomous. So came the flowering of rationalism in which reason was exalted above all else.In the reaction of this, thinkers through to the modern period emphasise the fact that man is not just intellect and reasoning power but a whole personality who doubts and hopes

believes and loves. Personal and propositional truth should not be set against one another; both are necessary.

It seems that, by its very nature, truth is a word or concept with many aspects, Thinking people, reflecting on the created world and their own experience see different aspects of existence. We have already noted different expressions of the nature of truth and when we consider what people accept as true (knowledge) a diversity is immediately apparent. Is existence then, merely a collection of diverse qualities, things, values etc., or is there an underlying unity?

3.3 The unity of truth Knowledge covers all that is true.Perhaps the word knowledge conjures up a picture of endless shelves of dusty books. It does, ot should, include personal knowledge (the things and people you and I know) and the knowledge of God's will. We sometimes contrast knowing about God with knowing God. By 'knowing about' we usually refer to a head knowledge of the facts but lacking committment. By 'knowing God' we usually mean having a live, committed, experiential relationship with God. In practice, people happily combine intellectual knowledge and personal knowledge. Neither do they lack commitment but the object of their.commitment is not God the creator but some lesser object or end.

The knowledge available in the world from books and people is immense and fantastically varied. We only need a fraction of it for particular purposes though it is probably no exageration to say that all of it is of significance for some person or purpose. All of it is part of truth (or what is true) in the most general sense. If we believe that God is creator and sustainer in our universe, all truth must in some sense be God's truth (2) All that can be shown to be true must make sense in the context of God's plar and purpose.Whilst we have to split things up, analyse and simplify to understand, continually approximating to what is true, from God's side, these limitations disappear, from where God stands, everything that is, including past and future may represent a coherent whole. Coherence and consistency, then, are basic criteria of truth. That all truth shall be regarded as God's truth and therefore valid or good or whatever affirmative word you want to use in an assumption of a presuppositionIt is, though a basic perspective which can help us to stand against much falsehood and sloppy thinking in the world of today. We would want to argue, for example, that contrary to truth being relative to particular times and societies, if God and his wisdom are unchangingly the same, then truth should likewise be unchanging and universal. This does not mean that we, any of us, can tie everything together and understand fully but that an absolute standard of truth exists. The universality and the unity of truth are things we only approximate to in our present state of knowledge.

Clearly this perspective that all truth is God's does not mean that all truth (in the general sense) is either contained in the Bible or is deducible from it. Historical Christianity has believedin the truthfulness of scripture as the inspired word of God but is is not an exhaustive revelation of everything men can know or want to know as ture. Human knowledge in mathematics and science arose from other sources than the Biblical writings. They are nevertheless valid insights into the created world; perhaps, in a way, revelations. "Whatever we understand about nature is ultimately about God's creative wisdom and power". "Whatever we do in human art and science ultimately comes from the creative and rational potential that God invested in men by making us in his own image"(3).

The loss of a unified view of knowledge in our day is most obviously evidenced by the distinction between sacred and secular, especially amongst religious people. It is not uncommon for all learning not directly associated with the Bible to be dismissed as secular and by inference inferior or even worldly. Truth must be truth wherever it is found. The material sciences have discovered a complex world of order and beauty which could never have been imagined centuries ago. This must be part of the fabric of God's world, whether we understand the relationship or not. By the same token, studies in the human sciences, psychology, sociology etc. must also be investigating aspects of God's world and truths discovered are just as much truths of the created order as are truths of the mathematical sciences. It is much more difficult to get at the truth in the human sciences and often, controlled experiment, the stock in trade of scientif -ic method, is impossible with human subjects.

The point I wish to emphasise is that, viewed correctly i.e. from God's point of view, knowledge and truth must be one whole. As such, there must be an underlying unity in all things that spring from the creative hand of God. It is not a unity of similarity since even on the most superficial level,the world shows us the most remarkable diversity and complexity whether we look at the inner structure of the atom or therelationship between people. The conviction that such a unity exists, acts as a spur to further investigation of the diversity clearly seen amongst people.

3.4 Error and limitation. The source of all knowledge and truth, on the basis of what we have said, must be God, but there is another party involved, man. The latter is limited, not only by his finite mind, knowledge and motivation, but also by his interaction with other men; the social dimension as it were. In a way, error bears the same relationship to truth that evil bears to good. Evil has two sources, acts of will (sin) and natural causes: Error too arises from these two sources.

