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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.

Correspondence and articles should be sent to the Endeavour Magazine, 34 Copse Hill, Purley, Surrey CR2 4LH

Subscriptions. We are reviewing the arrangements for subscriptions and as a result no renewal notice is included with this issue. We hope the next issue will be in May 1990 and this will be accompanied by a subscription request.

Editorial

A former bishop of Durham (Bishop Westcott who, with F J A Hort, was responsible for the Greek text on which the RV New Testament was based) was once waylaid by a Salvationist who demanded "Are you saved?" The learned bishop replied "That depends on whether you mean sōtheis, sōzomenos, or sesōsmenos. If you mean the first, undoubtedly; if the second, I trust so; but if you mean the third, certainly not." (He was referring to three passive participles of sōzō, to save.) One might think the bishop was cruel so to discomfit someone of simple faith and he certainly might have put it more gently. However it must be remembered that three tenses are used to describe "salvation" in the New Testament. It is threefold - a past fact (Colossians 1:13), a present experience (1 Corinthians 1:18), and a future hope (Romans 5:9).

Evangelicals tend to concentrate on the past and think of salvation as an accomplished fact (for example in R T Kendall's book "Once Saved, Always Saved"). This is clearly wrong. But it is equally wrong to think of salvation solely as a future event ignoring the texts which speak of the past and the present.

One word - several meanings

Our immediate concern however is not to draw out the lesson of this as regards salvation but to illustrate the fact that one word can have many meanings. In fact, technical words apart, most words have several meanings, sometimes differing widely one from another. The word "house" can mean an ordinary dwelling house, a block of flats, an office block, part of a school, a dynasty, and many other things. The particular meaning that the user intends is normally shown by the context.

We can say then that the meaning of a word is affected by the company it keeps. "Handsome" has a subtly different meaning when applied to a woman from what it has when describing a man. Scripture is no exception to this rule and if we don't recognise this we are liable to misunderstand what it means and, in particular, to find seeming contradictions everywhere.

When the rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked what he should do to inherit eternal life, Jesus replied "Why callest thou me good? None is good save one, that is God." Yet Jesus also said "God maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good." If words have only one single invariable meaning Jesus contradicted himself. But it is clear from the context that he is using "good" in two different senses. In the first instance "good" is a pure abstraction. In the second it is used in a comparative sense, meaning those who are better than those who are evil.

The classic case of confusion over what in linguistics is called "polysemy" (multiple meaning) is regarding "faith" and "works", as was pointed out in an earlier Editorial (No 80, January 1989). Paul also uses "flesh" in several different senses and failure to understand this has led many astray, leading them to adopt a negative attitude to the physical body, like Thomas à Beckett who secretly wore a hair shirt which after his murder was found to be "boiling with lice".

One of the most important words in Scripture - "Kingdom" - has

however traditionally been regarded as having only one meaning. But both the Hebrew (malkuth) and the Greek (basileia) mean not only a state ruled over by a king but also the abstract quality of authority or sovereignty. They can mean either "realm" or "rule". By a coincidence the English word in Jacobean times had this same dual meaning. For example, Hobbes wrote "Monarchy, which Government, if he limit it by Law is called Kingdom; if by his own will, Tyranny." (OED). Today however "kingdom" no longer has this second meaning so that it is read as invariably denoting "a nation state ruled by a king".

Kingdom present or kingdom future?

In the Hallelujah Chorus Charles Jennens, the librettist of "Messiah", wrote "The kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." The Authorised Version has it in the plural "the kingdoms of this world". Jennens was right however and the Revised Version has the singular, showing that it is not the nation states of the world that are spoken of here but the authority and the rulership over the world. Subsequent translations have followed the Revised Version and used the singular or translated it as "sovereignty" or "power to rule".

In the Old Testament there is the same duality of meaning but here the idea of "reign" rather than "realm" is the predominant one. ". . . the Hebrew word malkuth bears primarily the dynamic rather than the concrete meaning, and refers first to a reign, dominion, or rule and only secondarily to the realm over which a reign is exercised." (G E Ladd in "The Presence of the Future", p 46 (1974)).

Because of our failure to appreciate the dual meaning of the original words, "Kingdom of God" in the gospels has been interpreted exclusively as a physical kingdom with a king, subjects and a territory and therefore something which could only be in the future. But while there is much about the future Kingdom there are even more passages which speak of it as a present event. A further complicating factor is that the passages which do refer to the future kingdom are so often interpreted by others as having been fulfilled in the church. The effect on Christadelphian interpretation has been a tendency to make all the references to a present Kingdom apply to the future, even when the plain sense of the passage is against it, for example Matthew 11:28 "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you." Or Mark 1:15 "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."

The usual explanation is that the Kingdom existed then but only in embryo because Jesus the King was present. But this fails for two reasons. Firstly a kingdom, to be a kingdom, needs a king and subjects. A king in exile cannot be regarded as being a kingdom. Secondly, what Jesus said must have had meaning for his hearers then. But they did not regard him as a king. Even the disciples did not do so until Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi.

Rule or Realm? Or both?

If however the parables, and the sayings, which speak of the Kingdom in the present tense refer to the sovereignty of God, and of willing

surrender to that sovereignty in the way that Jesus taught, the difficulties disappear without in any way diminishing the meaning of the passages which speak of a future kingdom.

When John, afflicted by doubt in his prison cell, sent his disciples to enquire whether Jesus was indeed "he that should come" and they had gone away after witnessing his miracles, Jesus told the crowd "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist; notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." Surely John, the greatest of the prophets, will be a citizen of the future kingdom and far from being the least? Was not Jesus here saying that the man who bridged the gap between the period of promise and the period of fulfilment was, because of his doubts, as yet only standing on the threshold of the age he had helped to usher in? He was not yet a subject of that present kingdom.

G B Caird in "The Language and Imagery of the Bible" (1980) puts the matter simply and clearly when he says this about the dispute between those who see the Kingdom as wholly future and those who see it as only present:

If Jesus was referring to the final vindication of God's purposes in the reign of justice and peace, where the righteous are to banquet with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Matt 8:11; Luke 13:28-29), it is mere nonsense even to suggest that this was present on earth when Calaphas was High Priest and Pilate Governor of Judea. On the other hand, if Jesus was referring to the redemptive sovereignty of God let loose into the world for the destruction of Satan and all his works (Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20), it makes nonsense of the whole record of his ministry to argue that for him this still lay in the future. And we have only so to state the matter to see that on various occasions Jesus referred to both.

Ron Coleman

----- Stirring the Pot

How many of us get in from work, or doing the shopping and flop into a chair with a "Good cup of tea"? Loosening our shoes and stretching tired limbs we enjoy a little relaxation. But how "good" is that cup of tea? As we unwind and are thankful for a break do we stop to think of those who cannot relax, picking leaves for long hours in hot sunshine, overworked, underpaid? The money we spend in the supermarket on the packaged product goes largely to the already well-heeled shareholders and management of the large multinational companies who own the land and pay very low wages to the pickers.

The prophets warn rich men who exploit the poor that such behaviour displeases God. God wants us to "remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice and let the oppressed go free". (Isaiah 58:6)

How can we help? We do not actually manage the plantations or pay the workers. Maybe not, but we can select those we think most fit to handle our money by choosing from whom we purchase. We need not

(Continued on page 29)

Ebla: Facts and Fictions

Archaeology has been so valuable in shedding light on Bible times and enabling it to be seen in its living context that temptation to press archaeological findings too hard has not always been resisted. Examples are Woolley's discovery of silt deposits at Ur and Garstang and Marston's work on the walls of Jericho, the first interpretations of which have since been shown to be wrong. Something similar seems to have been happening as regards Ebla. Wilfred Lambert has been involved professionally in the study of its palace archive. He has published several papers and is shortly to address an international meeting at Naples on the subject.

The large mound covering the remains of the ancient city of Ebla, Tell Mardikh in the modern world, lies some 55 kilometres south-west of Aleppo, just off the modern Damascus-Aleppo road. The existence of this city in ancient Syria has been known since the end of the last century since it is named in several ancient inscriptions, but its location at Tell Mardikh became known only as a result of the finding there in 1968 of an inscribed statue naming the person as king of Ebla, followed by confirmation from later finds.

The excavations began in 1964, under the Italian archaeologist Paolo Matthiae, and have continued under his direction until the present. At first the finds were of no special interest to Biblical scholars, but in 1974 some cuneiform tablets were unearthed, and in the following two years, 1975 and 1976, a large archive of such documents was unearthed, and it is this archive which has attracted much interest and been the centre of controversy among Old Testament scholars. This was the first collection of inscriptions from an early date from so westerly a part of Syria, and it was hoped that light would be shed on the Old Testament.

