

ENDEAVOUR

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The wind bloweth where it listeth.

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Editorial

A GOD OF VENGEANCE?

"Who is this that cometh from Edom,
with dyed garments from Bozrah? this
that is glorious in his apparel,
travelling in the greatness of his
strength? I that speak in righteous-
ness, mighty to save.

Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel,
and thy garments like him that treadeth
in the winefat?

I have trodden the winepress alone;
and of the people there was none with
me; for I will tread them in mine
anger, and trample them in my fury;
and their blood shall be sprinkled upon
my garments, and I will stain all my
raiment.

For the day of vengeance is in mine
heart, and the year of my redeemed is
come".

Isaiah 63:v 1-4.

How can we reconcile a God who while promising Israel
loving kindness, pours merciless judgment on her
enemies with the God of love preached by Jesus Christ?

One explanation perhaps stemming from Jesus' reading
in the synagogue from Isaiah 61 1:2 The Spirit
of the Lord is upon me....preach good tidings to the
poor.....to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord"
- Jesus did not read the next phrase 'and the day of
vengeance of our God' but said "This day is this
prophecy fulfilled in your ears". Luke 4: 18-9.

It is argued that then was the time for preaching the
Good News but God's vengeance is yet to come, presumably
at the day of judgment!

This however is not a happy explanation for those whose

heart has been touched by the Spirit of Christ. A more likely explanation is that although Isaiah believed this would happen Jesus did not think his Father would be touched by feeling of vengeance let alone carry out a terrible slaughter on his own.

Why did Isaiah have this concept of God?

We have a recent example in our own day with the consecration of the Bishop of Durham in York Minster and the subsequent striking of the Minster by lightning and fire - It is the hand of God said many staunch churchmen!

So probably with Edom in Isaiah's day some catastrophe has probably overtaken them in which Israel had no hand. Ah, it is the hand of God!

Some may not like this explanation wishing to take the passage literally as God's work. In a restricted sense it was, as God is responsible for all his creation but has given them free-will. Isaiah had to contend with Persian dualism - A Good force and an Evil force. 'None of it' says Amos . Is there evil in a city and I the Lord hath not done it? In a similar way Isaiah sees in Cyrus a servant of Yahweh.

In suggesting that Isaiah's concept of God is not as clear or noble as that of our Lord's, we must not belittle his concept which was vastly above that of the surrounding nations. Indeed Is. 40-66 contains some of the finest concepts to be found in the Old Testament. However, to reduce Christ's concept of God to the O.T. concept would be distressing.

J.H. Weaving.

THE Gnostics -3

THE APOCRYPHON OF JOHN

The article in the last issue broke off with the begetting of the 'Only-Begotten One' of the Mother-Father; the latter being Barbelo (The Ultimate first power a male deity and Ennoia (His 'Thought' female). The 'Only-Begotten One' is not specifically identified as Christ at this point but very shortly afterwards following the creation of yet another aeon, the Mind, we read - 'It stood by Christ glorifying him and Barbelo'. This is a significant quotation as it gives 'The Christ' an importance greater than is seen in other parallel Gnostic writings. Next follow the creation of 4 'lights', 4 'powers' and many more 'aeons' and the last of these aeons is Sophia (Gk. Wisdom)* She is important and appears in many of the multitudinous strands of gnosticism.

Of Sophia we read:

"And the Sophia of the Epinoia, being an aeon, conceived a thought from herself with the reflection of the invisible Spirit and fore-knowledge. She wanted to bring forth a likeness out of herself without the consent of the Spirit..... And because of the invincible power which is in her, her thought did not remain idle and a thing came out of her, which was imperfect and different from her appearance, because she had created it without her consort.

This is the Yaltabaoth who took a great power from his mother and he removed himself from

* The other aeons, 'lights', and 'powers' all have N.T.-concept names. Will, thought, life.(lights) - understanding, grace, perception, prudence.(powers) - grace, truth forms, understanding, conception, memory, love and idea.

her and moved away from the places in which he was born.* He became strong and created for himself other aeons with a flame of luminous fire which (still) exists now. And he joined with his madness which is in him and begot authorities for himself. The name of the first one is Athoth, whom the generation call

The sixth one is Cain whom the generation of men call the sun. The seventh is Abel. The twelfth is Belias, who is over the depth of Hades. And he placed seven kings - corresponding to the firmaments of heaven - over the seven heavens and five over the depth of the abyss that they may reign. And he shared his fire with them, but he did not send out from the power of the light which he had taken from his mother, for he is ignorant darkness. "

This extensive quotation introduces us to the crux of the gnostic mystic idea of the source of evil in the world. - It is the creation of Yaltabaoth brought forth by Sophia without a father!

