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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: The Serpent in Genesis

In its April issue *The Testimony* comments, quite correctly, that the editorial in our last issue drew "a parallel between the way that the devil which tempted Christ is interpreted and the interpretation of the serpent in Genesis. If the devil be interpreted as human nature personified, moving in the mind of Christ, then why not interpret the serpent as temptation in the mind of Adam or Eve?"

The answer, says *The Testimony*, is that "the serpent is described in a perfectly literal way as a beast of the field, whereas there is no literal description of what the devil was in the Gospel records of the temptation."

Taking the serpent first, Genesis 3:1 says indeed that it was a beast of the field or, in present-day English, a wild animal. It was also, in the charming archaism of the Authorised Version, "the most subtil" of the animals. Newer translations mostly have "cunning" or "crafty". As the narrative continues we learn that uniquely it has the power of speech and the ability to reason. Modern linguistics has shown that language is so complex that, in the words of one expert, "it seems rather astonishing that anybody is able to learn a language at all". Children can only learn to speak if they are brought up among people who speak and even so there is a narrow window of opportunity, passed quite early in life, after which learning any language is impossible. Finally the creature, again uniquely, had moral responsibility and so was punished for what it had done. Is this a description of "a perfectly literal" wild animal? Or a picture of a man in serpent's clothing?

"There is no literal description of what the devil was in the Gospel records of the temptation" says *The Testimony*. Of course. Nobody defines the meaning of ordinary everyday words when telling a story. "Satan" was a name in common use whose meaning was well understood. So if Jesus used it without any qualification it would convey the generally understood meaning. But, as was pointed out in the editorial in question, "Satan" did not mean simply "an adversary" as our traditional explanation wrongly maintains.

There is ample contemporary evidence that Satan was believed to be a supernatural evil power who controlled vast armies of demons as his servants. Jesus said nothing to the people to contradict this, rather the reverse. When the Pharisees said he cast out devils through the power of Satan, Jesus did not deny Satan's existence but pointed out that schism in his realm was ridiculous. He said that his exorcisms showed that the Kingdom of God had "come upon them". In the parable of the house swept and garnished he used details of the current belief as to how demons behaved as the basis of his lesson.

It is this literality in the gospels that those who believe in Satan use to attack the Christadelphian interpretation. Our editorial quoted J. Oswald Sanders who said that we deny the existence of the devil "without a shadow of biblical support". Frederick S. Leahy in *Satan Cast Out* (1975) is equally condemnatory:

If we accept the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God then we are bound to accept their testimony concerning Satan.... Once we tamper with any doctrine of Scripture, or seek to re-state it in what is glibly called 'modern thought-forms', there is no logical stopping-place short of a total rejection of the authority of the Bible as a divine revelation.

Yet this is what our own critics have said about us when we have argued for a

figurative interpretation of the serpent in Genesis 3!

Apart from the foregoing there are positive difficulties about a literal serpent. Firstly, its punishment showed that it was morally responsible. But in that case the fall had already taken place before the encounter in Eden. As part of the creation the serpent had been pronounced "very good". But it was far from very good when it approached Eve. This robs the story of its whole purpose which was to describe the fall of man, not that of snakes.

Secondly, this event was a climactic, a turning point, which settled the tragic future of the world. If the serpent is literal, this momentous turning point must have been the result of one single incident. It depended initially on the decision of one woman on one particular day when she was under pressure from a creature that, so far as the narrative tells us, she had no reason to suspect was evil. Paul indeed says she was deceived. Nor was Eve or Adam aware of the tremendous responsibility that rested on their shoulders. No warning was given before the event about a possible tempter. Nor was there any opportunity of repentance, no second chance. Is it likely that God, after having created this marvellous and complex world (to say nothing of the vast universe whose size science has now shown to be necessary to produce the elements that make life possible), would allow an evil creature the opportunity of frustrating His grand design? The answer has to be "yes" if the encounter with the serpent is literal.

If the serpent is not literal but a symbol of temptation and sin within the minds of Adam and Eve it is not necessary for the outcome to have been determined by a single incident! The account could equally well symbolise a history of successive wrong choices interspersed with forgiveness and instruction. If God is indeed "a God who is full of compassion and pity, who is not easily angered and who shows great love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6, GNB) how was this shown if this part of the story is literally true?

The Testimony article does not attempt to deal with these difficulties or to answer those raised in the editorial it criticises. Instead it reprints an article by the late Peter Watkins which appeared originally 25 years ago. Its basis is that if even one single non-literal interpretation is allowed in the Genesis story the literality of all the rest is destroyed totally. This is developed by first appealing to the Apostle Paul and then by a detailed examination of Genesis 3.

As regards Paul the author quotes 2 Cor. 11:3 where Paul expresses fear that the Corinthians should be corrupted in the same way that the serpent beguiled Eve.

Assume for the sake of argument, that there was no serpent. Did the inspired apostle mistakenly think that there was one, and communicate his error to the Corinthians and ourselves? We can dismiss that idea instantly. Are we then to think of Paul as one who, although he knew perfectly well that there was no serpent was willing to deceive the Corinthians, and ourselves, by pretending the opposite....

This seems convincing until it is remembered that *the same charge could be made against Jesus* about his account of the temptation in the wilderness. This is the argument that believers in a literal Satan put to us. For example, J. Oswald Sanders in *Satan is no Myth*:

If our Lord's words on the subject are taken objectively, the conclusion, whether He was right or wrong, is that He believed and taught that He engaged in conflict with a personal tempter in the wilderness temptation. The language carries no other construction. He spoke and acted as though there was a personal devil, whose dominion over men He had come to shatter....

It seems inconsistent to admit that the references to Satan by Jesus are figurative

whilst maintaining that those by Paul to the serpent must be literal. A Baptist at a recent demonstration who was saying that John Stott would burn in hell for not believing that Genesis 1 was literally true was at least being consistent.

As regards Genesis 3, Peter Watkins begins reasonably enough by allowing that it is possible to believe in a literal Adam and Eve but at the same time in a figurative serpent. However, this reasonable stance is forsaken almost immediately. In the same paragraph anyone who takes this view is called on to explain "Whether he regards the serpent as the only non-literal element in the story. What about the special trees, the disobedient eating, the shameful nakedness, the covering and concealment, the questioning, the expulsion? In other words, what about the Garden of Eden altogether?" So we are immediately back to the "all or nothing" position. If just one thing in these chapters is claimed to be non-literal this amounts to a claim that everything is non-literal, which is inadmissible.

But then, in spite of this insistence that everything must be literal there comes a surprising admission. There is one thing in the story that is figurative. And this one thing concerns the serpent! It is of course Genesis 3:15, the words addressed by God to the serpent: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed...." The seed of the woman is literal; for this is a prophecy of the crucifixion. But the seed of the serpent is not literal; it is not the physical descendants of the serpent which are referred to, but a personification of sin. In an attempt to rescue the basic premise it is argued that these words in Genesis 3:15

are not part of the narrative in the ordinary sense. They are a piece of direct speech—a Divine utterance. Does this make any difference? Yes it makes a great difference when we realise that this utterance is one of the many edicts of Genesis.... These are prophetic utterances of great consequence, that have determined the course of history.

Six examples of these edicts are then given of which three come from Genesis 1-3. "Let us make man in our image"; "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh"; "dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return".

All three contain figurative language which is therefore permissible—they are edicts. So we now have *four* exceptions to the general rule. Actually the door has been opened wider than the author seems to realise because there are a number of edicts in Genesis 1 which could therefore legitimately contain non-literal statements. With so many exceptions it is idle to pretend that the original rule still holds good. The argument that to admit a single figurative element into the story makes it all figurative collapses completely. It is surprising that this article should be considered an adequate response to the question.

This insistence on literality, notwithstanding the difficulties it brings in its train, arises no doubt out of a feeling that literal statement is better than figurative. But this seems to be contradicted by Scripture itself. Otherwise why should it contain so much non-literal language—allegory, parable, metaphor, hyperbole, irony, synecdoche, metonymy and periphrasis?

In 2 Samuel 11 we have the story of David's sin told at length, showing how he persisted in wrong-doing over a period of time. In the next chapter we have an account of the same thing by the prophet Nathan in the form of a story about a rich man, a poor man and a little ewe lamb. It occupies just four verses. None of it is literal. Which is the more effective? The literal facts which David knew but to which he was blind, or the fable that struck home?

Ron Coleman

Letter To An Agnostic

Young people (and the not-so-young) have often been worried by the seeming contradiction between the Bible and science. George McHaffie helped many to find a faith which valued the truth of the Bible and the integrity of scientific discovery. In this letter, written shortly before his death in 1985, he explained how he felt that scientific truth backed up the Bible truth of Creation.

Dear Friend,

If you were committed to a denial of God's existence, my comments in this letter would be unlikely to change that conviction. As, however, you have some doubts on the matter, perhaps the following reasoning will tip the scales sufficiently to encourage further enquiry.

Some History

Before the rise of modern science it was believed that the natural world showed all the marks of intelligent design. A popular illustration was that of finding a watch. Even if the finder had no idea what it was, it is likely that he would have assumed it to be the work of an intelligent mind. From this it was concluded that the natural world, with all its intricate workings was also the product of an intelligent mind. With the introduction of evolutionary theory, however, it was argued that what appeared to be design was simply the outcome of numerous chance variations which, with the help of natural selection, have brought about the numerous species of animals and plants as we see them today. It is likely that most workers in branches of science which have a bearing on the origin of life now hold a theory of this kind.

The Christian church has an unimpressive history in relation to acceptance of new scientific discoveries. The first major test came with the new understanding of the motion of the earth round the sun.

