
THE

Endeavour

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THE ENDEAVOUR MAGAZINE

For Christian Thought And Action

April 1987

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Our object is to promote discussion of the difficulties that Christians face today in both thought and day-to-day living, in the hope that difficulties shared will be difficulties eased. The views expressed in the magazine are not necessarily those of the Editorial Committee but are published because it is believed that they will make a useful contribution to discussion.

Produced for the Endeavour Service Council
by John Maycock assisted by Ron Coleman.

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EDITORIAL

With a new editorial team taking over, we thank John Weaving for his many years of service; an acknowledgment is included in this issue. You will notice some changes have been made to layout and content; we hope you will like them. It seems appropriate at this time to review the function of the magazine and in particular the role of the 'editor'. One friend has questioned the virtue of having an editorial at all since it implies an authoritative standpoint which is alien to the spirit of the magazine.

We have elected to reinstate the motto "For Christian thought and action" which appeared on the early issues of the 'Endeavour Magazine'. To this end we add an aim, printed below the contents list, as a permanent reminder of the prime objective we have in view.

Of course everything we do as Christians should have Jesus Christ as the centre and source. Jesus said however that the work of counselling, comforting, communicating with the early Church would be performed by the Holy Spirit. He said (John 14:26) the Father would send the Holy Spirit in His (Jesus') name. The task: "He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you" (John 16:14). The baptism with or in the Holy Spirit was also a promise God fulfilled on that famous Pentecost day after Jesus' ascension. It has been suggested that the Spirit of God shown at work in the New Testament is the Spirit of Jesus. That God had a special work to do in the first Christian century is undeniable, but is he not still working today?

It was a difficult task encouraging the growth of spirit-filled followers of Jesus, at least in the ecclesias of Asia Minor. We have Paul's witness and work to show us that. How easily and quickly they fell prey to divisions, false teachers and science (or knowledge) falsely so-called. These problems, or variants of them, still afflict the 'body of Christ'. How is God tackling the problem today? We have the Spirit-given books of the New Testament, but they do not solve all our problems. Every major Christian community thinks its doctrine and practice is consistent with the Bible. An Anglican friend used to say to me that true understanding of the Bible (by implication his) was given by the work of the Spirit.

But even in New Testament times the Spirit does not seem to have short-circuited the normal processes of reasoned argument. Encouragement, not supernatural pressure, was the method adopted. Encouragement and reasoned argument are certainly things we can pursue in this magazine. Even the gifts of the Holy Spirit were not without their problems. Jealousy in the ecclesias prompted Paul to counsel love as 'a more excellent way' and, in the case of doctrinal teaching, John advocates testing the spirits "to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." John's test seems to have been to require the confession that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh. It may be that he had in mind particular docetic teachers who believed that Jesus only seemed to be human. They would not be able to make that confession. It is obvious that we today need to devise our own tests for our own peculiar difficulties, in conformity with the Spirit of Christ.

However one views the matter, differences of opinion have and will continue to arise and their resolution requires discussion in a spirit of love. Love, of course, was the greatest of the gifts of the Spirit. This we can fulfill; all of us who read and contribute in prayer or in writing to this magazine. What then about the editorial function?

Jesus demonstrated in one of his most dramatic acts, washing the disciples' feet, that we are to serve one another. We believe that an editor serves by enabling brethren and sisters with problems or uncertainties to voice them and to receive help from informative articles. In any periodical dedicated to Christian thought and action there should be some space devoted to worship - a 'Devotional' section is planned, to provide the opportunity for putting particular issues before the Lord.

We welcome contributions of any of the classes of material mentioned: problems posed, articles, letters, devotional contributions and comments on the news, provided it is topical. In all cases we ask correspondents to be helpful. Paul, in countering the disturbances caused by the misuse of the gift of tongues, implies that all gifts of the Spirit should edify i e build up the church.

The editorial, then, is not written from any position of authority but may, on occasion, benefit from perceiving more than one side of a question by virtue of what our correspondents may say. In all things it is God's view we seek; we commit ourselves to seeking to perceive the spirit of truth which is the Spirit of Jesus.

JOHN MAYCOCK

IS AIDS THE JUDGMENT OF GOD?

When AIDS first occurred in the United States in 1981 some people held that it was the hand of God punishing sinners in a way that defied scientific analysis. For a time the second part of the claim seemed as though it might be true, but science is now beginning to make some progress. What of the first part? Ian McHaffie examines it.

In Romans chapter one the Apostle Paul describes the state of mankind. The righteousness of God is revealed in the Gospel: the wrath of God is revealed against men's wickedness. How is this wrath revealed, and can we usefully use this term today? Three times Paul says "God gave them up . . ." He abandoned them to the consequences of their refusal to acknowledge Him. These consequences are described in several ways: God gave them up to impurity, to dishonourable passions, to a base mind and to improper conduct. In Romans 1:26-27, after describing homosexuality by which (so far) Aids has most frequently been transmitted, Paul speaks of men "receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error."*

It seems appropriate therefore to consider Aids (among a variety of other sexually transmitted diseases) as an illustration of what Paul means. Aids can be one of the consequences of ignoring God and his standards. In Romans 2:2 Paul continues: "We know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who do such things." To state therefore that Aids is the judgment of God seems a reasonable, biblical deduction.

This deduction seems straightforward until we think of the implications. If Aids is the judgment of God, it falls more widely than on "those who do such things." Although at the moment the sufferers are predominantly male homosexuals, three innocent groups are also involved: children born to Aids sufferers; haemophiliacs and others who require blood transfusions; the wives of haemophiliacs or of husbands who have been unfaithful. There is a risk that others too may become involved, but the extent is not yet clearly known. What of hospital workers, or anyone as a result of a coming in contact with infected blood (as could happen for example, in a road accident)? If Aids is the judgment of God, not only does it "rightly" fall on "those who do such things" but on many others.

* Quotations are from the Revised Standard Version

In its wider effects we are dealing with the general problem of suffering. Is that too a judgment of God (as a consequence of Adam's sin?) or are other explanations required also? Some suffering is our fault. If we drive dangerously and injure ourselves, the fault is ours. If we injure someone else, the fault is still ours, not theirs!

