
THE

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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

What is the right age for baptism? There is no difficulty in defining the wrong age and we are all agreed that infant baptism is not taught in Scripture. There is however remarkably little, if any, discussion as to the age after infancy when baptism is appropriate. Instead there is a tacit tradition that it is the middle or late teens. The difficulties and the strains that this can possibly give rise to tend to be ignored. That it is no new problem is shown by the following item of "Intelligence" from the "Christadelphian" of February 1897.

WARRINGTON. - I have to report an event of a most exceptional character. Since our brother and sister Ogden's immersion, about four years ago, their children, three in number, have been brought up to the daily reading of the Scriptures and instruction in Divine things, with the result that they each possess a knowledge of the truth in its doctrinal bearings far in advance of what we find in children of such tender years. This fact, coupled with a large mental capacity such as each of the children possess, may account for the probably unique incident I am recording. Some few months ago, the youngest of the three, a bright boy of about eight years, began to show signs of failing health, which soon intensified so as to cause anxiety to his parents, but, instead of this physical weakness causing a corresponding mental decline, it seemed to have a contrary effect, causing, if possible, a still more interested concern in the boy as to his relationship to God. A week ago it became evident that the great enemy could not be much longer kept at bay, and to the surprise of all the boy, of his own spontaneous will and desire, asked that he might be immersed for union with Christ. The usual questions proved conclusively that the power of the word had wrought its effect and that though so young he nevertheless possessed a knowledge of the things of the Kingdom and the Name such as made it impossible to refuse his application without incurring a great responsibility, and so a bath was procured and brought into the sick-room, and the boy was prepared to face the trying ordeal (for by this time he had become so weak that his bed-clothes had to be cut from off him). After having passed under the water, he requested to see each of the brethren and sisters who were present separately, to wish them a last good-bye, evidently realising that it was not for long. Thirty hours afterward he fell asleep in hope of a glorious resurrection, and was interred on Wednesday, January 13th; brother Garside, of Ormskirk, officiating. - T. S. McNair.

It is clear from this that there was considerable reluctance to baptise the boy even though he had "sufficient knowledge" and was "concerned about his relationship with God". The lengthy and defensive statement with its reference to "responsibility" shows that it was only the imminence of death which led to his wishes being acceded to. Evidently the trauma of the event gave rise to some further thought for

three months later the following appeared:

WARRINGTON. - Brother Ogden reports the obedience of his two daughters, LILIAN and FLORENCE (12 and 10) who were immersed March 30th, after a satisfactory and intelligent confession of the things concerning the Kingdom and the Name. [Others can testify that the new-borns, though young, are of unusual intelligence in the things of God. They are sisters to the interesting boy whose death was reported by brother McNair a month or two back. - Ed]

This is for me more than just an interesting bit of history for the boy was my uncle and my mother was the elder of his two sisters. I have only recently seen the above extracts but the story was not new to me although as told by my mother the emphasis was rather different. The desire for baptism was not just a last minute happening; my grandparents had argued for some time against an adamant refusal by the ecclesia to accede to their wishes. How true that was it is impossible to say now but the report itself conveys a deep feeling of reluctance to baptise one so young.

My personal interest does not end here however, for I evidently inherited the precocity of that previous generation. My father died two weeks after my third birthday and when I was told of his death my response, so my mother told me, was to say "He will be in the Kingdom, won't he?" At an even earlier age I had replied indignantly when rebuked for making a lot of noise that I was "singing about Jerusalem". I can myself recall being convinced at the age of five that the Second Coming was imminent, doubtless reflecting the expectation at "the meeting" in the wake of the Balfour Declaration. It doesn't seem unreasonable to say that my understanding of "the things concerning the Kingdom and the Name" at the age of eight would have been comparable to that of my dead uncle. Not that I would claim any special intelligence. It was just a result of my particular circumstances.

The most interesting thing about these reports in the "Christadelphian" may not be noticed at first; it is that the boy is not named. It must surely be unique for a person to be baptised and to die without his Christian name, and therefore his identity, being disclosed. The rightness or wrongness of their action must have so absorbed the good brethren of Warrington that they had forgotten that he was a thinking, feeling, individual; a person. He was just part of a problem. This is confirmed by the astonishing statement "to the surprise of all, of his own spontaneous will and desire" the boy wanted to be baptised. Why is it strange that an intelligent child who had been taught that, unbaptised, he would be rejected at the judgment seat, wanted to do something about it?

Certainly in my own case I came to be terrified (not by death about which I had the usual childish built-in protective instinct) but of the Second Coming. I can remember more than once, wakened by an unusual noise, getting out of bed at night and looking out of the window on to the busy street where we lived when there had been a disturbance below - in actuality probably nothing more than a fight in the public

house further down the road - and looking at the night sky to see if there was any evidence there that Jesus had come again.

What is the position today? Officially there has been no change in doctrine. Item 30 of the "Doctrines to be Rejected" remains. I imagine however that, as a result of the greater awareness of the needs and sensitivities of children, most parents today will tend to fudge the issue, or if they realise that this is something that their children are worried about, make reassuring noises. Certainly when I have discussed the matter I have not encountered anyone who insisted that the "Doctrine to be Rejected" is applicable to the children of believers. But it is perfectly possible that there are children today disturbed as I was so many years ago.

My own view is that there are good reasons for regarding mid or late teens as an appropriate age for a Christian commitment to be formally entered into. The reasons are those common to any decision that will decisively affect one throughout one's life. But that view is dependent upon there being some rethinking about the period before the time for such a decision. Is there any reason why we should think it necessary to pronounce on this matter? Is not this something that we should leave in the hands of a God who can scarcely love children less than we do?

We of course are not alone in facing this problem; it exercises the Baptist churches also. However while there are some exceptional churches who will baptise children at the age of six or seven the majority, like us, regard mid or late teens as the appropriate age. But the position of children in the Baptist church is different from that in our ecclesias. Births are there recognised and marked by a service of thanksgiving and dedication by the parents. Nor is there any suggestion that if a child dies unbaptised it will be lost eternally. In "The Water that Divides" (a joint consideration of the baptism debate by an Anglican and a Baptist) it is pointed out:

[There is] the sheer impossibility of treating children as strangers to God's grace. What baptist parent does not teach his child to pray from his earliest years? What Christian parent does not instruct his children in right and wrong from the standards of Scripture? What such parent does not take his children to church to share in the worship of the believing community? And what parent does not believe that God hears his children's prayers and accepts the worship of their hearts, and does not teach them so?"

Should we not too share this outlook? Anyone who doubts that some rethinking is necessary should ask himself or herself: What would have been the fate of poor little Stanley Ogden if the Warrington ecclesia had delayed their decision for a few days more?

Ron Coleman

Left, Right and Centre in the Church

In 1972 Len Richardson gave a series of ten talks on "The New Testament Church Contrasted and Compared with the Twentieth Century Ecclesia" to the London Bible Study Class. In this more-or-less verbatim report of the eighth talk in the series the author's characteristic spoken style will be detected.

It seems to me that every community or organisation has basically the same problems; political parties, professional organisations and religious bodies alike; and I have tried to summarise the problems of living together in any organisation in the title "Left, Right and Centre". There are, first of all, those who want to go too far and too fast, and are generally referred to as the 'left wing' of the party, the organisation, or even of the Church. Secondly there are those who do not want to go at all, or those who even want to retrench in the past; the conservative element, usually referred to as the 'right wing'. Then there are those who are in the middle of the road, willing to concede something to both sides but unwilling to join either, and these we think of as the 'centre'. And that is what I have in mind in this title 'Left, Right and Centre in the Church'.

An Old Problem

The Christian church has always had this problem, even in New Testament times, and we are not free of it today. The idea that we sometimes have entertained (and certainly I did in my younger days) that in the apostolic church everything was sweetness and light and everybody pulled together under the inspired direction of the apostles is a fallacy. In fact it was not really like that; we may like to think it was, but the facts are to the contrary. The Corinth ecclesia may be taken as a fair example of a large and prosperous Gentile church in New Testament times, and yet there were problems in that church that would take our breath away today, epitomized in 1 Corinthians 11. The chapter begins "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you." So we see the Corinthian ecclesia, following the example of the apostle Paul, and worthy of his praise; yet lower down, in verse 17, he says: "Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse". And he goes on to prove to them that it would be better not to meet together to remember the Lord at all than to meet in the manner in which they did, in which they made a mockery of all that the Lord's table stood for.

So, "I praise you", "I praise you not" - their graph, as it were, would be a zigzag, with some things for which they were praiseworthy, and some things for which they were blameworthy. Some good things, some bad. Views to the 'right', (e g the Judaising element, those who found it difficult to accept that Christ had made them free altogether from the bondage of the law), and views to the 'left' (e g those who said "all things are lawful unto me" and, as we shall see in a moment, had

to be in their turn reproved by the Apostle Paul), with the inevitable danger of falling apart so that "there were divisions among them".

It is humbling for us to realise that the attitudes that we may adopt, as the attitudes that they adopted in Corinth, though no doubt claiming to be motivated by the highest spiritual intentions, are frequently only one's natural inclinations showing through. "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?" ("Living on the purely human level" - New English Bible translation).