In the mediaeval world there were firmly held views about the universe. The earth, generally thought to be a flat disc, was held to be stationary with the sun, moon and stars revolving round it. The whole was thought to be covered by a dome above which was the abode of God and the angels who could easily observe happenings on the earth. The movements of stars were important to navigation and much thought was given to explaining them. Under the mediaeval system these were never understood rightly despite many ingenious theories. But in 1514 the secretary to the Pope asked a priest called Copernicus, who was also a mathematician, to look at the problem of calendar reform. He said that nothing could be done until the problems about the relationship between the sun and the moon had been resolved. That same year Copernicus circulated a manuscript which suggested a sun-centred system with a moving earth. For twenty years his theory, which was based mostly on mathematical calculations, was discussed all over Europe. Ironically the earliest attacks came from the Protestants and Reformers. Luther said:

"People give ear to an upstart astronomer who strove to show that the earth revolves, not the heavens or the firmament, the sun and the moon . . . sacred

scripture tells us that Joshua commanded the sun not the earth to stand still." Calvin agreed:

"The Bible says 'the world is also stablished that it cannot be moved.'"

The Roman church, which did not interpret Scripture as literally as Luther and Calvin, sitting in council at Trento in 1545, two years after Copernicus' death and the publication of his book *On the Revolution of the Celestial Spheres*, accepted his theory without reservation. However, on the 9th of January 1610, Galileo, looking through the newly invented telescope at the planet Jupiter, saw that it had 'stars' moving about it—the moons of Jupiter. He also saw that the Milky Way was made up of many thousands of stars, obviously an immense distance away. This confirmed by observation what had until then merely been theory.

It was Galileo therefore on whom the wrath of Rome fell, anxious to yield nothing to the Reformers as supporters of Scripture. In February 1616 Pope Paul V issued the following decree:

"The Doctrine of the double motion of the earth about its axis and about the sun is false and entirely contrary to Holy Scripture."

In the 17th century religious leaders believed that science as taught by Galileo was about to destroy the whole fabric of the Christian religion, the church and the Bible. John Wesley said "The new ideas tend towards infidelity". Today, however, it would be difficult to find anyone who would be troubled in conscience by the thought that the earth goes round the sun, quite apart from believing with Wesley that such a thought would lead to infidelity. Even so we still use language which reflects the old belief when we speak of the sun rising or setting. This has always been the language of mankind and, until Galileo's work, had been thought to be fully consistent with the underlying causes. The Bible writers used this language in their references to the natural world. A realisation of this would have prevented the development of theories which attempt to bring the first chapter of Genesis into some sort of harmony with modern science. For example, a huge time gap was proposed between the first and second verses of Genesis chapter 1. This idea was presented without regard for the clear meaning of the verse as set out in the Sabbath Law in Exodus Chapter 20:11: "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth..." Other theories were that the days represented immensely long periods or that each day was a day in which the process of creation was revealed. Genesis sets out *in the understanding of the time in which it was written* the fundamental teaching that all things in the universe were created by the one God and are not in themselves lesser gods to be worshipped, as was the practice of the pagans who worshipped sun, moon, stars, mountains, rivers, animals and plants. This point has a bearing on modern discussion of religion and science.

The Aftermath of the Galileo Controversy

The Christian church lost credibility over the Galileo affair. The religious interpretation of the world was seriously affected as a direct consequence. It might have been thought that in any further discussion of scientific developments Christians would have been wary of making hasty judgments or making ill-considered condemnations. Unfortunately this was not to be the case. Here are some examples. Increased understanding of electricity led to the invention of lightning conductors. Although churches were being damaged all over Europe the use of conductors was refused on the grounds that lightning was a bolt from God and should not be prevented. The understanding of mental illness brought about by

psychological and psychiatric studies was opposed on the grounds that such illness was caused by demons. There is still much confusion today about exorcisms. There is tension in religious circles today over the new perspectives presented by astronomy, geology, biology and archaeology on the structure, origin, age and history of the earth. Opposition to all these new fields of knowledge has been on almost identical lines to that of the Pope, Luther, Wesley and others in their earlier opposition to Copernicus and Galileo.

Christians should have no quarrel with the facts of the natural world. New discoveries should be welcomed even if they overturn long held understanding of how the world reached its present condition. The existence of God is, however, challenged by explanations of the origin of the world which arise out of a studied attempt to dispense with any suggestion of intelligent direction or purpose in the formation of the universe. In the paragraphs which follow an attempt is made, within the limits of present knowledge, to show that the elimination of intelligence leaves unanswered questions to which no contrary theory seems likely to be able to respond without making assertions which are unsupported by the evidence.

The Scientific Contribution

Astonishing progress in the understanding of the nature of the universe has been made during the last hundred years. This is due to the painstaking activities of scientists working in astronomy, biochemistry, biology, geology and many other subjects. The pace of discovery quickens all the time and the results are made available to the layman through books, magazines and television. Subject to more extensive comment in later paragraphs, the result of the last hundred years' work may be stated as follows.

The whole universe began from nothing fifteen billion years ago. From nothing, "inflation" followed by a "big bang" led to the expansion of the universe and the condensation of matter into galaxies, stars, planets and the other phenomena of the heavens. The earth is a planet. At first hot and turbulent, it cooled through time and simple forms of life appeared. Over the next three billion years animals and plants changed into the life forms we know today.

The most popular explanation of how all this happened is that it is all a product of "evolution". In modern speech "evolution" is applied to many things. Motor cars have evolved from slow ponderous machines. Cities have evolved from small clusters of houses. Books have evolved from handwritten manuscripts. The list of items which began in a simple fashion and became complicated is endless.

Animals and plants can be grouped into families. Many plants have a similar flower but differ widely in leaf, stem, root and size depending on whether the plant is in a warm or cold climate, up a mountain or by the sea or isolated on an island. Animals can be grouped similarly as can be seen, for example, by superficial examination of animals with a skeleton. This can be observed in more detail when the chemical constituents of the cells of the body and their functioning are examined. The simplest and most obvious explanation for this is that there have been common ancestors, and the various species of plants and animals have been adapted to different environments, feeding habits and life styles. There is little reason to doubt that the evidence points this way and that this is what has happened. The problem is how did it happen? Is there a discernible mechanism? The answer which most scientists favour is that all life arose through accidental events. No sense of purpose is claimed for this. As Carl Sagan declared in a television series, all is the result of a

giant accident: there is no meaning beyond this. Once an accident of reproduction has taken place which favours an animal or plant, natural processes involving a struggle for existence ensure the survival of the new form and its growth in numbers. If for personal philosophical reasons an atheistic position is favoured an accidental origin of all things devoid of all meaning is the only possible stance to take. The question, however, is whether this is a conclusion which it is reasonable to adopt in the light of the evidence available.

Chance or Intelligent Design?

We cannot, of course, observe now what happened at the beginning of the universe. Calculations can, however, be made.

An increasing number of physicists are thinking that the "big bang" was no accident. Paul Davies, an astrophysicist who is not a Christian, says of the initial tiny ball of matter that the energy of the explosion had to be fixed with tremendous precision if a universe that could support life was to be produced.

"If the bang is too small, the cosmic material merely falls back again [due to gravity] after a brief dispersal and crunches itself to oblivion. On the other hand, if the bang is too big, the fragments get blasted completely apart at high speed, and soon become isolated, unable to clump together into galaxies. In reality the bang that occurred was of such exquisitely defined strength that the outcome lies precisely on the boundary between these alternatives."

And further:

"All this prompts the question of why, from the infinite range of possible values that nature could have selected for the fundamental constants, and from the infinite variety of initial conditions that could have characterised the primeval Universe, the actual values and conditions conspire to produce the particular range of very special features that we observe. For clearly the Universe is a very special place; exceedingly uniform on a large scale, yet not so precisely uniform that galaxies could not form; extremely low entropy per proton and hence cool enough for chemistry to happen; almost zero cosmic repulsion and an expansion rate tuned to the energy content to unbelievable accuracy: values for the strengths of its forces that permit nuclei to exist, yet do not burn up all the cosmic hydrogen, and many more apparent accidents of fortune."

The question which has to be faced is whether chance could have produced so precise a calculation, without which there would have been no universe. The reasonable conclusion to draw from this is that an intelligence of immense capacity has been responsible. If within the earliest moments of the beginning of the universe, planning of this scale is evident, it would also follow that all that comes afterwards, galaxies, stars, planets, the earth, life and man with all his capacities were part of the overall design from the first moment of time and, indeed, before. It would also follow that, as accident could form no part in the first moments, there is no reason to suppose that accident has played any significant part in the subsequent history of the universe.

So far the changes from the first primordial act of creation through the formation of galaxies, dust clouds, stars and planets devoid of life can be understood on physical and chemical principles which, in given circumstances, can be, in a large measure, predicted. It is with the complexities of the emergence of life that the

¹ P. C. W. Davies, *The Accidental Universe* (C U P Cambridge 1982 pp 91 & 111)

concept of randomness, chance or accident is most strongly put under pressure by the strictly scientific approach.

Life

For the first 2000 million years or so it seems that there was no life on earth. During that period oceans, rivers, chemical compounds, land areas, turbulent weather, volcanoes and surface erosion all combined into a settled environment which appear to have given an anticipation of eventual life.

In the 19th century Louis Pasteur demonstrated, contrary to popular belief at the time, that life did not arise from non-living substances. Scientific evolutionary theory, however, requires that it did. As this cannot be demonstrated by any experiment, certain presumptions have to be made. Once the earth had cooled and seas formed it is presumed that under the influence of lightning, sunlight and the general conditions of the time a chemical soup came into being out of which the chemical components of life were formed. Random association of chemicals then took place which over millions of years came together as a living creature. In a laboratory it is possible to produce some of the elementary organic chemicals by passing electric currents through a solution of non-organic chemicals. Even if a further stage were reached, it would not demonstrate that it happened that way in nature, nor that it happened without the administration of intelligence as is being applied in the laboratory.

While organic chemicals (enzymes) derived from living creatures have been found in rocks there is no trace of any chemical soup. In view of the time which the soup was presumed to have existed this is surprising. On the contrary, organic chemicals have been detected in outer space which is hardly a chemical soup.