In the past people have seen plagues as a punishment of God. Some victims of the Highland Clearances saw their plight in this way too.* But the same problem of the indiscriminate nature of such "punishment" makes it difficult to consider this either as a whole explanation or an adequate one. Gloucestershire has recently been troubled with far more cases of meningitis than other parts of the country. Are people there especially sinful?

What Would Jesus Say?

Jesus was faced with this problem in Luke 13: ". . . those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:4-5) If it is thought that this passage refers only to physical accidents, not illness, the same assumption (that suffering is a punishment from God) is faced in John 9:2-3. "And his disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him'." The last part of Jesus' answer can present difficulties, but Jesus' attitude in both these passages is relevant to Aids. Illness, whether specific like Aids, or general, makes us aware of the frailty of human life. Some illness and suffering we bring on ourselves; some happens from causes not known and for which we are not blameworthy. Either way, we are warned of our weakness and mortality, and of the need and opportunity to repent. A moral response is demanded from us; on the one hand repent; on the other, use the opportunity to serve God. Jesus healed the man who was born blind.

All Guilty!

Romans 1 to 3 does not give us any cause to gloat over the sins of others. Paul declares that mankind as a whole has departed from God: ". . . all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23); ". . . you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things." (2:1) The real judgment will be revealed in the future (2:5-6). There are many evils, apart from sexual ones, which may

* Crofters evicted in Sutherland in 1845 took refuge in the small church at Croich. One scratched on the church window "The wicked generation".

or may not have obvious consequences in this life. Paul mentions several: envy, strife, deceit, slander, arrogance, heartlessness, ruthlessness (Romans 1:29-31). It is people who do such things as these, says Paul, who deserve to die (Romans 1:32). Is any one of us guiltless of some of these? It seems to me, therefore, that to use Aids as an illustration of God's judgment is unwise. There are many ways in which an ungodly life can have bad results. Aids is only one. If we are all affected by evil and in need of forgiveness, to look down on Aids victims is uncomfortably close to being like the Pharisee who looked down on the tax collector and thanked God that he was not like other men! It nevertheless remains true that if people adhered to Christian standards of morality, chastity before marriage and fidelity within, the Aids problem would not exist.

A Grim Prospect

What will the next few decades bring? Statistics are not reassuring, and it seems likely that we will all know friends or colleagues cut down by this disease. It is tempting, but unwise, to ignore the issue and hope that if we shut our eyes it will go away. The disruption of family life, the death of young people, the inevitable fear if the worst predictions come true, will require all the help, sympathy and care we can offer.

When death comes close, people are inclined to think more deeply about the meaning of life. It is quite probable that we will be approached by people, young people, in despair because of their plight and looking for help. How will we react? We won't be able to offer a lot in terms of this life. We should, though, be able to offer sympathy, understanding, and practical help. We should, too, be able to offer hope of a new life in the Kingdom of God. Aids remains as a destructive disease that is to be treated and, if possible, overcome. It would be wrong to suggest that the man born blind in John 9 was deliberately made like this by God so that Jesus could demonstrate God's power of healing. It is also wrong, I believe, to think that God has specifically sent Aids either as a punishment or as a means to encourage repentance. As with other disasters and tragedies however, there is the opportunity to learn from the situation and to derive some good from what is evil.

A Medical Solution

There is no immediate prospect of a vaccine to prevent Aids, or a drug to cure those who have caught it. Even if one is found tomorrow, the number of people now doomed to an early death is very large. But if, or when, a cure is discovered, what then? If we regard Aids as a punishment from God, will we be displeased? Will God Himself feel thwarted? If we think so,

we will be following those who objected to anaesthesia on the grounds that suffering is intended by God. If we take this view, we should oppose all methods of healing as interference with God's creation! If, instead, we remember Jesus, preaching, teaching and healing, we will take a different view. If a medical solution comes, let us welcome it as we welcome the increased health we all enjoy in the 1980's as a result of better hygiene, better food, better medical services. And let us, in humility, help in whatever way we can those who are now afflicted by one of the potentially most catastrophic diseases of the twentieth century.

A 'CONCHIE' REMEMBERS

In 1985 the BBC asked Conscientious Objectors for accounts of their experiences in war-time. Jack Murrell responded and was asked for more details. This first extract was an answer to the questions "If you were opposed to war, what form did your opposition take? What brought about your decision to take this stance?"

I was four years old at the outbreak of World War One in 1914 and 29 at the start of World War Two in 1939. My education was limited to the three R's at the village Church of England school. My mother, not a churchgoer, thought it good for her twins, Vera and me, to attend Sunday School. I hated it. My favourite day was Monday because a whole week separated me from Sunday School. However I enjoyed being a choirboy for the singing, and I had friends there too; it was part of the minimal social life we had. My religious education only began when I was twenty-one. There was what seemed a chance meeting in a Labour Exchange. I asked the other young man what job he was looking for (I spoke first). We were both draughtsmen, he already with a degree, and I very much a beginner. It was 1931 and there were no jobs. We played a lot of tennis and talked about the new invention by Baird and about religion. In spite of Sunday School, I was evidently open to education generally, and I know well enough now that the mysteries of existence attracted my curiosity. My jobless companion was a Christadelphian. So I learned about the contents of the Bible and became a member of this post-Reformation sect. To them I owe my introduction to the elements of the Christian Faith, a necessary step on the spiritual journey which goes on - and on . . .

The Community held that the teaching of Jesus was such that the disciples could not take part in Military Service. They were united in this. In World War One with others, notably the Quakers, they objected to Military Service. One or two members were sent to the Tower of London. In 1916 a certificate of exemption was granted to those who satisfied tribunals of their genuine objection on religious grounds. There were those outside the religious groups who stood for freedom of conscience and supported objectors on that principle and won exemption from Military Service as early as 1916.

