
THE

Endeavour

MAGAZINE



DECEMBER 1987

No 77

THE ENDEAVOUR MAGAZINE
For Christian Thought and Action

December 1987

No 77

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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.

Subscription: £2 for three issues. Correspondence, articles and subscriptions should be sent to The Endeavour Magazine, 13 Cheslefield, Portishead, Avon, BS20 8JA

The Editor's Page

Art is a fundamental need of the human spirit. As soon as man had attained the bare necessities of life - food, drink, clothes and shelter - he began to show himself an artist, as the pictures on the walls of ancient caves testify. Poetry goes back to the beginning of civilisation too, and music and dancing are particularly associated with primitive peoples. The advance of civilisation and the growth of prosperity has not diminished the importance of art even in our age of material pleasures. But what should be the relationship between art and religion?

We must start from the fact that we find art in the Bible. In 2 Samuel 6 there is, perhaps a little surprisingly, the art of the dance - the dance that carried David away in wild abandon but made Michal despise him. In 1 Kings 6 we have an account of the art of the sculptor and carver adorning the most holy part of the temple. Much of the Old Testament is poetry which still speaks across the centuries to us - the eighth Psalm can move us more than the vastness of the universe described in a book of astronomy. Poetry is not so much in evidence in the New Testament but there is often great artistry in the prose, frequently unperceived by the ordinary reader, for example the sustained dramatic irony of the gospel of John. The prohibition of mimetic art in the Second Commandment meant that there was no painting in Old Testament days but music more than filled the gap. As C S Lewis says about the Israelites ("Reflections on the Psalms"): "Their fingers itch for the harp, . . . let's have a song, bring the tambourine, we're going to sing merrily and make a cheerful noise. Noise, you may well say. Mere music is not enough. Let everyone, even the benighted gentiles, clap their hands. Let us have clashing cymbals, not only well-tuned, but loud".

Why then should some Christians today feel that art is peripheral to religion, or perhaps even antipathetic? There is more than one reason but the most obvious one is the legacy of the Reformation and the Puritan movement. By the Middle Ages art had become closely associated with the Church in the western world - painting, sculpture and music were almost entirely religious. When the authority and doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church were rejected so too was its art - at least in England, Scotland and Geneva. For some time afterwards church music was confined to singing metrical Psalms, without benefit of choir, organ or singing in harmony. As regards the visual arts, although the actual destruction in England was instigated by Henry VIII, he was exploiting, for political ends, the revulsion of many of the ordinary people at the opulence of images and paintings in the churches.

The Puritan movement which grew out of this objected to all kinds of pleasure and enjoyment as evil and regarded the beauty of pictures or music as appealing to man's lower nature and not to his spiritual side. In this it was closer to Plato than to the Old Testament.

We must now try to describe art and say what it is. To many people art is entirely concerned with the expression of beauty. This however is

not the whole story. One has only to think of the way it sometimes expresses fear and horror (the putting out of Gloucester's eyes in 'King Lear') or sorrow and despair (Mahler's 'Kindertotenlieder'). And what is it that Handel adds to the words of Scripture in the chorus "Worthy is the Lamb" or Bach in the Sanctus of the B minor Mass? Feelings of exaltation and triumph at the sight of Christ in Majesty in the Handel; something of the terror of Isaiah's epiphany in the Bach. What are fear, horror, sorrow, despair, exaltation, triumph and terror? They are emotions. Art is to do with the whole range of emotions.

I believe that in reality art is one of the three divisions of all human spiritual expression. Firstly there is the realm of the intellect, of knowing, which finds its clearest expression in science. Then there is the realm of conscience and morality which finds its pinnacle in righteousness. The third division is the realm of imagination, of feeling, of emotion which finds its expression in works of art. But these three are not independent of one another. The place of imagination in science is a commonplace today. Morality has to be informed by knowledge. Art, in its turn, has to be governed by knowledge and morality. "Art for art's sake" is no defence for the prurient or the degrading. Paul's hymn to love in 1 Corinthians 13 is an example of the interdependence of the three. No matter how right conduct may seem, no matter how extensive our knowledge, both are worthless unless our emotions are right and we have love. Of course love is not just emotion but it is emotion which powers love most effectively.

Karl Barth once mused that the angels in heaven undoubtedly sang Bach carefully in public, but when they went home they sang Mozart for fun - and the dear Lord especially liked to listen to them then. Underlying this little bit of fantasy is the truth that if God had made a world in which there was no colour, or had made us so that we were unable to recognise the pitch of a note or the difference in timbre between flute and violin, there would have been no painting and no music. The fact that he has made the world as it is and given us the capacity to use his gifts means that we should glorify him by using these gifts, not merely in worship but in the whole of life.

Let a poet have the last word. In "Fra Lippo Lippi" Browning makes his artist-monk give us his philosophy of art, first of all rejecting the Puritan and Platonist objection:

Don't object, "His works
Are here already - Nature is complete:
Suppose you reproduce her - (which you can't)
There's no advantage! you must beat her, then."
For, don't you mark, we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted - better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that -
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out.

Ron Coleman

Truth and Salvation

*Bill Davison responds to our invitation
to discuss the nature of saving belief*

I was converted to the Christadelphian faith some 35 years ago. My parents then in their middle forties were lapsed Methodists, my father having become disillusioned with orthodox Christianity. He was a left-wing intellectual, and was convinced that the Church of England was the Tory party at prayer. Being a pacifist on political grounds, he could not accept the aggrandisement of war by the Church leaders.

My grandmothers, both exemplary characters, were members of the Salvation Army and the Wesleyan Church respectively. I was educated at Church of England schools, and was fairly well versed in the doctrines of the Trinity and the Immortality of the Soul. As a little boy, I used to pray to a grandfather, whom I had loved dearly, and who I sincerely believed had gone to Heaven when he died.

After the Second World War, horribly aware of the senseless killing and maiming of countless thousands of fine young men, I did the rounds of the various denominations - Roman Catholic, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, the Cliff Fellowship, seeking for "truth". Eventually, I met up with a delightful young Christadelphian girl, Linda Cowlshaw by name, who was bubbling over with her faith. She introduced me to her father, the late Robert Cowlshaw of Rugby meeting. He was a man of considerable intellect, following the Daily Bible Readings in his well-thumbed French and Russian Bibles. He also had more than a fair smattering of Hebrew and Greek.

Being myself a very ordinary mortal, struggling at the time to pass my accountancy examinations, I was simply clay in brother Robert's hands. He disposed of my final orthodox prop, the Immortality of the Soul, by making me turn up every passage in Young's Concordance where the word "soul" occurred, to prove its mortality! Shortly afterwards Baptism followed.

I only give all this background to show that I have a reasonably rounded experience of conflicting Christian beliefs and practices. But coming into the Christadelphian faith, as I did, to me it was "the truth". I had found the pearl of great price. I was a happy young man indeed. As an athlete of some standing, being a boxer, runner and footballer, all this went by the board, in the zeal which I had for my new found faith. Nothing, I thought could ever shake that!

