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For Christian Thought and Action

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Our object is to promote discussion of the difficulties that Christians face today both in 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.

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Editorial

"In my youth I could never make sense of Hebrews 11. Here was a list of people extolled as being full of faith and pleasing to God. Yet even a casual acquaintance with their lives revealed people who never seemed to find what they were seeking and who suffered sin, despair, death and despondency". So wrote one of our correspondents in a letter we printed three years ago. He went on to say that later he realised the mistake he had been making. He had wanted a faith based on total understanding. On the other hand the people of Hebrews 11 were commended because they sought and trusted God despite all, despite their lack of a full and total understanding.

Our correspondent probably found the eleventh chapter of Hebrews difficult because of two words in its monumental opening verse: "Now faith is the **substance** of things hoped for, the **evidence** of things not seen." Both these words have changed their meaning since the time of King James I.

"Substance" goes back in fact to Wycliffe who merely transliterated the Latin "substantia" from the Vulgate: "Feith is the substance of thyngs to be hoped". The original Greek word "hypostasis" was often used in New Testament times for the title deeds of a property. A man who possessed the deeds possessed the property even though he had not seen it. Its meaning here is surely that faith gives us the possession of unseen realities.

"Evidence" today has a legal tinge and means "grounds for belief". At the time of the Authorised Version it meant "clearly" or "certainly". We can see this from the story of Cornelius in Acts 10:23 where it is said that he saw an angel "in a vision evidently about the third hour of the day". We would read that today as meaning that it was apparently the third hour of the day when he saw the angel. Actually it means that he saw the angel clearly. If Tyndale's translation ("Fayth is a sure confidence of thyngs which are hoped and a certaintie of thyngs which are not sene") had been adopted in the Authorised Version a good deal of confusion would have been avoided for it anticipated our modern translations such as: "To have faith is to be sure of things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see" (Good News Bible).

The lesson of the ensuing verses thus becomes clear. The characters surveyed by the author of Hebrews were often weak and fallible but they all had one supreme virtue. Although they did not fully understand they trusted God. As Jesus himself said "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed."

Difficulty in accepting this clear teaching may well arise because we fail to understand that most words may be used in more than one sense and scriptural words are no exception. The word "flesh" is used with at least five different meanings in the New Testament. Much argument would have been avoided if it had been realised that in some passages "salvation" is referred to as an accomplished fact, in others as a continuing experience and in others

again as a future hope.

The classical dispute as to whether salvation depends on faith or on works arose largely from confusion about different meanings, not in this case of "salvation", but of "faith" and "works". The Reformers relied on Paul: "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness". The Catholics relied on James: "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by his faith." Neither side appreciated that, as the context clearly shows, the two writers are using both "faith" and "works" in different senses. Paul is using "faith" in the same sense as chapter 11 of Hebrews. It is a firm belief that God keeps his promises and has kept all the Old Testament promises in the sending of his Son. The faith that James is castigating is mere intellectual acceptance of doctrinal propositions that even the devils believe. The "works" that Paul repudiates are things done, Pharisee-like, to ensure a credit balance in the divine ledger. The "works" that James applauds are deeds done in love.

But "faith" can be used in yet a third sense, namely a coherent system of belief, and it is wrong to assume that this is the same faith that either Hebrews or James is talking about. This is the error that the "Quicunque Vult" (the Athanasian Creed) falls into. It begins: "Whosoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholick Faith . . ." and it ends ". . . which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved." The particular doctrine so described is, of course, that of the Trinity. Notice that it does not say merely "will not be saved" but "cannot be saved" which is surely a human attempt to limit the power of God, even if the doctrine of the Trinity were more defensibly founded on the New Testament than it is. The mistake is to apply to this kind of faith the parameters that Paul and Hebrews set for the faith that they are talking about.

It has been pointed out (for example by John Austin Baker in his book "The Foolishness of God") that the history of the Church since Apostolic days shows that it "quickly became and remained a new version of [the] kind of Judaism which Jesus so drastically criticised". Nor did the Reformation put things right in spite of appearances to the contrary. "Even the great watchword of 'justification by faith not works' lost its point, because faith became the one work needful for salvation. If you could not 'believe', you were lost."

Is there not a danger of us going down this same road? One frequently hears the question with which Jesus concluded his parable of the importunate widow, "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?", interpreted as meaning "Shall he find true doctrinal belief on the earth?" It is clear from the parable that Jesus is talking about the same kind of faith that was displayed by the exemplars of Hebrews 11. Does not the claim that salvation is not possible for anyone who does not understand and

believe a particular lengthy and detailed doctrinal statement stem from this attitude? In other words, something which is quite appropriate and suitable as a basis of fellowship is regarded as a template which will constrain Jesus on the day of Judgment.

I can remember an exhortation of fifty years ago by a well-known brother - who is still alive - which concluded with the thought that, at the Judgment Seat, we trust that our failures to follow Jesus to the best of our ability in our conduct will, in his mercy, be overlooked. Surely, he said, it would not be wrong to think that others who have lived Christian lives as sincere and as good, or even better, than our own may not equally trust in mercy for errors in doctrine?

Ron Coleman

Towards Reformation and Renewal

This article, the first part of a series by the late George McHaffie, appeared in the Endeavour Magazine twenty-two years ago. We are reprinting it because his analysis of the then situation has been justified by the events of the succeeding years so that his warnings have even greater force now than they had in 1966.

The Christadelphian community has entered what is called the space age with evident perplexity. The civilisation of the last century, in which the community was born, is, at least in Britain, no more. Progress is, with few exceptions, at a standstill and in many parts there is decline. In such circumstances it is not surprising that there are widespread heartsearchings about our real aims and about the relevance of our attitudes and beliefs.

The heartsearchings provoke unfortunate repercussions in certain quarters. It seems that some find comfort in urgent assertions of their orthodoxy; in seeking to establish an authoritarian hold over the flock; in trying to compel uniformity and suppress the appearance of any ideas which were not hallowed by acceptance at least 50 years ago. This series of articles is written in the belief that authoritarianism of this kind is useless and harmful: that loud protestations of orthodoxy are, as often as not, like whistling in the dark to keep one's spirits up.

Our general aim is to explore the origins of our faith, to show something of the framework of Christian witness on which it is based and to trace out instructive affinities with other movements. Truth we believe has nothing to fear from investigation. Some speak as though any attempt to re-appraise our faith is virtual irreverence and springs only from evil motives. I can but say that what follows has been written as a sincere attempt to uncover reasons for the contemporary malaise, lack of

drive and our failure as a community to find an adequate response to our preaching.