We are shortly told that Yaltabaoth is impious in his madness... He said "I am God and there is no other God beside me". Then we are told that he and his companion archons created 'powers' and 'angels' 365 in all!

Sophia now realises that things are getting out of hand and repents. Her tears are heard and she is elevated to the ninth aeon, above her son Yaltabaoth but not to her original eminence.

At this juncture we are told that the Father revealed his appearance in human form and Yaltabaoth saw the image of the Father in the waters that were above the firmament, and he said to those attending him 'Come, let us create man according to the image of God, and according to our likeness - and He created a being according to the likeness of the first perfect

*Yaltabaoth changes into a lion-faced serpent.

Man and they said - "Let us call him Adam".

The creation of Adam is then described - Each of the 365 angels form a part of him! with the first angel creating his head and the last angel 'Abrana' creating the toes of the left foot!

However this is not the end. We now read of the 'origin of the demons' which are in the whole body, are ordained to be four :- heat, cold, wetness, and dryness, and the Mother of all of them is matter*. So we read that the psychic and material body was completed by them but their product was completely inactive and motionless.

We are then told that the powers (angels) became jealous because they had all concentrated and given their powers to the 'man' and his intelligence was greater than anyone of those who had helped to make him! and indeed greater than the chief archon! (presumably YALTABAQTH) so they threw him into the lowest region of all matter. "But the Blessed - the Mother-Father had mercy on Adam and sent him a helper - luminous Epinoia** who was hidden in him and restored him to his fullness. However the jealous angels took counsel with the archons and brought him into the shadow of death and he came a mortal man.

"And the archons took him and placed him in paradise. And they said to him, 'Eat, that is, at leisure, for their luxury is bitter and their beauty depraved. And their luxury is deception and their trees are godlessness and their fruit is deadly poison and their promise is death. And the tree of their life they had placed in the middle of paradise"

We are now introduced to the tree of knowledge of good and evil and John now asks a question saying to Jesus - "Was it not the serpent that taught them to eat?" The Saviour answered - "The serpent taught them to eat from wickedness and lust". The result was that the chief archon

* This was the work of the 365 angels but we are further informed that there are other angels that rule the remaining passions, if you wish to know them it is written in the book of Zoroaster.

** Gk. - 'thought'.

(Yaltabaoth) brought a forgetfulness over Adam to counter his power. John asks "What is 'forgetfulness?' and the Saviour said it was not the way Moses wrote, that is 'He put him to sleep.' (Genesis 2:21). The chief archon now wanted to bring the Epinoia of light out of his rib but he could not because light cannot be grasped so he formed a woman in the likeness of Epinoia. Then Epinoia herself lifted the veil which lay over his mind and he recognised his counter-image and said "This is indeed bone of my bones and flesh of..... Therefore shall a man.... and they will be one flesh"

"And when Aldabaoth noticed that they withdrew from him, he cursed his earth. He found the woman as she was preparing herself for her husband. He was Lord over her though he did not know the mystery which had come to pass through the holy decree. And they were afraid to blame him. And he showed his angels his ignorance which is in him. And he cast them out of paradise and he clothed them in gloomy darkness. And the chief archon saw the virgin who stood by Adam, and that the luminous Epinoia of life had appeared in her. And Yaldabaoth was full of ignorance. And when the fore-knowledge of the all noticed (it), she sent some and they snatched Life out of Eve.

And the chief archon seduced her and he begot in her two sons; the first and the second (are) Eloim and Yave. Eloim has a bear-face and Yave has a cat-face. The one is righteous but the other is unrighteous. (IV.38 4-6*adds: Yave is righteous but Eloim is unrighteous)..Yave he set over the fire and the wind, and Eloim he set over the water and the earth. And these he called with the names Cain and Abel with a view to deceive.

Now up to the present day sexual intercourse continued due to the chief archon. And he planted sexual desire in her who belongs to Adam. And he produced through intercourse the copies of the bodies, and he inspired them with his opposing spirit".

* Quote from a 2nd manuscript.

Finally, Adam begot the likeness of the son of man and called his name Seth.