My own conscientious objection was intended to be a consistent expression of my Christian Faith. In fact I was a theoretical C O en route to becoming experienced. I did not have the maturity then, to realise that freedom of conscience was more important than unblemished discipleship, and that one must be free to make the Christian pilgrimage, with its failures and successes. To be under military orders was to render up that freedom - so I now believe. I am thankful for the early steps that led me to that freedom. The ethics of Jesus were simple enough: love of neighbour taken to the widest degree, even to "enemies"; to persecutors and slayers. I know now that my position was based not on love but on fear. I mean that I was more afraid of taking a position where I could not live with myself and my Christian friends than I was of being in a fractional minority in a nation at war. I had not experienced a real identity with all men so as to "love them as myself." That I know is a continuing quest. I was aware, as I have said, of the theoretical elements of Christ's teaching and this has remained in its simplicity as the judge both of my falling short or any gains there may have been in my discipleship.

I should define what opposition to war means to me as a C O. It means that I stand for the application of the Christian way of life; that as taught and lived by Christ - "When the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us".. I have to follow it as best I can for myself, but not independently of human society. The witness of a member of the body of Christ has to be made in the world of mankind in a similar way to the original witness made by the Head of the body, Christ himself. If that witness is not made, then there is no follow-on of the "light that came into the world" and men would walk in relative darkness in this Gentile age as they did when the light first shined "and the darkness comprehended it not." Christians have the responsibility passed to them of reaching for the ideal and calling others to freely follow. The "Light of the world" was of such a nature as to reveal good of the highest order. Whether the light was accepted or rejected, and because "it lighteth every man" it would be the judge of what was good or evil.

The word "Pacifist" would not apply to me in the sense that it is used generally. I will explain why. It would not be part of my Christian witness to propose a "pacifist" political policy for my countrymen. The mere proposal of such a policy would not, in the way such policies have been advocated in the past, call upon men to first adopt the whole discipleship of Christ. "Christian Pacifism" is a confusion when offered as a policy to the nation who are not committed to Christ in the full sense. Christian Pacifism cannot be worn like a uniform or added as a banner to some political theory; it has to start within. Whoever invented the slogan "There is no way to peace, peace is the way" has expressed the Christian position with memorable brevity.

JOHN WEAVING - AN APPRECIATION

John Weaving has given up the editorial chair, and all the other work involved in producing this magazine, after fifteen years - longer than the tenure of all his predecessors put together. Most of that other work can be demanding, monotonous and frustrating and there is more of it, even for a small magazine appearing only two or three times a year, than appears on the surface.

Readers and writers therefore owe a considerable debt of gratitude to John for preserving this forum where unusual or unorthodox ideas can be put forward for consideration and discussion on their merits, without automatically attracting the censure that they so often arouse. Readers and writers? It would be myopic to pretend that 'Endeavour' exists only for the benefit of the readers. Amateur operatic societies like to think that what they are doing is solely for the amusement of their audiences, but the truth is that the performers get at least as much satisfaction from what they are doing as does the audience. So too 'Endeavour' must benefit the writers as well as - we hope - the readers. Even though there may have to be some initial arm-twisting to get people to write, when the writing is undertaken there is surely satisfaction and privilege in being able to put one's ideas before informed minds for consideration.

John has done his share of writing but in his case we suspect it may often have been because commissioned contributions did not arrive in time. We hope he will continue now that the pressure of writing to order has disappeared. And if gnosticism should seem a trifle esoteric, it should be recorded that at least one reader experienced great satisfaction when his bookshop, after prodigious efforts, put a copy of the Nag Hammar'i codices in his hands.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS - ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

In this series Gerald Dearden examines some of the foundations of Christian faith about which the evidence is comparatively slender. He is sure that honest appraisal strengthens true faith.

Scores of books in many languages have been written over the centuries to portray (so their titles claim) the life of Jesus Christ but when we have read a sample of them we may well reflect on how little, rather than how much, we know about Jesus in the biographical sense. Virtually our only reliable source of information is the Bible - mainly, of course, the four gospels - because direct secular references are slight. It is true that parts of the Gnostic gospels, more of which have come to light with the discovery of the Nag Hammadi papyri in Egypt in 1945, do make some reference to Jesus and his teaching. However, since these writings were discredited by the early church it is unwise to claim authenticity for them, except perhaps where they duplicate what already appears in the New Testament. Although the theologian Jerome, writing in about 400 AD, said that there might be "gold in the mud of the apocryphal gospels" the identifying of the gold is no easy matter.

If we seek contemporary, or at least very early, secular historical references to Jesus all we find are a few brief allusions, largely from hostile witnesses such as Pliny the Younger, Tacitus, Suetonius and Josephus. There are also some references in early Rabbinical sources such as the Babylonian Talmud. In about 112 AD, Pliny the Younger wrote a letter to the Emperor Trajan in which he referred to Christians who "followed a degraded and extravagant superstition" and who "sang hymns to Christ as to a God." About three years later Tacitus wrote in his Annals about Christians whose founder was a criminal who had been executed by Pontius Pilate but whose death had not stopped the growth of the movement. Suetonius when writing about the Emperor Claudius said that the latter "banished from Rome the Jews who were making an incessant uproar at the instigation of Chrestus." This may or may not be an allusion to Christ. A more detailed statement appeared in Chapter XVIII of Josephus' Antiquities, written about AD 95 but much, if not all,



of this oft-quoted passage was almost certainly an interpolation by later Christian scribes. Josephus was a fierce opponent of Christianity and would hardly have written the following himself, speaking of - "one Jesus, a wise man if at least a man he may be called . . . He was a great worker of miracles and a teacher of those who were curious and desirous to learn the truth and he had a great many followers, both Jews and Gentiles. This was the Christ that was accused by the princes and great men of our nation. Pilate delivered him up to the cross and, all this notwithstanding, those that loved him at first did not forsake him. He was seen alive again the third day after his crucifixion as had been foretold by several prophets; with other wonders that he wrought; and there are a sort of people to this day that bear the name of Christians as owning Him for their Head."

As a final non-scriptural reference to Christ we can extract the following from the Babylonian Talmud - "They hanged Jesus of Nazareth on the eve of the Passover because he practised sorcery and was leading Israel astray."