The idea of the chemical soup has been around for a long time. Originally it was thought that random jostling together of compounds of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen would produce the basis for the first living creature. As more and more information has been discovered about the simplest of living things, their enormous complexity has made the original ideas untenable. The simplest living creature which can exist, draws nourishment from its environment, reproduces itself, and consists of a single cell surrounded by a membrane. Contained within the cell is a minute chain of chemicals which by analogy, can be read like a book and provide the information necessary to form a similar cell and regulate its growth and development. This chain is popularly referred to as DNA from the initial letters of the chemical name. DNA is a remarkable substance. It is at the centre of all living processes. Everyone begins as a single cell. If all the DNA from the single cell from which everyone now living were drawn together it would form no more than a pinhead.

If the DNA did not copy itself exactly, even a minor mistake would lead to disaster. A slight error in the replication of a blood cell can lead to a life-shortening disease. Nevertheless the presumption is that through repeated mistakes some will emerge which are not harmful but will be of advantage to the creature in the struggle for survival. Over a long period these small changes are thought to produce new species and radically different animals and plants.

The simplest living cell (a bacterium) contains three million bits of information in its DNA although only 30,000 may be used. It can reproduce itself under favourable conditions in twenty minutes. The problem of producing life from non-life must, therefore, be seen as that of presuming that by a chance-jostling and interaction,

chemicals could arrange themselves in a precise order as is illustrated by the structure of a bacterium. This is beyond the limits of chance no matter how much time is allowed. But it did happen. Only a very superior intelligence could have first designed the scheme and then executed it.

Chance Variation and Natural Selection

Apart from the problems of the origin of life, strong objections can be made to the explanation based on survival of the fittest. Natural selection works in a species to preserve the best of the stock. In a hard winter the weakest, generally the oldest and those with the least ability to fend for themselves, perish. Variation occurs within a species in such matters as colouring and minor anatomical differences. Most of these differences are of small consequence although they may affect feeding habits. The ultimate question, however, is whether these small occasional and accidental variations could produce all the highly efficient complex forms of life which exist.

The answer ought to be found by observation of nature and the knowledge available from fossils. This is, however, lacking. Dolphins and whales it is presumed must have descended from land animals perfectly adapted to their surroundings. There is no indication from fossils of any intermediate stage. They appear fully adapted to a life in the sea. The speed with which this happened would be more consistent with adaptation preceding use. But this would suggest an intelligent forward plan which the accepted theory of evolution seeks to avoid.

The accepted theory also presumes that natural selection is the driving force which produces the complicated changes. This force has been greatly exaggerated. It can be shown that highly complex changes take place which have little bearing on fitness to survive.

There are probably some 35,000 species of orchids. Orchids are found in cold, hot, wet and dry parts of the world. Most are very beautiful. The flowers are exceptionally intricate. Some mimic the female of an insect and so attract the male to mate and thereby the plant is pollinated. Others are pollinated by only one species of insect. The chance variations would have to be very exactly coordinated to achieve a result of this kind. The standard view is that these pollinating procedures produced an advantage for the plant in the struggle for existence. But is any of this necessary to achieve pollination? Bees in Britain find the most profitable sources of nectar and pollen in sycamore, lime, holly, ivy and many other inconspicuous plants. It is unlikely that the average person is aware of the flowers of these plants. Bees have no need of a sophisticated system to attract them. A mere white petal, as in the bramble, or a yellow floret, as in the dandelion, is adequate. A blob of nectar and pollen on the end of a stalk is ample. A sugar solution poured on the ground will soon be covered with bees. They will collect pollen from plants which have no nectar, such as those which are normally wind-pollinated. The sycamore and similar plants have abundance of seeds. Orchids on the other hand are rare and often perilously on the edge of extinction.

If it were not for the dominance of the chance-variation linked with natural-selection explanation in most scientific approaches to the problem of life, numerous more examples of the above kind would be brought to light. The dominance of the theory can be seen in statements which appear in popular programmes on radio and television. It was stated in a programme that man's capacity to produce music and art must have survival value or it would not exist. Ideas of this kind can only persist so

long as any intelligent, spiritual interpretation of the universe is denied. The existence of the beauty of the orchids, of colour and man's capacity to enjoy it, of the sounds which can make harmonious music can be rationally explained if there is an intelligent designer with appreciation of beauty and art of which ours is but a pale reflection. The scientific evolutionary view presents, on the whole, a picture of numerous competitive creatures struggling against each other for survival. This view of nature may have been dear to the heart of the thrusting industrialist of the last century. It insufficiently takes into account, however, that nature is a finely balanced system. Bacteria, fungi and small creatures in the soil produce fertility by the breakdown of dead residues from plants and animals. There is no point in these inhabitants of the soil striving to become something else or tackle a different environment. They are needed where they are. The fine balance is maintained by predators keeping the correct proportion of the various species. The whole is also balanced by the defensive mechanisms available to plants and animals to deter too much predation. Birch trees can produce a deterrent within an hour of attack by caterpillars. Neighbouring birch trees can get the message down wind and start their preparations in advance.

Enormous damage has been done to this fine balance by man's use of highly poisonous chemicals to control predators. Friend and foe alike are wiped out. This can lead to devastating plagues of insects freed from their natural foes. The poisoning effect goes far beyond the objects of the attack in the first place. Birds, other animals, and man can be seriously affected. Considerations of this kind must challenge Christians to view more seriously their attitude to the natural environment and look afresh at the Biblical teaching about man's stewardship of the earth.

Conclusion

Is it possible, therefore, to arrive at an understanding of religion and science which will not be subject to the twists and turns of the latest discovery? Both religion and science have something to contribute. The purpose of the Bible is to lead man to fellowship with God and a knowledge of the meaning of human life. The Bible gives no scientific insights into modern science or technology, but does present a criticism of the popular view which provides for neither purpose nor meaning on a cosmic scale. The contribution of science is to give a much deeper understanding than in previous generations of the complexity of the world, thereby demonstrating the greatness of God and the impossibility of an accidental origin of the universe. It may well be that new, radical information about the universe will be discovered, but any further advance can only lead to yet further detail of its magnificent complexity.

The above comments are concerned only with chance as against intelligence in the formation of the universe. There are numerous other issues which could be pursued in the search for an understanding of God, but whether the universe was brought about by something akin to the gambler's luck streak or whether by the design of God is for each individual an all-important one. It is an issue which determines whether or not there is any purposeful, lasting value in your existence.

The history of the Bible-Science conflict and the suggested solution is examined in more detail in George McHaffie's booklet *The Bible and Science*, price 75p incl. postage, from 176 Granton Road, Edinburgh EH5 1AH

Bread from Heaven

John 6 provides us with the account of Jesus' miraculous feeding of the 5000 and the associated discourse on the bread of life. Michael Green draws comparisons from the Jewish and Old Testament background and invites us to meditate on the practical meaning for ourselves today.

The feeding of the 5000 recalls two miracles of mass feeding in the Old Testament:

- a. Moses giving manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16).
- b. Elisha feeding 100 with 20 barley loaves (2 Kings 4:42-4).

The first reference is obvious as it is extensively mentioned in the chapter (see verses 30 and 49 for example). The second reference is not as clear. Is it co-incidental, however, that John informs us in verse 9 that the bread used in the miracle was "barley loaves", whereas the synoptic evangelists who all record the miracle simply refer to the bread as "loaves"? Could it be that John and/or Jesus are anxious for us to see the similarity to the prophet's miracle? In 4 Kings 4 in the Greek Septuagint, as in the parallel scripture in our English Bibles (2 Kings 4), Elisha's servant was instructed to feed one hundred men with the twenty barley loaves. He does so and, as in the New Testament miracle, all ate with food to spare. Moreover, in the Septuagint passage, Elisha's servant is described as a *paidarion* (4 Kings 4:38) as is the young lad in John 6:9. These are the only occurrences in the Bible of this Greek word. We may conclude from this that the sign of feeding in John 6 also has Elisha's miracle in mind.

The importance of the feeding miracle must not be under-estimated. It was enshrined in Jewish belief that through Moses, they were fed in the desert. The people of Jesus' day were looking for the sign of a prophet who would feed them again with manna. The first redeemer, Moses, brought manna from heaven. "And it shall come to pass ... that the treasury of manna shall again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those years, because these are they who have come to the consummation of time" (2 Baruch 29:8). This, being written about the same time as the Gospel of John, gives us insight into Jewish thought of that period.

Jesus worked the feeding miracle and then commented on it. He made it plain that, although he was the Messiah, he was not the political leader that they were expecting. He did not allow the people to make him king (verse 15), and the discourse that begins at verse 26 starts by dispelling any confusion about the purpose Jesus had in performing the miracle.

Jesus' message in the discourse can perhaps be summarised as an expansion of the quotation contained in 6:31: "Bread from heaven he gave them to eat." The feeding of the 5000 and the discourse that follows on the bread of life are summed up in understanding these words. The quotation is not one we have in our Scriptures. It could be a combination of Exodus 16:4 & 15, or it may be a saying of the time echoing Psalm 78:24 or Nehemiah 9:15.

The Jews in the first century understood the quotation in 6:31 to mean that Moses gave them bread from heaven. In John 6:32, we have Jesus' understanding. "In very truth I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven." It is important for us not to miss that this is a drastic re-interpretation of the Jewish view. Once we have grasped that then we can see how the rest of the chapter is concerned with the new Christian thought:

- a. It was not Moses, but it is my Father.
- b. It is not that bread was given, but that it *is* given.

c. It is not bread, but true bread.

John wants us to accept the miracle as more than just a historical event. It is of the utmost importance to him that the feeding is regarded as a sign. It is necessary to look for the symbolic truth in order to come to the reality behind the sign. Those listening should have done this, for it was a principle taught in their Scripture, as seen with reference to the manna in Deuteronomy 8:3. Mark 8:21 demonstrates that this is what Jesus expected of the people with regard to this miracle.

The statement made by Jesus in verse 33 would be quite a shock for the Jews. "For the bread of God is the bread which comes down heaven and gives life to the world" (verse 33). This food from God is not just for them, but for the *cosmos*, the world, or even the universe. This heavenly gift is also for us!