John then asks the Saviour about the destiny of the souls of the various classes of men. Will all be saved? He is told that his question is difficult. Those on whom the Spirit of life will descend will be saved and become perfect except for the state of being in the flesh. John then asks - Where will the souls go when they have come out of the flesh? He is told that she is taken up to the 'rest of the aeons'. The less fortunate souls are cast into prison by the 'authorities' who consort with them until they are liberated from forgetfulness and become perfect and saved. A still less fortunate class - 'Those who did not know and have turned away' and those who have blasphemed the spirit will be tortured and punished with eternal punishment.

Now comes another significant strand in this complex and tangled web - John asks the Saviour "Lord from where did the despicable spirit come?" The answer as we may have anticipated, is not clear-cut. The jealous chief archon Yaltabaoth is the source he contrived that the 'powers' committed adultery with Sophia and 'bitter fate was begotten through them which is the last of the terrible bonds.

"From this fate came forth every sin, injustice, and blasphemy....."

"and thus the whole creation was made blind in order that they may not know God who is above all of them".

This leads into the Flood - 'and he* repented for everything that had come into being through him. This time he planned to bring a flood over the work of man.

Noah was warned and he preached to the 'sons of man' but they did not listen. But now we read :

*From the argument 'he' could be 'God' (Barbelo) or Yaltabaoth. God is the last to be mentioned in the context. This will be discussed later.

'It is not as Moses said - "They hid themselves in an ark"(Genesis 7:7) but they hid themselves in a place, not only Noah but many other people from the immovable race'.

"And he made a plan with his powers. He sent his angels to the daughters of men, that they might take some of them for themselves and raise offspring for their enjoyment. And at first they did not succeed. When they had no success, they gathered together again and they made a plan together. They created a despicable spirit who resembles the Spirit who had descended, so as to pollute the souls through it. And the angels changed themselves in their likeness into the likeness of their (the daughters of men) mates, filling them with the spirit of darkness, which they had mixed for them, and with evil. And they steered the people who had followed them into great troubles, by leading them astray with many deceptions. They (the people) became old without having enjoyment. They died, not having found truth and without knowing the God of truth. And thus the whole creation became enslaved forever from the foundation of the world until now. And they took women and begot children out of the darkness according to the likeness of their spirit. And they closed their hearts and they hardened themselves through the hardness of the despicable spirit until now."

The 'he' in this passage is clearly Yaltabaoth for he created the 'powers' and some angels.

Finally, Christ comes down - He is described as the 'perfect* Pronoia' of the All. He enters the 'prison' and the foundations of chaos shake. He hides himself because of their weakness. They do not recognise him. He returns a second time and enters Hades. He returns a third time and enters into the middle of their prison', which is the prison of the body and I said "He who hears let them get up from the deep sleep....."and I raised him

* Pronoia Gk. thought.

up and sealed him in the light of the water with the five seals in order that death might not have power over him from this time on.

Then Jesus says - "Behold now I go to the perfect aeon".

'And the Saviour presented these things to John that he might write them down and keep them secure....and he disappeared from him, and John went to his fellow disciples and related to them what the Saviour had told him.

Jesus Christ Amen.

We have endeavoured to convey the text of the Apocryphon of John by removing repetitions and leaving out irrelevant and redundant material; in the next article we intend to examine the theology and subsequently to relate it to the adversaries of Paul and John.

John H. Weaving.

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THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE NT-3

Without doubt the crucial experience of Jesus' life was His baptism by John in Jordan and the descent of the Spirit. Of the event Luke (3:21) says: "Heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in a bodily form like a dove" and then we have the voice declaring that He is The Son of God. How did Luke know, or how would anyone know that this was the Holy Spirit?

If it were in a bodily form like a dove does that mean that people would merely see a dove? What does a dove look like when it is the Holy Spirit?

If we look at John ch1 v 32 we see that it was John the Baptist who gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from Heaven as a dove and remain on Him". It may be that only John had the impression of a dove. There isn't a way of resolving the question of what people saw because the words don't explain it to us. All that the words say are that John saw the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove.

Clearly, this was a crucial experience which Jesus had and he may well have described it to the disciples and they would have remembered. Luke goes on to say that Jesus (ch 4 : 1) "full of the Holy Spirit" returned from Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert". What was Jesus' experience of the Holy Spirit?

Well if we look at the temptations and the statement of the voice of God, we conclude that first and foremost it was an experience of sonship. Remember the intimate way He has of referring to God as "Abba" Father. This "daddy" phrase, is an indication of a consciousness of sonship. We cannot say

this was absent before but it may be that His receiving of the Holy Spirit brought it into prominence.

Secondly it is quite clear from the temptations that Jesus had a heightened consciousness of the battle between good and evil which, we deduce, came from His "filling" by the Holy Spirit. Another thing that may have been present is a sharper understanding of the significance of scripture, e.g. the way He replies to the devil's questions.