The undisputed facts are that this big archive is a palace archive, and that it dates from roughly the third quarter of the third millennium B C according to current chronologies. The relative dating can be fixed archaeologically: the finds from this palace can be correlated with finds from archaeological levels of other sites and a sequence of such levels for the whole area can be worked out, but this does not yield a dating in years B C. For that scientific techniques such as radio-carbon dating have some value, but they only give approximate dates, and when historical evidence provides sequences of kings and years of their reigns, that is more precise. Current chronologies use every possible source of information, but for the period of interest here they could be even two hundred years out. Dates given here must be taken with this qualification. For this palace at Ebla a more pressing problem than that of finding exact dates B C is that of relating the kings of Ebla of this period with the kings of Egypt and southern Mesopotamia, since then the new evidence could be fitted in to what is already known of the history of the period. The excavator Matthiae is confident that the palace can be dated in relation to Egyptian history by the finding of a stone jar lid with the name of Pepi I of Egypt inscribed on it. Other experts in Syrian

archaeology are less sure about the value of this object, but from a Biblical interest it makes no difference whether the palace was contemporary with Pepi I or not.

There is even less evidence to date the palace in terms of southern Mesopotamian history. Not one of the well known rulers of that area who ruled c. 2500-2250 B C has so far turned up in any of the inscriptions from Ebla. At the time Ebla had close relations with Mari, a town on the Euphrates just a little upstream from the modern Syrian-Iraqi border and names of rulers of Mari contemporary with the Ebla archive do occur in it, and one of these, Iplul-II was already known from inscribed statues excavated at Mari. However, Iplul-II of Mari cannot be correlated with the sequences of rulers from southern Mesopotamia, so no further benefit results.

The ruins of the palace at Ebla yielded its archive almost intact to the excavators because it was destroyed suddenly, so the attempt has been made to ascertain the king responsible for this destruction. Two southern Mesopotamian kings are known to have seized control of Ebla during the period, Sargon of Akkad (c. 2335-2279 B C) and his grandson, Naram-Sin (c. 2255-2218 B C). Matthiae now favours Sargon of Akkad as the king who destroyed the palace of Ebla. There is even less evidence for correlating this period of Ebla's history with the Old Testament, since, contrary to the assertions of some, no Old Testament figure has occurred in the documents from Ebla so far published. Attempts to date the palace in such terms as "the time of Abraham" have no basis, since Old Testament evidence does not allow a dating of Abraham in years B C and no king or other person datable in the relative chronologies of southern Mesopotamia or Egypt occurs in the Old Testament before Shishak of Egypt in the early years of the divided monarchy. So one must be content to accept that this archive is from approximately the third quarter of the third millennium B C, and, to give a Biblical perspective, that was about 1,000 years before Moses.

To understand clearly the claims that have been made about this archive, the story of its decipherment and publication must be told. Giovanni Pettinato, Professor of Assyriology at the University of Rome, was the official epigrapher of the expedition, and over three years some 16,500 tablets and fragments of tablets came to light and were his responsibility. It is still not altogether certain how many complete tablets are represented, but it may be some 6,000. The script is cuneiform (wedge-shaped impressions made in soft clay), and it employs hundreds of signs, most of which have several different values. The language of the vast majority is a Semitic language, that is, related to Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew and Babylono-Assyrian, but the script originated in southern Iraq, among the Sumerians, who spoke the non-Semitic language Sumerian. This script, however, reached Ebla through the Semitic-speaking areas of central Mesopotamia, where it was already used for the oldest known dialect of Babylono-Assyrian, called Old Akkadian. As written at Ebla the signs are not always correctly formed. The local scribes often mixed up the less common, more complex signs. To work on this material it is necessary to be well equipped in Sumerian, Babylono-Assyrian and the



West Semitic languages such as Hebrew, but even with such qualifications the task was of considerable difficulty.

Pettinato was well equipped, but kept the task to himself, not inviting any helpers, but, being under pressure to tell the world what the tablets said, first published short articles based on his preliminary work. One of the first of these, in the "Biblical Archaeologist" for 1976 (vol 39, pp 44-52), quoted personal names, heading the list with: "Mi-ka-Ya" = "Who is like Ya?", which interchanged with "Mi-ka-Il" = "Who is like Il?". Il is the Biblical El, so the latter name as rendered was the same as the Biblical name Michael. The interchange of Il and Ya could not fail to suggest that Ya here is the same as Ya in Hebrew names, where it is a short form of Yahweh, but Pettinato in print at least avoided committing himself by saying, "at Ebla at least Ya had the same value as Il and points to a specific deity." He further suggested that Ya was "a shortened form of Yaw" but offered no convincing evidence. This alone assured close attention from Biblical scholars, and some of them, along with journalists, began to push the matter with more than ordinary zeal.

Further matter of Biblical interest was announced in the following year or two. It was asserted that Sodom, Gomorrah and the other cities of the plain (Genesis 14:1-2) were named in the Ebla documents, and that the king of Gomorrah, Birsha, was also named. As with Ya, Pettinato was not always quite as explicit as some were making him out to be, but he did for a very short time assert that a flood story had been found, though he withdrew this long before journalists stopped repeating it.

Serious scholars were not amused by the manner of these revelations. Matthiae, who could not read the tablets, had some inkling that the Biblical parallels might not be certain, and scholars who could have checked the tablets were not allowed to see them, while Pettinato had published hardly one. Relations between Matthiae and Pettinato rapidly deteriorated so that in 1978 the latter ceased to be epigrapher for the expedition, and was replaced by Alfonso Archi, but Pettinato kept hold of thousands of photographs of tablets and began to publish them in earnest. First appeared a catalogue in 1979, then three volumes of texts respectively in 1980, 1981 and 1982. These were published by the Istituto Universitario Orientale of Naples, where Pettinato had been professor before he moved to Rome, but were regarded as illicit by Matthiae. Archi, the new official epigrapher of the expedition, was not so well prepared for the task as Pettinato had been, so an international team of scholars to oversee the publication of the archive was set up, and between 1981 and 1988 seven volumes of texts were published by five scholars, so that in the current year there are no less than ten volumes of texts, and some others published in articles.

This flood of publication has had a sobering effect on discussion of alleged Biblical parallels or confirmation. The vast majority of tablets are administrative records, many concerning woollen cloth and textiles, and are singularly uninformative on matters which modern scholars would like to know. The few literary texts were gathered in a volume published in 1984, but one has since turned out to be a list of terms for cuts of meat and suchlike! (A small tablet first published in an article as 'proverbs'

turned out to be the Sumerian numerals from 1 to 10 in phonetic orthography!)

Of the sure literary texts two are Sumerian, a myth, and a short hymn, claimed by Pettinato to relate to Genesis 1. With the full publication of the latter one might have hoped for further light, but the opposite has occurred: qualified scholars have been silent because of its extreme difficulty. Two other literary texts are Semitic myths, but from southern Mesopotamia, one previously known from a copy found at a southern site. And the rest are mainly short incantations, some Sumerian, some Semitic, and one or two certainly composed in Syria, but not necessarily at Ebla. The lexical texts have been the biggest surprise. The Sumerians from the beginning of writing compiled lists of signs and words, and some of these were being copied out at Ebla, but in addition there are bilingual lists: Sumerian signs or words with Semitic translations of some. The biggest such list has more than 1,400 entries, and so far it is known only from Ebla.

Claims that Ebla confirms the truth of the Bible have been made in specifically Christadelphian contexts. Arthur Gibson has written on various matters from Ebla in "The Testimony", for example in October 1976, February 1981, May 1981 and July 1982. Richard Purkis also in his short book "The English Bible and Its Origins", first published by Shuter and Shooter in South Africa in 1978, second edition (whether revised or not unclear) of 1988 published by Angel Press, Chichester, also advertised by Tamarisk Press as one of their publications. More widely seen has been the Bible Exhibition, similarly pressing matter from Ebla as confirming the truth of the Bible. In the light of present knowledge of the finds it must, with regret, be said that most things written in this connection have either been proved false or remain uncertain.

First, the alleged god Ya. Pettinato based his reading on one of several theoretically possible values of the sign whose most common value is NI. The value ia is used in some Sumerian, but so far it has not been found at Ebla apart from this alleged use in the divine name. Pettinato still holds that e g Mi-kà-NI must be read Mi-kà-là, but other qualified scholars do not. When variant writings of the same name occur, normally they are different writing for the same spoken sounds, so Mi-kà-Il and Mi-kà-NI on this principle (which is based on a whole mass of undisputed evidence) should have the same pronunciation.