The text of the discourse is familiar. The true bread that God gives from heaven is Jesus himself. "I am the bread of life," he says (verse 35). The importance of grasping this can be seen in verse 54, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life." It would appear that, by introducing the motif of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood, John intends to point us to the Lord's supper. In Mark & Paul Jesus says: "This is my body" (Mark 14:22, 1 Cor. 11:24). However, the Johannine text may be nearer to the original saying. It is possible that he said at the Last Supper, "This is my flesh", a more likely phrase in Hebrew or Aramaic. If this is true, it would seem to confirm that this discourse refers to the breaking of bread, or at least that Jesus' teaching is in the language of the Last Supper.

What are we to make of this if we are going to avoid the trap the Jews fell into of too literal an understanding? There are warnings against this in verses 26-7, 31-2, 34-6, 41-3, 52-3, and, perhaps most pointedly, in verse 63. "It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."

There is a danger that we, whilst recognizing that Jesus' words are obviously not to be taken literally, might interpret the passage as just an exhortation for us to take bread and wine weekly as symbols of Jesus' flesh and blood. However, Caird in his book *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* suggests that the passage is not primarily about the Lord's Supper. Instead, the language of the breaking of bread is used in order to contrast the manna, representing the Torah, with the true bread from heaven, the incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ. "Flesh" is used in John as symbolic of incarnation (see 1:14), and the people are here being told, though they could not yet grasp it (John 13:7), that an understanding of what the coming of the Son of God into the world means is only possible in the light of his death. In other words, Jesus' whole life and purpose is epitomized in his self-sacrifice, on which we meditate as we take the bread and wine.

Deuteronomy 8:3 makes plain the meaning of the manna miracle: "... [God] fed you with manna ... to make you understand that human beings live not on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of Yahweh." This is presumably the truth that Jesus had in mind when he said, "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete his work" (John 4:34). In Jesus' life and death, we see the Word of God in action in the world. If we accept this argument, the practical reality behind taking the bread and wine is that the true disciple of Jesus must live by his principles.

As the manna miracle showed that the Hebrews must feed on God's every word, so both the feeding of the 5000 and the taking of bread and wine show that the follower of Jesus must be led by his teaching. The Christian should try to live a Christ-centred life. This, surely, is what is meant by eating his flesh and drinking his blood. May we daily feed on this heavenly food!

Do We Observe the Commandments of Jesus?

(Part 3)

Apart from commandments in the direct teaching of Jesus, a considerable number of practices are enjoined on believers elsewhere in the New Testament. Others were carried out in the early ecclesia and apparently endorsed. We show an interest in some of these today; others we completely ignore. Amongst these practices are: choosing by lot, laying on of hands, circumcision, eating kosher meat, length of hair, excluding immoral people, marriage and celibacy, relationships between parents, children and slaves, headcoverings, greeting one another with a holy kiss, holding up hands in prayer, the avoidance of expensive clothes, anointing the sick with oil, payment to leaders of the ecclesia, sharing goods with teachers, and the enrolment of widows. It is again important to examine why we do not practise many of these today. Can we reasonably pick and choose, and if so, on what basis? Ian and Averil McHaffie continue their analysis.

Underlying any assessment of practices like the laying on of hands, anointing with oil, or headcovering in prayer is the question: Is this simply part of the practice of the ancient world (through which principles are worked out) or are these practices fundamental in themselves? We shall examine each in an effort to arrive at overall conclusions and their implication for today.

Choosing by Lot

Choosing by lot is an ancient practice. Pagan Romans used it to decide who should get Jesus' clothes (Matthew 27:35). In the Old Testament the will of God was revealed by lot when Saul was chosen as king (1 Samuel 10:20-24). When the disciples in Jerusalem sought a replacement for Judas, God answered by lot:

And they prayed and said, "Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which of these two thou hast chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside, to go to his own place." And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:24-26)²

No further mention of this occurs in the New Testament. It was, however, a way of trusting in God entirely for the outcome. Why do we not do it today? Is it a lack of faith in God? Is it a belief that using lots would be relying on chance? Or is it because we feel that God acted directly in Bible times but does not do so now? Offices in the ecclesia are usually chosen by ballot or by accepting volunteers. Would choosing by lot be a more biblical method? In Acts 1 the matter was in the context of prayer, and this certainly should accompany our methods of decision-making.

Laying on of Hands

The laying on of hands in the Old Testament could indicate the passing on of a blessing (Genesis 48:8-20), and identification of the people with their sin-offering (Leviticus 1:4), or the passing on of authority or power, as of Moses to Joshua (Deuteronomy 34:9). In the New Testament there are similar applications, possibly following rabbinic practice. Jesus blessed children, laying his hands on them (Mark

² Quotations are from the RSV.

10:16). He healed the sick likewise (Mark 6:5), as did the apostles (Acts 9:12). The gift of the Holy Spirit was sometimes conferred by the laying on of hands (Acts 8:14-19). The practice was also used as a way of appointing believers for a specific service (Acts 6:6 & 13:3, II Timothy 1:6). Paul laid his hands on Timothy (II Timothy 1:6) and urged him not to be "hasty in the laying on of hands" (I Timothy 5:22), perhaps meaning that he should not rush into choosing people for various tasks. While there are aspects of the laying on of hands which do not seem applicable today, such as the passing on of the Holy Spirit, or healing, the use of the laying on of hands in appointing believers to specific tasks could still be seen as relevant. Newly baptised brethren and sisters are given "the right hand of fellowship" which would seem a modern adaptation of the idea. The term appears in Galatians 2:9, but for something different. The practice may well have arisen from the emotional value of physical contact between individuals. Physical contact expresses warmth, affection, sincerity. We used to see a car sticker which said: "Have you hugged your kid today?" Physical contact between human beings is important and valuable.

Circumcision

Acts 15 reports controversy over circumcision. This controversy over fundamental Jewish practice arose again and again in the New Testament.

But some men came down from Judaea and were teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." (Acts 15:1)

The dispute was whether Gentiles who had been baptised into Jesus had to be circumcised. The outcome in Acts 15 was that they did not, but it was still assumed that Jewish Christians would practice circumcision. Obviously there is the strongest Old Testament support for Jews, even when converted to Christ, continuing circumcision. For a time, to win over the Jews, Paul was willing to meet Jewish sensitivity.

Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. (Acts 16:3)

But the logic of the New Covenant was that ritual practices of this sort were no longer relevant either for Jews or Gentiles:

Now I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is bound to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love. (Galatians 5:2-6)

For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but a new creation. Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God. (Galatians 6:15-16)

For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal. His praise is not from men but from God. (Romans 2:28-29)

Paul, therefore, applied to the practice of circumcision the teaching of Jesus that true worship is in spirit and truth. The fact that Paul, under the guidance and inspiration of God, could declare redundant under the New Covenant such a fundamental Old Testament practice as circumcision, should set for us the general principle that Christian worship is a matter of the spirit and the heart, not a matter of physical acts.

Food

A similar problem arose concerning food. Jewish Christians continued to keep the Jewish food laws and a compromise was agreed that to some extent Gentiles should do so too:

...it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity. (Acts 15:28-29)

The strongest Old Testament support can be adduced for not eating meat with the blood still in it (Leviticus 17:10-14) and the decision at the Council of Jerusalem was that these "necessary things" applied to the Gentile believers too. In addition, the Gentiles were not to eat meat which had been killed as a sacrifice in the temples of pagan gods, and they were to refrain from unchastity. This last requirement (refraining from unchastity) concerns moral behaviour and it is therefore to be expected that this would continue under the New Covenant. But since this, along with the requirement that meat should be prepared according to Jewish regulations, is listed among "necessary things", should we not still observe all of these today?

Jesus in his comments about food apparently declared the food laws inapplicable (Mark 7:19), but the full implications of this were not at first realised. The need to keep Jewish and Gentile believers united lay behind the compromise in Acts 15. The full spirit behind the New Covenant was revealed to Peter in the vision in Acts 10:12-15. Not only were the Jewish food laws no longer relevant in Christ Jesus but the Jew/Gentile distinction was no longer relevant either.

And Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly, I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him...."

(Acts 10:34-35)

Even so, Peter and the believers in Jerusalem, found this message hard to accept:

But when Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. (Galatians 2:11-12)

It was Paul, under the guidance of God, who spelled out most clearly that under the New Covenant the former distinctions no longer applied:

Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:23-28)

Nevertheless, the practice of slaughtering animals in pagan temples was a continuing problem because some converts felt that eating meat obtained in this way implied some acknowledgement of the power of the pagan god. The real position is this:

I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself. (Romans 14:4)

There was the risk, however, that eating meat from or in pagan temples might cause some people to abandon their newly found Christian faith. In such circumstances, it was necessary to avoid the practice.

...nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for any one who thinks it unclean. If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died. (Romans 14:14-15)

The fact that compromise was necessary in the first century on this issue did not alter the fact that the true Christian position regarded the kind of food eaten as irrelevant.

The right spirit is to be grateful to God for whatever we eat, but to take care not to cause others to lose faith where they incorrectly adopt a contrary position.

As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions. One believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats; for God has welcomed him. (Romans 14:1-3)

Length of Hair

In Acts 18:18 it is reported that "at Cenchreae he cut his hair, for he had a vow." This refers presumably to Paul, but possibly to Aquila. The same practice is mentioned in Acts 21:23-26, where Paul is asked to associate himself with four men who are under a vow. The vow is presumably the Nazirite vow mentioned in Numbers 6, where a vow of dedication to God either by a man or a woman was fulfilled by abstinence from grape juice and grapes and by not cutting the hair.

All the days of his vow of separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the time is completed for which he separates himself to the LORD, he shall be holy; he shall let the locks of his head grow long. (Numbers 6:5)

Whether done by Paul or Aquila in Acts 18, it seems to have been felt even under the New Covenant as an appropriate way of showing dedication to God. The Mishnah prescribed 30 days as a minimum time during which to allow the hair to grow long. Some like Samson were Nazirites all their lives. Though we have this one incident of the Nazirite vow being carried out in the New Testament, there is no suggestion that the Nazirite vow was binding on brethren and sisters under the New Covenant. The practice of growing one's hair long and of shaving it off received approval or disapproval in different places at different times. As part of the Nazirite vow it was appropriate for both men and women to grow their hair long and then completely (Numbers 6:18) to shave it off when the period was expired. Absalom was spoken of with approval (II Samuel 14:26) and admired for the length of his hair which he cut only once a year. Surrounding nations who "cut the corners of their hair" are mentioned with disapproval in Jeremiah 9:26. On the other hand, in the context of society in Corinth (I Corinthians 11:6) disapproval is expressed of long hair on a man, while for a woman it was regarded as a disgrace either to have her hair cut or shaved.