When I was baptised, I had no idea there were divisions in Christadelphia, and it came as a great shock, to a one-year old convert, to come across ex-Christadelphian Frank Elston, leader of "The Master's Household" who considered that I was beyond the pale, belonging to the worldly mixed Temperance Hall Fellowship, whose members listened to the radio and read

newspapers! Inevitably he fell out with his son-in-law, William Butterfield, who formed his own fellowship, "The Remnant of Christ's Ecclesia", who forbade sisters to cut their hair, and made this a test of discipleship. I then followed the tortuous theological trail right back to "The Bereans", "The Dawn" and "The Suffolk Street" fellowships, studying as I went along the questions of "clean flesh", "divorce and remarriage", "resurrectional responsibility" and "inspiration". There was even the great controversy as to whether Dr Thomas smoked or not.

In all the argument and debate the theme which kept repeating itself, was that of the "One Body", that there is, and only can be, one true and apostolic Church; and that all the rest must be counterfeit. This, is, of course, the claim of the Roman Catholic Church, "proving" apostolic succession right back to the Apostle Peter. Therefore, it is the true Church of Christ, the true Faith, to any believing Catholic.

Robert Richards of Camberley, a considerable Bible student, and a dear friend of mine, came to the conclusion with me, that "faith" can be defined as a system of Doctrinal Truth and a Way of Life. The two are inseparable. Truth must be in the heart, as well as in the head. Having a grasp of academic truth is not sufficient, this belief must be put into practice. Faith without works, indeed, is dead.

The Christadelphian claim, is to possess this "truth", and I indeed personally believe that we have a knowledge of saving Bible truth, and if we live by it, then by the mercy and grace of The Lord God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, we shall enter into everlasting life. But that "we have the whole truth and nothing but the truth", I would beg to disagree. There could be, and probably are, Christ-centred communities throughout the world who are in the Way of salvation.

Being objective, there are things wrong in Christadelphia. We have become a well-educated, middle-class community, steeped in the trappings of materialism; and this prosperity has caused a marked spiritual decline, which I believe has driven away many of our young people. Further, on matters of doctrine and practice, we have largely ignored the New Testament teaching on the ethical working of the Holy Spirit, and we have relegated sisters into second-class members, by forbidding them to pray and read Holy Scripture in our assemblies. This is, of course, a personal viewpoint.

But having said that, there are many plus points in latter-day Christadelphia. We are a far more Caring Community that we have ever been, and we are not so condemnatory and negative in our preaching, being conscious of our own imperfections, and quite rightly so. We recognise that other communities, like the Evangelicals, put us to shame in their faith and zeal for Christ. This does not mean, of course, that we should leave this Faith to which we belong and, more importantly, to which we have been called, because we are lacking in dynamism and drive. We have to call for reformation, and this must start in our own personal lives. We must become more enthusiastic in our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and

talk to everyone with whom we come in contact, about the coming Kingdom of peace and everlasting joy.

Finally, we dare not say who will be in the Kingdom and who will not. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself will make that kind of decision when He returns, and we can happily leave the matter in His safe hands. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? Meanwhile, I believe that I have been called to the Christadelphian community, and here I am to stay and work to the best of my ability, upbuilt by the love of many brothers and sisters in Christ. Guided too by the Lord God's Holy Word; and led by the Lord Jesus Christ operating by the Spirit. May the Lord Jesus soon come, to put this poor world of sin and death right.

Bible Exhibitions

The National Bible Society of Scotland is celebrating 1988 as "The Year of the Bible" and churches are being encouraged to use the opportunity to promote the Bible. Several Bible Exhibitions are likely to be put on. Averil and Ian McHaffie ask what should we expect of a Bible Exhibition?

We can be reasonably certain that most people visiting a Bible exhibition are not themselves thoroughly acquainted with the Bible. In general, most people have only a sketchy knowledge of its contents. Imagine visiting an exhibition on the Koran or on the Guru Granth Sahib (the Sikh holy book). What sort of expectations would we have of an exhibition on those books? If we apply ourselves to that question, we might get some idea of the kind of Bible exhibition suitable for the needs of the general British public.

Here are some suggested guidelines. In visiting any exhibition, consider the extent to which these suggested criteria are followed.

The contents of the Bible

A first requirement will be to outline the contents of the Bible along with suitable explanation. Since the Bible is rather a long book, to do this is not easy. It is inevitable, therefore, that a summary is attempted and some selection made. This should be done in a balanced manner, highlighting the important sections but taking care not to distort.

The contents of the Bible are so varied that it might be best to divide the Bible into separate categories such as the following: History (Role of patriarchs, judges, prophets, early church); Lessons for Modern Life (poverty and riches, work, charity, home, race relations); Life of Jesus (teaching, preaching, healing, crucifixion, resurrection, return); Salvation (God's promises, death and eternal life, Jesus' life and death, the cross, hope for the future); Christian Life (worship, prayer, faith, hope, love); Creeeds and Controversies (Old Testament: Yahweh versus superstition and fertility gods; New Testament: Pharisees, Sadducees, Law versus faith and

freedom); How the Bible was Written and How It Came to Us (when written and by whom, formation of the Canon, Bible translations); One Bible, Many Churches (developments in church history, different approaches to tradition and Scripture, political/philosophical/psychological influences, ecumenical movement); How to Read the Bible (context both in the chapter and in the times when written, what did it mean then, what now? See for example the Lion "Handbook to the Bible" pages 58 & 59. This sort of diagram could usefully be enlarged to form a display panel in its own right.) An alternative would be to run separate exhibitions on each category.

One way round the problem of such variety is to have a wide range of publications available to see, to buy, or take free. The Lion series has some excellent titles. The publishers produce a 50p small sample of their "Handbook to the Bible", with a coupon at the end which invites the purchaser to get the full handbook at a reduced price.

When, where and why?

To understand the contents it is not only helpful but necessary to know when they were written, where and why. The original context often needs an explanation, since it is otherwise difficult to understand what was originally meant and what it means for today. For example, without an awareness that Palestine was part of the Roman Empire, it is not easy to understand why Pilate sentenced Jesus, or why Jesus said that if asked to go one mile his followers should go two. Without knowing something about the sacrifice of animals, it is not easy to understand comments on Christ's death, or the teaching of Romans 12 that we should offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. It is important to link ancient thinking with modern so as to make it clear that although the Bible is written in an ancient context, its message is relevant in ours.

Several interest levels

Exhibitions on any subject are best labelled for three levels of interest. Large signs give a general view, smaller ones give more detail, and smaller still can go into greater explanation. This means that someone walking round fast can get an overall picture, most visitors can absorb more detail without taking too long, while anyone who wishes to study the exhibition in depth will find enough detail for it to be worth while. Apart from a good range of literature, as already mentioned, it is desirable to have special leaflets and books for children and young people. Computer games and videos can also be appropriate if carefully chosen. There are some good cartoon versions of the Bible on video, and these both amuse and forcefully convey the point.