Some scholars have argued that one must opt for one of two other known values of the NI sign, i or lí, which are then interpreted as phonetic variants of Il. The present writer has argued for NI as an abbreviated logogram. A logogram is a sign or group of signs which represents a whole word without giving the pronunciation (readers had to know that; some symbols in English are the same: " = " is pronounced "equals"). In Old Akkadian one of the commonest attested writings of the noun Il "god" is NI.NI, to be read i-lí. The scribes of Ebla commonly abbreviated logograms, so, it is argued, they took over the Old Akkadian NI.NI and shortened it to NI for Il. So what is certain is that there is a name Mi-kà-Il, which is also written Mi-kà-NI. How to explain NI in this name is still a matter for discussion, so it is extremely ill-advised to

press this as a confirmation of anything. What is more certain is that Pettinato's interpretation of the name as a whole is doubtful. The preposition ka 'like' occurs in Biblical Hebrew, but it does not occur at Ebla, so Mi-kà-Il is not an early form of the name Michael. There is an extremely common name type at Ebla consisting of noun ending in -a followed by the name of god, e.g. Enna-Il, and presumably Mi-kà-Il is a name of this type: Mika-Il, with a noun Mika of unknown meaning.

The alleged occurrences of the cities of the plain can be seen to be baseless without any appeal to complicated matters of ancient script. What seems to be the clearest case is Sodom. There is a place written Si-da-mu in the Ebla documents. So it has been alleged that the Biblical Sodom occurs at Ebla, so proving its existence in the third millennium B C. However, leaving aside the difficult question of whether the S of the Hebrew Sodom is the same S as in Ebla Si-da-mu, it is well known that in this part of the ancient Near East several places can have the same name, so the Ebla Si-da-mu is only relevant if it can be shown that the place meant was down by the Dead Sea. Unfortunately this cannot be done. From the contexts it would seem that Si-da-mu was a small place not too far from Ebla in north Syria. If there really is a personal name Bi-ir-sha in the Ebla documents (Pettinato was quoted by another scholar, he seems not to have put the matter in print himself) it has no value for confirming the king of Gomorrah in Genesis 14. Personal names can persist for millennia. Samuel, for example, occurs at Ebla as Shu-ma-Il, and it is still in use today.

A person claimed by some to occur both in Genesis and Ebla documents is Eber of Genesis 10 and 11, connected to the ruler of Ebla who went under the name Ebri'um. But the latter has an extra final element -i'um not occurring with the ancestor of the Hebrews. Though convention already has settled on Ebri'um, the first sign is ambiguous and it could be read with a P equally well: Epri'um (or Ibri'um/Ipri'um). In addition, while the first consonant in the Hebrew name is 'ayin (a sound not used in the English language and so not rendered in translations) it is unknown which Semitic consonant begins Ebri'um, since the script, being of Sumerian origin, does not have the means to express this (just as English does not) and a number of other Semitic consonants. Thus the correspondence between the two names is uncertain at two points, and at one point they are different: hardly a convincing case. And the Bible gives no hint that its Eber was king of Ebla.

Some writers have tried to exploit the language of Ebla to prove something or other about Genesis. What is written at Ebla is now conventionally called 'Eblaite', but there is no assurance that it was the spoken language of the place. In the ancient Near East it was usual, when a script was first borrowed, to use it to write the language of the people from whom it was borrowed rather than the language of the borrowers. For example, in the well known Amarna letters, the king of Egypt corresponded with rulers of Syria and Palestine in Babylonian cuneiform script and Babylonian language, though the latter was not the spoken language of either the king of Egypt or the various rulers of Syria and Palestine. Thus 'Eblaite' may be the spoken language of the Semites of

central Mesopotamia, not that of Ebla itself. The arguments raised about this linguistic entity seem to be based on the idea that Hebrew was the first language, and somehow 'Eblaite' proves the point, or that the polyglot world resulting from the Tower of Babel finds a reflection at Ebla. Richard Purkis (p 12 of his book) reports the finding at Ebla of "large tablets having up to 42 different languages on a single slab." This is total fiction. No such tablets have been found, and it probably results from misunderstanding an oral statement of Pettinato. There are large tablets of many columns containing the bilingual lexical list, and someone misheard or misunderstood the number of columns as the number of different languages.

The idea of Hebrew as the first language is not stated in Genesis, though it is possible to conclude from the occurrence of Semitic names that a Semitic language (though not necessarily Hebrew) was the first language. This is not a necessary conclusion, since ancient names with meaning can be translated (rather than transliterated) from one language to another, but we cannot now go into this problem. What Ebla does is to show from the personal names in use in the district that a Semitic language was spoken there in the third quarter of the third millennium B C. However, in southern Mesopotamia we have an abundance of documents written in Sumerian some 500 years earlier. Following the line of argument employed for 'Eblaite' one should surely reply that here is proof that Sumerian was the first language. (The assertion that the Sumerian at Ebla is older than the Sumerian from Sumer itself is incorrect.) The whole question is a folly since we have no evidence before the invention of writing.

It would be easy to quote example after example of misunderstandings of Ebla documents unwisely promoted as proving something about the Bible. Many of those publicists have been innocent people misled by others who seemed to know. Even when knowledge was readily available, the enthusiasm of some carried them away. For example in "The Testimony" for October, 1976, p 383, Arthur Gibson quoted an entry from the bilingual list; al-du-ga : i-ri-sa-tum and asserted "this means 'Here is Atum!' (an Egyptian god). Had he consulted "The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary" vol E, p 298 (published in 1958), he would have seen that the Sumerian al-du-ga, rendered by erishtu in Babylonian, means 'a wish'.

It is unfortunate that so negative a verdict has to be pronounced. But enthusiasm even for the best of causes must be tempered by proven facts and good judgment. There could be benefits from Ebla for Bible study. One is already certain, though neither sensational nor spectacular. The Hebrew *kīmāh*, found twice in Job (9:9 and 38:31) and once in Amos (5:8), has generally been rendered 'Pleiades' following a tradition first found in the Septuagint version of Job, which may date only from the first century B C. The bilingual list of Ebla in line 792: mul-mul = kà-ma-tù, equates the Sumerian Mulmul 'Pleiades' with kaymatu, an earlier form of the Hebrew *kīmāh*. Thus the tradition in the Septuagint Job is confirmed from the Ebla list compiled many hundreds of years before Job was composed.

Schisms and Heresies in the Church - How they arose and how they were dealt with.

*This is the sixth of a series of ten talks given by **Len Richardson** at the London Bible Study Class in 1972 under the general title "The New Testament Church Contrasted and Compared with the Twentieth Century Ecclesia." In this transcript he examines the New Testament meaning of the words, and contrasts the practice then with that today.*

Without trying to descend into any kind of pedantry which I am not capable of, or a profession of knowledge which I do not possess, I think it will be necessary for us in looking at this subject to first of all think of the two key words, and the Greek words from which they are taken, because there is a good deal of misunderstanding as to what we mean when we talk about "heresy", and what a heretic is. The word, according to Young's Concordance, that is translated heresy means "a choice, opinion, or sentiment", and it is taken from the verb "to choose". The Greek word is, if you are interested, in the English form "hairesis". It is the same word, you will find, if you look it up in Young's Concordance, as the word "sect". So a heretic basically is not somebody who has misunderstood a point of dogma. A heretic is a sectarian, somebody who has chosen to separate himself from the mainstream of opinion. Now the word schism comes from the Greek word "schisma", being spelt in almost exactly the same way, and this word means "a rent or a division". It is the word Jesus used in the parable of the piece of new cloth in an old garment, when he said it would make a "rent" and the garment would be useless. "The rent is made worse" - this is the word schism. Perhaps this will help us to get the two words in focus. A heretic is a sectarian, and schism means a rent, a tearing apart.

Hersey

It seems to me, having looked carefully at the New Testament uses of the word heresy, that it always carries the idea of deliberately leading away a party, forming another group. Titus chapter 3 v 10 is a very well known verse in this connection; "A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself". "A man that is factious", the RSV says. You notice here is a moral judgement. This is not a man who has just misunderstood, who genuinely has been trying to understand and has come to a wrong conclusion, he is a man who is "factious", and there is a moral judgement, because it says "he that is such is subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself." It is not just a question of a genuine misunderstanding but a desire to disrupt the body that Paul has in mind here. Similarly in Galatians chapter 5 v 20 heresy is linked up with other sins of the flesh. Starting at v 19; "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness" and so on. I think it is clear that the word heresy in this context is being thought of

as a moral thing. Here is a man who is guilty of a moral offence. It is as bad in the sight of God as these other "works of the flesh" and it links up closely in the context here with wrath, strife, seditions, . . . heresies.