It may be that some feel uneasy about admitting to the existence of any problems in the community; perhaps even a little ashamed. There is nothing unique about our position. Other churches are often hit harder than we are by a realisation of their decline. Christian literature makes it clear than an enormous turmoil on this aspect has been going on for a long time.

All true revival and every genuine reformation must spring from the roots of the faith and be built up from there. For our start it is necessary to go back to more distant roots than Dr Thomas's work, to a tradition of which he became part.

The Outcome of the Reformation.

It can be said as a general truth that there were three streams of Christian tradition flowing from the reformation of the 15th and 16th centuries.

1 Reformed Roman Catholicism:

The Roman Church took warning from the reform movements and, while maintaining its traditional creeds and liturgy, endeavoured to clear out many pre-reformation abuses.

2 The Protestant Churches:

The Lutheran, Calvinistic, Scottish and English Churches which retained the traditional creeds and showed a wide variety of church government and varying degrees of liturgy.

3 The Anabaptists:

This stream was always much smaller and, in wilder times, much at the mercy of the other two and persecuted by both. It held loosely the historic creeds, refused state allegiances and seldom attained the worldly respectability inherent in the others.

It would be a gross and unfair oversimplification to say that only the third stream contained truth but, nevertheless, the cradle for the growth of a church after the original pattern of Christ, is found there more than in any other. Simplicity of worship, freedom from compromise with the demands of governments, insistence that the Christian is one who takes an adult decision in the matter of discipleship are three basic elements whose absence faults the first two streams. The Roman Catholics and Protestants have had their wars and committed atrocities against each other but both alike have cruelly martyred numerous adherents of the Anabaptist tradition from whom alone, in reformation times, sprang a true appreciation of non-violence demanded by the Sermon on the Mount.

The Anabaptist stream has itself, however, at times grown some quite unacceptable branches. Associated with the Baptist and Adventist principles there has been unreasoned fanaticism and

militarism, a fascination for varieties of gnostic heresy (believing that material things, e g man's body, are evil); there have been fantastic prophesyings and premature anticipation of Christ's second coming; there has been a tendency to reject a reasoned approach to religion in favour of emotional guidance which has led to claims of unique and often spectacular spirit gifts. Exclusive and bitter sectarianism has been common.

Simplicity of Worship

It may be fairly said that out of the Anabaptist movement there have arisen not only the Baptists of today but Quakers, Pentecostals, Mormons (the leading legends owe a lot to a Baptist preacher), Plymouth Brethren, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Unitarians.

Spiritual Enthusiasm

There has also been much mingling of the streams. The Plymouth Brethren were originally a breakaway from the Anglicans but rapidly absorbed Anabaptist principles; present-day Baptists appear to be seeking more and more identification with the Protestant stream; Methodism, again an Anglican breakaway, shows many characteristics of Anabaptist piety. Evangelical parties of all churches, state and non-state, show the absorption of what was once almost exclusively an Anabaptist outlook on personal decision for Christ.

In the final count, it is the writer's belief that all that is best and truest has in large measure been cradled and pioneered outside the bonds of the Roman Catholic and Protestant streams.

It is not possible to argue the case at length here to show which, if any, of the early Anabaptist streams gives the most useful lead, but if one looks for a church which avoided the excesses of the extremer groups, which did not forget reason in the conduct of its affairs, which was the first to revive the truth of the Sermon on the Mount and which faithfully practised baptism by immersion, one is led to a community called the Polish Brethren who flourished from the middle of the 17th to about the middle of the 18th century. Poland was the scene of their activity for the simple reason, that at that time, it was the only place, Protestant or Catholic, where there was freedom of religious expression. One of the greatest leaders of the thought of this Church, though oddly enough not a member of it, was Faustus Socinus and the teaching of the Church is generally described as Socinian.

The Socinians

The word itself has for a long time been a term of reproach in theological circles because of its association with radical views on the Trinity, the atonement and hell-fire. On the other hand, it has been said of the Socinians that they combined the fervour and simplicity of worship of the Anabaptists with great learning. In their time, they were feared as a formidable enemy to Protestant

Christianity and were led by men of great scholarly ability. They conducted a vigorous publishing effort from their centre at Racow and their books and thinkers penetrated (often clandestinely) the universities of Europe.

The distinctive tenets of the Socinians were:-

1. God is one - as Father - as distinct from the Trinitarian Formula.
2. Jesus Christ - Son of God - a man born of the Virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit and after His resurrection raised to a position of divine honour.
3. The Holy Spirit is the power of God and not a separate personality.
4. The sacraments accepted were the Lord's Supper and baptism by immersion of adults.
5. The prevailing views on the Cross (penal substitution) were vigorously opposed in favour of a moral view.
6. Holding political office and participation in war was rejected.
7. They opposed the doctrine of eternal torments, held that man was mortal, immortality conditional.
8. They were among the earliest exponents of freedom of conscience and enquiry in the post-reformation era.

It will be evident, even from this brief sketch, that the principles of a type of witness, such as the Christadelphian body later adopted, are here, and I think there is little doubt that Socinian thought greatly influenced Dr Thomas.

Resurgence of Jesuit activity in Poland led to persecution and martyrdom of the Socinian Church, together with many other Protestants who were banished from the land. Freedom then ceased in Poland. The Socinians were scattered throughout Europe losing their corporate identity but influencing other Churches, particularly the early Mennonite Baptists in Holland. There is much evidence of Socinian influence and sympathy in later times and among notable people, e.g. Sir Isaac Newton. Many of their principles are now triumphant in modern Christendom.

An interesting account of the Socinians will be found in Wilbur's book "A history of Unitarianism: Socinianism and its Antecedents", also in "Socinianism in 17th Century England" by H McLachlan, and their position is summarised by R S Franks in "The Work of Christ." More recently, the history of the times has been written up extensively by G M Williams in "The Radical Reformation".

Elements of Dr Thomas's Stand

Some appear to relish the idea, and it may be that he himself fostered it, that Dr Thomas, unaided, uncovered the truth from the great mass of error hiding it after centuries of apostasy. I do not think, however, that we seriously detract from the work he did by suggesting that on the contrary he gathered liberally from

abundant material to hand. Similarly, we may consider that he fought constant battle with the whole of Christendom, pursuing a lonely and unpopular path. I think, however, that in many of his statements he was following a trend popular in certain influential circles. If this can be established, the reasons why he did not have more success might be instructive. For example, it might be possible to ascertain whether an unbalance of emphasis arose. It might also be useful to enquire whether a church can be nourished mainly by doctrinal battles without losing some of the finer elements basic to Christian witness. In order to evaluate this I propose to review the leading points in Dr Thomas' teaching against the background in which he worked.