There must of course have been a sense of power : Luke ch. 4v 14 "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit". We are not told what that meant. Perhaps there was an experience of "empowering", and certainly he was able to perform miracles of healing and, in a few cases, to raise the dead. Also there was mission there : the recognition of a need to preach. He quotes (v18): "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor".

Clearly Jesus feels that the whole of that prophecy has come true in His mission which is part of the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Now the interesting thing is that all of these results of the filling of the Holy Spirit that I have quoted here of Jesus are all mirrored in the experience of the early church even an authority over evil spirits.

The important thing about Jesus, though, is that from being the receiver of the Holy Spirit, He later comes to be the giver. We see this in the other of Luke's books. Acts ch.2 v33. In Peter's speech he talks of Jesus: "exalted at the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit". Notice that, it was promised; and remember all the meanings of promise from the Old Testament. He continues "and has poured out what you now see and hear", (ie at Pentecost). So the origin of the pouring out of

the Holy Spirit is a promise of the Father.

Now the gospel writer John was the great exponent of God's promise of the Comforter or Counsellor (NIV). In John ch.15 we have those statements about what was to come: v.26, for example, "when the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me". This spirit that Jesus is going to send will reflect Jesus in some way. He says (ch.16 v7) "It is for your good that I am going away". How incredible it seems that it could be good for the disciples that their leader would go away. The reason is that, "Unless I go away the Counsellor will not come to you : but if I go I will send him to you".

So the Counsellor which is difficult to distinguish from "the Holy Spirit" is both sent by God and Jesus. Lastly, in v16 "A little while, and you will see me no more; again a little while, and you will see me". In some sense then, the coming of the Spirit was to be a seeing of Jesus Christ. That is something we must remember.

Let's now go on to Acts again and to the great initiating event in the history of the church, that of Pentecost. Let us first note from Acts ch.1 that it was as a result of a promise, (Ch1 v4) He (Jesus) gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit."

This promise is, as crucial in the New Testament as the promise to Abraham were in the Old Testament. Indeed, the disciples link it immediately with the Kingdom, v6 "So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Because of their training in the Old Testament the disciples expected the Kingdom to come and it

seems fairly evident that John Baptist with his prophecy of the one who would baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire may also have had in mind the Kingdom coming. The Old Testament prophets mention Spirit and fire as they write of the fulfilment of all things in the Kingdom.

This baptism is an empowering Jesus says (Acts ch1 v7) "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you: and you will be my witnesses". The purpose then of the Holy Spirit was that the church should witness to Jesus Christ.

So we come to this experience of filling at Pentecost: Acts 2 v4; "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." Now this experience does seem to be different from any experience of John the Baptist or even of Jesus Christ.

There is a miracle reported here but was it a miracle of speaking or hearing? There doesn't seem any reason why different languages would be necessary. There was Greek as a common language in the empire. Peter does not appear to have spoken in tongues, or at least it is not recorded as such. Neither did all speak the main Gospel message, it was Peter as the spokesman, making the important speech.

There is a precedent today for hearing being the significant thing in tongues as understood for example by the Pentecostals. The speaker expresses himself ecstatically and another interprets. So there are perhaps grounds for thinking of tongues in Acts as a miracle of hearing rather than a miracle of speaking.

The other thing to note is that this was quite clearly perceived as the Last Days. Peter quotes Joel v.17 "In the last days, God says: I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions." He links what was happening then with the expectation

that the end was about to come.

One is conscious through most of the New Testament of this expectation that the fulfilment will come, that Jesus will return, that the whole thing will be finished and that here they are experiencing the spirit in the end time.

When we get to the end of Peter's speech it seems absolutely clear to answer one of the questions I asked, that Peter thinks the Holy Spirit was for every believer. Acts ch2.v38 "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you:" Notice the reference to the "promise" it was regarded as a firm promise from God. "For you and your children and for all who are far off" The phrase "far off" may indicate space but "your children" indicates continuity.

Luke seems generally at pains to point out that the Holy Spirit was available for everyone. An example of this is the way that he treats the parable of Jesus about the good Father. (Luke ch.11 v13) You remember that Matthew also has the same account and he represents Jesus as saying that if earthly fathers give their children "the real thing" (a fish not a snake) "how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those that ask him." But Luke says "how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" If we were being in critical mood we would say, which was it that Jesus said? It seems unlikely that He would have used both expressions. I think the important thing is that whatever Jesus said meant something slightly different to Matthew and Luke. To Luke it meant a reinforcement of this promise that the Holy Spirit would be available to everyone.