It is interesting to notice that the Jews accused the Christians of being sectarians. It is not surprising that they should think of this new body, the Christian community, who grew out of Judaism in the beginning, as being heretics, or those who led away a party, who separated themselves from the mainstream. So Paul defends himself against this charge in Acts chapter 24 v 14: "But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets; and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." Notice how Paul says that while they call it heresy, "in fact what I stand for are the very things that the Law and the Prophets foretold should come. I am really standing on the same platform that they ought to be standing on. This is not heresy, or a breakaway party, this is a fulfilment of the religion which they have professed." And again in chapter 24 v 5: "For we have found this man" - that is Paul - "a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes". And that is the same word as heresy. To the Jews, this was heresy - the heresy of the Nazarenes. And again in chapter 28 v 22: after Paul has got to Rome and they send a deputation to talk to him about his views: "We desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against". And that is again our word heresy. They looked on these men, Paul and the other preachers of Christianity, as being men who were leading away a faction. The Jewish religion was the true religion and Christianity was an offshoot of it in their eyes. It was a sect, or a heresy.

Schism

Now the word schism, as I have said, means a division or a rent. Schisms or divisions as we well know were the bane of the Corinthian church. I Corinthians chapter 1 v 11: "For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ." And so they were cut up, divided into parties. It does not appear that they had stopped meeting with one another. They had not broken off and formed another "fellowship", as we should say, but they were divided in their midst and there was among them those who said I am Paul's man, I am of Apollos, or I am for Cephas, and inevitably if you start getting parties like this you get somebody who says "a plague on all your houses! I am for Christ." It comes out again in the 11th chapter and the 18th verse: "For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you" - Schisms. And again we notice that they "came together" in the church; they had not broken off into little fellowships, having nothing to do with each other. They came together but they were divided off, into parties or factions.

Now the question we are trying to answer is, how did these divisions

arise? How were these sects formed in the early church? It is a very difficult question. Divisions at Corinth, which we may take as a pattern because the divisive spirit seems to have been more at work there than anywhere else, clearly arose from the contentious spirit of men and was always rooted in human pride. "You are puffed up", Paul says, "for one against another". Notice that human pride does not always mean being puffed up for yourself. You can glory in someone else. They were glorying in men. They were puffed up for one against another, but they got some kind of reflected glory out of it themselves. Some were declaring: Apollos is our man, he is a fine speaker, he has got a better presence than Paul, such an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures". No doubt he appealed to many of the Greeks in the Corinthian church. They admired Apollos, so they got some kind of reflected glory for being one of his followers. The personality cult, we call it, is often responsible for these kinds of schisms or divisions that arise in ecclesial life.

What happened in Corinth

I want now to look at 1 Corinthians chapter 4, because Paul says something there that I think is very important for us to get into our minds and our hearts today. (Verse 6): "And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" What he is saying, it seems to me, is this. 'I have chosen Apollos and myself particularly to show you that you ought not to range yourselves behind human leaders.' I suppose if there was one man above all that the Corinthians could have ranged themselves behind, it was Paul himself, because he had founded the Corinthian church and he was their father in the Truth. "Though you may have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet ye have only one father. In the bonds of Jesus Christ I have begotten you." They were his children, and he looked on the Corinthians with a particular kind of affection. This is clear from his writings. And yet he says, 'Who is Paul? and who is Apollos? Was Paul crucified for you? And were you baptised in the name of Paul?. How absurd it is for you to be ranging yourselves as Paul's men or Apollos' men or Cephas' men or anybody else's man. You are Christ's. It was Christ who died for you and nobody else.'

Now, he says, I want you to learn by the example of Apollos and myself, "not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another". We know, and they knew, what was written of men in the scriptures, that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked". "Men of low degree are vanity and men of high degree are a lie", the Psalmist says. And we could go on making similar quotations which they ought to have known. This is what was written of human nature. This is what the scriptures taught about the nature of human life. It counts for nothing in God's sight. It is Jesus who is everything, and men are nothing. This is what Paul was saying. And if they would only get that into their thick heads, he says, then they would

not start having these divisions, this cutting up of themselves into little parcels, and labelling themselves Paul, Apollos, Cephas or somebody else.

Heresy a moral fault

In almost all cases in the New Testament when we read the word heresy it seems to be allied to evil practices, and often to exploitation to selfish ends. Let us look at one or two examples of it. II Peter chapter 2 v 1: "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgement now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." Note the type of people Peter is talking about here. These were not inoffensive men who had misunderstood some abstruse doctrine of scripture, or some passage of scripture had eluded their comprehension. These were evil men, that is what Peter is saying. Theirs was not just a misunderstanding, or a genuine endeavour, even if unorthodox, to understand truth, but a denial of the Lord that bought them. "And many shall follow their pernicious ways", (Their licentiousness, RSV; their dissolute practices, NEB) and because of them the way of truth will be reviled and they will exploit you.

Now in my experience in the brotherhood I have to confess that I have not met any brethren who have been really of this type. Although we may throw at them a passage that says they shall bring in "damnable heresies", the fact is that I can honestly say that I have not met any people who were trying to make merchandise of me, or were inciting me to licentiousness, and who were guilty of denying the Lord and causing the Truth to be reviled by people outside, and exploiting us for their own ends.

Now that these things were taking place in New Testament times is very clear, and I do not think we ought to be too naive and think that they never happen to us and never could. Clearly they could happen, but I do not think that we should manufacture them and pretend that they are happening, because we have fallen out with somebody else about the meaning of a passage of scripture, and so start using verses that describe an evil man, who is making merchandise of people, and defiling the truth, and guilty of pernicious practices, licentiousness and dissolution. This is the kind of man a heretic was in New Testament parlance.

In the epistle of Jude there is a very famous verse that we know well. Jude is saying in verse 3 that he set out to write them a nice cosy little letter "about our common salvation", but it became necessary to write unto them and exhort them "that they should earnestly contend for the faith, which was once for all delivered unto the saints". Something has come to his knowledge that has made him change his plan. He intended to write to them about their common salvation, perhaps a general hortatory epistle, but he said it became necessary for him to write unto them that they defend the faith, because (verse 4) "there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly

men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here is the same charge against heretics in New Testament times. They were evil men who had "crept in unawares", and now were turning the grace of God into lasciviousness. I would identify them, although I cannot prove it, as the people who developed Paul's doctrine of justification by faith and said "All things are lawful unto me." They actually went about teaching that it did not matter how you behaved. The more you sinned, the more scope you gave for the grace of God to operate, to which Paul indignantly replied in Romans 6: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid". But clearly there were those who were teaching this, otherwise he would not need to expostulate against it. There were those who were saying behaviour did not matter, all things were lawful, anything goes, because Christ will wipe the slate clean. It is his righteousness, not ours, and therefore it does not matter any longer how you behave. And this probably led to the introduction of these evil, corrupt practices, so that a party began to grow up who really were indulging in the sins of the flesh. Verse 8 of Jude: "Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignitaries". In verse 16 we are told that they were grumblers and malcontents following their own passions.

From this it would appear that the "heretics" of New Testament times were vicious men who introduced corrupt practices into the church. Men were led to follow their own passions, thinking that it did not matter any longer. Verse 19: it is these "who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit". (The NEB translation is "these who set up divisions"). These people were schismatics, sectarians, dividing up the body, cutting it into pieces, and saying in effect, 'Those who follow us do not have to bother any more, but can do what they like.' And in this way they were exploiting the believers and introducing corruption into the church. Essentially, then, it seems to me that heresy is the act of forming a break-away party and schism is the result, of which unfortunately we have more than our fair share of experience in our brotherhood.

Pride and Prejudice

The earliest heresy which seems to have arisen in the church was from the Jewish party in Jerusalem. These were they who said 'Except ye be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses ye cannot be saved.' Here I would think the heresy arose from pride. Pride and prejudice are never very far away from one another. They had been brought up in the Jewish faith and thought they were God's people - Gentiles were "dogs", so if Gentiles were going to have any part or lot in this matter then they had got to become Jews. They had got to be circumcised and keep the Law. This heresy has repercussions all through the New Testament epistles and we find it too in Acts. Paul had to fight it all his life and you will constantly find him arguing against it, closely reasoning it out to show them that if they relied on circumcision then "Christ would profit them nothing". Out of these two branches of the human race, as it were, God had made one new man, the Christian body, and so made peace between the two. (Ephesians 2 v 16)

Did Paul disfellowship heretics?