Bible Prophecy

Associated with our witness there are other aspects of belief which are not confined to a minority of Christians but which can claim adherents from nearly all sections of the Christian movement. Prophetic interpretations of current political events are an example of this. Efforts to deduce the likely date of the Second Coming were popular during the first three centuries but waned for a period and then gathered momentum again by the tenth century.

During the period of primitive Christianity, approximate dates for the last Judgment were repeatedly set. And as each date passed without the appearance of the hoped-for events, an error in calculation was admitted, and the date was reset. The years turned into centuries and the belief was evolved that one thousand years - one day in the eyes of the Lord - would have to pass from the birth of Christ to the day of His Second Coming (Joseph Gair. "The Legend of the Wandering Jew").

Interest in prophecy has been uneven throughout history with peak periods corresponding to great national and international upheavals.

Prophetic Forerunners

The Reformation was one such period and there followed the era of Mede, Sir Isaac Newton and Bishop Newton. This upsurge tailed off by the middle of the eighteenth century, largely through disagreements in interpretations and the counter suggestion that the church would have 1,000 years of victory to put the world right before Christ came. (Post Millenarianism.)

It is probable, however, that no other period in the world's history has shown such an interest in prophecy, and been in a position to draw on such resources of scholarship, as that which followed the French Revolution in the late eighteenth century.

With the benefit of hindsight we can see that the French Revolution was the outcome of intolerable oppression by a ruling class which had no sense of responsibility for its subject people and was incompetent to govern. To the pious churchmen of the time, however, it seemed as though God's eternal basis of law and

order was being swept away beneath a flood of impiety. The resultant wave of prophetic interest led to the continuous historical interpretation of the Book of Revelation reaching what was to be for all practical purposes its final form. The first five vials of Revelation 16 were generally agreed as being fulfilled in the events following the French Revolution (understandably enough if one really believed that the end was at hand). Earlier identifications of the seals and trumpets were put together in the overall interpretation of the book.

The Seventh Day Adventists have carried out research in great detail into the history of interpretations of the Book of Revelation. The result is published in four volumes as "The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers" by Leroy Edwin Froom (1954). For the period 1799-1845, 62 major expositors in Europe are listed. The majority were in Britain and all but four pursued the continuous historic interpretation. Dr Thomas differed only in detail and in the interpretation of Chapter 10 from the historical elements of these expositors. Around the year 1840 interest on the part of the professional preachers faltered. This was due partly to disagreements about details of the interpretation but chiefly to the leading British exponent, the Presbyterian Edward Irving, falling into doctrinal disagreement with his church. Irving was one of London's most popular preachers but developed views on Christ's nature, and condoned ecstatic outbursts in his congregation which were unacceptable to his presbytery.

While, however, in this country, enthusiasm was dying down, in America it was being born and continued so for at least another 20 years. Enthusiasm was maintained particularly among the laity by the proximity of expected terminal dates and political upheavals. The years 1843, 44, 47 were widely expected to yield great things in fulfilment of the period 2,300 days (Dan. 12:11) (BC 457 plus 2,300 on the basis of a day for a year). Similarly, interest was maintained by the 1,260 days (Dan. 12:7) being calculated to end in 1866.

One of the last, greatest, most scholarly and careful of the expositors of the orthodox church was Edward Elliott who commenced in 1837 to write a book called *Horae Apocalyptae*. Published in 1840, it saw editions in 1846, 47, 51 and 62.

Eureka

It will be seen from the above that Dr Thomas's work ("Elpis Israel" commenced 1848) coincided with the waning of professional exposition in Europe while yet many still had their hopes set on the years 1848-49. He was at the height of American interest on the subject and published "Eureka" (Vol I 1861, Vol II 1866, Vol III 1869) at the peak of interest in the terminal date 1866. He wrote, therefore, after an intense period of study on the part of Christians of all persuasions (Dr Thomas mentioned many of these in the preface to "Eureka" Vol III), and entered into their labours and at a very popular time for such expositions. In his writings, Dr

Thomas discounts much of the work of the other expositors but this appears to be mainly because of their attitude to the immortality of the soul rather than because of any difference on historical interpretation.

The continuous historic interpretation of the Book of Revelation as Dr Thomas received and accepted it was largely the outcome of the work of expositors standing foursquare in the tradition of the Reformation. The Reformers themselves were bitter in their attacks on the Anabaptists. By adopting the historical interpretations defined by expositors such as Elliott (Church of England) Dr Thomas was following a path alien to the tradition in which he himself stood.

The structure of the Revelation is such that any interpretation requires the identification of two opposing forces. One is that of Babylon (and her progeny); the other is that of Jerusalem (and the people of God). From the standpoint of the Reformer, Rome is the great enemy and persecutor. For the sixteenth century Anabaptist, Rome may indeed be an enemy and persecutor. But if he is being martyred by drowning at the hands of reformation-inspired persecution (in mockery of the baptism he proclaims) then his identification of who is the persecutor and who the people of God will not be that of the Reformer.

The tension created by this difference of views runs through Dr Thomas's exposition of the Apocalypse. For example, in the interpretation of the Death of Witnesses (Revelation 11) which occurs toward the end of Volume II of "Eureka", we have a long exposition interspersed with condemnations of Greek, Latin and Protestant apostasy. His exposition of the text of the Apocalypse, however, relates to witnesses of a Protestant character, holders of the doctrines of the immortality of the soul, infant baptism and so on which he, in the immediate context, condemns. Similarly the death of the Witnesses is interpreted as their political death. Though if it were suggested that politics and witnessing for Christ were associated in any other context great exception would be taken. If the political aspect of the witnessing is removed the exposition does not stand at all for during the period when the witnesses are reputedly dead they are admitted to be a "powerful and ever-watchful body" ("Apocalypse and History" Page 99).

(To be continued. It should be noted that these articles appeared originally several years before the series "The Protesters" in the Christadelphian in which the Socinians and their successors featured prominently.)

Resignation of John Maycock

John Maycock has been forced to relinquish the editorship of this magazine as a result of the situation in his ecclesia. Serious conflict within, and pressure from without, followed country-wide circulation of the December 1987 issue of the magazine (No 77) by two brethren who falsely accused it of departing from the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith. A letter from the Recording Brother of Clevedon to the "Christadelphian" in May last stated categorically "that the Clevedon Ecclesia fully supports and upholds the Scriptural teachings as summarised in the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith and that we have received the same assurances from the brother concerned."

However it soon became clear that the assurances that John had given were not sufficient and that the Clevedon ecclesia would not be satisfied until the character of the magazine had been changed so that "articles designed to promote discussion or present novel views" should be commented upon editorially or accompanied by appropriate references from authoritative Christadelphian sources as to the accepted view. Although many would have regarded this as too restrictive of editorial freedom, John agreed to the conditions in the hope that a *modus vivendi* could be achieved.