When we go back to Acts we see that this now is reinforced. When Philip preached in Samaria (Acts ch.8)

the people were baptised but the Holy Spirit :Had not yet come upon" them. Peter and John had to come up from Jerusalem and lay hands on them before they received the Holy Spirit. Now this of course is not like Pentacost: the Spirit did not, on this occasion, come spontaneously, it required Peter and John to do something.

We learn from this and other things in Acts that there was not a strict uniformity in the way things happened in the first century. Philip's work seems not to be associated with the receiving of the Spirit. When he baptised the eunuch there is no mention there of the Holy Spirit. In the case of Cornelius on the other hand, it is very much like Pentecost. The believers received the Spirit even before Peter had explained the Gospel to them and baptised them. They also spoke in tongues. It almost seems that tongues speaking was a sign of receiving the Holy Spirit.

One asks how did they recognise that someone had received the Holy Spirit? Was it apparent to Peter and John or the Jerusalem church that those in Samaria had not received the Holy Spirit?

One possible answer is an experience, perhaps the Samaritans did not report a feeling of receiving the Holy Spirit. The outward sign that Luke seems to seize on in Acts is speaking in tongues. For me the speaking in tongues appears as one thing that was common. What happened to Cornelius was the same thing that happened to the disciples at Pentecost, and it is the same thing that was happening in the Corinthian church. Of course you may wish to disagree about that.

It is certainly true that tongues are not mentioned on all occasions when the gospel is preached and the Spirit is received. It is not mentioned in the case of the Pauline churches in Acts but then neither is water baptism mentioned on every occasion.

It is interesting to look at Acts ch.19 when Paul meets the disciples of John because it reflects what may have been a "norm" in these times. Paul, finding the group had only received John's baptism, teaches them about Jesus and they were baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus. Luke then writes: "When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all."

There we have, in addition to the speaking in tongues prophecy as a result of their receiving of the Holy Spirit. One has the impression that it was expected that a Christian would receive the Holy Spirit. Peter in Acts 11 views the receipt of the spirit as a fulfilment of the prophecy of John the Baptist. Speaking of his visit to Caesarea (v15) he says: "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning." So Peter does not distinguish between what happened to Cornelius and what happened at Pentecost.

He also describes it as being baptised with the Holy Spirit, this receiving of the Spirit.

Luke presents a simple message of God working. Yet we know that there were counterfeit prophecies. We know as a matter of fact, that there were counterfeit tongues, but one would not know that from Luke's Acts. He doesn't seem to appreciate the problems of distinguishing tongues which were from God and tongues which were from any other source, or true prophecies from false. Luke's message seems to be that the Spirit was received generally amongst followers of Jesus and that a common sign for it's receipt was the speaking in tongues.

Tongue speaking is a subject on its own but Michael Green says that he knows of more than one person who can get anyone to speak in tongues.(1)

Clearly then one might say today there is a psychological tongue speaking. It is certainly not clear that "tongues" are always a sign of the Holy Spirit even though they appear to have been taken as such in Luke's day.

It is also clear from the Acts that the apostles felt guided by the Holy Spirit in many very ordinary affairs; for instance the sending on a mission. We read in Acts ch.13 v2 at Antioch that "the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart from me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them". So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off". How did the Holy Spirit speak in this way? We are just not told.

To get behind this language is extremely difficult.. It may be that one of their number spoke believing that he was speaking with the authority of the Holy Spirit. It would, though, need others to recognise that this was so and the action on this occasion was a perfectly ordinary one of sending people on a mission.

J. Maycock.

CORRIGENDUM

Last issue of Endeavour No.70 page 15, line 33 'not' should be deleted and read :

For many years now it has seemed incredible that a God of love could sentence any human being.....to endless torture.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD (iv)

The third article in this series ended in what seemed to be an impasse. In the gospels the Kingdom of God is something which is both present and future. How can it be both? This difficulty was met historically by concentrating on one aspect and ignoring the other. The majority saw the Kingdom as something present and identified it with the Church. While looked at dispassionately such an identification would seem incredible, the difficulty was eased in practice by the companion belief that salvation lay in the admission of the souls of the righteous to heaven and the presence of God at death. The second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, although remaining part of the creeds, were reduced by this to insignificance.

On the other hand a minority concentrated on the Kingdom as something wholly in the future. It grafted the Old Testament pictures of the physical defeat and destruction of Israel's enemies on to the second coming and regarded the Kingdom as being established by force. The teaching of Jesus about the presence of the Kingdom was almost completely ignored.