It is interesting to notice, however, that although Paul fought these Jewish prejudices tooth and nail, because he realised that if this heresy got hold of men's minds it would take them back to the synagogue and away from salvation by grace, yet there is never a hint as far as one can see that he ever thought of disfellowshipping them. He argues it out, he appeals to them, he draws on the scriptures to convince them, but he never says "off with their heads", or "out with them". I wonder why? He even advocated that they should be accommodated, if possible, yet without yielding an inch on principles. Having maintained the principle, he then said, 'Well if this brother finds it difficult, and wants to "observe the day", let him observe it. Do not make fun of him because he is observing it. If he wants to eat a certain kind of meat and not eat some other kind of meat, let him do so. As long as he does not judge you, do not deride him.' That was Paul's way of dealing with it. 'Let us live together and try to understand one another's difficulties and problems'.

It has already been observed that there were in the Corinthian church many parties, mainly due as I have suggested to the desire to "follow my leader." I sometimes think that some brethren, if they were asked to speak on "my favourite passage of scripture" would choose I Corinthians chapter 11 verses 18,19 "For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." Now I find some difficulty in this verse because it is quoted by brethren who say "You have got to have divisions". If one says anything about divisions being wrong, pointing out that Paul said "Is Christ divided?", they will inevitably come to this verse and say, "There must be heresies among you that they which are approved may be made manifest. Heresies are a divinely sent opportunity for you to prove your worth."

I do not think that is what Paul said or meant at all. I have always had a deep feeling that we have not got the right translation here. One of the dangers, of course, of new translations is that if you are not careful you grope around to find one that says what you think it ought to say, and you may charge me with having done that, but there is a school of thought, including J B Phillips, which gives the sense of this passage on these lines: "I suppose there must be heresies among you in order that your self-appointed leaders may be shown up." The Living New Testament paraphrases it in similar terms, "I suppose you feel this is necessary so that you who are always right will become known and recognised." One can imagine Paul saying this, because he did indulge in a good deal of satire. He could almost be saying it to the Christadelphian body! "It seems that you have got to have your everlasting divisions in order that the people who want to lead should be able to do so". That is the satire in Paul's words. Now I may be wrong, but I think something like this is implicit in this verse. Paul is not saying, and never has said, that divisions are a good thing, because all through this epistle he is telling them that they are a bad thing. He does not want to have divisions; he wants to have unity; he wants to have brethren understanding one another and

loving one another and bending over backwards to accommodate one another.

Corinth and ourselves

Our own history is not unlike that of Corinth - a story of continual division - often linked with men's names, so that we even go back into the past and call it "Brother so-and-so's division". Paul renounced it and I think we ought to renounce it. That is not to say that never, ever, will we separate from a brother if it becomes necessary, but to think of division as a weapon to be used against sections of our brotherhood, in my opinion is not New Testament practice. "Who then is Paul and who is Apollos but ministers by whom ye believed?" "Learn in us", he says, "not to think of men above that which is written". "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?"

We have other New Testament heresies mentioned, as for example 1 Corinthians 15 v 12: "How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" I find it difficult to think of an ecclesia like Corinth to which an apostle has to write and say to them "How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" But it does not ever seem to have been thought necessary to disfellowship them. They were there, and they were saying these things, and Paul reasoned with them, out of the Scriptures. Again in 2 Timothy v 16-19 Paul refers to those who said "the resurrection is past already". But we notice again in this heresy that there was this inference of evil, a moral judgement as well. It was not just a pure misunderstanding. "But shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker; of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal. The Lord knoweth them that are his. And let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity". And he goes on to speak of a great house having in it vessels of honour and dishonour. There will always be the two, he seems to be saying. You will always have this kind of people in the house. "Let both grow together until the harvest", Jesus says.

Going too far?

In our faith there are things that "angels desire to look into" and yet sometimes we want to analyse it all down till we know "exactly", and have written it down in a statement, a clause in a Constitution. And of course that is where many of our divisions have come from. Most of them have sprung from this desire to probe too far, to be able to say precisely what was the nature of Adam before the fall or something like that. Or what exactly was the method of God's inscrutable judgement by which the death of Christ on the cross effected our salvation. It has been a source of endless disputes in our body as it was in the early church, and as it was all through the ages. This is the saddening and humbling thing, that all through the history of the Christian church these same arguments have kept coming up, and people were everlastingly falling out and excommunicating one another over them. One extreme always begets another. If one makes a statement that it is this, then somebody else is

sure to make a statement that it is that, stressing either the humanity or the divinity of Jesus. The same kind of contentions arose about the doctrine of the atonement - Christ's death as a sacrifice for sin. "I delivered unto you first of all" wrote Paul to the Corinthians, "that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he rose again the third day". But we will not be satisfied with that. We want to know why he died, and what was the exact transaction in it; and then we start falling out, because all are never going to see it exactly from the same point of view to a hair's breadth. So we have the cutting up, the schism. Is it really possible to say we know exactly why Christ died? Can we know precisely what the transaction meant in the mind of God? Cannot we say that "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures", and be glad of that, and deepen our understanding of it as we are able, without falling out with one another and trampling on other people's views?

I have undertaken to discuss how heresy was dealt with, but it is easier to say how it was not dealt with, because it is not easy to find out just what they did when these views arose. There seems to be no evidence in the New Testament of people being disfellowshipped for a misunderstanding of a point of doctrine. Certainly Paul was heavily against the "sectarians" - these evil men who were introducing corrupt practices into the church and setting themselves up as leaders and drawing away people after them. He did not want anything to do with that. In fact he told the Thessalonians that they were to reject such men. But there seemed to be no mass excommunication of sections of the body such as we have in our own community. There is nothing of that in the New Testament. We do not find several different branches of the Christian faith. There were schisms; and evil men with wrong teachings, against whom Paul fought continually. But we do not find a section described as Apollos' fellowship, or Paul's fellowship, or Cephas' fellowship. We do not get anything like that in the New Testament. If heretics left, as they generally did, for it was the very nature of heresy to break away in order to become leaders in their own right, it was their own action. Paul urged the church to resist them and have nothing to do with their schisms. "Mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine you have received and avoid them". It was their heresies that were the evil thing, their divisions, their setting up of themselves as leaders of factions. This was the evil thing which was to be avoided like the plague. It is not, in fact, until we move into the period that we call that of the apostate church, and certainly by the third century, that they were anathematising one another en bloc. With the development of the powerful bishops and archbishops, and the hierarchy of the apostate church from the middle of the second century and onwards, came the idea of mass excommunications, the cutting off of whole lumps of the body, and the issuing of bulls that excommunicated people that they did not know. But this was an apostate practice which we do not actually see in the New Testament.

The changed circumstances of today may justify a different approach to erroneous teaching. We are not talking today about Christianity versus



Judaism, or Christianity versus pagan religion, but Christadelphians versus other Christian views in varying degrees of error, and it does not seem to me that the answer to this is as simple as you may think I have made it sound up to now. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12 "No man speaking by the Spirit calleth Jesus accursed; and no man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit". Today, I think, this would be an over-simplification. In apostolic times you were either a Christian or a pagan. There were no brands or divisions or sects. They were not divided up. If you said "Jesus is Lord" you acknowledged the Lordship of Jesus, you were a Christian disciple, and liable to be fed to lions for making the confession. If you said "Jesus is accursed" you would be allying yourself with the pagan enemies of the faith. You were saying "Jesus is nothing to me". It was as simple as that. It is not quite so simple today. All the same our rigid insistence on the detailed statement of dogma is not apostolic in origin. There is no statement of faith as such apparent in the New Testament unless in very broad and simple terms such as I have already quoted - "Jesus is Lord", or "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God".

Simple affirmations of faith in Jesus are what we find in the New Testament. There were no rigid applications of rules of fellowship. Disfellowshipping appears only in certain individual cases, though we cannot be quite certain even then, that casting out of the body is recommended by the Apostle. But in general terms there was certainly no mass excommunication of whole parts of the body. Now if we accept this, I do not say it means that we have got to try and get back to it (though you may think that we should) and it may not change our present system at all. We may still feel that it is right and wise in order that we should preserve the basic things of the truth in which we believe that we should take action, disfellowshipping action, against any who hold erroneous views. But if we realise that this is what we have decided as a Christadelphian community, with the desire to serve God and to preserve his word in the world; and that it is not a New Testament practice, it may make us aware that this is a human, not a divine institution. It may possibly teach us to apply the system with less rigour and more gentleness, with a greater awareness of other people; a greater awareness of our own human fallibility; and consider the possibility that we may be mistaken sometimes, and thus be able, perhaps, to contemplate the rethinking of our position, without the charge of heresy or the effect of schism.