Denominational Bias

Any exhibition presented to the public as a Bible exhibition should aim to give a balanced and fair assessment of how the Bible is understood today. There are varying views on this, and care should be exercised by the organisers not to present a denominationally or doctrinally biased version. An exhibition on the Koran for example, should give the Shi'ite, Sunni and Ismailia understanding, fundamentalist and modern, not just one.

Similarly, a Bible exhibition should give some indication of the varied approaches in interpretation, Protestant and Catholic, fundamentalist and non-fundamentalist. It is, of course, quite in order for any group to promote via an exhibition their own particular understanding of the Bible. It is only fair and honest, however, that it should be clearly advertised for what it is. For example, "Jehovah's Witnesses and the Bible" would allow J W's to present the Bible in the way they see it, and visitors would go expecting to learn this. Be suspicious of any exhibition which is presented as a straight Bible exhibition, but in fact promotes the views of any particular sect or denomination.

Attractively produced

Museums used to be piled high with exhibits, often poorly labelled. In recent years there has been a revolution in display so that people are used to clear, attractive presentation. If a reasonable impression of the value of the Bible is to be conveyed, an exhibition needs to look competent, be well arranged, colourful, well-lit, visually attractive (with photographs, models, diagrams, videos etc). It also needs to be easy to follow.

Sensible Claims

Sometimes exaggerated and inaccurate claims are made about the Bible. Though well intentioned, they are likely to put off an intelligent enquirer. Check whether claims made can reasonably be substantiated. Watch out for generalisations like "Everywhere the Bible has been read it has done good." Visitors need to find only one example to the contrary (like the Jonestown mass murder in Guyana some years ago) to see the inadequacy of such a generalisation. Claims about archaeology also need to be treated with care. Demonstrating the truth of one incident in the past does not, logically, prove the truth of everything in the Bible, much as we might wish it did.

Staffing

In almost all exhibitions the public look round at their own pace, occasionally asking attendants if an explanation is sought. It is reasonable enough that attendants at a Bible exhibition should engage visitors in conversation, so long as they don't then try to pin visitors down and press their own group's doctrinal points on them. The Bible has a most important message, but the exhibition should be well enough arranged to convey this clearly. Visitors should never be made to feel 'trapped' by the staff. It goes without saying that we should expect as visitors always to be treated pleasantly, politely and with consideration and respect.

Translations

Since the original texts were in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, does the exhibition give an explanation of the different translations, the problems in achieving a good translation, and the need for expressing the Bible in clear, modern English? Do those organising the exhibition make use of this themselves, quoting modern texts, for example, in the exhibition itself and in their regular church and personal use of the Bible?

Follow on

The Bible (as the Koran for Muslims) is a book with a message for

believers. Since any Bible exhibition would aim to convey a message, check what sort of follow on help is offered, including Bible reading charts, reference books and commentaries, and modern translations. Is there any offer to take part in discussion groups on the Bible, and is this offered in its own right or in a sectarian way?

Any comments on these criteria, and on any exhibitions or displays visited, would be welcome.

God And Violence

John Maycock gave a talk at this year's Summer School on "Violence in the Old Testament". He has reworked the material to consider the subject of God and violence against the background of the whole Bible. He begins by reviewing the nature of the problem and solutions in our literature.

Violence in the Old Testament

Most people's concern about violence in scripture centres on the Old Testament. The renowned heretic Marcion (circa 140 AD) considered the Old Testament to be utterly incompatible with the God of love revealed in Christ. Mind you, his Gnostic views made him critical of some of the New Testament as well. Nor is this a problem for the second century only. In 1920 a German theologian, Friedrich Delitzsch, wrote a book with the title "The great deception". His claim, based on the difference between the testaments, was that the Old Testament purports to be the word of God but it is not.

Whilst not in any way supporting the extreme views quoted above, there is a question to answer. Violence by human beings is not the issue: we see plenty of that reported daily in the media. The problem is the violence attributed to God. Many people see some of the acts described in the Old Testament as a gross over-reaction to the sins committed. Take the flood of Genesis 7 for example. We can accept that the earth had become "filled with violence" and that it needed reform. But was universal annihilation the appropriate remedy and does it demonstrate a 'God of love'.

Another example, the establishment of Israel in the promised land, is intended by God to be by extermination of the previous inhabitants. However sinful they may have been, it does not seem to us a morally acceptable act. It hardly seems just since it is only those in the land who are targets for this policy of total elimination. The policy is reflected in the rules of war in Deuteronomy 20:10-16. In cities "which are very far from you" * women, children, cattle etc are allowed to live. In the cities of the land, on the other hand, "you shall save alive nothing that breathes,

* Quotations are from the Revised Standard Version

but you shall utterly destroy them". We know that in addition to the people being sinful, the reason for 'a final solution' was to keep Israel holy and separate from idolatry, but it is extremely difficult for us to see how this end justifies the means, especially in the light of the example of Jesus.

It is not only in these arguably 'special situations' that we have difficulties. Summary execution continues to be the Divine solution to what seem to us trivial sins. The man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day is hardly involved in a heinous offence and Uzzah is actually trying to save the ark of God from falling but both are killed by God, the latter directly, the former by order. The attitude to other religionists in Israel is that they should not live. Elijah at Carmel and Jehu at the temple of Baal execute acts we would universally describe today as massacres. This is, surely, diametrically opposed to the teaching of Christ.

Judgement on the wicked

There is a theme (some might call it a law) which is related to the examples given above which is continuous through the whole Bible; it is that transgression of God's law merits death. It was a result of disobedience that Adam and Eve were condemned to death. We have to make a distinction though. We do not object to 'natural' or accidental death. The thing that offends against the principles Christ taught is violent death. The examples given in the previous section were purposeful acts of God resulting in violent death.

The language of the Psalms would indicate violent death as the just end for the wicked: eg. "The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked" (Psalm 58:10). Or consider the curse against the "daughter of Babylon" in Psalm 137:9, "Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!"

But this is not only the message of the Old Testament alone. The words "But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me" is, in Jesus' parable (Luke 19:27), spoken by the nobleman who had gone away to receive kingly power. This would appear to be Jesus' verdict on the wicked. So for Paul, Jesus' coming again will be "revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction . . ." (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

How can we reconcile all this with the mercy and love of God? The special quality about Christian love according to Matthew and Luke's account of Jesus' words is that we should love our enemies. He also said that "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" which seems to signify that war is wrong. Is love for one's enemy only a temporary expedient until we can truly identify 'the wicked'? Is it a restricted ethic for individuals or small groups? We shall look first at solutions in our own literature.