The New Testament

Interesting though these external sources may be, they do little more than supply strong evidence that a religious leader called Christ did live, was executed and had a subsequent following. For anything more explicit we have to turn to the New Testament but when we look there what do we find? Certainly not a biography. We discover little or nothing about Jesus' childhood and youth or his home background. We learn nothing about his physical appearance. The nature of his daily work and his education are matters for conjecture and speculation. Apart from the brief glimpse of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple (recorded only in Luke) we have no definite picture of our Lord during the first thirty years of his life. Of the millions of words he must have spoken during those years we know less than twenty - "What made you search? Did you not know that I was bound to be in my Father's house? (Luke 2:49 *). This prompts our first group of unanswered (and perhaps unanswerable) questions. Did the young Jesus indulge in light-hearted, casual or humorous conversations with family or friends or did everything he said reflect in some way his divine origin and mission? When and how did Jesus learn that God, not Joseph, was his Father. Did he receive a series of dreams, visions or other forms of divine revelation when he was a child? What precisely did Jesus mean when, later in life, he declared "In all that I say, I have been taught by my Father (John 8:28) or "The Son does only what he sees the Father doing: for the Father loves the Son and shows him all his works?(John 5:19-20).

*Quotations are from the New English Bible

As we read the Biblical Testimony about Jesus we have to admit that we know hardly anything about ninety per cent of the period of his life on earth. What sorts of conversations did he have with members of his family? We have no record of anything he said individually to Joseph and (more surprising still) we know of less than twenty words that he spoke to his mother in two short sentences on two very different occasions. First, at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, he said in words which sound like a rebuke, "Your concern, mother, is not mine. My hour has not yet come." (John 2:4). Secondly, on the cross, pointing out his mother to the apostle John, he said to her simply, "Mother, there is your son" (John 19:26). Then, of all the countless conversations he must have had with his brothers James, Joses, Judas and Simon only one is recorded (John 7:6-9) "The right time for me has not yet come, but any time is right for you. The world cannot hate you; but it hates me for exposing the wickedness of its ways. Go to the festival yourselves, I am not going up to this festival because the right time for me has not yet come." We know that these brothers were antagonistic to Jesus during his ministry and until their conversion, presumably after the resurrection, but we can only guess at Jesus' relationship with his brothers and sisters during the first thirty years of life, or at what types of conversation he had with them.

"There is much else that Jesus did"

Even when we turn to the ministry itself, it is not possible to build up anything approaching a full chronological picture of what Jesus did and said during those three years or so. Just to give an indication of the gaps in our knowledge, perhaps I could refer to an analysis, recently completed, of the recorded words of Jesus. Taking all his sayings in the four gospels together and selecting the longest version of his words when they appear in more than one gospel, we find that the total of Jesus' recorded words is about 30,000. At normal conversational speed all of them could be uttered in three hours. Furthermore nearly a third of all Jesus' recorded words were spoken in the one week prior to the crucifixion. He must have said many things to his disciples, to the crowds, to the Pharisees and Sadducees and to his family, of which we know nothing and this prompts another unanswered question. Are the recorded words of Jesus which have been providentially preserved for our benefit a summary of what he actually said or are they a verbatim account? For example, did the Sermon on the Mount take only a quarter-of-an-hour or twenty minutes to deliver? - that is all that it would take as it stands in Matthew's gospel. And what other equally compelling sermons did our Master preach, of which no record has survived? After all, in introducing his gospel, Luke did say that "Many writers have undertaken to draw up an account of the events that have happened among us, following the traditions handed down to us by the

original eyewitnesses and servants of the Gospel." What happened to these "many writers" and how much more would they have told us about the life and work of Jesus Christ than we derive from surviving sources? Perhaps this seems an idle question but it should not be forgotten that John at the end of his gospel wrote "There is much else that Jesus did. If it were all to be recorded in detail, I suppose the whole world could not hold the books that would be written." This of course is hyperbole but it does underline the fact that we know comparatively little about the life of Jesus and that there are a multitude of unanswered questions to which we would love to know the answers.

One great act of trust and faith that is required of every Christian is to believe that what we do know of the words and work of Jesus does constitute a truly representative sample of all that he said and did. To put it another way, it is a vital act of faith to accept that enough is revealed to enlighten Christ's followers through all ages in the way of salvation which he opened and exemplified. Doubtless there were secret explanations and admonitions that Jesus gave to his closest disciples and which have been largely hidden from subsequent generations. This seems apparent from two passages in the fourth chapter of Mark's gospel. In the first, Jesus says to his disciples, "To you the secret of the kingdom of God has been given but to those who are outside everything comes by way of parables." (v 11) In the second we are told, "With many such parables he would give them his message, so far as they were able to receive it. He never spoke to them except in parables; but privately to his disciples he explained everything." (v 33-34) We remember that Jesus' close disciples were also promised that when they bore witness to their Master, the words they were to speak would be given them by the Holy Spirit. The New Testament affords plenty of examples of such inspired declarations by some of the apostles, but we still know only a little of what Jesus said to them privately when he was alone with them.

Consider for example the wealth of private teaching, exhortation and advice given to the eleven apostles in the upper-room after Judas left them, and recorded by John in the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of his gospel. Incidentally, there are more than 2,000 of Jesus' words here (one fifteenth part of all his recorded words), spoken on one brief but poignant occasion just before Gethsemane. There must have been many previous occasions when Jesus was alone with his small group of chosen disciples and when he revealed to them some of the mysteries of the kingdom and of the Father's eternal purpose. It is true that we are given glimpses of a few episodes, especially when the disciples asked him secretly to explain parables or to elucidate

other testimony but those incidents must be only a tiny fraction of the whole.