We praise the man who "has the courage of his convictions" but every bigot and fanatic has that; what is much harder and rarer is to have the courage to re-examine one's convictions and to reject them if they don't square with the facts. ("Logos", page 247, May 1987)

Towards Reformation and Renewal (2)

The first article in this series, reprinted from 1966, described the tension between main Christadelphian beliefs, originally put forward by the Socinians, and the interpretation of prophecy inherited from mainstream Protestantism. The late George McHaffie then questioned Dr Thomas's interpretation of Revelation and continues his examination in the present article. He thus anticipated the four major Christadelphian expositions which have appeared since 1973, all of which depart considerably from "Eureka". He concludes by showing that the general belief that Dr Thomas was an original lone voice predicting the return of the Jews to Palestine before there was any thought of this happening is not true.

There are numerous criticisms which have been and could be made about the line of exposition taken in Eureka. The most serious objections are probably as follows:

(i) Biblical language, figures and symbols which are well established in Scripture as a whole, are given meanings devoid of spiritual content. For example, the strongly messianic passages of Rev. 12 about the man child who would rule "with a rod of iron" are related to the Roman Emperor Constantine who sought to bring unity to his empire by adopting one religion for it - Catholic Christianity - and succeeded in presiding over the first persecution of Christians by Christians.

(ii) For a "continuous historic" interpretation it seems oddly lacking in modern references. True the "war in the air" has been suitably up-dated (it will be war above the air before long). But what can we make of the vials described as "the last plagues of all, for with them the wrath of God is consummated" (Rev. 15:1) being related largely to the Napoleonic wars? Has there been no war on the sea since Nelson? Yet if we try to up-date this what a gap is left in the "continuity"!

(iii) The Apocalypse draws enormously on Old Testament allusions and direct quotations. This is the key to the meaning of the book. What should be observed, however, is that the Apocalypse transforms Old Testament prophecy and gives it a new and Christian context. In Rev. 19, for example, the Gogian prophecies of Ezek. 38 and 39 are re-set with the object of the attack not "cattle and goods" but Christ and the saints. The pre-Christian temple passages in Ezekiel Ch. 40 onwards, which presume a Mosaic legal groundwork, are given a Christian setting and are re-interpreted in Revelation 21 and 22. The "continuous historic" approach on the other hand gives precedence to historic allusions over scriptural ones.

During private discussions on the meaning of the Apocalypse one often meets the question, "If the line taken in Eureka is questionable what is the alternative?" The fact that no Christadelphian exposition has been produced which commands wide assent as an alternative is often taken to be sufficient reason for thinking that there is none. Defenders of the

traditional exposition often make it easy for themselves by assuming that the only other alternative is the "futurist" view which sets the entire action of the book in the future. It is suggested, however, that if anyone conscientiously sets out to find in detail the meaning of the Revelation, giving due weight to the meaning of the words and symbols as presented in the rest of the Scripture, he will be well satisfied with the result. Such use of the book, without recourse to abstruse political history, will be nearer the use intended by John on the Isle of Patmos when he wrote it.

Apart from the Apocalypse the same pre-occupation with contemporary excitements may be traced in the exposition of other prophecies.

Britain and Prophecy

One of the most eagerly followed and frequently quoted statements by Dr Thomas on prophecy is what he said about Britain and the Jews as found on page 442 of "Elpis Israel".

But to what part of the world shall we look for a power whose interests will make it willing, as it is able, to plant the ensign of civilisation upon the mountains of Israel? . . . I know not whether the men, who at present contrive the foreign policy of Britain, entertain the idea of assuming the sovereignty of the Holy Land and of promoting its colonisation by the Jews . . . the finger of God has indicated a course to be pursued by Britain which cannot be evaded and which her counsellors will not only be willing but eager to adopt when the crisis comes upon them.

The following views on this passage will sufficiently illustrate general feeling.

In these extracts is foreseen a course of events of which there was no indication at all at the time they were penned, but which have been completely realised. . . ("God's Way" (John Carter) page 228.)

It is the fact that the arguments and conclusions here advanced [in the pamphlet] are not new at all but were first published nearly 100 years ago, before there was any sign of that development in the land which seems so natural to us now, before there was the slightest indication of Great Britain being interested in either Palestine or Egypt . . . ("Britain in Prophecy" (Islip Collyer) page 13. [As proof, the quotations from "Elpis Israel" are given.])

Since Dr Thomas wrote, Britain has obtained the sovereignty and lost it, leaving a trail of bitter memories in Jewish hearts through her suppression of the Jewish immigration urge, and only on Britain's departure has a real return to the land been possible. Granted, however, that Britain occupied a valuable role for a while and that that is sufficient to meet the points made above, how justified is the claim for unique prescience in "Elpis Israel"?

A number of books have been published in recent times which review the relations between Britain and the Jews. One such is the book "Bible and Sword" by Barbara Tuchman. Only a reading of the book can bring the full impact of the evidence to bear but it can be shown in a few

quotations that far from being "a course of events of which there was no indication at the time they were penned . ." ". . before there was the slightest indication of Great Britain being interested", the whole plan, political and religious, had been the excitement of the day for years before.

On the 11th August 1840, Lord Palmerston, then Foreign Secretary, wrote to the British Ambassador in Constantinople:

There exists at the present time among the Jews dispersed over Europe, a strong notion that the time is approaching for their nation to return to Palestine . . .

The letter then went on to ask the Ambassador to influence the Sultan to encourage the Jews to settle. A few days later, August 17th, The Times published a leading article on a plan "to plant the Jewish people in the land of their fathers" which it said "was now under serious political consideration", their rights and privileges "being secured to them under the protection of a European power." I quote from Barbara Tuchman's book:*

There was no doubt as to the identity of the European Power that The Times had in mind . . . the article created a sensation. "The newspapers teem with documents about the Jews" recorded Lord Ashley. . . Obviously neither Palmerston nor The Times had come up with the same idea within a week of each other by pure chance, each had been led to it by . . . the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury . . . His motives were religious . . . [he] envisaged an Anglican Israel restored by Protestant England at one stroke confounding popery, fulfilling prophecy, redeeming mankind . . . Belief in the second advent has always been a moving principle in my life [said Shaftesbury] . . . since according to prophetic scripture, the return of the Jews was indispensable to this great event . . . his daily prayer . . daily hope. .

"Oh, pray for the peace of Jerusalem!" were the words engraven on the ring he always wore on his right hand.

Attempts to buy large areas of Palestine had, as early as 1840, received the blessing of Queen Victoria and The Times carried a suggestion from a correspondent that Britain should buy Palestine for the Jews.

It is clear from all this that there was a large and influential body of opinion in England at least ten years before the appearance of "Elpis Israel" who saw in British protection of the Jews and influence in Palestine, including purchase of the Land itself, the surest token of the early realisation of the second advent.

Which, then, came first - interpretation of Ezekiel 38:13 "Tarshish" and the "young Lions" as a symbol of Great Britain protecting the Jews, or political interest and hence a searching for some prophetic peg on which to hang the events?

Looking back now on the "Tarshish" interpretation, a nation "willing and eager" to control Palestine, we can see that the expected fulfilment has fallen through, but more than this must be said. We have an example

* Pages 176 - 178 in the current edition (Macmillan 1982) obtainable from the Christadelphian Office. Barbara Tuchman, a celebrated American historian who wrote on a wide variety of historical subjects, died earlier this year.

of how the pressure of contemporary events can blind eager, prophetic scholars to obvious facts. Without British interests already materialising, would anyone have suggested that "Young Lions" always a symbol of irresponsible ravaging (see Hosea 5:14), would be on hand to protect "cattle"? Surely not! Would anyone interpret names indigenous to Arabia - Sheba and Dedan - as referring to some distant power even of an invading coloniser?

The picture which emerges from Ezekiel 38 is of an Israel threatened on all sides with their traditional enemies in Arabia (like young lions) longing to take a spoil in conjunction with a northern invader.

I have dealt at some length with the prophecy aspect because it formed so large a part of Dr Thomas's work and because it offers such scope for comparisons and revealing of trends. It shows Dr Thomas caught up in a contemporary excitement. In the preface to Eureka, Volume II, he speaks of it as "well-timed" . . . "two years or so later would have been unseasonable and possibly too late." Most of the points he was exercised about have now taken their place as forgotten history. A great deal of the subject is a by-path.