In recent years difficulties in both positions have grown. As regards the first, it has been increasingly doubted whether souls exist and particularly whether they are separable from the body. Since God chose to make and develop human personality in physical bodies, the idea that disembodied spirits are somehow superior to minds in bodies seems less and less likely as time goes by, particularly in view of the tremendous intricacies of our bodies and brains. The main difficulty in the second position is the self-contradictory idea that men can be made righteous by war or punishment. There have also been difficulties over resurrection. It is now clear that personality does not reside in the physical remains of a dead person. Resurrection can now only be thought of as the re-creation of a personality by God "remembering" it and clothing it in a new body. It has thus come closer to the idea of a soul.

Faced with these difficulties I suggested that a way out could perhaps be found in something else that was very much part of the teaching of Jesus which, however, brought difficulties of its own with it. We find this something inextricably mixed with the passages which speak of the Kingdom as something present - in fact an explanation of why the Kingdom was something present. It is the defeat of Satan by Jesus.

The beginnings of the idea of Satan are to be found in chapter 1 of the book of Job, where one of the "sons of God" casts doubts on Job's righteousness and is allowed to subject him to many trials. This idea of a supernatural spirit who opposes God and his people was developed in Judaism by the time of Christ into a complicated demonology with thousands of fallen evil angels. The New Testament reflects this belief - albeit in a much more restrained form - but nevertheless regards the then present age as a time in which God had allowed Satan to exercise control over men. It was Satan who moved Judas to betray Jesus (Luke 22:3). Disease is bondage to Satan (Luke 13:16). Satan was eager to tempt the disciples (Luke 22:31). He tempted Jesus in the wilderness by offering to share his power with Jesus if Jesus would worship him (Luke 4:5-7).

Jesus was able to cast out devils - the angels of Satan - by a word and this was seen as remarkable evidence of his power. This figures particularly in the early chapters of Mark. Faced with this, the Pharisees, with a certain amount of desperation, said that Jesus could only cast out devils by the power of the prince of the devils, Beelzebub (Matthew 12:22-29 = Luke 11:14-22). Jesus refuted this by retorting that the idea of civil war in the kingdom of Satan was ridiculous. He then continued "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you." Luke has an interesting variation (11:20); "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you." "The finger of God" is a Hebrew metaphor for the power of God, and if we put the two accounts together we can see that "power" equals "kingdom". This illustrates the fact mentioned earlier in the series that the Greek word translated "kingdom" in the Authorised Version (basiliea) has the primary meaning of "rule" rather than "realm". Jesus is saying in effect, "If the power of God has come upon you then you have seen God's rule - you have seen his kingdom."

The significance of Jesus's power to exorcise demons seems to be that before the final conquest of Satan and evil by God's kingdom, it has invaded Satan's realm to deal him a preliminary but decisive defeat. This is shown by the parable of the strong man, part of the same incident in Matthew 12. "Or how else can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then will he spoil his house." (v 29) Satan is obviously the strong man. His house is "this present evil world" (Galatians 1:4) and his goods are men and women under his evil influence. But he has already been attacked and his eventual defeat is sure. That final defeat will not be yet awhile however; it must await the age to come when Satan is cast into the eternal fire prepared for him and his angels (Matthew 25:41). Another reference is in Mark 1:24 when the demons ask Jesus if he has come to destroy them.

These and other passages about Satan and demons present peculiar difficulties. Is there a supernatural power of evil, or is Satan just a personification of fallen human nature? I myself doubt whether there can be a supernatural power of evil because of the immense problems that dualism brings. But the references to demons and Satan are so many, so explicit and so emphatic that one can sympathise with those who take them literally and say "This is what scripture teaches." It is certainly the case that in those times Judaism was fully committed to a belief that there were spiritual powers of darkness. Neither Jesus nor Paul contradicted this belief; on the contrary they seemed to endorse it. The argument that "Satan" by its etymology means "adversary", and therefore we can substitute "adversary" when we meet the word Satan, is one that modern linguistics dismisses immediately. It would be as legitimate to argue that when we speak of a ship sailing we really mean it is propelled by wind power, not by diesel engines. Words mean what their utterers intend them to mean and the intentions of the Jews of Jesus's day are perfectly clear.

The conquest of Satan must thus either be literally true or, if not, stand for something so important that it had to be allowed to remain

uncorrected, dressed in the clothes of the mistaken belief. In one way or the other, the coming of Jesus was a decisive event in the struggle against evil, of immense significance in the history of the redemption of the world.