When the August 1988 issue (No 79) appeared it was scrutinised closely by two members of the Arranging Committee who, while accepting that there had been no breach of the BASF, prepared a lengthy list of objections, the character of which can be judged from the following three examples.

(a) Although it was accepted that the article "Unanswered Questions about the Resurrection" had been balanced by the editorial book review "I believe in the Resurrection of Jesus", the cross-reference was not sufficiently clear.

(b) It was "rather tactless" to report the session at the Summer School at which a charitable organisation "Christian Engineers in Development" described their work in Africa. (There was no mention of doctrine in the session and it was not clear to what denomination, if any, the group belonged.) The objection was to a mention of their "high Christian idealism". This would be seen as evidence of association with other religious groups.

(c) A letter from the late David Pitt Francis on the current discussion in the "Christadelphian" about whether the word "church" should be used to refer to ecclesias was criticised. (David Pitt Francis had argued that the early Greek associations of the word "ecclesia" were just as disreputable as the later ones of "church"). This was said to be a mistake on the evidence of current English dictionaries and contrary to the views of Robert Roberts. The Editor should have corrected it. (David's qualifications are referred to in the obituary on page 17)

After consideration of this report the Committee decided that their requirements had not been met and called a Business Meeting in December to consider a recommendation that Bro Maycock should relinquish the editorship of Endeavour. As it was obviously quite impracticable to produce a magazine under such close and idiosyncratic control by a Committee, the only courses open were either to refuse to accede to the request or to resign. John chose the latter, before the meeting, in order not to provoke further dissension in the ecclesia. He was also influenced by the illness of his wife Jan who was distressed by the controversy. She was suffering from cancer for which she had had an operation and was undergoing radiotherapy with its traumatic side effects.

We owe a great deal to John who took over the editorship at a time when the magazine was experiencing considerable difficulties in production. The trouble he has seen during his tenure has been worse than that experienced by any of his predecessors save perhaps the late James White in the very early days. In addition to the amount of work involved in arranging for articles, and corresponding with contributors, there has been the phenomenal extra burden of replying to a large number of personal attacks, some more reminiscent of the world of politics. And only those who have experienced it can appreciate the feeling of hurt when, as a result of false statements, former friends and acquaintances - disregarding relationships that have endured for years - become hostile. We are grateful that John and Jan will continue to deal with subscriptions and that John will otherwise continue to be associated with our work.

CHRISTADELPHIAN SUMMER SCHOOL 1989

Friday 28th July to Tuesday 1st August, St Andrew's Hall, Birmingham

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

Study led by Willfred Lambert

TRUE WORSHIP—LIVING SACRIFICES

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UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

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Join us for a helpful and enjoyable weekend together. Write for more details to:

Ian McHaffie, 176 Granton Road, Edinburgh EH5 1AH

Suffer It To Be

There was a Boy; ye knew him well, ye cliffs
 And islands of Winander! - many a time,
 At evening, when the earliest stars began
 To move along the edges of the hills,
 Rising or setting, would he stand alone,
 Beneath the trees, or by the glimmering lake;
 And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands
 Pressed closely palm to palm and to his mouth
 Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,
 Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,
 That they might answer him. - And they would shout
 Across the watery vale, and shout again,
 Responsive to his call, - with quivering peals,
 And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud
 Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild
 Of jocund din! And, when there came a pause
 Of silence such as baffled his best skill:
 Then, sometimes, in that silence, while he hung,
 Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
 Has carried far into his heart the voice
 Of mountain-torrents; or the visible scene
 Would enter unawares into his mind
 With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
 Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received
 Into the bosom of the steady lake.

This boy was taken from his mates, and died
 In childhood, ere he was full twelve years old.

Wordsworth's poem reminds us of the tragedies which seem to be inherent in our world of sin and death. It is easier to understand the pain and distress caused by man's efforts. We have someone to blame! Accident or natural cause is not so easy.

God's judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah may have used a natural phenomenon in the volcanic area around the Dead Sea. The same explanation will not do for the flooding of Bangladesh. Are the people of that particular area any more sinful than in many other parts of the Indian sub-continent? I think not. Did the people of Jamaica deserve the judgement effected by hurricane Gilbert or the Armenians the devastation of the earthquake?

Even more heart-rending than these natural disasters are the human tragedies caused by illness. The boy in Wordsworth's poem is paralleled by many cases both young and old of people attacked by disease elements beyond our control. Perhaps even worse than all are the illnesses which reduce a much loved family member

into what one may not unfaithfully describe as a living death. Demanding of carer's time and strength, they often leave near and dear ones devastated by the change, dare one say disappearance, of the one they knew and loved.

These things seem to be unmitigated evil and yet these cases can be the occasions for the most wonderful witness to the God-given spirit of life.

The question posed to the puzzled mind is, where is God in all this? There seems a sense in which scripture is saying that all evil is directly the action of God - "Does evil befall a city, unless the Lord has done it? (Amos 3:6). There are undoubtedly situations which are intended to be tests or trials of faith. If we believe God strengthens his people, and the experience of faithful men and women proves that he does, then he must be with us in our troubles.

The Psalmist understood this: "I cried to thee for help, and thou hast healed me" (Psalm 30:2) and "thou hast delivered me from every trouble" (Psalm 54:7). Jesus demonstrated the Kingdom as a realm where evil spirits were cast out: illness was healed. In this he was demonstrating the character of God. However the climax of Jesus' witness was in crucifixion: a submission to the forces of evil and the will of God.

If "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" and arguably he was with him even on the cross up to the very last (Mark 15:34) will he not be with every one of us who is assailed by the destructive effects of the otherwise wonderful world? The cross which each one of us may be required to take up is very different. There is, I am convinced, a randomness in the way God has ordered the world. It is not by design that heat energy from the warmer seas can concentrate into spiral winds which wreak death and destruction when they cross a land mass. It is not by any direct act of God's will that some people succumb to disease agents in their environment leading to disability or premature death.

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him (Romans 8:28). It must follow that he will help those, our brothers and sisters, who are caught, temporarily on the eternal scale, in the evil which results from the "whole creation . . . groaning in travail". When we care in love we are working with God and in harmony with that Kingdom spirit which the Lord Jesus so vividly demonstrated in his ministry. Those who, like the boy in the poem, have died must await the future work of God. For now we are his hands to heal and help wherever we can be of service.

John Maycock

Meeting Together

What is the difference between a meeting to have the readings and a Bible Class? Or between the Sunday Breaking of Bread and a Fraternal Gathering? Most of us tend to think instinctively in terms of the degree of formality. Ian McHaffie examines this against the Scriptural background.