The effect of all the expenditure of energy on prophecy on the community's development can only be guessed. It is a subject which tends to encourage an all-or-nothing approach. Those caught up by it devote enormous time in a constant attempt to match political development with Bible words. Most of the efforts are mercifully forgotten after a few months.* The dominance of interest in what is, after all, secular history in our community in times past may be seen from the following quotation from "The Christadelphian, 1896, p 417:

What other books would you recommend me to read besides the Bible and those written by Robert Roberts? - Rollin's "Ancient History"; Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire"; Russell's "History of Modern Europe"; Dr Thomas's "Eureka". - Ed

We must seriously question whether such pre-occupation has had the effect of turning minds to spiritual thoughts. We may suspect, instead, that even faith itself can be diverted to the wrong object. Instead of a faith grounded in the experience of life in Christ, in the reality of worship, in utter trust in God as Saviour and ever present help, we may find that our real confidence in God is based on some political event past or present and our spiritual temperature measured by the existence or otherwise of a threat of global war. Ethically this has had the effect of unbalancing judgment. Frequently the interpretations have been favourable to our own race and in danger of equating our own country's enemies with God's. A negative attitude to human suffering has also to be laid at the door of a prophetic interpretation which has conveniently concluded that a suffering nation is under prophetic judgment.

Much prayer and thought is needed to restore the priorities of Christian witness. In practice this has been perceived, though not often articulated, for many years. Caution on "prophecysings" has, unfortunately, often been wrongly ascribed to indifference.

* For example, Eureka Vol III, p 580 stated in February 1868 that Rome would never be the capital of Italy. It became the capital on 20 September 1870.

Correspondence with the Editor of "The Christadelphian"

7 September 1989

Dear Brother Michael,

We should be grateful if you would allow us to correct the statement in the letter from Brother and Sister Barbaresi in the September issue that The Endeavour Magazine and the Summer School "have become a forum for questionable ideas on such things as the inspiration of the Scriptures, the nature of God, the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom, the millennium, the sister's position, and so we could continue."

This charge can best be answered by specific comment on each item listed:

(1) We accept the inspiration of the Bible and have never maintained otherwise.

(2) The nature of God. It is alleged that we teach the Trinity. This has never been the case. Several articles have been published on this subject in Endeavour all of which oppose the Trinity. We can state categorically that at the Summer School no one, even in discussion, has ever supported it. The basis of this allegation was a selective quotation from a letter in the December 1987 issue in which a correspondent described how Trinitarians regard their doctrine. To remove any misunderstanding our correspondent made it plain in a letter in the next issue (April 1988) that he himself did not (and never had) supported Trinitarianism.

(3) The Holy Spirit. Different views exist on this within the brotherhood, as can be seen from the debate in 1959 in The Christadelphian between Brother John Carter and Brother Alfred Norris, and from the more recent controversy in 1983. In an article which warmly praised our community, a contributor by way of exception said that in his view we have "largely ignored the New Testament teaching on the ethical working of the Holy Spirit." If this is a "questionable" idea, it is no more than that expressed in the words of Brother Alfred Nicholls that "wherever God works, it is through His Spirit, . . . that wherever His will is flouted, . . . it is His Spirit that is resisted and His Holy Spirit that is grieved." (The Spirit of God, page 152)

(4) The Kingdom. Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God in one sense was already present and in a fuller and eternal sense was yet to come. The claim that we support a present Kingdom of God but not the future Kingdom is simply not true.

(5) The millennium. In an article in the December 1987 issue of Endeavour an ex-Christadelphian said why she disagreed with Dr Thomas on the time and nature of the millennium. This was printed in accordance with a policy of allowing to-and-fro discussion on certain aspects of Biblical teaching. Her contribution was printed in criticism of a previous article, as regular readers would know. Far from denying the coming Kingdom on earth, she specifically affirmed her belief that Daniel 2:44 refers to the Kingdom to be set up at the return of Christ. Her interpretation of the millennium did not represent the Editor's view, nor

that of other readers or contributors, and the following issue (Spring 1988) contained a lengthy editorial rebuttal of her ideas. Although this has been pointed out on numerous occasions to our critics, many have failed to ascertain the facts and still seem unaware of this. They imagine that her views are ours.

(6) The sister's position. There are several strands of thought and practice on this in the brotherhood, each claiming to be based on the Bible. Sisters have been giving addresses within the Christadelphian community since the early 1900s, as can easily be demonstrated from magazines and programmes (other than those associated with Endeavour from then until the present.

(7) "and so we could continue". It is impossible to answer a catch-all criticism of this kind. It is an unhelpful comment, especially in view of the lack of understanding shown in the subjects previously listed.

We are surprised that those who have never attended the Summer School and who seem to have only a sketchy knowledge of what has been printed in Endeavour nevertheless speak as if with authority. It is obvious from correspondence and from the various circular letters that much criticism is based on prejudiced second-hand information. Personal meetings over the last year have enabled some fallacies to be dispelled, but it is sad that many brethren have preferred not to discuss calmly the issues raised but to pick comments out of context and then attack by circulars or in other magazines. We consider that faithful brethren and sisters have been persistently misrepresented and unjustifiably maligned. Our aim is to enhance our witness to Christ by encouraging careful Bible study, self-examination (as individuals and as a community) and fair discussion in a Christlike manner.

Can we therefore appeal to our brethren and sisters to seek to be more understanding, to discuss issues from a Biblical standpoint, and to take great care not to misrepresent one another?

With love in Jesus our Lord,

Ron Coleman, Ian & Averil McHaffie

(on behalf of The Endeavour Magazine and the Summer School)

4 October 1989

Dear Brother Ian, Sister Averil and Brother Ron

You will probably by now have received your copies of the October issue of the magazine and seen that I have not published the letter you sent me last month setting out some answers to the criticisms made by Brother and Sister Barbaresi.

I am sorry to say that you appear to have side-stepped some of the issues they raised and, had I published your letter, I would have been involved in bringing upon you even more of the criticisms you have complained about

receiving during the past eighteen months. This I was not prepared to do.

Sincerely your brother in the Lord Jesus Christ

Michael Ashton
EDITOR

14 October 1989

Dear Brother Michael

Thank you for your letter of October 4th but we were disappointed that you did not publish ours, especially as that of Bro and Sis Barbaresi contains the kind of misrepresentation that two of us complained of when we visited you in the summer and which those who attend the Summer School feel keenly about. We had felt reasonably confident that in fairness you would give us the opportunity of rebutting Bro and Sis Barbaresi's hearsay accusations.

We are puzzled by your saying that we appear to have side-stepped some of the issues raised. In order to keep the letter short we replied as briefly as possible but we felt that we had covered all the points raised and think we are entitled to know what it is you have in mind.

Your statement that you wish to save us from endless criticism is appreciated but your refusal to print our reply leaves the world-wide readership with the erroneous impression that we are unable to offer any rebuttal of the charges of heresy levelled against "Endeavour". May we take it that, in these circumstances, you will publish no more criticisms of us unless you give us the right of reply?

With love in Jesus our Lord

Ron Coleman, Ian and Averil McHaffie

(on behalf of the Endeavour Magazine and the Summer School.)

3 November 1989

Dear Brother Coleman, Brother Ian and Sister Averil

I anticipated that you would be disappointed by my decision not to publish your reply to the Barbaresi letter, but still believe that the reasons I gave in my previous letter to you are valid

I am not prepared (nor can you reasonably expect me) to say in advance whether or not I will publish any more letters critical of **Endeavour**, and if so, whether I would be prepared to publish any reply you may decide to send. As on this occasion, such a decision would depend on the content of the letter(s).

Sincerely your brother in the Lord Jesus Christ

Michael Ashton
EDITOR



Studies in the Books of Judges and Ruth

By Harry Whittaker. Biblia, Cannock. 1989

Reviewed by **Wilfred Lambert**

As the author who has published more on Biblical topics than any other living Christadelphian, the writer of this work must be congratulated without reservation. Despite the quantity (an advertising sheet included in this book lists twenty-two books prior to this one), the author maintains his rugged independence, putting forward what he conceives to be the right interpretations and understandings.