I daresay it came as a shock to the Corinthian brethren and sisters when they received this letter from the Apostle Paul to be told that these high and mighty attitudes that they were adopting, these principles for which they were standing, were nothing other than a manifestation of the flesh, of their purely human level of thinking. They were thinking in purely human ways, and while they ranged themselves behind their respective leaders, the fact was that they were just following their natural inclinations. A cool, objective and truly spiritual judgement is very difficult, if not almost impossible, to achieve. Our innate personal likes and dislikes so easily colour which side we favour, disguised, of course, always with a few scripture texts; and where groups form on this basis it only needs one or two articulate leaders to make a division, either open or concealed. However we owe to these dissensions - the arguments that raged over meats, the observance of festival days, the necessity or otherwise of circumcision, which were continually recurring - some of the purest and loveliest of Paul's expository epistles. It is in dealing with these very problems that Paul rises to the occasion and so beautifully shows the scripture teaching on these matters.

The Right

There were clearly two main schools of thought. There were what we might call today the 'hardliners', with their traditional Jewish background, who had a weak conscience about eating meats sold in the Gentile markets, and found it difficult to accept that circumcision and Jewish festivals were no longer binding on Christian believers; then there were the Gentile converts who had more liberal views, who had not been brought up in the prejudices and traditions of the Jewish faith, who held that in Christ Jesus they had been made free from these things, and who seemed to have professed a better understanding of the Christian faith. "We all have knowledge" was their claim, and they were right of course; they did have knowledge and were able to see a wider view than their more prejudiced Jewish brethren. But they tended to despise the more scrupulous Jewish Christians who found it abhorrent to think of eating certain kinds of meats and felt themselves bound still to observe certain festival days.

These two parties, the right and the left, were a running sore in the New Testament Church, and Paul stands always in the middle and says, You are both right, and you are both wrong! This man is right in his view because to him that is what his faith requires him to do; whilst the other is right in his view, because he has seen that in Jesus Christ

we have been made free from these inhibitions and prohibitions of the law. So you are both right, but also both wrong - when you attack one another over these things. In the 14th chapter of Romans Paul is dealing with the same and related problems to those we have spoken of. We notice first of all in verse 1 (and it stops us in our tracks immediately): "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations". Now we say, him that is weak in the faith, we cannot receive! As good Christadelphians we may not "receive" one who does not understand the truth. This does not mean, in fact, that Paul is saying a man who holds wrong doctrine is to be received into the church. He is not talking here about the basic content of the Christian faith, but about a man whose faith is "weak" in relation to the kind of things they were worried about, a man who has a weak conscience with regard to eating meat sold in the market place, that may have been offered in sacrifice, and probably had been so offered to an idol. His conscience is weak, he feels scrupulous about these things. Never mind, Paul is saying, receive him, and do not sit in judgement on him, but try to understand his point of view. Verse 3: "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth; for God hath received him."

Toleration

Now this is teaching mutual toleration, and we do not like that word 'toleration' do we? We tend to be intolerant as a community, and as individuals; we expect everybody to share our views and if they will not, we will hit them over the head with a Bible until they do. But Paul is preaching toleration here. He is teaching mutual respect for people who do not share your particular point of view. The man who is able to eat is not to despise the other man, to make fun of him, or think that he is some kind of inferior Christian who does not understand. And the man who has been brought up in the Jewish faith, and cannot shake off his Jewish prejudices, is not to judge his fellow Christian (as he was wont to do). So one was wrong for judging and the other was wrong for scorning; and both of them should have had a better respect for one another in Christian love - verse 4: "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand".

The Left

Of course the Christian liberty that was claimed by the parties of the Left was equally repudiated by the parties of the Right; and there is Paul in the middle, as it were, holding the ring. Many of the catch phrases used by the 'liberal wing' are taken up by Paul in his epistles and dealt with quite severely. He himself, in his doctrine, stands for freedom, for liberty. "Christ has made me free from the bondage of the law" is where he stands theologically. But he does not stand with them in their scorning of others. "We all have knowledge", they say, "We understand better than them". I know, says Paul, that we all have knowledge - knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. This 'knowledge' you claim as if it were your proprietary right; you feel yourself to be more

spiritually educated than your brethren; you think you are able to see things better than they, and that you have been better instructed in the truth than they. But this can be a dangerous thing, Paul says, "knowledge puffeth up", but only love can build up. "All things are lawful to us" they say, "These Judaising brethren get on our nerves. We know perfectly well that it does not matter what you eat because Jesus said so". Yes, says Paul, all things are lawful unto me but all things are not good for me. I have got to consider the impact that my liberty makes on the other brother before I can say that a thing is lawful. "All things are not helpful" - the RSV translation - so when we start claiming our 'rights' and saying 'we understand', we have always got to remember that what we are saying may be perfectly right in itself but it may be quite wrong if we make it an overbearing thing in the lives of others; it may not be 'helpful'; it may not be upbuilding; it may not even be good for ourselves.

So we go back to Corinth now, where the same problem is exhibited in I Corinthians 8:7: "Howbeit" Paul says "there is not in every man that knowledge". I think you could put 'knowledge' in quotes, because this was a kind of catch phrase of the parties of the left - "we all have knowledge". But Paul says there is not in every man that 'knowledge' for some "with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat as a thing offered unto an idol and their conscience being weak is defiled". Again I suppose it would have been brethren in Gentile ecclesias such as Corinth who had been brought up with the Jewish inhibitions who would have a conscience about this thing. Quite possibly also there would have been pagan converts in Corinth who had in former times been idolators, who had actually offered sacrifices in the idol's temple, and now found themselves unable any longer to do this. Having come out from the world into the fellowship of light in Jesus Christ it would be an abhorrent thing that their brother did not seem to see there was anything wrong in eating this kind of meat. He ought to know better, they would think, because they had a conscience of the idol that the other man had not.

Who is weak? Who is strong?

Their brethren, on the other hand, had what we should call today a more liberal view. I would prefer to use the word liberated and say they had a more 'liberated' view. There seems to have been a total incomprehension of one another's point of view, and again we find Paul standing in the middle holding the ring. The strong who were free from inhibitions, he says, were to consider the effect on their weaker brethren. It is interesting to note in passing that those who banged the table the loudest and made the most frightening noises about their brethren were really 'the weak'. They took the strong line saying "Touch not; Taste not; Handle not;" - you cannot do this, you cannot do that. Thus they laid down the law for their brethren. But, in fact, in Paul's book they were the weaker brethren because their conscience was weak; they were easily upset; they were easily caused to stumble; they could not see the width and breadth that their brethren could see.



We can take a lesson from this, because sometimes we think that if a man makes a lot of noise and claims to be 'defending the purity of the truth' he must be the stronger man in the faith. He may not be however, and he was not here! He was one of the weak brethren, while the strong were those whose conscience was, in the view of their brethren, more 'elastic', who could see that an "idol was nothing in this world" and it did not really matter what you ate. "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak." (1 Corinthians 8:9) Here is the responsible use of Freedom. Be careful in using your freedom to eat that you do not cause some Christian brother to sin whose conscience is weaker than yours. We need to remind ourselves in the same way that we are not our own, that we are not free men at all, we have always to consider the implications of our actions in the minds and lives of our brethren and sisters. "But when ye sin so against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ." (v 12) If you cause your brother to stumble you have sinned against Christ and though you may be perfectly right in your theology, yet you have not considered sufficiently the impact in the mind of a weaker brother whose conscience is more easily defiled.

There are two important points which emerge from this consideration. First of all, there was in New Testament times a conflict between the liberal and conservative views and in these matters as we have seen, the conservative hard-liners were, strictly speaking, wrong. There can be no doubt about the fact that theologically they were wrong, for in Romans 14:14 Paul states quite categorically: "I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean." Why does he say this? I think he is referring back to the saying of Jesus recorded in the Gospel, when he said "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." "Because", Jesus says, "it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats". Modern translations bring out that this last phrase is a comment by the gospel writer - "Thus he declared all foods clean" (RSV).

The Need For Restraint

The second point is this; Paul never advocated renouncing their liberty, but rather restraining it, in order to avoid causing a brother to stumble. This was very different from pretending to accept the right wing view himself, which he never did. We never find Paul agreeing that a man is defiled by eating a certain kind of meat, or that he ought to observe a certain kind of day, such as a festival day, he never advocates that; he always maintains the principle but then bends it, and accommodates it for the good of his brother. In other words the liberal views of those on the left were still under the law of love and they could never escape from the law of love. They had indeed been emancipated from the prohibitions and inhibitions of legalism but not to please themselves, as we see in the next chapter (Romans 15). "We then that are strong" - and you have got to put these words in the context

of the times, remembering the difficulties they experienced in living together as one in Jesus Christ - "we then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let everyone of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself: but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me."

Again in Galatians 5 Paul is dealing with the problem in exactly the same way.

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace."

We see therefore that Paul never stopped maintaining the freedom from the law that Jesus Christ had made possible, "the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free". But look now at the restraint of Christian love in the 13th verse:

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.

Another text for today! "Liberty", but not to be used as an "occasion to the flesh", rather a liberty to serve one another in love. If you are always at one another's throats, tearing one another to pieces, Paul says, all you will do in the end is to consume one another; there is no upbuilding in this.