Brethren and sisters meet today in a variety of ways. They meet to do the readings together. They meet for Bible classes. They meet at fraternal gatherings. They meet to enjoy a meal or a picnic together. They meet to proclaim the Gospel. They meet to break bread together. Sometimes the meetings are very informal, such as on holiday in the open air. This difference between formal and informal can be observed in several ways, and brethren and sisters respond differently as to how they regard these meetings.

This difference in response can be seen not infrequently in the way brethren and sisters dress. On a picnic, people are dressed informally, and prayers may be said in thanks to God for our food and our friendship, and no one minds the informality or thinks God does. On the other hand, Sunday morning breaking of bread is much more formal, with brethren and sisters often dressed in their best clothes, and some feel that because it is a breaking of bread, "Sunday best", including sisters in hats, is the only style appropriate.

Attitudes to reading the Bible and discussing it also show this variety of approach. It is not unusual, for example, to "read round" at Bible classes or on campaigns, with brethren and sisters joining in discussion and making exhortational and expository points from the readings. Many, however, would feel this inappropriate on a Sunday morning. Some would disagree with having discussion, feeling it would detract from the solemnity they associate with the bread and the wine. Many would object also to the idea that sisters could read or add exhortational comments at a breaking of bread service. What, then, is the difference? Are some things acceptable to God in an informal setting, but not a formal one?

Most brethren and sisters are willing to acknowledge that some of what we do is based on tradition, and a change is often refreshing and welcome, as many have found at gatherings, conferences, or when meeting on holiday. It is a matter of tradition, solely, that we meet on a morning for our breaking of bread. Some ecclesias meet in the afternoon. There is little biblical backing for either for references in the New Testament indicate that the brethren and sisters met in the evening (e.g. 1 Corinthians 11:23, Acts 20:7). What, then, about the special attitudes many hold towards the breaking of bread service - formal, best clothes, no discussion, no verbal participation by sisters? Is this also tradition, or is it based on Bible teaching and practice?

Meeting in the New Testament

After the crucifixion Jesus' followers were understandably afraid, and therefore met behind closed doors (John 20:19). After the Resurrection our Lord appeared to the disciples and convinced them that he had indeed risen (John 20:26). After the Ascension, the disciples gathered upstairs in a house in Jerusalem:

"All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers." (Acts 1:14) ¹

On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) "they were all together in one place". They were meeting in a house, and "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit", presumably the sisters as well as the brethren, as is also suggested in verse 17. After Peter's preaching, about three thousand were baptised, of whom it was said:

"they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42)

It is not clear from this how much these were separate activities. It seems likely that the various meetings would overlap. In verse 46 we have some more information:

"And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people." (Acts 2:46-47)

They met in the temple (where Jesus had preached), and then together in their homes. We are likely to read this in a modern way, assuming the breaking of bread was like ours. However, it was part of a proper meal, as is indicated in Acts 2:46 and 1 Corinthians 11:21. The characteristic Jewish phrase for beginning a meal was "to break bread", and Jesus was recognised at Emmaus (Luke 24:28-35) when he did this. While, therefore, the Last Supper was a special, unique, occasion, and drew some or all of its setting from the Jewish Passover Meal, it seems at first to have been commemorated after Pentecost at brethren and sisters' ordinary meals, probably every day (Acts 2:46). The word translated "Supper" clearly shows this. Supper to us today is usually a light meal but in the Greek world and Palestine "supper" (deipnon) was the one substantial meal of the day eaten by the family together. The setting was presumably what we would call "informal".

Acts 20:7-12 suggests a similar picture (though later in the evening than the meetings mentioned in the first few chapters of Acts). The breaking of bread was again associated with a meal (verse 11). No particular "order of service" can safely be deduced from this passage, since it was a special occasion before Paul's departure the next day. There was a talk (or discussion - "Paul talked with them") and after breaking bread and having a meal, conversation took place until daylight. It was in an upstairs room, hot, and probably crowded on this occasion, which suggests why Eutychus was sitting in a window. It sounds informal rather than

formal, but we cannot see any New Testament evidence for such a distinction.

In 1 Corinthians the believers are described as gathering together:

"when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you assemble as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you" (1 Corinthians 11:17-18)

Their divisions arose from greed at the breaking of bread meal, each seeking his own food and not sharing with the poorer members for some of whom this may have been the only substantial meal of the week. Paul reminded them of the origin of the breaking of bread and exhorted them to a proper, spiritual approach. 1 Corinthians 14 gives more details of what meetings were like:

"When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation . . . you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged . . . (1 Corinthians 14:26 & 31)

There is no indication whether these aspects of meeting together happened at the breaking of bread meals or not. It seems unlikely that there was a hard and fast separation between the different aspects of church activity. On the other hand, the physical work of preparing the meal makes it likely that this would be a separate occasion, as is shown by later development after New Testament times.

In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul accepts the role of both brethren and sisters in praying and prophesying, and there is no reason to suppose that this did not take place at the breaking of bread meals, just as on other occasions when the believers assembled. The apparent prohibition on women speaking (1 Corinthians 14:34-36) seems to contradict this, but it is not satisfactory to use these three verses as if this was the universal New Testament picture. (This has been considered in a separate paper. ³)

After the time of the Apostles, there was a considerable departure from New Testament teaching and practice. Baptism became switched from the candidate's confession of faith to the supposed importance of the water. The breaking of bread ceased to be a meal, and became in the Roman Catholic church a special "sacrament" in which it was thought that the bread and wine literally became the body and blood of Jesus (transubstantiation), and the congregation took almost no part. In the Anglican church, after the bread has been "blessed", it was thought to have in it "the real presence" of Jesus (not quite the same idea as transubstantiation, but not too different either). This is not the New Testament teaching, where the bread and wine are symbols, taken to remember the events surrounding Jesus' sacrifice and the beginning of the New Covenant. The importance of the breaking of bread lies in the fellowship (sharing together) in our remembrance of what Jesus has accomplished. It is a witness to our unity in

Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). We do not, as Christadelphians, believe in the "real presence" of the Anglican concept, for Jesus is always present whenever and wherever we meet together:

"... where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20)

Jesus is equally present at all our meetings, formal or informal. We cannot see any biblical justification for classifying some meetings as formal and others as informal. Brethren and sisters are "in my name" as brethren and sisters, and whenever they meet together Jesus is in the midst of them.

As regards clothes, the New Testament is generally critical of expensive clothes (James 2:1-5, 1 Timothy 2:9, Matthew 6:25-33, Luke 16:19). The Bible attitude is that "the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7). (The question of hats has been dealt with in a separate paper.¹)

It is obviously a matter for ecclesias how they run their own services, and for individuals to decide on their form of dress. Both should act with awareness of what the New Testament says in its context, and should respect the actions of ecclesias, gatherings and conferences, and the consciences of individual brethren and sisters who arrive at different conclusions on how we should apply the Bible today.