Why should this be? Perhaps one answer lies in the fundamental intention behind the original production of the gospels. At first, the infant churches had no New Testament as such, nor had they any cohesive organisation or communication systems. Some of them would have possessed and treasured one or more of the letters of Paul and perhaps a collection of the best-known sayings of Jesus. What they needed for further guidance towards understanding and unity was knowledge of the essence of of Jesus' teaching and the assurance that his sacrificial crucifixion was followed by his miraculous resurrection to immortality as Israel's Messiah. John revealed the essential nature of the gospels when he wrote "Those [sayings] here written have been recorded in order that you may hold the faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this faith you may possess life by his name." (John 20:31)

Overhearing a Conversation

Although this message applies to Christians in all ages, the gospels and the epistles were written primarily for the young churches of the first century, whose spiritual needs were met by the very nature and content of those inspired writings. In this context there is an interesting passage in a book entitled "How to understand the gospels" by Anthony Deane who wrote, "In the first years of Christianity there would be no need for a detailed account of our Lord's ministry. For one thing, vivid memories could be obtained in talk with those who had been eye-witnesses of his work. When Christians came together, one or another would pass on the teaching he himself had heard." Again, in a much more recent work entitled "Something Overheard", written in 1977 by Anthony Harvey, we read this about the evangelists - "The writers and their readers are conversing about matters they both understand, but which they have not made clear to us. They do not tell us their agenda, their problems or their pre-suppositions. It is only from hints and asides that we can tell what was going on and why they said the things they did. We have to pick up these hints in order to catch the full import of what they are saying."

Both these authors highlighted important features of the gospels which help to explain why there will always be the major unanswered question, "How much more did Jesus say than what is revealed in scripture?" There is also a related question, "Are the words in the gospels a paraphrase, précis or summary of what Jesus said or do they represent his teaching

verbatim?" This query is not without importance in another context. If scholars are right in saying that Jesus preached to the people in Aramaic, the language of the common people of Palestine in his day, how difficult was it for the gospel writers to translate Aramaic into Greek? and when, in turn, the Greek was translated into English how far could the purity of the original meaning be preserved? The fact is that unless we believe that divine oversight and guidance influenced and determined the eventual content of the scriptures as we have them, then there is every reason to doubt our ability to defend the accuracy of the wording of the modern gospel message against the criticisms and attacks of agnostics.

Faith does need to be child-like; and modern Christians do need to take comfort from their Master's prayer, "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and wise and revealing them to the simple. Yes, Father, such was thy choice." (Luke 10:21) And what is the essence of this revelation? Perhaps it can be expressed in this way - while there are too many unanswered questions for us to be able to write a biography of Jesus, or even a full chronology of his ministry, nevertheless the fundamentals of the gospel message are clear and the basis of Christian faith is known although much of the detail will remain unknown until the promised day when God's truth is revealed in its fulness.

CHRISTADELPHIAN SUMMER SCHOOL 1987

17-20th July, College of the Ascension, Birmingham

Main sessions planned for this year are:

Acts of the Apostles (led by Fred Barling)

The Atonement (led by Ron Coleman)

Archaeology & The Bible (led by Wilfred Lambert)

Other sessions are planned on The Use of Sisters in the Ecclesia, The Problem of Violence in the Old Testament, Paul's Travels in Asia Minor, etc.

Join us for a helpful and enjoyable weekend.

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JESUS, SON OF MAN, SON OF GOD

3. CRITICS OF THE CREED

Why did the classic doctrine of the incarnation, lynch-pin of Trinitarianism, remain so long unchallenged, and why is it now being criticised? Ron Coleman attempts an answer.

In the last article we ended with a query. Why should the doctrine of the incarnation, finally formulated in A D 451 at Chalcedon, have proved so enduring? It was born amidst great controversy, it was a compromise expressed in language then difficult to understand and now almost incomprehensible. Insofar as it can be understood it often seems to be self-contradictory. And yet it has, for nearly a millennium and a half, been venerated as though it were part of scripture itself.

There are at least three reasons. That it was a compromise is the first. For many years afterwards there was a disinclination to open the door again to the bitter controversies that had ushered it in, especially as its greatest opponents, the Nestorians (who believed that Jesus had two separate natures, joined only tenuously), were excommunicated and formed a church of their own, the remnants of which still exist today. Secondly, the church became increasingly intolerant of dissent and behaved like twentieth century Marxist governments who allow no independent thought. Thirdly, the opportunity for Bible study and for the propagation of independent opinion was very limited. Before the Reformation there were very few Bibles in the vernacular languages and before the invention of printing new ideas could not be disseminated widely. Many of the few who were capable of thinking for themselves were, in effect, bribed not to by the rich livings provided by the church

To these three we can add a fourth. As J A T Robinson says of the formula of Chalcedon in "The Human Face of God", there was a bias in favour of the divinity over against the humanity. "Christ may have had two equal natures (even though in practice one was more equal than the other) but the person who 'had' these natures was firmly on one side of the line. He was divine." But the divinity of Christ was an essential part of the atonement. To question that divinity in any way might well have seemed to be imperilling the questioner's salvation.

It was this fourth reason which may well have preserved the doctrine a thousand years later when much of the strength of the other three was weakened by the surge of new knowledge in the Renaissance, by the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages and by the power of the printing press. Thus it was that the doctrines of the incarnation and of the Trinity mostly went unquestioned when the great upset of the Reformation took place.

The Socinians

There were many divisions among the Reformers but there was one thing that they had in common. They were as adept at persecuting those who differed from their various individual beliefs as Rome had been. For a time however, uniquely in Europe, there was religious freedom in Poland. There the church of the "Polish Brethren", which denied the literal pre-existence of Jesus, attracted an Italian, Fausto Sozzini, who had wandered round Europe seeking an opportunity to teach his anti-Trinitarian beliefs. He settled in Poland, became an adherent of the church of the Brethren, changed his name to Faustus Socinus, and became a powerful influence on its thought and belief. But it was not long before the temporary freedom in Poland disappeared and the followers of Socinus were scattered.