The Problem Today

Now we come to the 20th century because we are trying to get the lessons of the first century and apply them to ourselves; and of course we have got similar variations of emphasis in our own days. It must be so, men are not automatons, there will always be people with odd views of their own, or odd attitudes of their own; some who think this way and others who think that way. We have our Left-wing liberal thinking, and we have our Right-wing conservative thinking; we have some who have what appears to others to be a legalistic approach to religion on one hand; and we have an emphasis on individual freedom in Christ on the other. And sometimes, let's face it, there is as much bitterness and incomprehension as there was in New Testament times. So I would like in conclusion to offer a few thoughts applying the lessons of Corinth and Rome to our own 20th century ecclesias.

Legalism is dead; there can be no doubt about that. Paul says so, the Scriptures tell us so, and Jesus said so - Legalism is dead. We do not live under a law of works, we are not trying to win our salvation by doing things, by abstaining from this, abstaining from that, going



through some kind of rigorous bodily exercise to make ourselves pleasing to God. Freedom of conscience is a Christian concept, though we are still responsible to others, as we have seen, for its operation. For example freedom of thought and of speech, it seems to me, must be allowed in our midst. A harsh regimentation of thinking about the word of God and the damming of discussion, or inflexibility of interpretation, is a violation of the liberty we have in Christ and will end, as legalism always must end, in spiritual suffocation. "Where the spirit of the Lord is", Paul wrote (2 Corinthians 3:17) "there is LIBERTY". And this was the freedom which the legalists in Corinth and Rome were denying themselves and others, and this was their offence. It was not that they were unable to see, as Paul could see, or as some of their more liberal brethren could see, that they had been emacipated in Jesus Christ. This was not their condemnation. Their judgment was that they denied this liberty to their brethren.

On the other side, however, we are not ever "free" to destroy another's faith. We are not ever free to say things, or do things, in such a way that our brother "for whom Christ died" stumbles out of the path, and great care is necessary in how we react to the opinions of others for although we may be technically quite correct we can still be totally wrong in application. The overriding principle as we have seen already is Christian charity. (Sometimes I think we use the word 'love' in place of charity so much that in a sense, we have devalued the coin a little and the word 'charity' can perhaps sometimes conjure up a more complete picture than the word love.) The overriding principle therefore is Christian charity, "only use not liberty as an occasion to the flesh but by love serve one another".

The words "strong" and "weak" are only relative terms. We may talk of strong brethren, or weak brethren - but who is strong? There is not much difference really and we shall all need mercy at the end of the day; and none of us can afford to trample on other people or their opinions or their consciences. Respect for others is part of this Christian charity which Paul is talking about, because we are all weak before him and we all alike belong to him; we are all fellow slaves in his service, so it ill becomes any of us to claim the right to criticise and condemn our brethren. Toleration is not a naughty word; it almost appears to be so sometimes, but it is not really so. Do not be afraid to be tolerant.

Magnanimity

Of course we are not to tolerate everything, and there are some things we may not compromise over. But we should tolerate as much as we can, not as little as we can. Try to be large minded and large hearted, this was the way Paul handled the situation. Toleration is not something to be avoided at all costs. "Let your moderation be known unto all men" he writes to the Philippians (4:5) and that sounds very near to toleration, while the Greek word itself is even nearer. "Let your moderation be known unto all men" means willingness to concede a point, and Conybeare and Howson say that the word really means "yieldability". In other words, show your willingness to give a point,

your willingness to temper your views in the light of other people's opinions and views. "Magnanimity" is the translation of the New English Bible - let your magnanimity be known unto all men because the Lord is at hand.

So we are brought back again to Romans 14; "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth". Then who are you sitting in judgement upon another man's slave? He is responsible to him not to you, and to his own master he will stand or fall. "Yea he shall be holden up". Christ does not want any of us to fall. He does not want any of us to stumble. He wants us to succeed and is willing to hold us up. "He shall be holden up", Paul says, this brother whom you despise. Christ is the only and ultimate judge of all things. Then why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ, and shall all need a great deal of mercy in that day. Let us therefore show it to one another now, for "he shall have judgement without mercy that hath shown no mercy."

Encounter with an Anglican

(John Maycock describes an experience which reflects on our perception of others - and theirs of us.)

In January of this year I was talking to an Anglican colleague at work. We got round to Christian belief and I remember that I mentioned our non-acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity. He made some comment like "That puts you out on a limb then" but drew from his briefcase an A4 sheet advertising 'The Bishop's Lent Discussions' which, he said, were intended to be ecumenical in character. He asked whether I would be interested in attending and indeed told me of the meeting arranged to set up the groups.

How should a Christadelphian react to such an invitation? Some, I know, try to do a deal by agreeing to attend church only in exchange for a corresponding attendance at one of our meetings. In this particular case I would have found it difficult to think of an equivalent to the 'ecumenical discussion group'. But this line of thought did not occur to me at the time.

I noticed at the top of the sheet of paper that the name of the Bishop concerned was George Carey. This name rang a bell for two reasons. First, I knew that he had been of significant help to a Christadelphian family of our acquaintance. Indeed it was a phone call from the afore-mentioned cleric, who had just moved to Bristol, which alerted us to the sudden illness of a dear Sister in the Lord. Subsequently we met Mrs Carey at the funeral of this friend.

The second "bell" which rang resulted from my having a book entitled "I Believe in Man" by this same gentleman. The notable thing about it is the defence it provides of the much-valued Christadelphian

doctrine of the nature and destiny of man. The following quotations from the latter part of the book make this clear.

That man is by nature mortal and therefore subject to death, and that death came into the world through man's sin are two viewpoints expressed in scripture.

This idea of the resurrection is at complete variance with the ancient Greek concept of the immortality of the soul. This latter theory distinguished between a mortal part of man, the body, and its indwelling immortal element, the soul. What happens to the body is of little concern to the soul which, after death, is free of its hindrance. The Biblical emphasis, however, is upon the unity of man as a whole person, not merely a collection of parts. Both Old testament and New Testament unite in saying firmly 'man is a body' and not as the Greeks would say 'man has a body'.

One must admit these are commendable things to see coming from the pen of a man who has become a Bishop in the Church of England.

The day-by-day decisions one is called to make in life rely on an intuitive assessment of propriety. In this case I said to my Anglican friend that I was interested in his discussion group. Imagine my surprise then, a few days later, when my colleague came to see me, rather concerned at the possible contribution I might make to his group! The reason was immediately revealed. It was the description of Christadelphians given in a little book "Cults and Isms" by J Oswald Sanders. The copy handed over to me to read was published by Lakeland in 1969 but was written originally in 1948 and revised in 1962. In it Christadelphians were one of 13 "cults" or "isms" ranging from Roman Catholics to Seventh Day Adventists to whom the author (an Australian) applied Paul's condemnation in 1 Timothy 4:1-2 (Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith . .") Christadelphians are especially singled out because the author's grandparents had been Christadelphians. Our beliefs are set out in numerous quotations from the standard works of earlier times such as Christendom Astray, The Slain Lamb, The Truth of the Trinity and The Blood of Christ, with Bible passages appended which, it is claimed, disprove them.

It was not this however which had disturbed my friend (and embarrassed me) but a quotation from pages 3, 6 and 8 of a Christadelphian book "Who are Christadelphians" of which the following is a sample:

For we hold that the religious opinions and sacramentalism of all orders of men in 'Christendom' so-called are nothing more than that 'strong delusion' sent of God upon all mankind that they should believe a lie, that they might all be condemned. We object to the fundamental doctrines of Christendom: the religion of the churches and chapels is a negation of Bible teaching on almost all points. We hold it to be 'the abominations of the earth' with all dissenting names and denominations, aggregatedly styled 'names of

blasphemy' of which the European body politic, symbolised by the eight-headed, scarlet-coloured beast is said to be "full" (Rev 17:3).

My response was to give my friend a short (one and a half page) statement on the Apostles' Creed, written for my own interest, and a copy of the booklet by Alfred Norris "The Things We Stand For". He came back after a little while with some annotations on my piece which he had read before the booklet. He then repeated his invitation for me to join their Lent discussion group. What I found interesting about the annotations was that far from not knowing what he believed (a common Christadelphian image of church people) he was very perceptive. Overall, though, he was quite amazed at the difference between the spirit of the community represented in Alfred Norris's little book and that of the portrayal of us in Sanders's book, relying on "Who Are Christadelphians?" It was obviously the manner in which our doctrines were presented rather than any difference in the doctrines themselves which changed his attitude.

In the event, through holiday, sickness and other commitments I only went to one of the five meetings. It was indeed "ecumenical in character" in that doctrinal issues were scarcely raised at all. The subject was "New Life - Worship" which was given a strongly personal emphasis. To begin with we were invited to divide into twos "to tell of a time when you were certain of God's presence, and how you felt." A taped talk by George Carey centred on responding to the Love of God with love and enthusiasm. He made the point that we need to give God space in our lives; we need time to be alone with God in addition to our corporate worship. The last part of the evening was devoted to a study of the Lord's Prayer based on Luke's account. The most reliable Greek manuscripts do not have "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven" which is reflected in modern translations from the RSV onwards, although of course the words remain in Matthew's record. In consequence the presentation centred on the work of God in the world today. This has however to be set against George Carey's own words in "I Believe in Man": "But the Kingdom is more than just a present reality. It is abundantly clear that God's Kingdom is not yet fully established but awaits its completion. . . . [it] will come in all its fulness as the completion of all things, when Christ delivers the Kingdom to his Father, having conquered all opposing forces (1 Cor 15:24)"

(We have tried without success to ascertain who published "Who Are Christadelphians?" - not very surprising perhaps in view of the fact that there are at least 12 different fellowships, all claiming to be the authentic Christadelphians. The spirit of the extract is not dead among us however. In March of this year "Logos" said 'The churches of christendom are sanctuaries for apostasy, and nothing more. Christ taught "the Truth" - not lies, false doctrine and hypocrisy - will make us "free". "Grace and Truth came by Jesus Christ" - not by the false doctrines and God-dishonouring views promoted by the churches whose members the Editor of Endeavour regards as "fellow Christians")

Women's Liberty in Christ

This is the concluding article in Bill Robinson's series but is of course far from being the last word on this complex and controversial subject. To those who hold that there should be no departure at all from New Testament practice he points out some of the many ways in which changing social conditions have brought about changes, and that even in apostolic days exceptional women transcended the normal patterns. The novel interpretation of some passages in the pastoral epistles will no doubt give food for thought and possibly provoke discussion.