¹ Quotations are from the RSV. ² Should sisters give addresses? What does the Bible say? ³ Sisters and hats. What does the Bible say? Copies available without charge from 176 Granton Road, Edinburgh, EH5 1AH on receipt of a stamped addressed envelope.

Obituary: David Pitt Francis

We were very sorry to hear of David's sudden death on 28th November at the early age of 53. David was an exceptionally original thinker and a keen Bible student. When we read about polymaths most of us feel we would be daunted to meet them. Not so with David. Modest, quietly spoken - perhaps even diffident - he had a gentle humour that put you at your ease. A polymath? Yes, because he had deep knowledge in two widely diverse fields. That which was not obvious to us at the Summer School was to do with his work. He had two higher degrees in statistics and accountancy theory, together with a Ph. D. He had published a string of books on these and related subjects and was a Principal Lecturer in Business Studies at Middlesex Polytechnic.

If this might seem an undue preoccupation with Mammon it was belied by his modest style of living and his real and abiding interest in the deeper and more puzzling problems of Scripture. This led him towards prophecy for the study of which he was equipped with a degree in Theology, History and New Testament Greek. His written work started with "The Message of Daniel" (1969) followed by "Meditations on the Last Message of Jesus"

(1973) and a full-length exposition of Revelation in 1982 ("The Most Amazing Message Ever Written") the product of 15 years of research in which he had read most of the currently available commentaries, both liberal and conservative. (Reviewed in our 1983/2 (No 68) issue by George McHaffie.)

David's last book, "Nostradamus. Prophecies of Present Times?" (1984) seems an eccentric choice for a Christadelphian. Nostradamus was a French Jewish Catholic of the 16th Century whose Delphic prognostications have fascinated succeeding generations because of the claims that they have been and are being fulfilled. If this is true the unique character of Bible prophecy is discredited. David laid aside his own preconceptions and treated the predictions with scientific impartiality. He did of course compare them extensively with their alleged fulfilment but this is something open to inconclusive argument. So he went further and elaborated a theory of prediction testing. For example, random predictions, especially if they are vague, may come true - here Statistics is important. Five such criteria are deployed which discredit Nostradamus and thus vindicate Bible prophecy.

Before starting his career David did Bible Mission work in Jamaica. Latterly he ran a charity called "Gracious", in which he used his abilities as an economist and statistician to help charities evaluate how best to use their resources. Although he made a good recovery from a stroke he had a year ago it did reduce his activities considerably. We are grateful to him for the stimulus to fresh thought he has given the Brotherhood over the years. We shall miss his gentle and erudite presence. Our deep sympathy is with his family, in particular with his wife and two children.

Two Views on the Interpretation of Revelation

During the compilation of "Eureka" this tremendous claim was made by Dr Thomas: "The Apocalypse was given by Deity to Jesus Christ that He might show it to His servants; and the reason why no exposition is extant is that Jesus Christ, who is the truth, had not given the ability to the 'wise and prudent' of the Laodicean Apostasy. The correct interpretation being Christ's, it was for Christ to provide for its publication. Such is the Author's conviction." An Exposition of the Apocalypse. (Preface) F Bilton. 1955.

There has been a great deal of wishful thinking and ill-founded guesswork associated with the "exposition" of this part [Chapters 17 & 18] of Revelation. To a greater extent than is commonly realised the anti-papal assertions of orthodox Protestant commentators have been uncritically accepted, usually more out of personal inclination than by reason of clear-cut Biblical support. Yet would it not be strange indeed if those who share so many of the blatant errors of Catholic dogma should prove to be the most dependable guide to the interpretation of the most complex of all Bible prophecies? Revelation. A Biblical Approach. (p 206). H A Whittaker. 1973.

What is His Name? A Biblical Study of Divine Titles

By Alfred Norris. Aletheia Books, London. 1986

Reviewed by Wilfred Lambert

God's names are a complicated and potentially cranky subject. This is especially so from a Christian standpoint, since the names usually offered by those who treat the subject are exclusively Hebrew names, perhaps with some Aramaic additions, which are only to a limited extent reflected in the New Testament. It is thus tempting to conclude that these Hebrew names are not fundamental to the Gospel. This is certainly true, but all the same they merit study as a significant element in Scripture. Some of this work can be accomplished by contextual study, so that diligence and access to a suitable concordance allows the subject to be followed in English. But the meanings of the names cannot be ignored, and for this a good knowledge of Hebrew is required.

The author comes off well on most of these points. He writes in his usual clear, breezy style, and is anything but cranky. He sees the problem of Christian relevance and so treats "the peculiarly New-Testament name" 'Father'. He started from concordances and systematically studied all occurrences of the main names and titles of God in the Old Testament in their contexts. The book is essentially an analysis of this material. The concise format in which the results are presented gives no idea of the amount of work involved. (The name Yahweh alone occurs some 6,800 times!) Further, the author has not only done his homework and then presented the reader with the conclusions he reached, but has also given much of his working materials so that the reader who is no Hebraist is able to study the subject himself. On pp. 141-160 he reprints the listings of all the occurrences of the names from G V Wigram's "The Hebraist's Vade Mecum" and pp. 103-138 offer 45 tables, most presenting selections from the concordance listings to show particular aspects of the facts. The book is thus a practical working tool and fully merits the sub-title.

Deep water is of course reached with the expositions of the names, so to help his readers the author gives first a summary of his conclusions (pp. 15-26), then on pp. 29-99 a fuller and documented statement. So far, so good. But here the reviewer must insert a caveat or two. The author himself refers to "the rather mechanical approach which this book has adopted throughout" (p. 82). The reader who is a complete beginner in the subject will not always find his way in material which is so close to the concordance and is so briefly explained. More systematic explanation would have helped. From the title on the author identifies names and titles. In human speech generally they are separate. "Corporal John Smith" identifies the person by his name, and his professional army rank by his title. The name serves to

identify the individual, while the title is a description shared by others. In the Bible the matter is less simple in that most personal names had a meaning and so share something of the descriptive character of titles. Also the two categories can merge, as when what was once a title by frequent use in effect displaces the original name. "The Almighty" is such a case in our own language. Nevertheless, as it seems to the reviewer, this book would have been clearer if the distinction had been made. The author's argument about Yahweh Elohim on pp. 58-61 would have been much simpler and more cogent, and readers might have been less baffled by the sudden and unexplained comment on p. 82: "the statement has often been made that this [i.e. 'Yahweh'] is properly the only term which should be called the 'Name' of God at all." Other matters too, to which the author makes brief allusion, may well be a source of confusion to readers not already well versed in the subject. What, for example, are the "scribal emendations" reversed in Table 5 and rarely mentioned elsewhere?