Most Christians believe that decisive event was the Incarnation and that Jesus was God the Son become man. In this way God entered into and became part of his world in a new way. The difficulties and the contradictions of the Trinity have always made us Christadelphians shy away from the idea of the Incarnation. We should realise however that it is not necessary to accept the Chalcedonian definition in order to believe that in some special way God experienced the suffering and agony of his creation through Jesus. The essential difference between Trinitarian and non Trinitarian Christologies is belief in the pre-existence of Christ - there are other differences, of course, but they are less significant. There are an increasing number of theologians today who question or reject the pre-existence without lessening their commitment to a belief that God was in Christ in more than a metaphorical way. The feeling is not confined to liberal theologians of the kind that contributed to "The Myth of God Incarnate" but extends to Roman Catholics such as Schoonenberg, Schillebeeckx and Küng and to Protestants such as John Robinson, Knox and Berkhof. John Austin Baker (now Bishop of Salisbury) who of course is a Trinitarian has expressed this commitment very finely in what is essentially an non-Trinitarian way in his book "The Foolishness of God".

Jesus is the image and likeness of God in human terms; he has done God's work in human space and time. Faced with this truth, I cannot stop there. I have to go beyond it to an even greater affirmation, because of the very nature of love. It is inconceivable that love could ever say: 'I must save these children of mine, and that will mean the most terrible suffering. I will find someone else to do the job.' Love does not send others to suffer in its place. Love comes itself. And at this point I am struck dumb. I dare not frame the thought that faces me, and yet there is no other thought to which I can turn and escape. This is no clever theory, no remote possibility, no wild imagination. It is something I know. It is absurd, it cannot possibly be true, but deep inside there is no question about it. The Cross is not a picture of God. This was God himself.

To go further than this would mean entering more deeply into Christology than the scope of this article allows but we need not do that to understand something of how God could suffer in Jesus. From human experience we know that a relationship can be so close that one individual would gladly suffer for another because watching the suffering is worse than enduring it

If therefore we cannot accept that there is a literal Satan who has been defeated we must, in order to do justice to what Jesus taught, at least adopt a moral theory of the Atonement. (Moral theories of the Atonement are those which regard the coming and the death of Jesus as a supreme demonstration of God's real nature and of his love, the effect of which is to induce rebellious mankind to give up its rebellion.)

What is the effect of this on our understanding of the Kingdom of God? It must be said that it tells heavily against a wholly-future kingdom, to be established by Jesus through the conquest of sinful nations at his return, because it diminishes the importance of the first coming very greatly. It also makes penal theories of the Atonement obligatory. Penal theories hold that Christ died to meet the claims of God's justice, a justice that demands that penalties must be paid before God can forgive. A typical recent exposition is that, in requiring Jesus to die, God, "having upheld his righteousness in condemning sin, can now in the abundance of His love and grace, extend forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with Himself to all those who will acknowledge His work in Christ." (My emphasis)

Such explanations of the Atonement are deeply unsatisfactory because they contradict completely what Jesus himself taught about forgiveness. It leads one to ask whether it was impossible for God to accede to that prayer at the time when Jesus taught his disciples to pray "forgive us our trespasses".

If the Atonement seems to belong to the more arid areas of theology perhaps we can put it in more practical terms. If men can be compelled into obedience and righteousness in the way so often envisaged as being applied by Jesus at his second coming, why did not God do it centuries ago? We see vividly today through television and the newspapers the terrible suffering of the people of Sudan and Ethiopia; we see and hear about bestial cruelties and tortures in countries like Uganda. But this suffering is not something new; it has been going on through the whole of history. Women have seen their babies die of starvation and captives have been cruelly tortured and enslaved since the earliest Old Testament days. We shudder at the closing verses of Psalm 137 - Happy is the man who pays you back for what you have done to us - who takes your babies and smashes them against a rock (GNB), but the shudder should not just be because of the contrast of this savage wish with the poignancy and beauty of the rest of the Psalm, but because through untold years this has been going on. For thousands of years God, on this view, has allowed a world of suffering and evil to continue when he could have brought it to an end. The Israeli army was bitterly criticised when it did not prevent the enemies of the Palestinians in Lebanon from entering the camps and massacring them. If ordinary sinful men think that was wrong, how much more does it seem contradictory for a merciful and loving God to allow something as bad to go on unnecessarily for centuries?