There are three offices defined in the New Testament: overseer ("bishop" - KJV), elder and deacon. (The Greek episkopos is, in effect, transliterated to yield bishop and translated to yield overseer). The authorities are agreed that the first two are identical. The proof of this lies in Titus 1:5-9 in a passage in which Paul enjoins Titus to "ordain elders in every city" (v 5) and then goes on to describe the same people in terms generally similar to those applying to overseers in 1 Timothy 3:3-7, actually calling them "overseers" in verse 7. So we have only two offices to consider, elder/overseer and deacon.

Phoebe

All three words are masculine in the original Greek, suggesting that the holders of the office would be men. Yet Phoebe, whom we have already met in this study, is described as being a deacon in Romans 16:12 - not a deaconess, a term which didn't emerge until two centuries later. So we must not conclude that the masculine gender of the words defining the offices precludes the tenure of these offices by women, just as it would be wrong today to conclude that the person conducting the Cleveland enquiry - Lord Justice Butler-Sloss - was a man.

When I have presented this argument in the past my critics, unable to deny the evident facts of Scripture, have argued that a deacon is just a dogsbody anyway, a mere servant. There is no denying that the word "diakonos" does mean "servant" or "minister", but it does not necessarily imply lowly service. The word is used about Christ himself in Romans 15:8 and Galatians 2:17. It is also an inescapable fact that it is defined as an office in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. It is also worth stating that there is another New Testament word for "servant" (doulos) which does have lowly connotations, often meaning a slave, thus supporting my contention. Further, Paul describes Phoebe as "prostatis" in a unique occurrence of this word (Romans 16:2) translated "succourer" (KJV). According to Liddell and Scott, prostatis literally means "one who stands before, a front rank man, a chief, a leader of a party, protector or champion." In confirmation of this, the related verb "prostasso" occurs seven times in the New Testament. In the KJV this is translated "command" on six occasions and "bid" once. It is clear therefore that Phoebe as a deacon occupied a position of authority.

Priscilla

It is convenient at this point to mention that there were other women holding prominent positions in the church in the New Testament (and in the Old, of course, but space forbids an extension to our study). Chief among these was Prisca, the wife of Aquila. (Prisca was her formal name; "Priscilla" is a diminutive). Of the six times the couple are referred to Priscilla is mentioned first on four occasions although readers of the KJV will only find three. However in Acts 18:26, where Aquila is mentioned first in the KJV, the Greek has the reverse order. The change by the translators seems to be due to male bias, for this is the passage in which Priscilla and Aquila "expounded the way of God more perfectly" to Apollos "an eloquent man and mighty in the scriptures". No doubt they felt it inappropriate for Priscilla to be given priority in this situation. While there is a cultural reason why Aquila should be named first when Luke introduces us to the couple (Acts 18:2) and when Paul sends formal greetings (1 Corinthians 16:19) - this was the natural practice of the time - it is surely significant that on the other occasions, where preaching or a personal relationship with Paul is concerned, that Priscilla is mentioned first. This suggests that she had greater ability than her husband and was the more important of the two for Paul and the early church.

Junia

Another notable name is Junia (Romans 16:7) who is described as "of note among the apostles". Junia is a feminine name and this is not contradicted by her being mentioned (with Andronicus) as Paul's "kinsman" (KJV), for modern translations substitute a non-sexual description such as "relatives" (NIV), "fellow-Jews (GNB), "compatriots" (JB). On the other hand modern translations have "Junias" rather than "Junia", a masculine name, reflecting the latest Greek texts. However "Junias" would have to be a Graecised and abbreviated form of a male Latin name Iunianus for which there is no evidence, even in non-biblical texts, while there is evidence for Junia. There is also the evidence of the church fathers in favour of Junia being a woman, including that most unlikely misogynist, John Chrysostom.

Among the lesser names we have Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis (Romans 16:12) who "labour in the Lord". A similar description is given of Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2,3) but here there is some further information which gives a clue to what that labour was. Euodia and Syntyche had had some disagreement and Paul asks some anonymous yokefellow to "help those women which laboured with me in the gospel (contended at my side in the cause of the gospel - NIV), with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life." It seems clear from this that these women had played an important part in the life and work of the church and the danger that was threatening was not just their personal welfare but the health of the church itself. Although no doubt there was something blameworthy about the quarrel there is no suggestion that they should be silenced or subordinated. This suggests that Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis, "who

work hard in the Lord" (NIV) had fulfilled a similar role in the ecclesia in Rome.

Women elders?

Are there any actual examples of women elders, analogous to Phoebe's being a deacon? There is nothing strictly parallel to this, i.e. a woman being given the masculine title of elder. But the word "elder" itself does have a feminine form in the New Testament, unlike the word "deacon"; it is used twice - 1 Timothy 5:2 and Titus 2:3 - and is customarily translated as older, elder or aged women. But do these references have somewhat more of a significance? When we come to Titus 2:1-5 we observe that the qualities to be possessed by the older men and women - temperate (sober) grave (worthy of respect) etc, given in verses 2 and 3, are effectively the same as those in 1 Timothy 3:2,8,11, the qualities required of overseers and deacons. In particular, overseers must be "able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2) and older women should "teach what is good" (Titus 2:3). The next two verses, referring to the training (RV) of young women and children, can be taken as an amplification of this good teaching, but "good teaching" (one word in the original) and "training" derive from two different Greek words, so that there is not necessarily a textual constraint requiring this. So, notwithstanding the external social climate in those days, there remains a possibility that we are here reading of women elders who were teachers, such as Prisca, Euodia and Syntyche perhaps. We also note that the conditions are different from the ones we experience today; there is a fair number of unmarried women in contemporary society, of which the Christadelphian society is typical, and it would not be usual for groups of women today to be solely responsible for exhorting younger women how to run their homes.

Returning to the mainstream of our argument, we feel there is sufficient evidence to suggest that these older men (not all older men) are elders - we stress again that the Greek for both terms (older man and elder) is identical - and that the older women are women elders. The rendering of 1 Timothy 5:1,2 in the KJV points quite clearly in this direction. Verse 1 simply has "elder" rather than "older man", and verse 2 has "elder women"; only a change in word order is required for this to read "women elders". Here too it is not suggested that all older women were women elders. These particular ones had specific duties; it seems unlikely that all older women would have been expected to be teachers.

To help us in trying to see whether this is a valid argument or not let us ask ourselves: who are these old men and old women anyway?. Think of the ecclesia to which you belong; does it ever receive letters or holiday postcards from some respected former member, say, specifically asking after the spiritual health - as opposed to physical health - of the older men and older women? And wouldn't they be referred to as brothers and sisters, rather than men and women? Individuals in these groupings may well be enquired after - but the groups as a whole? Would it not be unusual? I would venture to suggest that it would be just the same in the first century: Paul would be

writing about elders of both sexes.

So there were certainly female deacons in the first century and possibly female elders. The males would predominate, we don't doubt, but the females did exist. Thus we should expect there would also be female holders of the equivalent of these offices in our modern society and further, that there would be a higher proportion of them. This would be a natural application of the principles adduced in our series to contemporary ecclesial life. There are those who object to such an application and indeed I have critics who have accused me of being influenced by the contemporary social scene; they argue that the egalitarian principle now obtaining in the world at large has no place in our Christadelphian community and is unbiblical. Before we address ourselves to the twentieth century scene, however, we must look at the role played by the president at our various meetings.

Presiding

Let us concentrate upon presiding at the Lord's Table. We must remember that it is a table, not an altar, and should not be ensnared into accepting a Roman Catholic concept. The Catholic argument is that it requires a priest to officiate at the altar for the re-enactment time and again of the Lord's sacrifice; and a priest has to be a man since the priests of the Old Testament were men and the twelve disciples were all men. Christadelphians scarce need to be shown how every facet of the Catholic argument is false. Christ died once for all and is himself our altar and High Priest; and the whole family of believers is a holy and royal priesthood. Any suitable member of this family may remind the assembly of our Lord's death and initiate the sharing of the bread and wine. All the members are of equal status; all are one in Christ Jesus. It is true that the twelve were all men; it is equally true, and just as important, that it was to women that Jesus first revealed himself after his resurrection. But why should one argue from either of these facts that presidents should be male, or, indeed, female? No reason at all. Presidents can be of either sex since all are equal in Christ. They are neither apostles nor priests of any higher standing than their fellow priests, the members of the congregation, and no authority is exercised in presiding - at the Lord's Table or in any other circumstance; the president is there by consent of the assembly, the forum which also decides the form of service. And in the assembly the women have a vote - even a voice perhaps - which is the equal of the men's. So we conclude that a sister may preside at the memorial meeting, and hence at any meeting. Our conclusion highlights the absurdity of a sister not being allowed to perform less demanding tasks, such as the public reading of Scripture, the distribution of the emblems, and doorkeeping.