Many of them came to England, and it was in England, and later in America, that Socinian ideas persisted. It seems likely that Dr Thomas drew the beliefs which later constituted the Christadelphian Christology from this source. But the later history provided another illustration of the inbuilt instability of doctrines of the person of Christ. The ostensible balance of the divine and human in the Chalcedon creed tended to topple over in the direction of the divinity. In Socinianism it went in the opposite direction and eventually the humanity ousted the divinity. Socinian thought in England and America gave rise to Unitarianism. Originally Bible-based, arguing its case on its interpretation of the New Testament texts, it changed in the first part of the nineteenth century to become largely a movement "with no set creed . . . [believing] in the goodness of man and the plurality of divine revelation."

The Enlightenment

It was not until this present century that any serious questioning of the doctrine of the incarnation arose within mainstream Christianity, although the seeds of that questioning had been sown in the eighteenth century by the Enlightenment. This was the philosophic movement which stressed the importance of reason and led ultimately to our modern world, so utterly different from anything which had gone before. The Enlightenment

did produce an immediate challenge to orthodox doctrine, but it came from intellectuals who were either on the periphery of, or outside the ranks of believers - they were intellectuals who rejected the traditional beliefs in the name of reason. But in due course the ideas of the Enlightenment led eventually to the rise of Biblical criticism and critics of the New Testament argued that the doctrine of the incarnation was not to be found in it. The doctrine, it was argued, was something that had arisen in the second and subsequent centuries under the influence of pagan ideas of gods coming to the earth, or Judaistic beliefs about intermediate beings which had found expression in the gospel of John written, it was claimed, in the second century. For many years such views were expressed only by a minority of theologians and were rejected indignantly by the majority of believers. Eventually however this "liberalism" wrought a change in the climate of opinion so that reasoned questioning of this fundamental belief from within the church became possible. As a result there has been more controversy over the doctrine of the incarnation within the last forty years than had occurred since the fifth century. More books have probably been written on the subject within this period than in the whole of previous Christian history.

Critics of Chalcedon

The general trend of recent discussion has been to stress the humanity of Jesus as opposed to his divinity, without going so far as modern Unitarianism. D M Baillie was one of the first to put this forward in his book "God was in Christ" (1948) in which he said:

No more docetism . . . That is the first factor in the distinctive situation of Christianity today.

"Docetism" is the belief that Jesus only seemed to be a man. It is well expressed in the line from the hymn "Hark the herald angels sing", "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see." John Knox took it a stage further in "The Humanity and Divinity of Christ" (1967):

If then we insist on having a story which can also be taken as a statement of fact . . . we are restricted to adoptionism and docetism. We can have the humanity [of Jesus] without the pre-existence and we can have the pre-existence without the humanity. There is absolutely no way of having both.

Knox, of course, did not want to have either; he regarded the story not as a statement of fact but as a myth.

Theologians say that "myth" is a slippery word. This indicates that it has several meanings and that it is often difficult to know which particular one is intended. Myths were originally stories about supernatural beings

of long-ago, usually told to explain some natural phenomenon ('the devil's punchbowl') or social custom. When the word was applied to the Bible it underwent a change; although the events in the story were thought not to have happened it was a story which conveyed an underlying truth, something like the way an allegory does. But in ordinary speech today a myth is merely something that is mistaken or a delusion. The authors of "The Myth of God Incarnate" (Ed John Hick. 1977) used this ambiguity in order to shock, no doubt with the object of increasing the sales of the book. What they meant was that they did not believe that the incarnation was literally true but that the account of it nevertheless conveyed a valuable underlying truth - although they were rather imprecise as to what that truth was. It was followed in the same year by "The Truth of God Incarnate" (Ed Michael Green), a rebuttal, and then by a composite volume "Incarnation and Myth" (Ed Michael Goulder 1979) in which the two sides continued the argument. "The Myth of God Incarnate" and "The Truth of God Incarnate" were both reviewed extensively by Sheila Crawford in "Endeavour" Nos 56-58. John Weaving similarly reviewed "Incarnation and Myth" in Nos 60 and 61.

"The Myth" produced a great stir, probably more because of its provocative title than its content, most of which had been published before. It was a paradoxical situation so far as we were concerned. Those whose views on Scripture were closer to ours were defending views that we would reject, whilst the liberals and humanists were developing arguments that we might well have put ourselves. Thus Don Cupitt in "Incarnation and Myth";

The difficulties, both of logic and exegesis, in the traditional doctrine seem to me to be overwhelming. People will say, What will you put in its place?; and my answer is, What else but the primitive faith preserved in the New Testament?

And, on the other hand, Brian Hebblethwaite in "The Truth of God Incarnate":

The real issue today is whether or not we can believe in Christianity. Those who reject the Formula of Chalcedon are, almost without exception, men who have answered that question for themselves in the negative.

In other words, those who reject Chalcedon are not Christians.

The situation was rather like that in the last war when circumstances forced British and Russians to fight on the same side. Everything the Russians stood for was alien to the British cause except their attack

on the Germans; in the same way everything the "Myth" theologians stood for was alien to Christadelphian faith except their criticism of the orthodox doctrine of the incarnation.

Criticism from more conservative quarters

A significant recent development has been the spread of criticism from the radical wing to some middle-of-the road theologians. There is a useful survey of the present position in "The present-day Christological debate" (1984) by Klaas Runia. In the first chapter he says:

In recent years, however, we observe the remarkable fact that the ancient dogma is opposed by people who up till now were never regarded as liberal: Many contemporary theologians, from both orthodox and Roman Catholic backgrounds are of the opinion that the Christology of the ancient creeds is no longer tenable.

This charge is made the more specific by the headings of two further chapters in the book; "Chalcedon abandoned: Roman Catholic theologians" and "Chalcedon abandoned: Protestant theologians."

Two of the Protestant theologians cited by Runia deserve special attention because of their exhaustive analysis of New Testament teaching - J A T Robinson and J D G Dunn. Robinson may seem an unlikely candidate; after all he was the author of "Honest to God" (reviewed by Ralph Lovelock in "Endeavour" No 8 (1963)). Robinson however had two sides, one of them quite conservative. The Bampton lectures that he did not live to deliver have been published under the title "The Priority of John" (1985). In them he opposes the general view of scholars that the gospel was a work of pious fiction written at the close of the first century or later. In "The Human Face of God" (1973) he argued strongly that the pre-existence passages in John should not be read literally but metaphorically. The same is true for Paul and Hebrews he says, and concludes:

There is no doubt that either in New Testament times or soon afterwards the transition from one set of presuppositions to another did take place. And thereby Christian doctrine became committed to an understanding of incarnation that involved the veiling in flesh of a heavenly being.