John Thomas and C C Walker

The subject is most obviously treated in our literature under the topic of Christ and War. A booklet written by C C Walker under that title appeared first in 1900. The root of the matter is that "God visits sin with evil; war, famine, pestilence and death. The Flood is a terrible example for all time". Likewise God's command to smite the Canaanites resulted from "400 years of ripening iniquity on their part".

It is our duty to obey God's will. If God commands us to kill it is right to kill. Saul was rejected when he did not entirely destroy Amalek (1 Samuel 15:3). Jeremiah (48:10) is quoted in support: "Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord with slackness; and cursed is he who keeps back his sword from bloodshed". Christ's command "resist not evil" is for his people, the church. So, C C Walker argues, today is a time of war for the world in general. The time of peace will only come with the Kingdom of God after the return of Jesus.

Although Christ's followers are committed to non-resistance, God protects them "by less scrupulous professors who had freely used swords on their behalf". Scriptural backing is drawn for this from Revelation 11 & 12 which "things studied in history by the light of 'Revelation', [the Bible] yield the conclusion that God does not suffer the extinction of the faithful, though they observe the attitude of non-resistance; but even employs the sword of the wicked to protect and deliver them".

John Thomas, quoted in the same booklet, defended war. In 1849 he attended a meeting of the Peace Society in London and tried to convince them that war was an institution of Divine appointment and has proved of great benefit to the human race. The benefits quoted included the rights of God in the earth, vengeance due to the poured out blood of his people, the chastisement and overthrow of civil and spiritual tyrants, the defence of liberty and the establishment of peace based upon the ascendancy of right over wrong, of knowledge over ignorance and superstition. His point was that these things are of infinitely greater value than "gold or human life". He further argues that "while a Bible Christian must not fight in the absence of the captain of his salvation", since the nations of Europe are not Christian (they are "Papal, Protestant, Infidel" etc.), then taxation to maintain an efficient military and naval force in the present condition of the world is wise, prudent and indispensable". I wonder if a Christadelphian today would put such propositions to a national peace conference?

J B Norris

In 1954 The Christadelphian published a booklet by J B Norris entitled "The Christian and War". I detect in this a shift from the position adopted by C C Walker in respect of the 'benefits' of war. It is however pointed out that the New Testament nowhere criticises the patriarchs, judges or Jewish kings for engaging in warfare, indeed in Hebrews 11 they are commended. Israel's military take-over of Canaan at God's command did not expel an innocent or progressive people "but a nation whose licentiousness had become unspeakable" (Leviticus 18). Thus a thoroughly evil nation was judged but "not until their case was irremediable. God did

not permit Israel to inflict a premature judgement (Genesis 15:16)".

On the other hand, whilst war is often disciplinary "The Old Testament confirms all human experience in regarding it as an evil". David is prevented from building a temple for God on account of the wars he had waged and the bloodshed they had involved (1 Chronicles 22:8). Also through Ezekiel (33:11) God says he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

There is no expectation that the Christians will be protected by others willing to fight, though respect is accorded to the self-sacrifice and bravery of a country's fighting men. It is even suggested that nations would benefit from adopting Jesus' policy of non-resistance.

In respect of wars of the future, J B Norris reports the New Testament message that "Irresistible power and supreme authority will then be exercised by the Lord and his elect" as evidenced for example by the promise "He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations, he shall rule them with a rod of iron" (Revelation 2:26,27). This is, however, described as a movement from observance of a careful code of love with meekness (now) to the exercise of love with authority (at the return of Jesus) and where that is despised, with judgement. Significantly, the Old Testament "preface to the New Testament dispensation was marked by warfare appropriate to the historical and moral limitations of ancient times", so the "display of power which will in certain directions accompany the inauguration of the Kingdom . . . will presently, apart from dealing with a final rebellious outburst, cease for ever".

George McHaffie

An undated paper by George McHaffie (The Christian Attitude to War) goes further than the above, and taking its stand on 'God is love' suggests that loving your enemy applies to the individual and the nation. "Britain to follow the Christian way, should now disband all her army, navy, and air force and extend peace and love to all other nations." The argument for Christian states using force is often based on Romans 13:14: "he [the governing authority] does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer". The most likely meaning of this in context is; submit to Rome - do not rebel against her. Jesus' command "render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" includes a similar political meaning. Even in the context of the Gentiles lording it over them, the advice "it shall not be so among you . . . may have a national inference".

It is admitted that in certain circumstances the destruction of evil men or nations is, and has been, called for and the Canaanites come into this category. A similar position will arise in future "when God will decree the destruction of those who 'destroy the earth'. . . . When, however, Jesus introduced his new commandment 'that ye love one another', . . . he brought a purer, nobler and therefore holier conception of conduct for man. . . . For one who has learned Christ's rule of love, . . . reversion to

(To be continued)

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Women's Liberty in Christ

Prejudice was once defined by Professor G C Field, the Chairman of a Conscientious Objectors' Tribunal in the last war, as the influence of any feeling on our thinking except the desire to know the truth. Bill Robinson takes this as his starting point in an enquiry into this vexed question.

If ever a subject were charged with difficulties this is surely it. The principal reason lies in the traditional Christian's insistence that the woman's secondary, inferior role is an irrefutably obvious Biblical doctrine. Here a Christadelphian is very much a traditional Christian: the subject is not to be overtly discussed unless it can be guaranteed that the standard conclusion will be reached. Anyone having the temerity to do otherwise is at best viewed with suspicion and at worst is the recipient of unbecoming and uncharitable criticism. This generally includes the charge that the practices of Christendom and the world are being aped; but those who aspire to truth should have the ability to distinguish between a trend encouraged by modern sociology on the one hand and a thoroughgoing Biblical investigation on the other. This article falls into the latter category and it will require the reader to shed his prejudices and be utterly unbiased.

We will begin by considering the difficulties, or some of them, referred to in our opening paragraph.

Just why is woman inferior to man - at least in the Christian context? And why does she have to be dumb in church? There are biological differences between the sexes but brains and the apparatus for speech are common to male and female. Since it is a Biblical principle to use one's talents why the proscription against a woman's using hers?

A reason sometimes advanced is that in general women are less intelligent than men. This is known not to be true but, even if it were, all will admit that there exist clever, dexterous women and slow-witted, gauche men. The argument is therefore irrelevant.

Another reason frequently proffered is that women are more emotional than men. They often are, but why is this a reason for not allowing women to speak or take other than a back seat? It is certainly no impediment to being a Prime Minister, for example. Neither of these two reasons is Biblical, we should note.

Women in the New Testament

Women were physically and vocally active in both the Old and New Testaments; in particular we cite the manifestly general case of women praying and prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11:5 and the example of Priscilla teaching Apollos in Acts 18:26. Thus women taught men and prayed and spoke in assemblies, yet we read elsewhere they should do none of these things! Clearly, these commands cannot mean what they appear to mean at first sight, and our resolution of the paradox requires us to accommodate this activity and non-silence of the woman in the scheme of things.