Despite the author's original, analytical approach, he is of course writing in a particular intellectual environment: as a Christadelphian primarily for Christadelphians. In this context there is a background, mostly in the works of Dr John Thomas, who wrote on this subject in his "Phanerosis" and elsewhere. Comparisons are proverbially odious, but honesty sometimes compels one to make them. Dr Thomas's strength lay in his ability to grasp the true doctrinal teaching of the Bible as against most then current orthodoxy. But his knowledge of Hebrew and Greek was imperfect and he was prone to see mysteries in ordinary linguistic phenomena which seemed strange to an English speaker. Thus occasionally the author seems to formulate his argument to counter views current among some Christadelphians and which go back to Dr Thomas. The author is certainly a better linguist than the Doctor and does not allow one or two obscure passages to become the key to thousands of clear passages.

One reviewer has already accused the author of virtually rejecting "the distinctively Christadelphian doctrine of God-manifestation" (R. Carr, "The Testimony", vol. 57, no. 683, November 1987, p. 393). It is unfortunate that the issue was stated in such emotive terms. The categories of "true" and "false" would surely have been better, and it is perhaps relevant to note that John Carter also had his doubts about Dr Thomas's exposition of the plural Hebrew word Elohim, see his Preface to the 1954 reprint of "Phanerosis and other Writings". The reviewer shares these doubts. Babylonian scribes at the period of the Exile also sometimes wrote a plural "gods" when meaning a single god, but no one here, where there is no religious commitment on the part of scholars to the writings, sees any hidden meaning. The plurals still refer to one god pure and simple.

However, while "What is His Name?" does mark a big advance in a Christadelphian exposition of the names of God, it is still a

long way from perfection, as its author is the first to admit. One of its main failings is that it turns its back on the many advances in knowledge of Hebrew made over the last century, and in the knowledge of the ancient Near East made over the same period. The meanings he assigns to Hebrew words are taken from older reference works mostly, and newer ones do not always support the points. For example, the name Shadday is taken as meaning "Almighty" on the basis of tradition supported by the older lexica. The tradition is first known from the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible, but the difficulty here is that the translator is as likely to be presenting the theological views of his own age when rendering a divine name as passing on the understanding of the original authors. Later Greek translators did the same in rendering it "the Sufficient One", based on a combination of Rabbinic canons of interpretation and Greek philosophy. While not committing himself to the point, the author quotes Gesenius on p. 37:

It might be derived from shadad . . . [which] is said by Gesenius to mean 'to be strong, powerful, vehement, hard', though the basic idea seems to be of destructiveness, and thus the Irresistible One, to stand in Whose way is to court annihilation.

More recent Hebrew lexicographers (Brown, Driver and Briggs; Koehler-Baumgartner) give the meanings as "devastate, despoil, deal violently with", so omitting "be strong, powerful", and one must note that to be destructive is not to be irresistible, so the proposed etymology cannot be sustained, while tradition cannot be shown to be reliable. So the only serious conclusion for the present is that the meaning of Shadday is unknown. (The author rightly rejects the etymology from the Hebrew shad "[female] breast", so Shadday = "fruitful". A more popular one at the moment derives it from the Babylono-Assyrian shadû "mountain", and theophanies of Yahweh on mountains are well known in the Old Testament so that an adjective meaning something like "of mountains" would not be obviously wrong. But again it is not clearly right. There is no Babylono-Assyrian adjective with this meaning used as a divine epithet, and the word with this meaning does not occur in Hebrew or related dialects.) Throughout the author takes El to mean "strength" and while we shall not delay readers with the technical details this time, the result is exactly as before. As a noun meaning 'god' and as a name 'God' there is no uncertainty at all, but the idea that the same word means "strength" is something for which arguments can be erected and names of experts quoted, but in the end there is just no assurance that the idea is right. In the light of the most recent knowledge it looks like a simple biradinal noun unrelated to any verbal root.

More generally the author does almost nothing to set the materials he is using in their ancient context. It is important to do this to avoid reading modern concepts into ancient texts. In the case of the New Testament, expositors make welcome use of

secular knowledge. The dates of Tiberius, for example, will be taken from a secular history. Similar background information about Old Testament worlds also exists, though it is often more difficult to ascertain and use. It is surely relevant to point out that El was used as a name among the Canaanites for the head of their pantheon at the period when the Israelites were taking possession of their land. The texts from which this is best known are the pagan myths found at Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit) on the Syrian coast. And they are particularly relevant because quite an amount of their poetic phraseology is also used in Hebrew poetry. This gives a setting rather different from what has traditionally been assumed. The Israelites worked out, under divine guidance, their distinctive ideas of God in a world of oppressive polytheism, and had perforce to draw on the vocabulary of polytheism in the process. This is seen most clearly in the use of Baal as a name of God, which is attested for the time of David, but was rejected later, a name not dealt with in the book under review.

In a second appendix the author offers his reasons for continuing to use Jehovah, and rejecting Yahweh. The reviewer does not find this convincing and regrets that some perfectly factual and sober paragraphs of J Weingreen are dismissed as "a fine piece of addled writing".

The Oracles of God

By John Carter. The Christadelphian. 1944 (Reprinted 1988)

Reviewed by Wilfred Lambert

With its third printing "The Oracles of God" maintains itself as a popular item of Christadelphian reading matter. One might compare it with Robert Roberts's "Christendom Astray" but the differences are more significant. "Christendom Astray" arose in an earlier generation when the aim was to evangelize among other Christian communities. "The Oracles of God" was written when new members came mostly from Christadelphian families and Sunday schools, so that now the need was to sustain the faith within the body. As writers, too, these authors are very different. Robert Roberts as a professional journalist had an attractive, fluent style which John Carter did not emulate. Any interest his writing has results from the subject matter rather than from its presentation. The context of writing of each book brought a different pressure to bear on each writer. Robert Roberts had to convince possibly unwilling members of other denominations while John Carter could rely on a general loyalty of his readers and only needed to supply them with material in support of views already held. But Robert Roberts had the easier task of appealing to the commonly accepted Bible, while John Carter was concerned with various scholarly matters that went under the term "Higher Criticism", in addition

to the Bible. "Bible claims and critical theories are in conflict" was his theme.

From the standpoint of hindsight two questions must be asked about "The Oracles of God". First, was it reliable and well conceived when first published? Secondly, does the 1988 reprint fill a real need? In some ways the second question depends on the answer to the first, but nevertheless the second will be taken first.