In the Corinthian context the background is presumably not the Nazirite vow but prevailing practice in some of the pagan religions at Corinth where sexual identities were reversed: men dressed as women, and women as men. This was particularly the case in the worship of Isis. Hence, perhaps, the comment in I Corinthians 11:14 approving of long hair in a woman, but short hair in a man. Hair length otherwise varies according to fashion and culture. In the 1930s sisters who cut their hair short (contrary to previous practice) were criticised in *The Christadelphian* for going contrary to Bible teaching. Most sisters now, however, do cut their hair short and are thought none the worse because of it. I Timothy 2:9 warns against expensive and showy hair decoration. Attempts therefore to impress others unduly or extravagantly can justifiably be criticised. In itself, however, hair style and hair length, whether male or female, is not a matter of concern under the New Covenant unless the style gives a wrong impression of Christian standards.

Drive out the wicked person from among you

In I Corinthians 5:13 Paul orders the ecclesia in Corinth to expel from their

membership anyone who is immoral. His instructions arise from an incident where a brother in the ecclesia is sleeping with his stepmother and the ecclesia seems to think this is acceptable. It is worth noting that disfellowship in the New Testament was always for immoral behaviour. It was not applied to brethren and sisters who were weak in faith or who had difficulties or doubts. Nor was it applied to people who neglected good apostolic advice. A number of passages can be quoted from the New Testament which might seem to deny this statement, but a careful examination demonstrates that those who were to be withdrawn from were encouraging immoral behaviour. For example:

I appeal to you, brethren, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own appetites, and by fair and flattering words they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded. ...I would have you wise as to what is good and guileless as to what is evil; then the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

(Romans 16:17-19)

Note the contrasts between "serve the Lord Jesus Christ" and "their own appetites", between "good" and "evil", between "God" and "Satan".

As for a man who is factious, after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is perverted and sinful; he is self-condemned.

(Titus 3:10-11)

The contrast in Titus 3 is between those who apply themselves to good deeds (submissive to rulers and authorities, obedient, ready for any honest work, not speaking evil of others, not quarrelling but being gentle and courteous to all—Titus 3:1-2) and those who go in for "stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels over the law". Paul is not talking here about proper and sensible discussion but about those who engaged in quarrelling and sought to create divisions.

Jude had similar people in mind when he appealed to ecclesias "to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (verse 3). The faith was being opposed by "ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness" (verse 4). They are described as people "who set up divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit" (verse 19). Jude's advice was:

But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

And convince some, who doubt: save some, by snatching them out of the fire; on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

(Jude 20-23)

The practice of excommunication was reserved in the New Testament for those who were openly and persistently immoral. Immoral behaviour ranged from sexual misbehaviour on the one hand to quarrelling on the other. Amongst ecclesias today sexual immorality is rare and this term could not according to New Testament understanding cover things like marrying a non-believer. Though marrying "out" is undesirable for many reasons, there is no evidence that the New Testament would have approved disfellowship for this. Quarrelling, harsh words, and threats of disfellowship are sadly not unknown, and though according to New Testament standards these would merit excommunication, disfellowship seems never to be applied for these offences today. *(To be continued)*

The three articles "Do We Observe the Commandments of Jesus?" are from a longer work entitled *Principles and Practice* which it is intended will be published as a booklet. The authors would welcome comments on what has appeared so far.

Gehenna not a Refuse Dump

by Wilfred Lambert

The mortality of man has always been a point in our teaching. It involves giving Scriptural definitions of the human 'soul' and Scriptural exposition of 'heaven' and 'hell' as they relate to the destiny of man. From a scholarly standpoint much of this is not controversial. Scholars who go to the Biblical books with an open mind to find out the meanings of words agree that the Hebrew 'soul' (*nefesh*) of man is indeed mortal and bears no relationship to the immortal soul of Platonic teachings and of the medieval church. With 'hell' the problems are superficially greater because of the occurrence of Biblical passages speaking of a fiery place reserved for the punishment of the wicked, and it is these that are the concern of the present article. As is well understood among us, this is a metaphorical use of the name of a spot just outside the walls of Jerusalem. In general our traditional understanding is correct, save for one particular, to which attention will be drawn.

The spot in question is a valley to the south of Jerusalem called "the valley of the son of Hinnom" in Old Testament topographical contexts, see Joshua 15:8, 18:16; Jeremiah 19:2 and 6. In Hebrew this is *Gē' ben Hinnōm*, and Hinnom is a personal name which presumably belonged to a Canaanite in the land before the Israelite conquest, only surviving in the name of the valley. Most likely "son of Hinnom" is an ancient scribal misinterpretation for "sons of Hinnom". In the spelling conventions of standard Hebrew manuscripts *bn* (pronounced *ben*) is "son of" and *bny* (pronounced *bnē*) "sons of". Once in the Hebrew Bible (II Kings 23:10) the standard Hebrew text offers *bny* in this name, "(valley of) the sons (of Hinnom)", but a marginal note of medieval origin directs readers to pronounce the singular *ben*. In the times of the earliest surviving Hebrew manuscripts scribes took liberties in adding or omitting the consonant signs used to indicate vowels, such as *y* for *ē*, and the Dead Sea Scroll copies of Biblical books differ from the standard later Hebrew manuscripts in hundreds of such cases. Thus one is justified in choosing the alternative which gives the better sense. "The valley of the sons of Hinnom" is better because the Israelites followed earlier local tradition in having a rule that land belonged to a family and generally could not be sold or otherwise disposed of except by descent within the family. This is shown in Naboth's refusal to part with his vineyard at Ahab's insistence. The Hebrew 'son' includes of course 'grandson', 'great-grandson' etc. Thus "valley of the sons of Hinnom" implies that it was the ancestral property of this family. The alternative "son of Hinnom" would imply that it belonged to one particular son of a Mr Hinnom, who, for some reason, was not referred to by his own name. This is less probable. As used as a place name, the phrase was later abbreviated to "Valley of Hinnom", as in Nehemiah 11:30, and the Aramaic form of this, Gehenna, occurs in the New Testament, where it is rendered 'hell' in the English Authorised Version.

In the Old Testament this phrase always refers to the actual valley, in the New Testament it is always a figure for the place of punishment of the wicked: Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9: 43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6. In two of the occurrences in Matthew, 5:22 and 18:9, and in the one in Mark, it is

referred to as fiery, and it is in this connection that wrong information is often given. It is often asserted that the valley at Jerusalem served as a refuse dump, and that fires were kept burning there to consume rubbish, from which the fiery character of the New Testament Gehenna derives.

There is nothing in the Bible to support this, nor indeed in other contemporary documents, nor in all the extensive earlier Rabbinic literature, which often depended on traditions going back to Biblical times. The earliest known occurrence of this idea appears in a commentary on the Psalms by David Kimchi, a Rabbinic Bible scholar who lived in Provence in the south of France c. 1160-1235 A.D. In commenting on "the land of the living" in Psalm 27:13 he writes on Gehenna:

"...it is a place on the earth adjacent to Jerusalem. It is an obnoxious place where impure things and corpses were thrown, and where there was a constant fire to burn up the impure things and the bones of the corpses. Accordingly the place where the wicked will be judged is metaphorically called Gehenna."

The extremely late date of this idea renders it very uncertain, and it must also be noted that a place for burning human bodies is not what is usually meant by "refuse dump" or any other such phrase.

There is in fact another explanation of the burning attributed to Gehenna in the New Testament, which is firmly established in the Old. Five passages: (II Kings 23:10; II Chronicles 28:3, 33:6; Jeremiah 7:31-32, 32:35) refer to the valley of the Son(s) of Hinnom, and to Topheth, a particular spot within it, as the place where human sacrifice to the pagan god Molech took place. Children were "burnt" or "passed through the fire" in rites performed there. There has been much scholarly discussion about these practices, but the recent book of John Day, *Molech: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament* (Cambridge, 1989) offers strong evidence that the Old Testament statements are to be taken at face value. Human children were burnt to death to honour Molech in this valley. This ritual burning, then, is the background of the imagery used in the New Testament for the place where the wicked will be destroyed.

One other passage needs consideration. Isaiah 66:24, in a picture of the future destruction of the wicked, says, "their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched." Gehenna is not named in the context, but in Mark 9:43-47 the phrases from Isaiah are quoted alongside the name of Gehenna. In the context of Isaiah the words do not describe sacrifices to Molech. Fuel was not abundant in pre-exilic Israel and a permanently burning fire would have consumed vast quantities of wood. Nor is there any reliable evidence that God-fearing Israel maintained a permanently burning facility for the disposal of unclean human corpses. The cost of fuel and the Sabbath laws would together have proved insurmountable obstacles. The passage in Isaiah is looking forward to the future, and though Gehenna is not named, the words do anticipate the New Testament use of the concept of Gehenna. The words are not describing exactly what happened in the Valley outside the walls of Jerusalem, but use the burning there as a basis for imagery in the prophetic vision of the final destruction of the wicked.

Thus traditional Christadelphian teaching is basically correct, but in one detail it has been misled by late Rabbinic speculation.

Translating and Understanding the Bible

It is easily assumed that translations are done in an arbitrary fashion, and various versions are sometimes dismissed as "just a paraphrase!" In this edited transcript of a talk given at the 1989 Summer School Ron Coleman describes the careful methods of modern Bible translation.