There is, in fact, only one passage which says women must be quiet in church; it is 1 Corinthians 14:34,35. But here we have another difficulty which is not normally acknowledged; it is simply taken for granted the verses have their superficial meaning of women's submissiveness and silence. Yet if we assume the make-up of the church was much as it is today we have a major problem to contend with. Married women can learn at home by asking their husbands but what of unmarried women? They have no husbands at home to learn from! Some try to explain this by saying they can ask their fathers or other men. But the fathers of older unmarried women are likely to be long dead and an unmarried woman shouldn't be living with another man. And in any event the verse **does** say "husbands". We shall have to return to the passage later.

Head coverings

Another difficulty, rarely recognised as such, is the wearing of hats by sisters. The accepted rule is that baptised women **must** wear a hat and unbaptised ones need not: the wearing of a hat is the outward token to Christadelphians that the woman is baptised. Opinions vary as to when the hat should be worn: certainly for the memorial meeting, though hackles are occasionally raised when some rebellious sister goes bare-headed to a special effort. Some, after the fashion of 'Plymouth Sisters', wear a head-scarf rather than a hat; it is argued that this more closely approximates to the veil that Scripture prescribes.

And the reason for the sister's wearing the hat or head-scarf? She is demonstrating her subjection to the brethren. The difficulty here is four-fold:

¶ It is remarkable that a practice on which so much insistence is placed is based on only one passage of Scripture.

¶ The passage is the **only** one which unambiguously refers to standard practice when the Church assembles, almost surely in the memorial meeting. Both men and women pray and prophesy whereas we only permit men to perform these tasks. I realise there is some doubt as to what 'prophesying' means (and even, in some circles, 'prayer') though all accept that it is some form of public proclamation. If we insist on a woman's head being covered then we should insist on her speaking. We'll leave a discussion of this till later.

¶ Just what does being submissive to the brethren mean? Is the sister to attend to any brother's whim? Is she to fetch and carry for him? For the many who believe that women in general should submit to men in general the problem is even greater. Is the sister at the beck and call of the milkman, for example? Won't her husband be upset (if she's married) when she performs her various tasks for other men and brethren? In practice of course, this sort of behaviour doesn't obtain, though this - and more - is what being submissive entails. We take it to mean that the sister should sit quietly through the meeting, making no contribution to prayers or readings, though she is allowed to sing hymns. (Yet we can be surprisingly tolerant in the moments prior to the start of a meeting when both male and female are frequently anything but quiet.) Our interpretation

of submission further means that a sister may not present a paper in Bible Class, and many meetings forbid her from contributing to the discussion.

¶ A fourth difficulty follows as a consequence of this. It arises from our understanding of what "being in church" means. Our restriction on women's active participation is confined to our assembling together in a public place - the meeting room or hired hall for a special effort, for example. When we meet in a private house for a Bible Class it is quite common for sisters to be bare headed and to take part in the discussion; they may even present studies themselves. However, if we accept that we are in church when two or three are gathered together, we are being inconsistent; our standard rule should still obtain and the woman should make no contribution. There is no resolution to this difficulty by taking the view held by many that "being in church" refers only to the Memorial Meeting; in this case we should certainly allow sisters to contribute fully to every other type of assembly, and to do it without wearing hats. But we don't. We haven't thought it out as a community and thus greatly underuse our total resources - by at least 50%.

So we will begin our analysis proper by looking at this key area; it has much to tell us.

The Woman's Covering (1 Corinthians 11:3-16)

Let us assume initially that the passage refers to men and women in general; this is the way it's normally taken.

The basis of the whole passage is in verses 3 to 6: man's literal head symbolises Christ, the head of the Church; woman's literal head symbolises man, to whom she is subject. So the man's head must remain uncovered in Church so that Christ will be very evident to the assembly; if his head is covered he dishonours Christ, his head in the figurative - and highly important - sense. The woman, on the other hand, should cover her head: her figurative head in everyday life, the man, is not symbolically covered up. If her head isn't covered she dishonours the man by 'vaunting' him in the assembly, where only Christ should be 'on view'.

I hope that some are already questioning the premise we provisionally accepted at the start of this section, that woman (in general) is subject to man (in general); I certainly do, for I know of no place in Scripture which says this. At first sight verse 3 of this passage appears to say so but we should consider the very clear evidence of the rest of Scripture. Here the consistent pattern is that a **wife** is subject to her husband; she is not subject to anyone else's husband. Those who persist in extending the subjection in this way, bearing in mind the sexual basis of the Bible imagery - for imagery it is - should contemplate the deep waters into which they unwittingly wade.

The most obvious example to illustrate the unambivalent teaching is Ephesians 5:22,23 where we are given the reason for the subjection; "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church". Other examples are Colossians 3:18 and 1 Peter 3:1. So, returning to our consideration of 1 Corinthians 11, the RSV rendering of verse 3 is the correct one "... the head of a woman is her husband".

Man and Woman - or Husband and Wife?

At this point a minor - but highly important - diversion is called for. Are we justified in replacing the word "woman" by "wife"? The answer is yes. Whilst the two words are different in English they stem from a common Greek original, "gyne". And the same is true for "man" and "husband"; the Greek for both is "aner". Other ancient languages have the same arrangement, including Hebrew and Syriac, the original languages of the Old Testament. Further, the device has modern relics, some of them very extensive. For example, all Germanic languages save English have one word for "husband" and "man", and English has survivors such as "man and wife".

Now this speaks volumes about the social habits of our ancestors. **The norm was to be married**; adult males would be husbands and adult females would be wives. Arranged marriages were the order of the day, as they were until recently with the Jews and still are in large tracts of the Muslim world.

This was certainly the case in the first century; I refer readers to that respected work by Edersheim, "The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah" (vol 1, p 353). The ears and minds of people in those days would spontaneously interpret the word "gyne", for example, as "a married woman" unless the context powerfully militated against it.

To round this particular diversion off, our argument is confirmed by the modern usage in Germanic tongues just referred to. Thus, whilst Norwegian has only one word for "husband" or "man", it does differentiate between "wife" and "woman". This reflects today's social behaviour where the norm is that the male takes the active role in seeking a consort, the female the passive one; the consequence is that there are relatively few unmarried men but a greater number of unmarried women.

The lesson we learn from these comparisons of popular speech and social practice is that we should not survey the ancient Biblical scene with modern western myopic eyes.

To return to our main theme, we have established that the wife was subject to her husband, as the Church (the Bride) is subject to Christ (the Bridegroom). When the wife's head is covered her own glory, her long hair (v 15) is not seen, and **she has authority on her head** (v 10). It is **her own** authority, and may be likened, say, to the Queen opening Parliament; she is the one who has authority, the symbol of it being her head covering, the crown.

We read in verse 5 that the wife may quite properly pray and prophesy with her head covered. She is on a par with her husband who may pray and prophesy provided his head is **not** covered.