The only way we can escape from the "now or then?" dilemma of the Kingdom is to realise that the problems stem from transferring spent or rescinded prophecies about literal Israel (see the earlier article in Issue 69) to spiritual Israel. The Kingdom can be both "now" and "then" if we realise that its coming depends on human response to God's unprecedented initiative in Jesus Christ. That initiative was the fulfilment of God's promises, fulfilment without consummation. The consummation must come later. We would readily accept the following (from D M Baillie's "God was in Christ") as an adequate explanation of the delay between the fall and the first coming.

And then, when man was ready to receive it, the full revelation came. Thus we may say that God was continually pressing through into human life in every age, so far as man would allow, and the reason why the Incarnation did not take place earlier is because man was not sufficiently receptive. Since man is not a puppet and cannot be saved against his will, there is a sense in which God cannot go faster with His revelation than man will let Him. That is what gives a tragic note to the 'sacred history' of Israel . . . it is precisely because of their obtuseness, their intractability, that His purpose had to work so slowly.

Why cannot we accept this as regards the second coming? One reason is that it is foreign to the Christadelphian ethos with its view of "Christendom Astray" to see the Cross working in the world, leading men to a greater understanding of God. This attitude is perhaps understandable when we look back and see the sad way in which organised Christianity has misused the Gospel. Some of the worst crimes and the greatest cruelties have been perpetrated by men who claimed they were doing Christ's work. Yet throughout the centuries a small flickering flame has been kept alive; if that had not been the case the Christadelphian faith itself could not have come into existence.

Another reason is because of the exaggerated claims made in the name of evolution - that the world is gradually getting better and that eventually it will reach perfection. The truth is that while in many ways the world is better, in many ways it is the same, in some ways it is worse. But this was true also of the world of Christ's day compared with, say, the world of Samuel's day. The real difference between Samuel's day and Christ's day was that in the latter some men were more receptive and were able to receive the message that he brought. Is it not fair to say the same about the world of our day compared with that of Jesus's day? In many parts of the world there is today, alongside the greed and materialism, a feeling for the needy, weak and oppressed in other parts of the world by ordinary people which compares well with what was extraordinary then. When Paul took up a collection in Greece for the needy Christians of Jerusalem he was doing something unprecedented; today such an obligation is accepted by such unlikely people as pop singers!

Then there is the tremendous advance in the understanding of the physical world. We have learned more about it in the last 40 years than in the whole of previous human history. As men peer into the secrets of this unimaginably complex universe, may there not be many more who will "see the invisible qualities (of God) both his eternal power and his divine nature . . . in the things that God has made (Romans 1:20 GNB)?

This is not an argument for post-millennialism, namely that the world will gradually get better and better until it reaches a millennial state and then Christ will return. It is an argument that God now deals with individuals, not nations. In the days of the prophets when salvation was God fighting for Israel and conquering their enemies, there was no individual hope of a future life and national salvation for those alive at the time of deliverance was the only hope for the future.

There is now an individual hope of eternal life, and when God decides to bring to an end mortal human existence, surely those then alive will be dealt with as individuals? In any event the idea of Christ and his saints waging physical warfare on the nations is preposterous. With the power of the creator of the universe in his hands how could any man, no matter with what weapons he was equipped, resist Jesus physically for a moment?

The question of why the world has gone on as long as it has with its tale of sorrow still nags at us. Perhaps a solution can be found on these lines. We believe that what we do as individuals in this life is in some way decisive for us eternally. C S Lewis suggested a reason for this when he said "In the perfect and eternal world the law will vanish, but the results of having lived faithfully under it will not." May not the same be true for the human race as a whole? The lives that we have lived, the things that we have discovered and the achievements we have had, as it were "on our own", could have the same sort of eternal value.

It may seem weak and inconclusive not to be able to put forward clear and concrete pictures of what will happen when Jesus comes back, such as are commonly sketched (including recently the prediction that wrongdoers will be taken to Jerusalem for public execution!). We have to remember however, as was said earlier, that nobody, not even the mother who bore him, understood beforehand what would happen when Jesus came for the first time.

In Old Testament days, because of human limitations, the light was weak and fitful. In the New Testament it is stronger and more constant. But surely we should not think even so that we can fully understand what will happen? If we were to should we not be like an ancient Israelite insisting that there could not possibly be any greater bliss than sitting under his own vine and fig tree? In reality we know already that there is the promise of having "the power to understand how broad and long, how high and deep, is Christ's love . . . and so be filled with the very nature of God." (Ephesians 3:18,19 GNB) That is what the rule of God, the Kingdom of God, means.

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