In fact the book goes back beyond its first publication in 1944. The first eight chapters (of ten) were originally published as articles in "The Christadelphian" for 1927-28. The passing of time does not of course change basic truths, but this book is an answer to scholarly trends, which do change. What was of great concern sixty years ago might not be today. Young people of 1989 might not know what a "whist drive" was (p. 1), and the author's frequent appeal to the rendering of the R.V. will find less interest today, when the R.S.V and N.E.B, among others, are more used. Also more recent discoveries, such as older Biblical MSS, the Bodmer papyri for the New Testament and the Dead Sea scrolls for the Old Testament for example, were not available to the author. In short, a new, up-to-date book would have been preferable, but since such a work does not exist an older book which does not altogether meet present needs has been reprinted. If the question is put why no one today writes a work of similar scope to meet current needs, part of the answer lies in the book under review.

Since the middle of the last century study of the Bible has been shaken by both fresh scholarly approaches and by new discoveries. As often, the actual innovators have been few. Most scholars have followed perceived leaders. Fashion has often dominated scholarly work, and underlying philosophies have frequently sparked particular lines of Biblical interpretation. The new finds have rarely been accessible to Bible scholars. While any Hebraist willing to master the old alphabet could read a copy of the Moabite stone, very few can judge for themselves whether the Egyptian Mernepta stele naming Israel, or the Sennacherib prism mentioning Hezekiah, has been accurately translated, nor whether a certain archaeological stratum at Jericho was really contemporary with the time of Joshua. Discoveries have come in such spate and changes of opinion have been so frequent that it is small wonder that those who had faith in the Bible as the only source of God's revelation have been disturbed. Opinions became polarised. Some scholars were carried away by the new ideas and discoveries, which were not always correctly evaluated. Others simply dug their heels in, protesting their faith in the Bible and refusing to accept anything that went against their convictions. In the tense atmosphere sober, balanced evaluation of the new ideas and discoveries was rarely forthcoming.

John Carter had a profound knowledge of the English Bible, but his reading in 'critical' works was limited. Mostly he depended on conservative writers of other denominations. One illustration of the

disadvantage of this must suffice. On p. 81 of the recent reprint under review here he is dealing with the question of whether the text of the Old Testament we have is reliable, and quotes "W. Robertson Smith 'Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament' ". In fact another scholar, S. R. Driver, wrote a book with this title, the work of Robertson Smith quoted being "The Old Testament in the Jewish Church" p. 71 (1st Ed of 1881 = p. 56 of 3rd Ed of 1926). It explains that all our Hebrew MSS go back to one and the same text with only the most trivial variants, and that this state of affairs is attested so far back as the end of the first century A.D. Immediately following, John Urquhart is quoted, and here not even a title is provided, but no doubt it is his "The Inspiration and Accuracy of the Holy Scriptures" first published in 1895. Urquhart states much the same as Robertson Smith, and even alludes to him "as will be seen from the words quoted from W. Robertson Smith", so raising the question whether John Carter had himself read Robertson Smith or was only quoting him at second hand from Urquhart. The latter must surely be the case, since John Carter's own words after the quotations from Urquhart (the first paragraph on p. 83) rebuke "rationalistic critics" for refusing to allow that accurate copying went back earlier than the 2,000 years for which it was proved by the words of Robertson Smith. Such an attitude would not be possible for one who has read the whole context of Robertson Smith's statement, for after detailing the evidence that the Old Testament was very accurately copied in Hebrew from the first century A.D. he proceeds on p. 73 (1st Ed = p. 61 3rd Ed) to document with equal precision the evidence for variant texts, and in some instances substantially variant texts, in all earlier evidence:

On the contrary there is abundant evidence that in earlier ages Hebrew MSS. differed as much, or more than, MSS. of the New Testament.

Robertson Smith had only the Samaritan text of the Pentateuch and Joshua, the Septuagint Greek translation, and the book of Jubilees, but today the Dead Sea Scrolls have provided much more evidence, and they have confirmed the best previous textual criticism. Comparison of the Septuagint, which was made before even the date of the Dead Sea Scrolls, with the traditional later Hebrew text had convinced serious textual critics that the quality of this Hebrew text varied considerably from book to book. The books of Samuel, for example, are in a comparatively poor state, and could often be corrected and improved from the Greek, while other books seemed to be in better condition and received little if any help from the Greek text. The Dead Sea Scrolls have confirmed this. While the much publicised complete Isaiah scroll does not differ much from the standard later text, a still unpublished fragmentary text of Samuel in places confirms what had been deduced from the Septuagint, and scrolls of Jeremiah similarly confirm that the Septuagint of that book, which is about

an eighth shorter than the standard Hebrew text, is based on a shorter Hebrew original. A short book for English readers dealing with this kind of material, but not with the Cave IV scroll of Samuel, is Ralph W. Klein, "Textual Criticism of the Old Testament. The Septuagint after Qumran", Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1974. So the facts are quite the opposite of what appears in "The Oracles of God" on this subject, and it seems that the author was misled by John Urquhart.

The influence of this material in "The Oracles of God" has gone beyond the pages of the book. The Bible Exhibition gives much emphasis to the accuracy of the Jewish copying of the Hebrew Bible, with the strong implication that such accuracy dates from the authors' times. Reference is made to the counting of even the letters of each book, but this only goes back to the Middle Ages. The facts are that in some cases textual variation is very considerable, so that, as already stated, one eighth approximately of Jeremiah is at stake. Preaching should not be based on misinformation. And there is no need to lose faith over this matter when the facts are ascertained. The shorter version of Jeremiah, may well be closer to what the prophet and Baruch were responsible for than the longer version of our Bibles, but no essential doctrine is lost or changed if the extra sections are omitted. In the New Testament a section of John's Gospel in the A. V., ch. 7:53 - 8:11, is well known not to be original at that point, but faith in Jesus does not collapse in consequence. The evidence of the ancient MSS is to be taken seriously.

While the case of the text of the Old Testament is extreme, it is not unique in the book under review. Desire to sustain faith against attack at times resulted in less care to ascertain facts than might have been the case. After so many years it is a matter for regret that the book has been reissued without these errors being corrected, or that a new book has not been written. The difficulty has been that large areas of serious scholarly work have been dubbed "criticism" so that they have been made to appear wrong even before the facts have been ascertained. If the present generation wishes to promote its faith, it is essential that some engage in serious study of all the matters covered in the work under review so that wrong information is corrected. True faith has nothing to lose from this process, and the possibility of making converts can only be increased.

We would normally have included a renewal slip with this issue which completes the 1988 set of three. Due to the events referred to in earlier pages the timing and frequency of future issues is under review. A renewal slip will be enclosed with the next issue. We are sorry that owing to pressure on space we have had to hold over the fourth article in Bill Robinson's series "Women's Liberty in Christ".