Neither male nor female in Christ

In everyday life, therefore, the wife had to defer to the husband; in Church, appropriately covered, she was his equal. Hence there is neither male nor female in Christ (Galatians 3:28), confirmed by the fact that each church member is subject to every other member (1 Peter 5:5; Philippians 2:3,4; and Ephesians 5:21): all are equal. Just as hands, ears, and eyes etc, are sexless and neuter members of a human body, so are the members of

the Body of Christ "sexless and neuter" (Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12), and just as the hands ears and eyes of a healthy body are controlled by its head so are the members of a healthy Church controlled by Christ.

The equality of the sexes in Christ has an added confirmation. Not only is the wife's own glory - her long hair - out of the way, but that other glory (v 7), the wife herself, her husband's glory, is simultaneously not on view. She is not present as a wife, just as he is not present as a husband. They are present as "neuter" members of the female Church whose bridegroom is Christ.

It is apposite at this point to state what the covering was in New Testament times. Verse 14 tells us: "... her long hair (Greek: koma - whence "comet" - a long-haired phenomenon) is given her for a covering". This, quite simply, is it: blind acceptance of the tradition of Christendom for almost two millennia has made it difficult for us to accept this straightforward statement in the text itself. Just consider the enormity of it. Scripture states that the woman should be covered when she is praying or prophesying; the covering is her long hair and it confers authority upon her. Yet we insist that she wear a hat, do not permit her to pray or speak, and say she is under the authority of the men! What a travesty! Wrong on all three counts!

There are one or two details before we leave this aspect of our study. Long hair of itself covers the head no better than short hair; it covers the back (or front, if you don't want to see). The covering of the hair is accomplished by sweeping the hair up and wrapping it around on top of the head, the meaning of the word for "covering" ("peribolaion") in verse 15. On a recent visit to Jerusalem I met an American party in my hotel; all the women had hair fashioned as I have just described. On expressing my interest to a male member of the group he informed me they were from a non-denominational church in Iowa and that the women were following the example of the Bible. The man was no more forthcoming than this but I did derive some satisfaction from the encounter.

What of the veil, or head-scarf, preferred by some sisters as being more Biblical than a hat? The practice derives from some versions translating one of the Greek words in our passage as "veil". One such version is the RSV. Consider the context, however. Of the three sections in 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 the first and the last talk of hair; the first concerns its absence and the third its abundance. Is it not most likely, therefore, that the middle section concerns hair? The Greek word "katacalypto" used in this section has "covering" as its prime meaning but does have "veil" as a secondary meaning. Without doubt, the context requires our taking the prime meaning and I fear our well-intentioned sisters are mistaken.

It will be apparent that the head-covering does not distinguish between baptized and unbaptized women; it distinguishes between baptized married and unmarried ones. Remember that there would be few, if any, of the latter of mature years so that effectively all the women's heads would be covered.

Finally, what of the angels of verse 10? This is difficult and we can't be dogmatic, but it is possible to arrive at a plausible explanation which

accords with the facts. Most people will take it for granted that the angels referred to are the immortal celestial beings. But this is not the fundamental understanding of the Greek word, as may be shown by considering a standard feature in most Greek newspapers headed "mikres angeles". At first sight it appears to mean "little angels" but actually is the prosaic "small announcements". And indeed the basic meaning of "angel" is "a message" (as in "ev-angel-ion", "good message") or "a messenger". The Corinthian angels are likely to be female messengers used by Paul. One such angel was Phebe, of Romans 16, to whom we are indebted for taking no less a message than the letter to the Romans to Rome. She was from Cenchrea, the eastern port of Corinth.

More could be said about 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 but the foregoing deals with all the major points. It will now be useful to examine briefly how my critics look at the matter. They adhere to standard Christadelphian practice, defending it by asserting that the praying and prophesying were gifts of the Holy Spirit; one group holds that the praying was in tongues. The standard rule, it is agreed, is that the woman should be silent in church: God saw fit to waive the rule while the Holy Spirit gifts were operative but the eloquence of the first century reverted to the silent norm as soon as the gifts were withdrawn. Yet this cannot possibly be an explanation worthy of serious contemplation by the unbiased enquirer. It says in effect that when the Church itself began in the first century it commenced with the abnormal - its women praying and prophesying; the norm didn't start till later, in the second century, presumably. Yet the command to be silent in church (1 Corinthians 14:34,35 which we have yet to analyse) does not have the proviso "carry on speaking now, the ban only comes in the next generation", in spite of all the references to the woman's subjection (which we have looked at) being to the time then current. So these critics' explanation does not make sense.

There are two more serious objections to the argument, however. First, I find the ascription of such capricious behaviour to God offensive and insulting to him. God is consistent. I put it to readers to judge: is it not far more reasonable that God, in causing sons and daughters to prophesy (Acts 2:17), was enhancing a natural practice? We do, after all, know that both sexes prophesied in Old Testament times. If God chose women to speak by the Spirit would he not allow them to speak when the Spirit was no longer with them? And second, if my critics are consistent in their logic then surely this would mean that neither male nor female has any right to speak today. The gifts are no longer with us so modern sons - as well as daughters - should hold their peace. Nobody should do anything!

[To be continued]

The Kingdom Of God Is Within You

Believers in a literal millennium can be divided into pre-millenarians (who believe that Christ will return before the millennium) and post-millenarians (who believe he will come after the millennium). Helen Booker puts forward a post-millennial interpretation for consideration and discussion.

Do Christadelphians push the Kingdom of God off into the future too much, seeing it only as a political organisation to be set up during the millennium, and miss aspects of its reality now? I think they do. It is because Dr Thomas dealt mostly, if not entirely, with this aspect. He did much to open scripture to our understanding, of course, but he was not infallible, nor did he claim to be. And right from the beginning I had difficulty with his interpretation of Revelation 20.

Why, I wondered, should Revelation only mention Gog and Magog at the end of the thousand year reign of Christ when they play such a prominent part in ushering in the second coming of Christ? (Ezekiel 38:39). Why does Ezekiel end with the temple and make no mention of a further uprising? And how could scripture say that with his return "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, neither shall they learn war any more" if there was again going to be a military uprising? There is an obvious contradiction in this.

Yet I could not put my finger on the error. Quite obviously the kingdom was going to be set up at the return of Christ and it was going to be a theocracy. Daniel 2:44 tells us that. "And in the days of these kings" (those represented by the feet of Nebuchadnezzar's image) "shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." So what was wrong?

Well a few years ago I was given the probable answer by Allon Maxwell. I believe it was the answer to a prayer offered all those thirty-odd years ago when I first read Elpis Israel and Thirteen Lectures on the Apocalypse, asking God to show me what was wrong with Dr Thomas's interpretation. Basically it is as follows.