When Sue Lawley interviewed Enoch Powell on "Desert Island Discs" she came to the question "Which book would you wish to have on the island" and said as usual "The Bible and Shakespeare are already there." But she was thrown off her stride when Enoch Powell demanded rather fiercely "But which Bible?" "Well", she said, "any Bible." "A Greek testament," he replied. "You can only understand it properly if you read the Greek." He went on to say that although his Hebrew wasn't as good as his Greek, nevertheless he would want a Hebrew Old Testament. Enoch Powell was overstating his case as he does so often. What may be true for a man who was a Professor of Greek at the age of 25 is obviously not true for most people. But on the other hand it is often not appreciated what a barrier to understanding having to read in translation is. Of course more than 99% of us cannot do without translations. But we do need to understand something about translation, its methods and its difficulties if we are not going to be led astray.

Languages differ so much from one another, each with their own subtleties, that except in technical matters it is very difficult and sometimes impossible to convey thought accurately from one language to another. This is particularly true for poetry of which there is much in the Bible. This might seem to be a counsel of despair. But it is not so bad as it seems. For if we are aware of the difficulties we can take steps to overcome them. The traditional Christadelphian view about translation was expressed by Robert Roberts in a pamphlet he wrote at the time of the partial inspiration division. He was dealing with the objection that while the Bible in its original languages was inspired this couldn't be said about translations. His reply was this.

The translation of a book into another language is a mere feat of technical expertness by which the ideas expressed in one tongue are reproduced in the appropriate terms of the other.

A mere feat of technical expertness. Translation is therefore a mechanical process, complicated it is true, but just a technical problem. In saying what he did Robert Roberts was probably echoing the general view about translation of his time. But since then, especially since the development of the science of linguistics, we have learned that, like nearly everything else, it is immeasurably more complicated than the Victorians thought.

A simple illustration. In ordinary English we no longer use the second person singular except jocularly. I saw a sticker on a car a few weeks ago which said "If thou touchest my car I will smite thee with my fist." But in French and German *tu* and *du* are in daily use and usually indicate a degree of intimacy. How is the

translator to deal with a conversation between a boy and a girl in which *tu* or *du* are first used? Only in some roundabout way can he show that the relationship is moving into a new stage of intimacy. Such a translation would immediately attract criticism in some quarters. "It isn't there in the original" they would say. And it would be true that the actual words used would not be there even though the idea was. Or take *glasnost* for example. We all know that this means "openness". But Russian experts say that doesn't really capture the subtlety of the Russian since it is derived from "glas" or voice. So it means something like "speaking out". But we have no word in English for the quality of speaking out. We can't say "speaking-outedness". So we have to approximate to "openness" but that doesn't really catch the flavour of the Russian word. But the grammar, syntax and vocabulary of Hebrew are far less closely related to English than Russian is.

Just one example, of vocabulary. The Psalmist constantly urges us to "wait upon the Lord" but "wait" in English is an umbrella word which covers many different circumstances. A man on death row. A mother-to-be. The IRA man with his finger on the button when the army patrol approaches. They all "wait" but the experience is different in each case. Now Hebrew, I am told, has six different verbs all relating to how the worshipper feels when he is attending on God and quite obviously these subtleties have not filtered through into the AV.

One way of appreciating the difficulties is to think of the subtleties of our own language. We are so used to them that we tend not to notice the oddities. There are for example what Philip Howard of *The Times* calls "Janus" words. Janus was the god who looked forward and back—hence January. We have words that have two meanings, one the exact opposite of the other. Which meaning is intended depends on the context. "You said you would stand by me but when the crunch came you just stood by." Or "I tried to persuade him but he was quite unbending. Later on, though, he did unbend a little and agreed to go with me tomorrow." It is easy to imagine how difficult these would be to translate. Or the subtle difference between "I have little faith" and "I have a little faith". So, in order to understand the Bible we need first of all a translation which recognises these difficulties and does its best to cope with them. And the question immediately arises: How does the AV (or the KJV as the Americans call it) measure up to these requirements?

This is a highly emotive subject on which there are very strong views. So first of all I would like to quote as neutral an opinion as one is likely to get. Samuel Sandmell is a distinguished American Jewish Hebrew scholar and his views are not likely to be influenced by Christian preconceptions. In his 1972 book *The Enjoyment of Scripture* which is a popular literary appreciation of *Tanakh*—what the Jews call the Old Testament—he gives this advice to his readers about the AV:

The King James Bible of 1611 is a unique achievement in English literature but it presents three difficulties. First, English has so changed since 1611 that a modern reader may find the King James unclear, or even, in places, unintelligible. Second, advances in scholarship have made it possible today to revise inaccuracies or correct downright errors in the King James. Third, the King James is everywhere majestic, even in passages in which the Hebrew is folksy, so that the King James is quite often untrue to the tone of the Hebrew. While the King James is the most admired translation ever made into English, and justly so, I regard it as unusable for my present purposes.

I am fairly confident that Sandmell's criticism of the AV for being too dignified in some places would apply to some parts of the NT. It has been said that NT Greek, the *koine*, would probably have sounded to speakers of classical Greek like Indian English sounds to us. Not just because of the sing-song accent but because of what seem like literal translations of the Hindi or Urdu. For example Indian guards on a train leaving Crewe will announce the next stop by saying, "We are coming now to Euston", even though it is two hours away.

Another independent assessor is Alan Duthie in his *Bible Translations and How to Choose Between Them*. Duthie is a senior lecture in linguistics and in this 1985 book considers all the translations into English from Wycliffe onwards and lists the more important (411 of the whole Bible plus 11 of the NT only) in order of merit. This is no vague subjective judgment but is based on the answers to a large number of precise questions such as "Who are the translators?" "Do they know the original languages well enough?" "How accurate is the translation?" "Is it in the natural English of today?" and so on. The first five in order of merit are: The Good News Bible, The New Jerusalem Bible, The New American Bible, The New English Bible and The New International Version. The Authorised Version comes thirty-second.

Why then do so many of us cling to the AV? I think it is partly the beauty and partly the familiarity of the language. I see a close parallel in this to Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer which has been in the news recently because of his quinqucentenary. Both are very well suited for liturgical use and the archaism of the language and even its eccentricities are endearing. I remember the first Collect in the Communion Service from morning prayers in my schooldays "Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid." I was sorry to hear the other morning that the ASB Rite A has altered it to "Almighty God unto whom all hearts *are* open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden."

But I think that most of the vociferous support for the AV for study purposes is sheer conservatism and this is shown by the rather desperate attempts to argue that it is a more accurate translation than later ones. A subconscious reason may be that its lack of clarity sometimes helps in doctrinal arguments. Expositors have a vested interest in using a version which needs explanation: "It seems to say x but it really means y." The fact that "the churches" use modern translations is another reason for not using them. I'm serious over this because it seems no accident that the most popular modern translation, the NIV, is the one most frequently criticised, in spite of it not being the most radical of the new translations, and that its popularity is at least partly due to its language being nearer to the AV than say the Good News Bible or the Jerusalem Bible.

The part played by tradition is illustrated by the fact that in our public prayer most brethren still address God as "thou". In Old English "thee" and "thou" were universal when only one person was being addressed, but in Middle English they were gradually superseded by "ye", "you" and "your" for superiors. This of course soon spread to equals as well but "thee", "thou" and "thy" continued much longer for inferiors. In dialect they have lived on for children addressed by their parents and between equals, especially intimates. So it is anomalous that it should be thought

respectful to address God as "thee" and "thou". The reason is of course that they are associated with God in the AV. They have become what translators call "honorifics" and it is entirely due to tradition. I am not saying that "thou" is wrong. The customs of a lifetime are hard to break. But it is not wrong to say "you".

So I would say that the first step to understanding the Bible is to use a modern translation *for study purposes*. I say "study purposes" because I see no harm and much good in continuing to use the AV for liturgical purposes, that is, in our services, including quotation in addresses where there is no difficulty over the meaning. In fact if you become familiar with a modern version you can quite often see the real meaning lying shrouded in the language of the AV. You can of course gain the same understanding and more by consulting commentaries but you tend to get it piecemeal and don't have the benefit of seeing the text as a whole. I am sure that most of you here will already be doing this and so I am preaching to the converted. But there has been so much propaganda against the modern translations and quite often from brethren who are experts in languages that it needs saying again, particularly as a preliminary to explaining why these new translations are better. Put very briefly, the older translations translated the words; the new ones translate the meaning.

What is the difference? Surely the meaning lies in the words? But languages are like icebergs. Only ten per cent is visible, the rest is deep down. At the top we have the sound of the spoken words or the sight of the written ones. This in itself is marvellous. The words you are hearing now have already become nerve signals. They are tracing fixed pathways in your brains which, if damaged, would render even the clearest prose meaningless. And they are tracing other pathways and calling up other associations unique to each one of you, your brain and its memories, intentions and desires. There's been a good lot of Chinese spoken on television in interviews recently and it certainly made me marvel that what seemed mere noise could have meaning. But it is not enough to be able to recognise that each of these strange sounds are words and the words have meanings. Because you don't get the meaning of the whole just by adding the words together like numbers in an addition sum. The meaning depends on the way the words relate to each other. In English word order is very important. "Hit John Bill" has no meaning although all the words mean something.

"John hit Bill" means something different from "Bill hit John". In inflected languages word order is not so important because case endings give the sense. The rules which say how the different relationships between the words determine the meaning are called grammar which has a number of sub-departments such as syntax. Now we are getting down below the surface. Of course we constantly hear complaints that grammar is not taught today. But even so it has to be used to convey meaning even if it is used instinctively.

Go a bit deeper and there are more complications. Another story about a guard on a train. The announcements by this guard were of a very high quality, clear and well-structured. When I went along the train to the van in good time to get my bicycle I met him and because we so often grumble about the railways I thought it right to compliment him on how clear he had been. In return he gave me a bit of his

philosophy about announcing and ended by saying "I never say 'Thank you' like so many guards do. They ought to thank me". I tried to explain to him that when anybody says "Thank you" after making an announcement he doesn't really mean "Thank you". What he means is "I have finished." In the same way the weatherman isn't really concerned that his listeners should have a good week-end after he has just forecast gales and rain. He means "This is the end of the forecast".