J D G Dunn writes similarly in "Christology in the Making" (1980) but with even greater scholarship and penetration. He concludes that (with the sole exception of John 1:14) there is no statement of the doctrine of the incarnation in the New Testament. Christ is not depicted there as a divine being who had pre-existed with God, but rather as the climactic embodiment of God's power and purpose.

The pre-existent Word is not identified with some heavenly redeemer figure, but rather with God's creative wisdom, God's redemptive purpose and God's revelatory word expressed in a final way.

Similar reservations about the traditional doctrine are expressed by Anthony and Richard Hanson in "Reasonable Belief" (1981) and Anthony Hanson in "The Image of the Invisible God" (1982). (Neither of these books are mentioned by Klaas Runia). In "Reasonable Belief" the following charges are considered:

The Chalcedonian account of Jesus does not tally with the New Testament account. [Its] picture of the God-man is not really compatible with full humanity. In the Chalcedonian theology the relation of the humanity to the divinity cannot be satisfactorily explained.

After discussion of the arguments for and against these propositions the authors conclude:

It will be plain from the way in which we have criticised the various defenders of the Chalcedonian theology that we do not believe that an adequate defence has been worked out in modern times.

It is clear therefore that the belief that Jesus pre-existed in heaven as the second person of the Trinity is under attack from two quarters. The first argues that if it is true Jesus could not have been truly man. The second, quite independently, maintains that it is incorrect to read the pre-existence passages literally. They are metaphors. In face of this, why is the historic belief maintained so strongly and so fiercely as it is? Partly, no doubt, out of respect for tradition. But mainly I suspect because the alternative is adoptionism. No matter how persuasively the attackers of Chalcedon argue that Jesus was a man so open to God, so completely obedient to him, so wholly the vehicle of his grace that in him the Word was fully present, the question "but how?" will not go away. This objection was the Achilles heel of the old adoptionist explanation and this neo-adoptionism cannot escape it either.

Where does this leave us? It is not sufficient for us merely to repeat that Jesus was the Son of God, and leave it at that. If we do we are no further forward than we were at the beginning. The great Ecumenical Councils wrestled inconclusively with this problem, hampered and bemused as they were with their vague ideas of human physiology and psychology. We today know incomparably more than they did. Would it be hubris to think that this knowledge can help us? I think not, and in a final article will attempt to say how.

THROUGH A GLASS, DARKLY?

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John Maycock

Windows on Science and Faith

By Tim Hawthorne

Inter-Varsity Press 1986 £2.75

The ever-increasing body of scientific knowledge is difficult to keep up with, even for those of us trained (originally) in science. Contributions on the continuing dialogue between the book of God and the 'book' of science are always welcome. Tim Hawthorne's has the benefit of being short: 108 pages of text, including diagrams, five of which are whole-page cartoons.

The style is easy to read and an attempt is made to include a leavening of humour. The cartoons are good: my favourite depicts two operators before their bank of computers. The legend beneath reads: "It's not working because it claims it can think and has decided not to." In the text the humour does not always work so well. The jibe: "Even atheists have to believe in something!" is likely to put some people off reading the book, which is a pity.

Chapters are mostly four to six pages in length but nevertheless convey a flavour of the relationship between faith and science. Take the four page treatment of "The early chapters of Genesis" as an example. The author admits that he can only present a personal view but it is based on a belief in the Bible as infallible, when interpreted correctly. He suggests, then, that Genesis may give less support to the single original pair view "than the creationists admit". His impression of Genesis 4:14-16 is that the region (around Eden) was quite well populated. The argument is reminiscent of that in Ralph Lovelock's St Bride's notes on the early chapters of Genesis. He recognises this implies that Adam is the 'federal' head of humanity (Romans 5) and he quotes, as an alternative view, a professor of genetics who considers that homo sapiens passed through a population bottleneck in relatively recent times, and is prepared to believe that God placed his image in just two pre-human creatures, who became Adam and Eve.

Believing the evidence points to a much older earth than Archbishop Ussher's 4004 years he says that "most scholars accept the six days of Genesis as six long spans of time". There must be some scholars

who hold alternative views of which the best two are that the periods are days of revelation, or they reflect the divine decrees. A formal statement of these alternatives can be found in Alan Hayward's books mentioned below. This omission does not detract from the valid portrayal of different viewpoints and a way, or ways, of believing the Bible and retaining a respect for scientific knowledge. Virtually all the chapters include what I would call a Christian perspective.

Another touchstone for potential readers is the position adopted on evolution. Mr Hawthorne asks, as very few writers on the subject do, whether we can put a better theory in its (evolution's) place? Considering the scientific facts only, his answer is "probably no". He is not keen on Alan Hayward's view of many successive creative acts of God (expressed in his book "God Is - A scientist shows why it makes sense to believe in God").

It cannot, he says, be proved or disproved since it takes us outside science. I certainly agree with his avoidance of the 'God of the gaps' i.e. seeing the action of God only where we cannot find an adequate scientific explanation. Anti-evolution books are included in 'further reading' but so is "Darwinism Defended" by the non-Christian Michael Ruse. In between, Alan Hayward's "Creation and Evolution: the Facts and the Fallacies" is included as "a more moderate criticism of evolutionary theory".

The word "windows" in the title of the book is quite a reasonable description provided you remember the windows are rather small. The book does, though, cover many of the major issues, including molecular biology, and could well introduce many to the subject who would not otherwise tackle it.