The view that Dr Thomas had of the millennium as the future kingdom is incorrect. The kingdom is not the future theocracy to be set up at Christ's return but a more intangible thing that exists alongside the kingdoms of this world. You are in the kingdom of God if Christ is your king. It is among you. It is within you. In Luke 17:20,21 Jesus said "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo here! or lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." This was in answer to the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God should come. Like the Christadelphians they looked forward to a future kingdom, but they failed to realise that to be worthy to live in the future kingdom one must be in the kingdom now, living by the laws that govern that kingdom.

So the millennium is not referring to a future period of time when Christ reigns on earth, but to a period of time when Christ reigns over the earth from heaven. It is he who is opening the seals of Revelation, so to speak. To reign with him is to work with him. To be a priest with him is to be a mediator with him for those around us who are looking for God.

Symbolically the thousand years is a period stretching from Charlemagne to Napoleon. Charlemagne pushed nominal Christianity through Europe thereby giving Christ an arena in which to work. A thousand years later Napoleon began its disintegration. The Satan that was bound for a thousand years in the bottomless pit, or abyss, was paganism, pushed back into Asia to give Christ his arena. Now it has been released and Godlessness and paganism are gradually taking over again, preparing the nations for Armageddon. (When you come to think of it the "bottomless pit" is a good symbol for Asia with its seemingly endless hordes. It gets rid of another discrepancy in Dr Thomas's interpretation too. He makes the bottomless pit to be the "Arab countries" for Revelation 9, but "oblivion" when it comes to the scarlet coloured beast of Revelation 17.)

The "first resurrection" (Revelation 20:5,6) is not a physical one but a spiritual one. John 5:25 says "The hour is coming and now is, when the dead" (spiritually dead in trespass and sin) "will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those that hear will live." The fact that Jesus says, "and now is", places it at that time, while he was preaching. The second resurrection is in verses 28-30. This is future. It is literal. The graves open. He is not here emphasising verse 25, but speaking of a different point in time.

What then is the "second death"? Well, what is the first death? Is it not our spiritual death? Jesus regarded sinners as dead. "Let the dead bury their dead." So our first death is spiritual and our second death literal and eternal unless we are resurrected spiritually. In that case the second death has no power over us. And in Revelation 20 John is pinpointing what the thousand years reign of Christ is when he says, "This is the first resurrection". It is the spiritual resurrection of those who refused to receive "the mark of the beast". These lived (spiritually) and reigned with Christ (worked with him) during the thousand year period between Charlemagne and Napoleon. They were killed for their efforts but the second death has no power over them. Despite efforts to wipe them out "they shall be priests of God and of Christ and reign with him" during that period.

Well, that's it. I am convinced that the concept is correct even if the details (Charlemagne to Napoleon) can be questioned. No disrespect to Dr Thomas. There is a limit to what any man can search out in a lifetime. God, I'm sure, uses men like him to gradually open the meaning of prophecy. One builds on the work of another. I think that if readers were to look into this they might be less inclined to dwell on political aspects of the kingdom and the idea of possession of power in a future age. Our desired reward, I'm sure all will agree, should not be power over others, but love generated by a willingness to serve.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From David Parry, Ripley, Derby

I found the comments of Syd Greenall in the last issue much the same as my own experience. I would not say, however, as you have done in your editorial that it is a straight choice between doctrine and works. I have found that even when strong views are held the subsequent 'Christian' life and aspirations do not vary much. Sad to say, our insistence on being 'right' has not produced a similar model of 'right' Christian conduct. As a founder of the CARE group I have enough experience to know that our 'faith' has much more to do with tradition and family ties than actually responding to the words of Jesus.

I did not find the 'explanation' of baptism for the dead adequate. I enclose an extract from a commentary to show that there are alternative views. I also enclose details of the Mennonites which include their London address for information. Yoder's books are available in this country.

We thank David for his enclosures. The extract from the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* is too long to print here. It is noteworthy that Peake in his one volume commentary quotes one source with more than 60 'explanations'. I assume that J B Norris was proposing the one he thought most likely.

The leaflet on Mennonites says that challenging the teaching of Zwingli in the 16th century they preferred to be known as *Taufgesinnt* (those who baptise on confession of faith). Their authority is "the Word of God mediated through the Holy Spirit" (sic). Practical aspects are described; discipleship, mission, covenanted community life, congregational discipline, etc. No mention is made of what we would call a doctrinal basis.

The address given is: The London Mennonite Centre, 14 Shepherds Hill, Highgate, London N6 5AQ. Telephone 01-340 8775. J. M.

From Paul Pearson, Bury St Edmunds

Ron Coleman's series on 'Jesus, Son of Man, Son of God' was very stimulating: it was refreshing to read such a profound analysis of the arguments.

One aspect of the debate which is rarely given sufficient weight in Christadelphian utterances is that of the role of the

established Church as a continuing witness of Christ on earth. From a sectarian standpoint there are obvious reasons for this.

Yet, given the assumption, Richard Hanson can claim that 'the development of the doctrine of the Trinity was an outcome of the genuine drive and genius of Christianity'. Even after considering the euphemistically termed 'non-theological factors' in the shaping of events (such as the fact that Athanasius employed thugs to attack and suppress his opponents) Hanson can conclude The Third Constantinople lecture by stating that 'this doctrine was forged upon the anvil of human history, with all the uncertainty, conflict and vicissitude which that implies. It is a doctrine that has lasted and will last.'*

For members of the established Church the question of the nature of Christ has been settled long ago; the fact that it has lasted so long is a measure of the doctrine's veracity; the task of the present is not to challenge its basic assumptions but to explore how it can be meaningfully interpreted for the modern world. We can not turn the clock back. It is with this kind of awareness and understanding that an Anglican friend of mine judged the Christadelphian arguments to be 'quaint'.

The Constantinople Lectures commemorate the Council of Constantinople (381) at which the person of the Holy Spirit was fully described for the first time in the Nicene Creed. It is not however a full expression of the Trinitarian doctrine since it lacks a definition of how the human and divine are combined in the Son. This was rectified at Chalcedon (451)

As "the doctrine of the Trinity is primarily a christological doctrine" Hanson is praising a creed which falls short of the full doctrine of the Trinity and he has criticised the Chalcedon formula in "Reasonable Belief", written jointly with his brother Anthony. Hanson's Trinity is thus not that of official Anglicanism. But the Anglican laity is likely to have yet a third understanding for, as Hans Küng has said, "In popular Christian belief of course . . . the Trinity is understood in a tri-theistic sense." As to its permanence, Küng remarks: "The traditional formulas of the doctrine of the Trinity . . . cannot be imposed as a timeless obligation of faith on all believers at all times."†

R. C.

*R C P Hanson (1984). *The Making of the Doctrine of the Trinity*. Third Constantinople Lecture: Anglican & Eastern Churches Asscn. 'New Dictionary of Christian Theology', p 581. †"On Being a Christian" pp 474,477.