There is an interesting example of this in 1 John 2 where he says in v 26. "These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you" which seems an unnecessary statement. The NEB translation is "So much for those that would mislead you." Once again critics of new translations would complain "It's not there in the original". But what John is doing is signalling that he is changing the topic, in effect saying. "I've finished with that. Now for the next thing." This is an example of how translating the words may not translate the meaning.

Going deeper still, we encounter idioms. What is an idiom? The dictionary says "An expression characteristic of a particular language not logically or grammatically explicable." If that sounds complicated let me put it in simpler terms. An idiom is a phrase or a sentence that you can't tell the meaning of by looking up the words in a dictionary or grammar book. One member of the audience will remember an incident a fortnight ago when we were at a garden birthday party and our recording brother came round and, looking at an empty chair, said "Is anybody sitting there?" then apologised and said "Of course no-one is sitting there." What had happened is that he had forgotten momentarily that "Is anybody sitting there?" is an idiom. It means "Was someone sitting there who is going to come back?" So in voyaging downwards to meaning we have to decode idioms and decide what they really mean, not what they seem to mean.

Going down even deeper we come to polysemy. That means "many meanings" and it is about words—most words in fact—that have more than one meaning. Those Janus words I mentioned earlier are a special example because of the wide spread of meaning. Usually the meanings aren't so different. Take the word "house" which occupies three and a half pages in the big OED. We can all think of some of its meanings. There's the house that we live in. There's a block of flats. There's an office building like "Alexander Fleming House" where the DHSS looks nervously across at the Elephant and Castle, a public *house*. Or it can mean a company as in the phrase "house journal." Or something that is done in an organisation as in "in house". Or a part of a school. Or take the verb "to run". It seems simple enough. But take these examples. The boy runs. The car runs. The dog runs. The eye runs. Solder runs. The tap runs. The jelly runs. The nose runs. The paint runs. The sore runs. The stocking runs. The ivy runs. All slightly different. But exactly the same word. On the map of meaning words are not single points but areas like towns or even counties and in finding out the meaning we have to be able to say where in the town or the county our word is situated.

Deeper still in our pursuit of meaning we have to deal with all those special devices of language like metaphor, sarcasm, irony, rhetorical questions, hyperbole and its opposite meiosis, and many others.

But finally we get down to the absolute meaning of the text we are considering. This meaning is common to all languages but to express it in another one we have to go through the reverse process of climbing up the linguistic structure to find the right clothes for it to wear in the receptor language so that expressed in it it has exactly the same effect on its new hearers as it had in the original language on the original hearers.

But the climb back up from meaning to words is not an easy one. To take just one instance, polysemy, multiple meaning. Words are areas on the map of meaning. But the area in language (a) is hardly ever the same as in language (b). Take the Greek word *sarx* for example. In the AV it is translated "flesh", its basic meaning in Greek. But the way Paul uses it in different passages necessitates a whole lot of different words in English. It can mean "body" or "person", "human nature", "physical limitations", "human standards", "unregenerate state" or "sexual urge". How do we know this? The context tells us. So to translate it simply as "flesh" makes it impossible for us to get the same meaning as the people who read Paul's letters in the Greek. The great controversy over whether salvation is through faith or works need never have arisen if only it had been realised that Paul and James are each using both "Faith" and "Works" in a different sense.

But you well may be asking: "When we are analysing our text to find out its meaning how can we express that meaning except in words?" Well of course there is no other way. But words are used in a special simple way which can be translated accurately from language (a) to language (b). Those different meanings of "run" that I quoted came from a book called *Translating the Word of God* by John Beekman and John Callow who are associated with the Summer Institute of Linguistics. If that sounds theoretical I should say that this fundamentalist organisation is involved in the very practical work of translating the Bible into the languages of Latin America such as Kekchi, Bororo, Shipibo. It came from nine pages of describing how the various meanings of "run" could be classified as a demonstration of the method. The way they describe the result is by giving sample descriptions. Like this:

- "The boy runs." That means: "The boy goes faster than fast walking."
- "The eye runs." "A pus-like liquid is coming out of the eye."
- "The solder runs." "The solder has melted and is flowing."
- "The stocking runs." "A thread has broken and the stitches have unravelled."
- "The ivy runs." "The shoots of ivy are growing along a surface."
- "The motor runs." "The motor is working."

These descriptions are translated into the receptor language and a native speaker is asked to say whether they are being used correctly.

Of course it works rather differently for translations from Greek or Hebrew into English but the principle is the same. The phrase or sentence has to be broken down into its components. Take Mark chapter 1:4 which contains the words: "John preached the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins." That is, fairly literally, what the Greek says. One of the differences between Greek and English is that Greek tends to use nouns to describe actions whereas English tends to use verbs. That is why we have "baptism" "repentance", "forgiveness" and "sins".

These are all actions or events, people doing things. One of the disadvantages of using nouns like this is that it doesn't identify who do the various things and to whom they do them. The first task is to identify the participants. So, "John preached." To whom? "The people". Who was the baptism of? Again "the people". Who is it that gives forgiveness? "God." Whom does he forgive? "The people." Who is it who sins? Again, "the people." So we have the participants identified as follows:

John preaches.
 John baptises the people.
 The people repent.
 God forgives the people.
 The people sin.

That is not the order of events; it is the order in the sentence of the verbal nouns baptism, repentance, forgiveness, sins. The order in which they *should* be arranged is determined partly by the grammar of the Greek and partly from other general information. For example it seems clear that "baptism of repentance" is only a noun form of "repent and be baptised". This, very briefly, is the process by which the GNB version of Mark 1:4 emerged. It was: "John appeared in the desert baptising and preaching. 'Turn away from your sins and be baptised', he told the people, 'and God will forgive your sins.' "

You may feel that this is only marginally clearer than the AV "John did baptise in the wilderness and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." But we have to remember that we Christadelphians are a pretty well-educated lot who are at home with abstract nouns, and, even more important, our religious education over the years and our reading of the gospels tell us in other ways what this passage in the AV means. It has been decoded for us.

But the GNB is not designed for people who know already what it all means. It is designed for people who may be encountering it for the first time, it is designed for the majority of people in the mission field who will almost certainly have it read to them before they read it for themselves if they can read at all. When you hear something read you can't backtrack if you didn't quite understand it first time round, so it has to be clear. It is designed too for people for whom English is a second language, for people with only average education, for younger people who are more important in this respect than the old, if only because there are many more of them. That is why it is called a "Common Language Translation".

This final stage of the production of the translation is called "restructuring." That means building up again in the style of the receptor language. There is a good example of where restructuring is necessary in the first chapter of Ephesians. Verses 3-14 are one long sentence in the Greek, over 200 words in the AV. Presumably this is more natural in the Greek than in English. A sentence of that length in English, with many dependent clauses would be difficult to understand if read from the page. Nobody could understand it if it was read aloud to them. The AV does split it up into three long sentences but the GNB splits it up into several self-contained smaller units which can easily be understood. You would think that a Bible-loving and Bible-

reading community would welcome something like this, designed to make the Bible easier for ordinary people to understand. But not so.

An article in the *Bible Missionary*, said about this very passage:

God sometimes chose to reveal himself in complicated language. Unfortunately many modern versions deliberately cut down these longer sentences. By this means they *may* convey a 'clearer' impression to the reader's mind, but it is not a clear picture of what is revealed. These long sentences are frequently central parts of a piece of reasoning which can be masked from us in its sequence and relations by being broken up; it warps God's thoughts.

It is then dismissed as a paraphrase. No attempt is made to show that the GNB distorts the meaning in any way by its restructuring.

A century or so ago missionaries translating the Bible into the languages of the people they were preaching to were faced with the problem of translating the passive voice which occurs quite frequently in the Bible. "Judge not that ye be not judged." But a number of languages simply don't have a passive voice. What to do? These earnest but misguided missionaries invented passive voices for these languages instead of turning the passages into the active voice. The result was that their readers could make no sense at all out of them.

At last the dreaded word "paraphrase" has crept in. We might as well go the whole hog and whisper "interpretation" as well. First of all "paraphrase". A paraphrase is saying the same thing in different words in the same language. Note "the same thing" and "same language". To describe a *particular* translation as a paraphrase is meaningless, for all translation is saying the same thing in different words. So too with "interpretation." I worked in a job for nine years which took me to large numbers of international conferences, many of them absolutely dependent on interpretation. What was an interpreter? He or she, usually she, was an oral translator. One who produced written texts from written texts was a translator. The difference was not in accuracy but the medium in which the translation was made.

The criticism that is intended by these two words is that extraneous material is introduced into the translation, something which is not in the original, to make it easier to understand. This charge is rarely if ever pressed home; if it were it could be refuted because no responsible translation does that. It is of course restructuring which is usually being complained of. But there is one possible exception and the example of it I always quote is the word "oil". Except in two or three cases the kind of oil is not described. But we know without doubt that it was olive oil. Now once again this educated gathering would know this but most of the GNB's readers would not. Arctic dwellers would think of fish oil perhaps. West Africans might think of palm oil. Some, benighted creatures, might even picture petroleum oil. So the GNB says "olive oil". But is any extraneous material being introduced? Of course not! What is being done is to make *explicit* in the translation what is *implicit* in the original.

"Judge not that ye be not judged" is another example. This is known as a passive

of divine avoidance. The Jews, as we know, were averse to mentioning the name of God. Therefore they often preferred the passive because there was no need to mention the author of the action. Everybody knew that it was "God". So once again when the GNB says "Do not judge others so that God will not judge you" it is not interpreting or paraphrasing. It is conveying to today's readers what the passage meant to those who heard the very words of Jesus. And if the GNB, the NIV or the Jerusalem Bible are paraphrases so too is the AV as witness all those words in *italics* which are words not in the original introduced to make the translation more readily understandable.

But what about doctrinal impartiality? Modern translations have had a bad press amongst us; they are all accused of having doctrinal bias. Earlier this year *The Christadelphian* declared roundly,

No version of the Bible in English [is] a perfect rendering of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. In spite of the protestations of every new translation committee, they all have a degree of bias on doctrine. . . . no version is totally free from doctrinal bias.