"It is not for nothing that intimate relationships have usually been hedged with conventions, ceremonies and taboos. They involve dangerous moments of exposure, both physically and psychologically . . . The relegation of modesty is one of the tell-tale signs of what has been happening. Many people, if asked, would spontaneously think of it as a rather old-fashioned virtue. Yet some of the things that go with modesty - privacy, space to be oneself, the right not to be forced into intimacy - can be important, not least for the growing child. Modesty, understood in these terms, is part of the self-restraint that lets other people be themselves." Dr John Habgood, Archbishop of York, in The Times, 13 February 1987.

INSPIRATION AND THE EVANGELICALS

Wilfred Lambert

Biblical Inspiration

By I. Howard Marshall

Hodder and Stoughton 1982 £3.95

The subject of this paperback is important for all Christians, but especially to Protestants, since for them the whole message of Christianity comes through the Bible. The author, Dean of the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Aberdeen at the time of writing, is an Evangelical, conservative by general Protestant standards, but not extreme.

After an introduction setting out the problem by citing various opinions and pointing to difficulties contained in them, there are six chapters. The first surveys the evidence of Biblical testimony on the topic: how far the various books of the Bible claim to be derived from God. The second discusses the meaning of inspiration, showing the difficulties of the dictation and other theories, finally giving the author's preferred explanation. Chapter 3 deals with the ideas of truth and accuracy of Scripture ("the results of inspiration"), Chapter 4 with the impact of Biblical criticism or Bible study on concepts of inspiration. The fifth considers how the meaning of the Bible elicited by study can be made relevant for the modern world. The final chapter sums up the arguments presented and in conclusion deals with the authority of Scripture.

While no fundamentally new ideas are presented, a useful collection of material is offered, which will certainly help most people interested to formulate their own opinions. Though firmly in the Evangelical Protestant tradition, the author presents various opinions fairly. His sentences are lucid and easily followed, but the underlying thought does not come over so clearly, despite various summaries at more than one point. This is partly due to the presentation (see below), but may also result from the author's basis for accepting the inspiration of the Bible. To him acceptance is an act of faith. This is certainly correct, but it is no ground for neglecting an intellectual defence of that faith. A scientist puts his faith in certain theories, but he works from facts in formulating the theories so that the presentation of a scientific



theory can be lucid and cogent even if wrong. When the basis of Christian faith is mainly an emotional response its associated logic is less cogent. It is no criticism of this book that it does not present a rational defence of Christian faith: it did not set out to do this. But, as it seems to the reviewer, the author shares the common modern reluctance of Christians to promote an intellectual defence of their faith, which means that discussions of inspiration are less clearly focussed than they might be.

The author's own view of inspiration provides a good example of the way in which the presentation adopted of views which are eminently intelligible and reasonable in themselves does not help their comprehension. The author follows J.I. Packer's explanation of inspiration as resulting from the "concurative action" of the Spirit of God in the composition of the Bible' (pp 40ff). Since "concurative" is not to be found in most English dictionaries; it would surely have been best to define the term, but instead we are offered a detailed and at points obscure analogy. "God's creation and providence in the universe," we are told, can be described on two levels. On the one hand there is natural cause and effect as studied by scientists, which Christians may accept. On the other hand "we can explain creation as the act of God and we can also postulate his continuing providential care of the earth." This, it is argued, is "looking at the same phenomena from two different points of view." But scientific cause and effect can only explain how the created universe continues. So far there are only theories about ultimate origins, but no solid evidence to support them. Christian faith in contrast is as much concerned with why as with how the universe was created, and offers explanations of some events in human history. Thus only providence in the universe, but not creation, can be put together with science as "looking at the same phenomena from two different points of view."

The reviewer cannot accept the further point that on the same two levels "we have to use two different sorts of language, religious language and scientific language, and we cannot bring them together in a single description of creation" (p 42), because science has not yet described or explained creation. Similarly difficult is the statement on p 42 that "as finite human beings we cannot in principle understand how the finite and the infinite are related to each other." Being finite we simply cannot understand the infinite, except when it has been reduced to the level of our finite minds and so is no longer truly infinite. And though it is true that much human language about God and his works is "metaphor and symbol", we have a technical term for God's 'creativity', namely "create",

a concept derived from the Hebrew verb bārā', and however little we may be able to explain its modus operandi, it is hardly metaphor or symbol.

The essential point of this protracted analogy is that the inspired writers did not simply sit down in a corner and allow God's spirit to work upon them, but that, as appropriate, they acted like uninspired writers. If historians, they collected historical data from existing sources. As thinkers they used their human minds to think out their ideas and to word their sentences. In framing ideas they drew on the languages, modes of thought and stores of knowledge of their own worlds. But in all this otherwise human activity God's spirit worked on a few selected individuals so that what they wrote was both their own works, but at the same time works inspired by God. This idea is capable of simple explanation, and if the analogy is considered helpful, it will need much more lucid presentation before it can contribute to this end.

A similar case occurs in Chapter 4, on Biblical criticism. The main points are both valid and pertinent. Christian believers should not be driven to reject anything with such a title simply because of the title. 'Criticism' in this sense means no more than study and forming judgments from it. Some scholars have indeed used Biblical criticism with the intention or effect of undermining Christian faith, but that is no ground for treating the topic as taboo. In fact only study makes the Bible yield its message, and unbelievers who use such study to further their cause should be met by equally well-informed and learned believers. Study as such is neutral. However, the presentation of this message is hardly helped by the introduction of the terms: the 'historical-critical' method (p 84: which is rejected) and the 'grammatico-historical' method (p 86: which is accepted). Further, the long diversion in the consideration of the phrase Maran atha, while very interesting in providing something about the nature of inspiration which was not dealt with in its proper place in one of the preceding chapters, somewhat disrupts the orderly presentation of the author's ideas.

These difficulties of the book must not be allowed to obscure the many clear points made. Chapter 5, on interpreting the Bible, argues that the important thing is first to understand the various books in their original contexts. If we immediately ask what they mean to us in our age, we may easily misinterpret them. Once the message to the original audiences has been grasped we are in a position to begin to apply it in the often different circumstances of our own world.

All in all this is a useful work for any one wanting to have some reasonable thoughts on this subject brought to his attention, even if it remains a little uninspired.