Putting the liberty into practice

In reply to the criticisms referred to in the last paragraph but one, I protest that my approach is wholly Biblical. But part of that approach is to extrapolate from the social climate of the first century to that of the twentieth. To this extent I have been influenced by contemporary conditions, but in so doing I am simply following what is our practice in

other instances. Let us consider some examples.

(1) The early memorial meetings were held in houses, possibly early on the first day of the week, on what we would now term Saturday evenings. Yet we follow a formalised system inherited from Christendom and meet on Sundays at times which suit local conditions.

(2) In John 13:14 we read of Jesus commanding the disciples to wash each other's feet. The reason given is that it shows how no-one is superior to anyone else. We, in common with other Christians, adhere to the principle that it illustrates but have abandoned the practice itself. To argue that our cooler, less dusty western climes do not require this loving lowly act merely illustrates the point I am making. We adapt to the contemporary mores.

(3) From 1 Timothy 2 it is felt strongly that a woman should not teach, yet we waive the proscription with respect to Sunday School and instruction behind the scenes, as we have already noted. Further, many of our sisters are in the teaching profession, some having religion as their specialty. And it is not unknown for a sister to give Biblical addresses arranged by an external organisation for the general public which have been attended by brothers and sisters. This is generally deemed acceptable, though it becomes unacceptable if done from one of our own platforms.

(4) And in this very passage of Scripture dealing with teaching we read Paul's command that men everywhere should lift up holy hands in prayer. This we totally ignore.

(5) We are commanded to "Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss" (1 Thessalonians 5:26). But in our community brothers shake hands and it is sisters who are kissed.

(6) We translate ancient terminology into modern as far as illnesses are concerned. For example, anyone who was possessed of an unclean spirit, a dumb spirit or a spirit of infirmity is now categorised as suffering from insanity, epilepsy or arthritis respectively (Mark 5:1-5, 9:17-27, Luke 13:11-17). And we no longer consider exorcism to be the proper remedy for dealing with these diseases.

(7) We don't treat illness as James prescribes in 5:14 (anointing with oil etc).

(8) We describe the devil as sin in the flesh.

(9) We do not employ the name "Satan" in standard speech as, for example, Paul did when prevented from visiting the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 2:18).

(10) Most ecclesias don't use unleavened bread and do drink a sweet heavy wine, not the first century light wine diluted with two parts of water.

(11) We no longer fast in spite of the prescription by Jesus as to how and when we should (Matthew 6 etc).

(12) We do not regard 1 Corinthians 7:26-29 as applying to marriage in spite of the stress we lay on the time now being short.

I am aware of other examples, but a dozen will do: we translate Scripture into modern terms. This is manifestly the correct approach

yet we abandon it where the activity of sisters is concerned. Why should we? I suggest that we should take account of the contrast between the first and the twentieth century domestic scene. In the first century the woman was an insignificant chattel, a slave to her husband, to whose every whim she had to accede. A letter of the period from a wife to her absent husband illustrates this:

"Taus to Apollonius her lord very many greetings. Before everything I salute you, master, and I pray always for your health. I was distressed, my lord, not a little to hear that you had been ill, but thanks be to all the gods that they keep you safe from harm. I beg you, my lord, if it please you, to send for me; else I die because I do not behold you daily. Would that I were able to fly and come to you and make obeisance to you; for it distresses me not to behold you. So be friends with me and send for me. Good-bye my lord." ("Select Papyri", 1.115. A S Hunter and C C Edgar, quoted by William Barclay in "The All-Sufficient Christ".)

That was the Greek world but the Jewish world was no better and in some respects was worse because women were treated as inferior religiously. The well-known saying of Rabbi Judah ben Elai is an example. He maintained that a man had to say the following three blessings to God daily: "Blessed art thou who hast not made me a heathen, or a woman, or a brutish man."

Against this background the way that Jesus treated women was revolutionary and so too was Paul's declaration "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26-28)

But this new life of equality had to be lived in a society still governed by the old view of the status of women. This is brought out clearly in 1 Peter 3:1-3: "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without talk by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives." Peter then goes on to cite the "holy women of the past" as an example. "They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master." So the wife is no longer a Hagar but a Sarah and, additionally, her submission is not a forced one but a voluntary act which the husband has no right to demand; for, (v 7) "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life."

In today's western society there is no longer a social code allocating inferior status to women. The woman of today can be on a par with the man, educationally, socially and vocationally and should therefore not merely be allowed, but encouraged to let us profit from what she can offer, be the material of an exhortational or preaching nature. Manifestly there is no need for sisters' classes, though I have every sympathy with those competent hard-working sisters for whom such



classes are a lifeline.

Head covering today

In our first article we endeavoured to show that in the first century the woman's head was covered with her wrapped-up long hair as she spoke publicly; it was to show she had an authority equal to her husband's, in contrast to the then prevailing pattern of subordination. Nowadays such a custom is seen to be archaic and performs no useful function. Strong support for this contention comes from the need for covering being mentioned in only one place, 1 Corinthians 11. Corinth is known to have been a cesspit so far as morals were concerned, with both homosexual and heterosexual prostitution abounding. Short hair on a female and long hair on a male were tokens of prostitution or homosexuality; hence Paul's referring to such fashions as a disgrace (verses 14 and 15). The covering of the head was therefore almost surely a purely Corinthian practice, but even if it weren't it has no relevance for today when such hair fashions are no longer a disgrace; they have lost the significance they then had. We conclude therefore that the woman need not cover her head with her hair; there never has been a need to cover it with a hat except in the days when it was not conventionally respectable to be without one. Let her have any seemly hair style she wishes or wear a hat if that is her desire. In sum, let her use her Liberty in Christ.

Conclusion

If some move towards harnessing the untapped skills in our community is not made, an essential part in a reformation which is long overdue, I fear our decline will continue. As some of us cannot perceive that such a decline is well under way there are more and more brought up in households of faith who become disenchanted with our beloved fellowship; they reject outmoded attitudes which fail to capture the first century spirit of liberty in Christ and which do not measure up to the needs of today. If only we would take heed!

The Editor of "The Bible Searcher and Witness" accuses us of being tendentious in our quotation from Andrew Wilson's history of Christadelphianism (in the Supplement to our last issue) about Dr Thomas's opposition to a Statement of Faith. (If there was any prejudice it would not be ours since we relied on our intermediate source.) He quotes further from the original passage cited where Dr Thomas, apparently contradicting his earlier statement, says that "a creed or synopsis . . . becomes a necessity". One may well ask why then Dr Thomas did not himself produce one. The answer seems to be that he hedged it about with impossible and contradictory conditions. For example, a creed had to be capable of being "proved" (his emphasis) by anyone (sic) to be the teaching of the Father in his Word. However even such a scriptural creed should not be a substitute for the Word. But he then derides those who say "The Bible is my creed." Dr Thomas left only a few brief rules, "purely citations from the Bible, [which] were not considered by Thomas himself as worthy of publication in his lifetime." (AW) We maintain that neither we nor Andrew Wilson were misleading in what was said.

Letters To The Editor

From Alfred Norris, North Cave, North Humberside.

I appreciate your courtesy in sending me a copy of issue no. 80 of your magazine, containing a review of my book. ["What Is His Name?"] I should like your readers to see a brief reply, which I will try to couch in terms which do not provoke a self-perpetuating correspondence.

As the Reviewer has observed, my book was also reviewed in "The Testimony", and I have made my reaction known to the Reviewer. No offer of publication was made, but I am sending you copies of my answer to that Review. [Wilfred Lambert, our reviewer, did have a copy of this reply before him when writing his review.]

I ought in my own interests to say that I do not subscribe either to "The Testimony" or to "The Endeavour Magazine", and am, looking in opposite directions, not happy about the policy of either. Indeed, it is hard to find in the British brotherhood a journal which, as I see it, can maintain a solid orthodoxy in relation to our distinctive doctrinal position, while encouraging teachableness and honest adventure in our exploration of the Scriptures. But if, with that precaution taken and made known to your readers, you are willing to let them see this letter, I shall be grateful. To obviate "firstly", "secondly", and so on, I will enumerate my comments, which are based on statements made by the Reviewer.

1. I appreciate the commendatory comments.

2. It is true that I did not attempt to distinguish between 'names' and 'titles', though I am still not persuaded that any material loss arises from this.

3. Most of the readers of my book who have communicated with me appear to have found no difficulty in seeing the import of pp. 58-61, and I have had favourable comments on the 'overdue' recognition that the simple binary Name (Title?) YHWH E:LOHIYM is very scarce outside Genesis 2-3, even though this fact revolutionizes much of our former thinking about 'the Memorial Name'.

4. 'The Scribal Emendations' for which the Reviewer wants an explanation, are those variations detailed by Bullinger under the heading 'Emendations of the Sopherim'. I fully acknowledge that I am on the fringes of my own competence in mentioning these at all: but I don't build any conclusions on it, do I?