This work on Judges and Ruth is called "Studies", but in fact it is a commentary. The whole of the two books is covered so far as was practicable in 244 short pages, though, as with many commentaries, some matters receive more attention than others. The procedure is that each section is expounded in turn in a brief forthright style, and, if necessary, notes on particular verses follow each such exposition. Occasionally particular aspects arising from a given section are dealt with at greater length in special sections devoted to them. The author's strong point is his ability to catch the spirit of a passage and to express it clearly and forcefully in a few words. Further, he brings a learning and a certain openmindedness to his studies which are not found in all Christadelphian writings. This is particularly noticeable in respect of the textual problems of the book. Unlike some who give the impression that there are no textual problems in the Old Testament (see Endeavour No 80, January 1989, pp 24-5) the author faces the very real and frequent problems of text in Judges, often preferring the evidence of the Septuagint version to the readings of the traditional Hebrew text. Also he emends without any manuscript support if this seems justified. In the very first verse of Judges, for example, instead of the problematic "the death of Joshua" he emends, with many other scholars, to "the death of Moses". Any one wanting to study Judges and Ruth will find much to think about here.

A distinctive feature compared with other commentaries on Judges is the author's finding many hidden meanings in the text. On p 120 we read that "it is not difficult to trace a number of intriguing parallels between Jephthah and Christ." But the reviewer was not intrigued with the observation, "his birth not according to normal wedlock", which is simply a carefully chosen form of words to cover both the child of a prostitute and the Son of God born of a virgin. No doubt Alexander the Great, Napoleon or George Washington would provide similar parallels with Jephthah if one were to look for them. Another extreme case of this kind of exposition occurs on p 154, where the question is put, "Do Samson's seven locks of hair correspond to the seven-fold gift of the Holy Spirit promised to the Messiah (Isaiah 11:2)? The verse in Isaiah lists first a single gift: "the spirit of the Lord", then three pairs: the spirit of wisdom and understanding," "the spirit of counsel and might," and "the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord". Of them only "might" has any bearing on Samson's hair, so the reviewer feels that a negative response must be given to the question put.

Related to this finding of hidden meanings is the attitude which connects other portions of Scripture to Judges even when the text is not obviously related. II Peter 2:18-20 does indeed mention "the lusts of the flesh" (pp 144-5), but such things are not restricted to any one period of history or to any single character, so in the lack of any allusion to Samson in the context it is unhelpful to the understanding of Judges to bring up this passage. Indeed, too close attention to other parts of Scripture can result in an expositor overlooking the clear meaning of the passages in hand. Thus there was at Shilo in the period of the Judges and Samuel a structure for worship of the Lord and housing the ark. To the author it is the tabernacle, since this is what one would expect from certain parts of the Pentateuch: "[the tabernacle] had undoubtedly been set up originally in Shilo" (p 203). But problems arise that according to II Chronicles 1:3 the tabernacle was in Gibeon, so the suggestion is made that Samuel dismantled the tabernacle at Shilo after Eli's death, and it was re-erected elsewhere later. However, an impartial examination of the wording does not indicate that the building at Shilo was the tabernacle.

First, it must be remembered that the time of the Judges was when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes", so we should not expect orthodox customs to be in effect. In Judges 18:31 the structure is called "the house of God", and in I Samuel 1:9 "the temple of Yahweh", with pillars and doors. This sounds like a stone temple, not a tent. Final proof comes from Jeremiah 7:12-14 and 26:6. The prophet is rebuking the people of his time for their unworthy conduct, and tells them not to rely on the presence of the temple in their midst to guarantee their safety. They were invited to go to Shilo and to see what God did to his former residence there, since He was going to do the same to Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. This clearly implies that ruins were at that moment visible in Shilo, and that the ruins were what was left of the former abode of God, that is where the ark had been kept. No lesson would have been communicated to Jeremiah's compatriots had the ark been housed in the tabernacle, and this tent-like structure had been dismantled and taken away before the Philistines overran the area.

This is very clear evidence, and the only objection is that Psalm 78:60 in looking back over these events speaks of a "tent". However the Psalm is poetry, and if one has to choose between asserting that "temple" in the prose of I Samuel 1 is a metaphor for a tent, or that "tent" in the poetry of Psalm 78 is a metaphor for a stone structure, then there is really little choice. More attention to the book under study itself is desirable before comparisons are made with other parts of Scripture.

The reviewer is least happy, however, with the general level of accuracy shown in this commentary. Frequently meanings of Hebrew names are given, which do not contribute to the fuller understanding of the text, and are in fact not infrequently wrong or at least extremely doubtful. Space will not permit the citation of more than a few. On p 26 it is asserted that the name Shamgar means "Name of a stranger". The vowels, which are already attested in the Septuagint version, do not support this, and one wonders what would be in the minds of parents to

call their son "Name of a stranger". It is general recent opinion that this name is not Hebrew or Semitic, because there is a later Hittite king called Sangara.

On p 95 it is asserted that the name of mount Zalmon in Judges 9:48 means "Image". But there is simply nothing to confirm this, and even if it is correct, which is doubtful, it contributes nothing to the understanding of the passage. At times one wonders just where the false Hebrew etymologising comes from. It is argued on p 128 about Samson's riddle that "the riddle of lion and honey takes on special point when it is realised that 'the mouth of the lion' is a neat play on the name Philistine". In the whole context the phrase "mouth of a lion" does not occur, and the only Hebrew which yields anything like Pelishti (Hebrew: Philistine) is pi-layish, but this word layish for "lion" is rare and poetic, occurring three times only, in Job 4:11, Proverbs 30:30 and Isaiah 30:6, while in this passage of Judges the ordinary Hebrew prose word for "lion" aryeh is used, which occurs altogether 44 times. Thus there is simply no evidence that any ancient Hebrew speaker understood "Philistine" as "mouth of a lion".

Other factual inaccuracies are present. On p 54 it is argued that each of the twelve tribes had a sign of the Zodiac assigned to it. Unfortunately the earliest evidence for the existence of the concept of the Zodiac occurs in the 5th century B C, half a millennium after the period of the Judges, and then only in Babylonia. Such a pagan conception is not to be imported into Scripture. On p 147 the textual evidence for the number of spectators in the theatre where Samson was brought in for sport is both incompletely and inaccurately given. The Sinaitic Septuagint does not in fact have this book preserved. It is the famous 4th century Vatican manuscript which, alone as it happens, gives the reading "seven hundred", all the other MSS of the Septuagint offer "three thousand", in agreement with the traditional Hebrew text. The animals which Samson caught and used to burn down the crops of the Philistines were "wild dogs" on p 132, but "foxes" on pp 138-139. The latter is assuredly correct.

It might seem that the reviewer is overdoing the negative part of his task. He certainly bears no ill-will to the author and his most recent work. But he has drawn attention to some of the factual and scholarly defects in this work because they are typical of most Christadelphian publications and preaching at the present time. While professing to offer to the world at large "the Truth", we are negligent in making sure that our message is adequately researched and reliable should it be challenged at any point. What has gone wrong in our body is that there has been no encouragement to those able to investigate in depth all those matters which impinge on the basic truths of the Gospel. Having inherited these truths from our spiritual forebears we have wrongly imagined that every side issue and related matter is fixed as laid down by previous generations. In fact knowledge of the world of the Bible is advancing very rapidly but we have been left behind. This book is a valuable reminder that unless we put much more effort into keeping our message abreast of recent additions to knowledge that pertain to the basic, unchangeable truths, then we shall have failed in one of our most important duties.

(Continued from page 3)

exploit our fellows, or make slaves of them, just because we enjoy a cup of tea! "Fair" tea may cost a little more, but if bought from somewhere such as "Traidcraft"* can come from peasant farmers who are given better prices for their crops.

God's response to our thought for others is "Then my favour will shine on you like the morning sun . . . when you pray I will answer you, when you call I will respond."

Heather Burr

* A catalogue can be obtained from Traidcraft plc, Kingsway, Gateshead, NE11 0NE

In a recent issue of "The Testimony" it was stated that the note on page 20 of the May issue of Endeavour (No 81) about Dr Thomas and Statements of Faith had been written without sight of the original letter of Dr Thomas in the 1867 "Ambassador". This is not true. The note was written after careful study of the original document. Unfortunately the space available was not sufficient for a full statement of the reasons for the conclusions reached to be given.

CHRISTADELPHIAN SUMMER SCHOOL 1990

*Friday 27th—Tuesday 31st July 1990, DV,
St Andrew's Hall, Selly Oak, Birmingham*

SUFFERING AND THE WORKING OF GOD

—Michael Green

PARABLES OF JESUS

—Margery McGregor

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS (Continued)

—Wilfred Lambert

Workshops are planned on Christadelphian History, Art as an aid to Scriptural Exposition, and Drama. Other subjects will be arranged according to suggestions received from those who book.

You are invited to join us for an enjoyable and spiritually profitable weekend. Further details from:

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