Self-will can blind us to facts that do not fit our view of the world. Commitment expresses a will to believe but other possibilities are not excluded. Prejudice describes a will to believe which obliterates the views of others. There is good evidence to suggest that beliefs are strongly influenced by wants. A textbook on social psychology summaries thus: "The thought and action of the individual reflect his wants and goals." (4) Perhaps the variety of beliefs is not so surprising after all. If beliefs are linked to wants, they will be as various as the desires of man. The author just quoted writes to the effect that man has an innate "proclivity to create facts". He quotes the following example - "In support of their belief that fluoridation was harmful, residents of Washington quoted the following 'facts' :- It (fluoridation) is socialised medicine, rat poison and Nazi; it ruins batteries, radiators and lawns; it causes hardening of the arteries and veins,premature ageing,loss of memory,and nymphomania, and it weakends the will" (5).

So powerful is what I have called the personal 'rightness model' that the lack of relevant facts or conflicting facts, provided for us by different authorities, may force us to create, invent or distort 'facts' which bear little relation to reality. Such facts may support or be congruent with already established attitudes. As a counter to this manifest distortion of truth, we should appeal to facts which are public, that is, not the preserve of a particular minority and which can be checked or tested in some way.

Part of the 'natural source' of error is due to our finiteness. Our knowledge, understanding and our experience are finite and limited in time. The number of people we can get to know is limited, our judgement and memory are fallible and there is a limit to the complexity we can take in. Since we cannot, ourselves, check everything, we have to rely on others to do this for us. Much of our information comes from experts or authorities who may have abilities which you and I lack but more important their expertise derives from having studied and researched what information is available. To be regarded as an expert or authority, the individual must have gained acknowledgement and respect from others in the same field. Usually the information is available in written form - the shelves of dusty books again. When authorities agree, there is no problem but as was inferred above, they often do not.Sometimes this will reflect a genuine uncertainty which is irreducible. There are natural limits in some circumstances beyond which no one can go, in the present state of knowledge. Sometimes, however, the 'authority' will be influenced not by lack of relevant facts but by the traditions of the society to which he belongs.

If experts or authorities are influenced by the history, tradition or even the language of the society in which they live, bias might be very difficult to detect.

The Bible is no exception in this matter. First it has to be justified as an authority, secondly, it was written by authors who were all Jews (i.e. belong to one society) but over and above this different groups and societies have interpreted. it very different. Clearly, the limitations mentioned above may affect those who read the Bible. They may err in matters on which it is silent and they may err on matters on which it speaks; they may fail to read it correctly pr even worse they may read into it what is not there.

It seems that error and fallibility are deeply rooted in the human situation. The more concerned we are for truth, the more careful and painstaking we should be in a critical examination of assumptions, striving to satisfy whatever criteria seem appropriate, seeking advise from the best authorities and so on. It is often the case that the more knowledgeable people are, the more conscious they are of the limits and uncertainty of their own knowledge. Whilst the unity of God's truth seems a reasonable principle to cling to, total certainty about important issues seems impracticable. The hard distinction between true and false has a long history, supported both by religion and for some time, by science. Recent studies in many fields but notably in the study of people (social sciences) has made it seem that the black/white distinction of true/false does not reflect the world of human investigation. To quote H. Elias:

> "It certainly happens in empirical investigations that people make statements which are simply found to be false. Often enough rough dichotomies like 'true' and 'false' are highly inadequate in their case. People involved in empirical research often put forward propositions or theories whose merit is that they are truer than others or, to use a less hallowed term, that they are more adequate, more consistent both with observations and in themselves". (6)

We are really quite familiar with this idea of truer or more adequate. Many of the common decisions we make are based upon 'sufficient evidence' not absolute certainty; provisional rather than final; approximate not exact; subject to error but good enough for practical purposes. Even the most important decisions in life, like choosing a wife/husband or a career are subject to error and we have to live with our mistakes, Is our knowledge of God's will of this provisional and approximate kind or is religious knowledge somehow different. This we must consider. next time.

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4. Krech, Crutchfield and Ballachery, 'Individual in Society: A textbook of Social Psychology:. 1962 pp.70-78.
5. Ibid p. 188 (Box 6.3)
6. N.Elias. "Problems of involvement and detachment" quoted in "Modern Sociology" Ed. P.Worsley 1970, p.64