5. The comparison of what I write with 'Phanerosis' was bound to arise, and I think the Reviewer has shown some understanding of my motives in writing as I did, when he makes that comparison. I was anxious to promote a different way of thinking about the divine Names and, I suppose, unavoidably, I sought to make the difference clear without actually challenging the 'Phanerosis' way. For the same reason I thought it needful to stress that no doctrinal issues are involved in the differences.

6. I admit to having made little or no use of advances made in

Hebrew knowledge during the past century. I admit more: my book was very much a layman's work for studious fellow-laymen, and it has rarely strayed outside the English Bible and the relative concordances for its information. Indeed, if the Reviewer had cared to say that I would not have been even competent to discuss such things he would have been right.

7. Once again, though I am not sure that the comment, though valid, makes much material difference. One of two examples given of my shortcomings in this connection concerns **Shadday** and even before publication I was asked to give more attention to other possible meanings. I do not think I affirmed dogmatically that 'Almighty' was the only allowable meaning, though, equally, I do not think that the Reviewer has given any consideration to my historical case that as **Shadday** fades, so does " - of hosts" arise, apparently to take its place.

Of course this historical case depends on a traditional understanding of the historical sequence of the Books of the Old Testament, but then, as the Reviewer says, I write as a Christadelphian, in the main for other Christadelphians.

8. Perhaps it would be fair to observe here that I did arrive at a position in relation to the Names of God in the Book of Job, which played a substantial part in my subsequent thinking and writing: and I do not detect any comments at all on the parts of my book which deal with this.

9. The same admissions and exculpations arise about my treatment of **El**. In fact, it seems to me that the Reviewer's much wider knowledge than mine of the extra-scriptural usage of **El** does not really conflict with the way I treat it myself. Do I not say that the vocabulary of the Hebrews, with this as one of the Titles particularly in mind, drew upon and refined the Vocabulary of their contemporaries? I ought to add here, though, that "their distinctive ideas of God", even when protected by "under divine guidance", is not the language I should myself wish to employ about the divine revelation to that nation.

10. '**Yahweh**' v. '**Jehovah**'. I respect the Reviewer's right not to be convinced by the reasons I give for favouring the latter. Though he defends Weingreen against my comments, I do give my reasons for thinking that this author was not thinking straight in his comments on the quere perpetuum in relation to YHWH, and I do not observe the Reviewer's reasons for thinking that he was.

In preferring **Yahweh** the Reviewer would have much of the Christadelphian brotherhood, including those from whose outlook on other matters he most dissents, on his side; and all I would ask for here is that my reasons should be fairly weighed. I do not in any case want any who may agree with me to become 'Jehovah's Witnesses'. I am only desperately anxious that those who do not should not succumb to current pressures to become 'Yahweh's Witnesses'.

May I say finally (a) that I do not labour under the sense of gross unfairness in reading this Review (as I did in reading that in "The Testimony"), and I am grateful for this Reviewer's evenhandedness; and

(b) that I should be very glad if "Endeavour" readers who have read the Review but not the book, would read the latter also.

It may be obtained from me for the price of £4.00 post free.

(Wilfred Lambert replies: The author regrets (under 10.) not having heard my reasons for defending Weingreen against the charge of "addled thinking". Weingreen was merely recording the Jewish attitudes to the name of God and though Alfred Norris is perfectly entitled to consider these foolish, it is unfair to blame them on Weingreen)

The March issue of the "Christadelphian" contained an Editorial note about the resignation of John Maycock, ostensibly reporting the article on page 10 of the January issue of "Endeavour" (No 80). The following correspondence ensued.

3 March 1989

Dear Brother Ashton

I was sorry to find that the editorial note about the resignation of Bro John Maycock in the March issue of the "Christadelphian" gives a misleading impression.

Bro Maycock did not accept that the lengthy list of objections was valid; in fact he rejected every one of them in writing. He resigned, as stated in Endeavour No 80, "in order not to provoke further dissension in the [Clevedon] ecclesia. He was also influenced by the illness of his wife . . ." The implication that a justified case against the Endeavour Magazine has been accepted by the magazine is not true.

I should be grateful if you would issue a correction.

Sincerely your brother

(R Coleman)

7 March 1989

Dear Brother Coleman

I see no need to publish any correction to the purely factual note regarding the resignation of Brother Maycock included in the March issue of **The Christadelphian**. Brethren and sisters are free to draw their own conclusions from the reported information.

Sincerely your brother in our Lord Jesus Christ

(Michael Ashton)

EDITOR

21 March 1989

Dear Brother Ashton

I was disappointed by your reply of 7th March to my request for a correction to your note about the Endeavour Magazine in the March "Christadelphian".

You say the note was "purely factual" but it is clear that the facts are not correctly stated since you attribute to "Endeavour" the statement: "The scrutiny of the August 1988 issue resulted in the preparation of a long list of objections showing that the requirements of the ecclesia had not been met and, accordingly, Brother Maycock decided to resign from the Editorship."

In sharp contrast the account in "Endeavour" states clearly that Bro Maycock regarded the objections as unfounded and unreasonable and that he resigned to avoid further dissension in the ecclesia and because of the distress caused to his wife who was seriously ill.

I should have hoped that you would have accepted the accuracy of the statement in "Endeavour" without supporting evidence but since you apparently do not I enclose proof that it was, if anything, an understatement. This consists of a copy of the note that Brother Maycock gave to the Arranging Brethren detailing his reasons for rejecting their criticisms and a copy of his letter to the ecclesia announcing his decision to resign from the Editorship of "Endeavour".

In these circumstances I must request you to reconsider your decision.

Sincerely your brother

(R Coleman)

23 March 1989

Dear Brother Coleman

Thank you for your further letter dated 21 March. There seems to be some misunderstanding which your letter helps to remove. You believe that the statement (specifically the last sentence) in the March issue of **The Christadelphian** about the resignation of Brother Maycock was attributed to the **Endeavour** magazine. This was not the intention. Where quotation was made, this was marked in the usual way by quotation marks.

In a short note such as this it is obviously necessary to summarise what happened. Even with the additional material you have now sent I do not see the need to make any correction and, furthermore, would have thought neither Brother nor Sister Maycock would wish additional attention drawn to them in their present distress.

Sincerely your brother in the Lord Jesus Christ

(Michael Ashton)

EDITOR

31 March 1989

Dear Brother Ashton

Thank you for your letter of 23 March. I am afraid however that the misunderstanding is not wholly, or at all, on my part. When a newspaper commences a news item with words such as "The current issue of the Economist reports . . ." one expects that what follows will be accurate whether it is a direct quotation (in inverted commas) or not and whether it is lengthy or brief.

What I and several others feel is that the word "accordingly" after "the requirements of the ecclesia had not been met" can only bear the meaning "because the requirements of the ecclesia had not been met". The report in Endeavour showed quite clearly, and the documentary evidence I submitted confirmed, that Brother Maycock did not accept that the requirements of the ecclesia had not been met and that he resigned for other reasons.

His distress, and that of his wife, has been increased by your inaccurate report and it would be relieved, not worsened, by its correction. Brother Maycock confirms that this is indeed the case.

Sincerely your brother

(R Coleman)

4 April 1989

Dear Brother Coleman

Your latest letter merely confirms what has already been written. The facts are indisputable. Brother Maycock was not prepared to remain as Editor while the magazine was scrutinized as it had been by the Clevedon Arranging Brethren. This is all that I reported and, significantly, is all that was reported in Endeavour though at greater length.

I have no intention of amending what has been published and consider no further purpose can be achieved by prolonging this correspondence.

Sincerely your brother in our Lord Jesus Christ

(Michael Ashton)

EDITOR

Andrew Wilson, whom we quoted in our last issue, has asked us to state that he is not, nor has been, a subscriber to this magazine, that he adheres to the BASF, but believes that no human document can supplant the Scriptures of Truth as the ultimate arbiter of belief. We are happy to make this known but saddened that the spirit of some sections of the brotherhood is such that he thought it necessary. We did not seek permission to quote his work as it is in the public domain and such a quotation was permissible under the fair dealings provisions of the Copyright Act 1956. (See also page 20).

The Divided Kingdom

The Decline and Fall of Ancient Israel and the Rise of the Prophets

By Philip Hinde. Tamarisk, Lichfield. 1988

Reviewed by **Wilfred Lambert**

At the present time what might be called the Christadelphian 'private presses' are flourishing. Alfred Norris's "Aletheia Books" goes back some decades, and voluminous works of Harry Whittaker have been published under The Honest Truth imprint in the USA, distributed from an address in Cannock for Great Britain, to name only two. Of course in one sense the Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association is in reality 'private' too, being a self-perpetuating limited company, but it has greater influence due to the direct succession from Robert Roberts and the wide circulation of "The Christadelphian" magazine. That the other presses have sprung up and persist attests to either the lack of enterprise on the part of the CMPA or to dissatisfaction with its editorial policies, or to both.

In some ways the 'private presses' have served the community well. For a long time it appeared that Christadelphians were committed to Dr Thomas's interpretation of the Revelation as given in "Eureka", despite the fact that our Statement of Faith does not endorse it. The grave misfortune was first that there are in fact considerable doubts about this interpretation, most of which was taken over from earlier Protestant commentators, secondly that hardly any Christadelphians over the decades since its publication have been historians enough to evaluate it. Thanks to a series of 'private' publications by authors including David Pitt Francis, Alfred Norris, Peter Watkins and Harry Whittaker, it is now respectable to have no commitment to "Eureka", much to the simplification of our faith and the benefit of our preaching.