The Past Is A Foreign Country

Getting to Know the New Testament. By Stephen H Travis. Mowbray. 1987
Reviewed by Ron Coleman

A traditional comment is that we can spend our time more profitably reading the New Testament than reading about it. The value of this book is that it shows clearly the flaw in this argument. Like Dennis Nineham in his essay "The Strangeness of the New Testament World" (Theology, May 1982) Stephen Travis goes to the heart of the matter by quoting the opening words of L P Hartley's celebrated novel "The Go-Between" - "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there." Leo Colston said this when he discovered his forgotten 50 year-old diary. How much greater the foreignness when we look back 2,000 years!

We all appreciate some obvious differences between then and now but there are many that are not obvious. For example, when we send out invitations to a wedding or other social event, we set the date and the time. In first century Palestine only the date was fixed. The time depended on when the preparations were finished. Then a messenger was sent round the village to say that all was ready. To back out at that stage was rank bad manners except for a life-or-death reason. That is why the host of the Great Supper was so angry.

Literary attitudes in the past

The important differences however are not so much of this kind as those relating to the reporting of events. Today we feel that C P Scott's dictum "Comment is free but facts are sacred" should be scrupulously observed. Such a sharp distinction was unknown in the ancient world. It is considered to be quite wrong now to copy someone else's words without acknowledgment. It was not so in New Testament times. Again, most of us think instinctively of the gospels as biographies. Stephen Travis asks about Mark's gospel: "What kind of biography is it that tells us nothing of Jesus' birth or childhood, or what he looked like. Why is Mark so vague about the length of Jesus' ministry and the timing of events within it?" His answer is that Mark "is not giving a comprehensive account of Jesus' life but selecting events which will demonstrate what he was like, what his mission was, what he taught, how people reacted to him." Mark is thus not just a historian; he is also a theologian.

Another characteristic of Mark's gospel is that much of it consists of paragraphs which are complete in themselves and can usually be understood without reference to what has gone before and comes after, being only loosely connected together. It is clear from this, says Travis, that Mark constructed his gospel out of short units of narrative or teaching that had been used by preachers and passed on orally for thirty years. But would not this lead to exaggerations and mistakes creeping in? Five reasons to the contrary are given, the most telling of which is that people had better memories in those days. Some Greek and Roman schoolboys could learn by heart books of poetry longer than the whole of the New Testament.

Why should there be four gospels, three of which cover a great deal of the same ground, rather than one, or two, or many? After Mark had written his gospel the other three gospel writers wanted to tell the story afresh with different emphases to suit the readers they had in mind. While Luke and Matthew depended considerably on Mark they felt free to arrange and adapt him to suit their own purposes. But they had other sources and they used these too, as they needed. John's gospel, of course, presents other problems which cannot be dealt with in the space of a short review but Stephen Travis does not avoid them. Four gospels were apparently enough to satisfy the apostolic readers, for nobody else tried to write another.

When the Reformers rejected the infallibility of the Roman Catholic church they turned to Scripture as their source of authority and out of it grew the idea that for it to have authority every word must have been dictated by God to its human authors. Today this belief is far from universal but many Christians still feel in their bones that the authority of Scripture disappears if it is given up, even though the old belief brings many difficulties in its train. The book shows convincingly that faith can actually be strengthened by its abandonment. It is no longer necessary, for example, to say that Peter denied Jesus six times in order to remove the discrepancies between the accounts. It shows how new knowledge and understanding of the New Testament period enable such differences to be accepted without any damage to faith.

"Different slants - same story"

To give one example, Mark says that Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi was "You are the Messiah" (Mark 8:29*) while Luke reports the words as "You are God's Messiah" (Luke 9:20). Since this is the record of a very significant event the discrepancy demands attention. Stephen Travis's explanation is that Luke's Gentile readers would not have understood what "Messiah" (literally "anointed one") would mean. The only anointing they were familiar with was at the public baths when a masseur rubbed olive oil into their skin. So Luke adds the extra explanatory word to make explicit to his readers what was implicit to the actual participants.

After dealing at reasonable length with the difference that background knowledge of the time makes to understanding the gospels, Travis goes on to consider the epistles, Acts and Revelation in the same way. He then turns to the general questions his study has thrown up, considering first of all their effect on the authority of the New Testament, particularly the question of cultural relativity. Not even the most literal interpreter would regard Paul's instruction "Are you unmarried? Then don't look for a wife." as still applicable, nor argue in favour of slavery, nor think it obligatory for us to wash one another's feet. How are we to distinguish between what is of temporary and what is of permanent relevance? The answer is that we have to discover what the writers themselves regarded as central, in contrast to what they regarded as applicable for their particular circumstances. To do this we have to identify the principles involved. The

*Quotations are from the Good News Bible

method is demonstrated by an analysis of head coverings, slavery, the subordination of women and the prohibition of homosexuality. The first three are shown to be culturally relative and the last to be permanent. New to me was evidence that long hair in men and short hair in women was an open indication of homosexuality.

There follows a study of how inspiration works, together with chapters describing how correct interpretation is essential to doctrine, conduct and a true spirituality. The book opens with a short but clear explanation of the history and politics of the time and concludes with a chapter describing useful ways in which group discussion can take place on the topics listed at the end of each chapter.

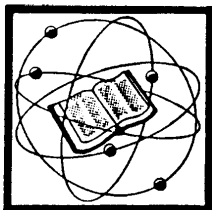
This is a short and easily readable introduction to the subject but there is greater knowledge and authority behind it than may appear on the surface. One might feel that the book of Revelation is dismissed rather briefly (continuous historical interpretation is rejected) but if one turns to the same author's "I believe in the Second Coming of Jesus" (Hodder, 1982) the extensive study behind the conclusions can be seen. An even deeper appreciation of Stephen Travis's scholarship is given by his "Christian hope and the future of man." (IVP, 1980). One could have wished however that there was more listing of sources in the present book and an index.

As an example of his effective style in the volume under review I would quote Travis's story of the performance of a playlet "The Parable of the Good Punk Rocker". When the Punk Rocker appeared to help the wounded man on the road to Jericho a woman at the end of the pew jumped and groaned in horror. For the first time in her life the parable had hit her as it did its first hearers.

Obituary: Syd Greenall

When we published Syd's article in 'Endeavour' No. 76 we were unaware that he had died on August 15th. Syd was well liked everywhere he went. His great virtue was the ability to see the other person's point of view. So much so that he was extremely reticent about his own views, almost to a fault one might say. It is reported that he was recording brother three times because he gave it up to give someone else an opportunity. He believed most strongly that the servant attitude was the most important for a follower of Jesus Christ. I shall always remember the vivid practical demonstration he gave at one Christadelphian Summer School on the character and scale of the solar system. He employed the young people to hold up models of the sun and planets to show the relative size and position. The enthusiasm generated as 'planets' were carried first across the room, then to the end of the corridor and finally right outside the grounds was delightful. We shall all miss his gentle spirit. Our prayers are with his wife Pat.

THE BIBLE AND SCIENCE



A CHRISTADELPHIAN STUDY

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