The most recent addition to the 'private presses' is Tamarisk, founded by an anonymous group of brethren, publishing from Lichfield. The work under review is apparently its first original publication. The printing and layout are excellent, the price is reasonable and very few misprints occur. It is unfortunate however that in the artwork on the front cover the division of the kingdom is shown as a line parallel to and west of the Jordan whereas of course the boundary between Israel and Judah was a line roughly east and west between the Jordan and the Mediterranean.

Though commentaries on books are meant to explain them, there is no rule as to what line they should take. Few or none explore all approaches equally. The work under review offers a map, a list of kings' names, two genealogical tables of kings, an appendix on chronology including a twelve-page chart, indexes of passages of Scripture quoted or used (oddly called 'Appendix II') and of subjects. It otherwise covers the period of history dealt with by summarising the appropriate portions of Kings and Chronicles with occasional use of passages from the Psalms and the Prophets. It is in fact much more a commentary than a history. A historian should stand back from his materials and see the events in a

broad perspective; this book is close to the narratives it depends on, and specially emphasises the moral judgments, normally on the kings, which the inspired writers make. The main part of the book is completed in just over ninety small pages of reasonably sized type, so little depth could be achieved.

On the positive side, the author has a simple lucid style and had acquainted himself with some of the background material essential for a commentator on these portions of Scripture. Anyone wanting to study this period of Israel's history could begin here, but for more advanced study there is not enough detail, nor any list of books for further reading. On the negative side, the "spiritual lessons", as the publisher's advertisements call them are surely more easily found in other parts of the Bible, and as a "technical work" it fails to provide much that even beginning students need. Each point will be taken in turn. Merely to draw attention to God's punishment of wicked kings does not create a devotional commentary. The personal lives of believers today are so different from those of the kings of Israel and Judah that lessons from the latter require a considerable amount of explanation to be made relevant to the former. It is necessary to draw out of the circumstances of the ancient history the various factors which bring to light the play of human motives and events. The kings' problems were not only religious and political, as mostly appears from this book, but also social and economic. The historical books of the Old Testament canon rarely refer to these problems, but the prophets supply more evidence, where social justice is a common theme, and this incidentally throws light on the economic conditions of the times. More than ninety pages would be needed to bring out these factors.

The publisher's phrase "a merely technical work" seems to decry what is helpful. The ancient authors wrote against a whole background knowledge that modern readers do not have for the most part, and this knowledge is often essential for an adequate understanding of the ancient books. In the work under review even the simplest matters are frequently not explained, though the author presumably knows them. 'Syria', for example, was Israel's most bitter enemy for much of the period under consideration, but just what was 'Syria' to the Hebrew authors? An extra paragraph or two here and there setting the scenes could have made the narratives much more meaningful.

In detail, not all of the author's opinions and conclusions are acceptable to the reviewer. Chronology is, as stated, a problem, but for practical needs something had to be done. The author seems to follow the principles of E R Thiele, who is named on page 100, though readers are not given any help in finding the work. It is entitled "The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings", and was first published by the University of Chicago Press in 1951, but the second edition of 1965 appeared with Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Unfortunately it is a prejudiced work, assuming the inerrancy of the numbers in the Masoretic Hebrew text and the falsity of different numbers in any other witness. Some of the seemingly contradictory numbers are due to variant systems in use by ancient scribes. That the author is not a safe guide on this subject is

also made clear on page 48, where he deals with the age of Ahaziah at his accession. The passage in Kings has "twenty-two years" but that in Chronicles "forty-two years". It is of course a clear scribal error, but the author tries to justify both accounts by repeating the explanation that Chronicles has literally "son of forty-two years", referring to his mother rather than his father. Presumably the author is unaware that Kings has literally "son of twenty-two years", and this is the standard Hebrew idiom for expressing a person's age.

Page 4. The Philistines did not "remove every means of manufacture of weapons" from the Israelites, but, because this was at the beginning of the Iron Age, simply prevented the Israelites from learning the new technology.

Pages 20-21. Psalms 74 and 89 can only be referred to Shishak's invasion by inventing history not recorded in Kings, Chronicles, or anywhere else, which seems inadvisable. The titles of the Psalms are not part of the original text, so Ethan cannot be brought into the argument. The author's use of the Psalms is generally insecure.

Page 42. Jezebel's face was not disguised, but made up for the occasion, a very telling point for the character of the lady.

Page 58. By misprint or otherwise "Tiglath-pileser II" is given for "Tiglath-pileser III".

Page 61. The immigrants brought to the northern kingdom by the Assyrians to replace the Israelites taken into exile have nothing to do with the Samaritans of New Testament times. Only the name encourages this confusion. The New Testament Samaritans were a conservative Jewish sect that had broken away from Jerusalem and set up its own temple on Mount Gerizim during the Intertestamental period.

Page 77. It is misleading to write of Tirhakah as "an Ethiopian, now commander of the army of Egypt". He was in fact king of Egypt from 690-664 B C.

("The Divided Kingdom" is obtainable from The Tamarisk Publishing Co Ltd, Georgian Mews, 24A Bird Street, Lichfield, Staffordshire, WS13 6PR. Price £3.95)

Why Baptism Really Matters

By Fred Pearce. Christadelphian Publishing Office

Reviewed by Ron Coleman

It may seem strange to devote a full review to a 12-page pamphlet but there has been more discussion about baptism in the last forty years than ever before in history while we have published little on the subject for some time. This is in fact the only recent discussion of infant baptism that the reviewer is aware of. Unlike the bitter dissensions and the persecution that accompanied the rise of the anabaptists the present debate between the supporters of infant baptism and those of believers' baptism has been conducted in a spirit of amity and friendliness that provides a model for all doctrinal argument. The result has been that

the issues involved have been set out with greater clarity than ever before.

It is true of course that believers' baptism is defended in our standard works but the argument has now moved on to a different ground that bypasses former defences. This is particularly so for our standard argument that baptism in the New Testament is solely that of believers and there is no record of children being baptised. This is now accepted by the supporters of infant baptism. Their reply is a simple but remarkably effective one. "Of course", they say, "but this is only to be expected. All the baptisms recorded are those of converts!"

The argument from silence is then turned back on us with a challenge to produce any record of the baptism of the children of Christian parents being deferred until they were adults. There is of course no such record so this shifts the argument to the question of (a) the evidence of history as to what happened in the immediate post-apostolic period and (b) the theology of baptism. In both these areas, but particularly the second, we have now a much harder row to hoe than previously. Perhaps the reviewer should say at this stage, since any exploration of our doctrines seems now to be turned immediately into a charge of heresy, that he does in fact accept believers' baptism as the true Scriptural teaching.

How does the pamphlet fare in this respect? It can only be described as disappointing; it is forty years out of date. How poorly it performs can be seen by putting it alongside two of several pamphlets issued by the paedobaptists. They are part of the Grove Booklets series, published under the auspices of St John's College, Nottingham, an Anglican Evangelical (Low Church) College. No 20 in the series "A Case for Infant Baptism" (1973) is by Colin Buchanan and is a straightforward but detailed argument for infant baptism principally on historical and theological grounds (not pleading tradition). No 24, "Infant Baptism Under Cross-Examination" (1974) is jointly by Colin Buchanan and David Pawson. The latter was a Methodist minister who resigned and became a Baptist minister because of his dissatisfaction with Methodist belief in paedobaptism. This is a debate about the points raised in No 20.

It is obviously not possible to give a detailed comparison between these two booklets and our own within the space of a review so illustrative examples must suffice. The first concerns the witness of present-day authorities on what happened in the early centuries. Our author contents himself with a single one: "Dr L Lange, a leading German theologian" The reviewer had never heard of him and diligent search has failed to find any trace - for example in the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, the Encyclopaedia Britannica, the bibliographies and indexes of any of his own books on the subject and, most tellingly, in the catalogue of Dr Williams's Library. This large theological library contains books by six authors named "Lange" none of which is Dr L Lange.

By contrast "A Case for Infant Baptism" lists 14 Baptist writers who have published books against infant baptism within the last 35 years. The author gives this information solely in order to be fair to his opponents.

A quotation from any one of these would have been more convincing than the elusive Dr Lange. If an independent witness is required a more persuasive one than from any individual author would have been the Lima Report of the World Council of Churches, "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" (1982): "While the possibility that infant baptism was practised in the apostolic age cannot be excluded, baptism upon personal profession of faith is the most clearly attested pattern in the New Testament documents". (Paragraph 11). While this may not seem to be overwhelming testimony it must be pointed out that it was agreed by supporters of infant baptism and has been accepted by the Church of England.

What did happen in post-apostolic days? Our pamphlet quotes two of the Christian Fathers, Tertullian and Justin Martyr. Of Tertullian (c 200) it is remarked that he was "said to be the first person to mention infant baptism. He had the reputation of upholding apostolic traditions. It is said that he wrote against the growing practice of infant baptism;". The paedobaptist reply to this would be that there is no evidence in Tertullian that it was a growing practice but it is clear that it was an established usage. "Novelty in fact is the one argument that Tertullian does not level against infant baptism, presumably because he could not convincingly do so". (The Origins of Infant Baptism - Child Believers' Baptism? David F Wright, Scottish Journal of Theology Vol 40 p 7). Moreover Tertullian accepted that infants could be baptised in cases of emergency. He never puts what would be the conclusive argument, that infant baptism does not come from the apostles. The "upholding apostolic traditions" argument has an additional demerit so far as Christadelphians are concerned inasmuch as that reputation is founded principally on his defence of the Trinity.

Justin Martyr is represented by a quotation which stresses the importance of knowledge and choice in baptism. Paedobaptists reply that in his "First Apology" (c 150) Justin speaks of "many men and women of the age of sixty and seventy years who have been disciples from childhood" and that the word translated "have been disciples" is used elsewhere to refer to baptism. This would take infant baptism back to AD 80 or 90.

The fact is that Patristics is a minefield and one needs an expert guide to avoid disaster. How difficult it is is shown by the 1960-63 debate between Joachim Jeremias (paedobaptist) and Kurt Aland (credobaptist), both of them eminent experts on the post-apostolic period. Which of the two had the better of the exchanges is still a subject of debate today. But guides favouring the believers' baptism case are available to those not too proud to use their services. Examples are "Christian Baptism" (Ed A Gilmore) 1959 and the SJT article (1987) cited above which, as the title suggests, argues that infant baptism grew from the baptism of "child-believers" (like Stanley Ogden referred to in the Editorial in this issue). The conclusion of studies such as these is that on balance it seems very probable that infant baptism was not practised in early post-apostolic days but completely incontrovertible historic evidence is lacking. Hence the judicious language of the Lima declaration.

What of the mode of baptism - immersion or affusion? Argument about this has been more muted, one reason being that insistence on one particular mode being obligatory can easily slide into the Roman Catholic dogma of "ex opere operato" - the act itself is efficacious. On this subject "Why Baptism Really Matters" again confines itself to quoting one authority, Dean Stanley's foolish statement of 110 years ago about the triumph of commonsense over custom in moving from immersion to affusion. We noted earlier Colin Buchanan's fairness in presenting his opponents' case. Our pamphlet here falls short of this. It is ludicrous to regard Dean Stanley as in any way representing the current position as can be easily seen by reading, for example, chapter II of "Christian Baptism" (1974) by John Murray.

It is however the new theological arguments that are the most difficult to deal with because they depend on a belief which is especially dear to Christadelphians and indeed is frequently claimed to be unique to them - the importance of the Abrahamic covenant. Whereas in the past church tradition and belief in baptismal regeneration were the arguments most frequently heard they have now been replaced by "Covenant Theology". This is not something completely new - it can be found in Tyndale and Calvin - but until Pierre Marcel's "The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism" (ET 1953) little had been heard of it.

Marcel begins by saying that most Christians believe that there were two covenants, the first at Sinai with Israel and the second instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper. Whereas the first covenant offered salvation in return for keeping the law the new covenant offers salvation in Christ, who is the mediator of the new covenant of grace. This, Marcel says, is wrong. The original covenant was with Abraham and it too was a covenant of grace. It is wrong to think that there are two covenants and thus to divide the Bible into two separate parts. He then quotes numerous familiar passages (for example from Romans 4 and Galatians 3) in support of his contention, showing that Abraham was accepted by God before he was circumcised and therefore his too was a covenant of grace. But one essential characteristic of it was that it included children in its blessings. This is not peculiar to the Abrahamic covenant - it is true also of the successor covenants in the Old Testament.

Reading Marcel one is struck by the similarity of many of his passages to those which can be found in our own works. As an example:

This covenant [with Abraham] was confirmed to Isaac, to Jacob, to Joseph and to their posterity. In every age believers have trusted in this covenant of grace and its promises; its sound echoes through all Scriptures, and God also makes constant reference to it as He progressively brings it to its full development. . . . The efficacy and validity of the covenant of grace and its promises are apparent at every important stage of God's revelation. . . . Paul affirms the permanence of the covenant and the real vitality of its promises (Gal. iii.17) Christians are the children born according to the promise (Gal. iv. 21, 23, 28); they are the children of Abraham (Gal. iii. 7,26,29); those who believe to-day are blessed with faithful



Abraham (Gal. iii.9) (Pages 67, 69, 71)

Compare this with the following:

Brother Thomas took the view that the understanding of the gospel of Christ depended on understanding these promises. The promises to Abraham are essential to our own relationship with Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:27-29); they show us that the promise of eternal life depends on us becoming the seed of Abraham and showing the same quality of faith as he did (Rom. 4:16). And yet this is a Bible teaching which is often neglected by evangelicals - in fact they usually reject the doctrine outright. (The Testimony, May 1981, p 111)

It is important then to understand that by our enlightenment we may be able to put off our Gentilism and become related to the commonwealth of Israel in which being "Abraham's seed" we shall become "heirs according to the promise". (Christendom Astray)

From this common ground with us Marcel then proceeds to argue that circumcision was a physical act which had the result of bestowing grace, namely to make the boy a member of the covenant people. Even though by descent he was an Israelite if it was not performed he would not be counted as such. Under the Abrahamic covenant converts to Judaism had to be circumcised as well as children. So, it is argued, since the new covenant is a continuation of the old, baptism should similarly be applied both to adult converts and to the children of Christians.

This is the reason, say the Covenant theologians, why there is nothing in the New Testament about the baptism of infants. Jews who became Christians would automatically have their children baptised at the same time as themselves. When further children were born they would be baptised too. What is significant about the New Testament record is that there is no mention of the baptism of an adult who was born of Christian parents. It also follows from the continuity of the Covenant that children may be members of the church even if they do not have conscious faith, just as boys under the old dispensation were circumcised before they had faith. For Gentile converts the natural precedent would be that of Jewish proselyte baptism under which children as well as convert parents were baptised.

Now of course strong arguments can be brought against this thesis but of necessity they must be much more involved than we have developed heretofore. They centre round the contention that the covenant in Christ is a new covenant. To argue this way requires great subtlety in view of the Christadelphian emphasis on the continuing nature of the Abrahamic covenant. It is therefore astonishing that this recent pamphlet seems completely ignorant of this new, though not recent, development. To send someone out to argue with a knowledgeable paedobaptist armed only with it would be like sending someone with a catapult to meet a machine gun. For a pamphlet to be convincing the author must study what the opponents are saying now and not rely on a memory of what was said fifty or a hundred years ago.

The Use of the Statement of Faith

In the May-June Issue of "The Bible Student" the following quotation from the Supplement to our last Issue (The Endeavour Magazine on Trial) appeared in an Editorial Statement:

Letters from campaigning ecclesias have in effect proposed an addition to the Statement of Faith, namely that every item in it is essential for salvation.

The Editorial Statement commented:

This is a distortion of the appeal letter, which said that those ecclesias represented believed that "... every doctrine outlined (in the BASF) is essential and must be treated as a matter of fellowship." The appeal letter from the six ecclesias nowhere stated that a literal acceptance of the wording of the Statement of Faith is a condition of salvation.

The appeal letter from the six ecclesias which we referred to contained the following passage:

The nature of our commitment rules out the idea of narrowing the basis of belief, or of making essential elements redundant. Narrowing the basis can only result in a situation where, even though a doctrine is believed, it might not be regarded as essential to salvation - and so it becomes pointless to teach it. Such only opens the way for fellowship with those communities not in the Truth. We feel that it is this distinction, which is being made by some, between what is, and what is not essential to salvation, that enables them to claim to believe the Statement of Faith and accept it as a basis of fellowship, while at the same time tolerating (or even commending) doctrine and practices contrary to it!

If our paraphrase of this statement is "distortion" then rational discussion must be at an end.

The letter from which "The Bible Student" quoted was not however the one we referred to - it was a more recent one dated 24 January 1989 the wording of which had been "slightly improved". The "slight improvement" included the omission of the above passage on which we based our statement. But the issue of "Endeavour" taken to task was dated January 1989 and was in fact distributed on 26th January. It was thus physically impossible for us to have quoted from the letter which we are alleged to have distorted and if this was not apparent to the signatories of the Editorial Statement they are guilty of gross carelessness in a matter as grave as this. But the fact that the earlier letter (dated 29 October) contained this proposed addition to the Statement of Faith must have been well-known to the signatories for it was circulated to every ecclesia in the country. Why did they not say "This criticism was valid when it was made but the matter has now been rectified?" No reputable worldly journal would have done other than that. And we are supposed to have higher standards than the world!

We do not have the space in this issue to reply to most of the other accusations made by "The Bible Student" but two are especially deserving of comment. In the Supplement we said that the object of Endeavour since its inception had been to plead for less acrimony in doctrinal debates. The astonishing reply is that "There should be no doctrinal debate within the ecclesia. All were baptised on the basis of their acceptance of the doctrines taught in the Scripture and outlined in the Statement of Faith". Our comment was made about doctrinal debates between fellowships. "The Bible Student" seems to be in need of the lesson that King Canute read to his courtiers. How do they propose to stop these debates - for example the strong criticism that the "The Advocate" levelled at the Editor of "The Christadelphian" for his reasonable and sensible Editorial on abortion? And what is "The Bible Student" doing in this very Editorial Statement but indulging in doctrinal debate? Let it remove the plank from its own eye the better to attend to splinters in the eyes of others.

Equally astonishing is the statement that nobody should be allowed to read anything contrary to our beliefs. "The mouths of gainsayers must be stopped". Individuals should not want to hear anything other than the truth stated in their midst. Ignatius of Loyola is but a step away. "If our eyes tell us something is white and the Church tells us it is black we must believe it to be black."