But who is to determine what constitutes doctrinal bias? Are we the only unbiased people in the whole religious world? Perhaps this extract from *The Bible Translator* will provide an answer. It comes from an article "Quality in Translation" by Eugene Nida in the July 1982 issue. Eugene Nida was formerly Translations Secretary of the American Bible Society and the United Bible Societies Translations Research Coordinator.

Those who judge a translation only, or primarily, in terms of so-called "accuracy" or "faithfulness to the original" are often not really as much concerned with fidelity to the Greek and Hebrew texts as they are with finding a translation which agrees with established doctrines. A recent article dealing with the question of "the best translation" listed the treatment of six specific doctrines as the essential criteria by which a translation ought to be judged; the trinity, the virgin birth, verbal inerrancy, the deity of Jesus Christ, the personality of the Holy Spirit, and the pre-millennial return of the Lord. If a translation is clear and emphatic on each of these doctrines, then it is presumably a "best translation". Such an approach, however, seems to put the cart before the horse. Doctrines should be derived from the biblical text and not the biblical texts from certain doctrines.

Who is more likely to be impartial—a technical expert who recognises that it is necessary to guard against prejudice in favour of three doctrines that we would accept and three that we would reject, or a representative from one of the two groups?

One particular translation that we have criticised as being influenced by doctrinal bias is John 3:16 in which "only-begotten Son" has been replaced by "only Son". (It has also been criticised by Trinitarians). This is what Eugene Nida has to say in his 1978 book *Good News for Everyone*:

When some readers do not find the term "only begotten" in John 3:16, they assume that the translators imply a denial of the doctrines of the deity and the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, but such is by no means their intent. The traditional expression "only begotten" arose from a misunderstanding of the original Greek word *monogenes*. This

was carried over into the Latin in the form of the word *unigenitus* (from *uni-* "one" and *-genitus* "born"). But while the Greek *mono-* does mean "only", *-genes*, the second part of the word, does not derive from *gennao*, "to be born", but is related to *ginomai*, "to become". Thus *-genes* means a "category" or a "kind", and *monogenes* really means "only one of its kind". That is precisely why this same term can be used in speaking of Isaac (Heb. 11:17). Isaac was certainly not the only begotten son of Abraham, for Abraham already had a son Ishmael before Isaac was born, and later he had several sons by his wife Keturah. But Isaac, as the "son of the promise", was the only son of his kind, that is to say a unique son. Similarly, Jesus Christ is declared in John 3:16 to be the unique son of God, his Son in a way that no one else is or can be.

OBITUARY: Horatia Webb

Horatia Webb died in July 1990 at the age of 96. She was a loyal member of the Cambridge Ecclesia in which she served from its inception by her father, Dr W. J. Young, until she moved to an old people's home for her last few years. Horatia will be remembered as a loving friend and supporter of the many young students who sojourned for some few years at Cambridge. Her life can be summed up in terms which I feel she would have welcomed, as a daughter who wished to follow the tradition of her father. Dr Young and his wife also entertained and helped the young students when they arrived from various parts of the country. He was a clear and original thinker who learned to speak 'wisdom only to the wise'. *Endeavour* (No 8, 1963) published his excellent article entitled "The Antiquity of Man" written originally for *The Testimony*, although not published. Horatia continued this tradition and like her parents thought freely and studied much in the Scriptures. She helped many at the Cambridge Meeting both spiritually and materially. Additionally her generosity extended to the Tutnall Children's Home. She regularly attended the Summer School from its inception in 1966 until she was prevented by old age.

Horatia will be remembered with love, affection and respect by all who were privileged to know her.

John H. Weaving

THE REALITY OF SIN — THE IMMORTAL SOUL UNSCRIPTURAL

"We recognise that the word 'sin' has little meaning for modern people.... Well, we may get rid of the word if we wish but we shall still be left with the reality it represents.... In the Old Testament three words stand out in describing man's tendency for evil... [*hattat; awon; pasha*] ... Although these terms are diverse in meaning there is a fundamental unity in the Old Testament understanding of sin seen in part as deviation, crookedness and rebellion."

"This idea [1 Corinthians 15] 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 from 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'."

George Carey (the new Archbishop of Canterbury), *I Believe in Man*, pages 46 and 167

Song of Solomon Study Guide

By Stanley Owen. *The Christadelphian*, Birmingham. 1990

Reviewed by Wilfred Lambert

The informed, sensitive reader will turn the first few pages of this new book with astonishment. The title page gives a good impression. The Song of Songs certainly needs *study* and any commentary able to *guide* the reader through it will be very welcome. The table of contents on the next opening similarly raises hopes, with its intelligently laid out sections of introductory matters followed by systematic exposition of the chapters of the Song. But the following opening gives the purpose as being to explain "straightforward teachings of Scripture and where appropriate to emphasise (a) First Principles of Doctrine, (b) Practical Outcomes" for those with little Scriptural knowledge. Here credibility is strained. Should the beginner in Bible study really launch into the Song before taking in the Gospels, epistles, historical and prophetic books and Psalms? But if (as surely all serious believers would admit) this already formidable list should have priority over the Song, then the students will have ceased to be beginners when they are ready for that small book. This comment is not intended to discourage study of the Song, but is offered (the reviewer hopes) as an assertion of common sense.

However, that being said, it remains to consider this new book on its merits. It could still be commendable for more mature students. The pedagogic arrangement will not put off mature readers if the content is valuable. In the context of Christadelphian literature progress can be observed, for which the author is indeed to be commended. In the Introduction, for example, he knows that "the full canon of the Old Testament may not have been finalised until the end of the First Century A.D." (page 4), which is a big advance on John Carter's *Oracles of God*. That work (1988 reprint, pp. 69-70) merely repeats uncritically Josephus' certainly incorrect statement that the Old Testament canon was finally closed when the latest author completed his book and handed it over to the priestly authorities. However, this progress has not gone far enough, for the very next sentence of our author asserts that the Song formed part of Jesus' canon. This unfortunately cannot be proved. The Song is nowhere quoted in the New Testament, and the author's suggestion on page 10 that Jesus' comparison of Solomon with "the lilies of the field" alludes to the Song's (2:1) "lily of the valleys" is unconvincing. Jesus' knowledge and observation of nature was not only mediated through literature. Also the author writes as though unaware that the position of the Song in the canon was disputed in orthodox Jewish circles toward the end of the first century A.D.:

"All the books of Scripture defile the hands [i.e. are canonical], (even) the Song of Songs and Qoheleth [Ecclesiastes] defile the hands. Rabbi Judah said, 'The Song of Songs defiles the hands, but Qoheleth is disputed.' Rabbi Jose said, 'Qoheleth does not defile the hands and the Song of Songs is disputed.' Rabbi Simeon said, 'Qoheleth is taken less seriously by the House of Shammai, but more seriously by the House of Hillel.' Rabbi Simeon son of Azzai said, 'I received a tradition from the seventy-two elders when they installed Rabbi

Eleazar son of Azariah in the College, that the Song of Songs and Qoheleth defile the hands.' Rabbi Aqiba said, 'God forbid! No Israelite ever disputed that the Song of Songs defiles the hands, since the whole of time is not equal to the day when the Song of Songs was given to Israel, because all the Writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies! If there was any dispute it was a dispute solely about Qoheleth.' " (Mishnah, Yadayim iii 5)

Rabbi Aqiba's absurdly exaggerated claims for the Song only confirm that there was real opposition to its inclusion in the canon, which he tried to override by the palpably untrue assertion that no one had ever disputed that book. However, Aqiba won the day and the Song is in the resulting Pharisaic canon, which became the only Jewish canon to last.

The line of interpretation taken in this *Study Guide* is that the Song reflects a true story of a young Israelite lady wooed first by a country shepherd, to whom she formed an attachment, then by Solomon, and that while for a time she was drawn by the wealth and position of Solomon, in due course she went back to her first and true love. Any one reading the whole text with an open mind will wonder where the evidence lies for such a reconstruction. In fact it is plainly not there. The author relies on the higher-critical technique of noting somewhat differing emphases in the different sections spoken by the male lover and assigning them to different speakers. Furthermore, violent handling of the text is needed to support this view. Chapter 3:1-5 does not fit the interpretation followed, so it is taken as a dream (page 31), though nothing in the text suggests this. The appeal of this line of interpretation for the author was, first, that it gives a purpose to the book as a part of Scripture: it teaches proper conduct in the matters of love and marriage. Secondly, it supplies a basis for exhorting young people to personal chastity in an increasingly immoral world. While these aims are wholly admirable, they do not justify imposing a wrong interpretation on the Scriptural book. Further, it is unwise to base instruction for the young on doubtful interpretations. Some of them may be seeking justification for abandoning traditional Christian standards and this could be found in perceived doubt about teachings based on uncertain interpretations. I Corinthians rather than the Song should be studied for this purpose.

In smaller matters the same mixture of progressive, open-minded inquiry with doubtful matter prevails. The chapter on Interpretation (pp. 9-10) tries to explain the various possibilities, but overall it is not particularly lucid, and is confusing when it reports that "some critics of the Bible would perceive the accounts of the Garden of Eden, the Flood or Jonah as being pure fable." Apparently the author means "pure fiction". 'Fable' is a literary category, as in the case of Jotham's fable of the trees in Judges 9:8-15, and in a discussion of literary categories it is particularly unfortunate to misuse the word. Too often the author is unaware of what any commentator should know. On page 6 'Song of Songs' is called "the inspired subtitle". In fact "the Song of Songs which is of/for/about Solomon" is the only title in Hebrew Mss, though it is not certain that these titles are inspired. Page 7 draws conclusions from "the frequent reference to gardens, vineyards, trees, fruits and spices" in the Song, apparently unaware that this feature is shared by much ancient Near Eastern love poetry earlier than Solomon. The author only rarely delves into Greek and Hebrew, but the few occasions are unhelpful. Contrary to page 38 the Hebrew 'bride' is not related to the root 'make perfect', but to the root 'veil', because married women in

some ancient Near Eastern societies always went veiled in public. The Book of Revelation does not "close with the plural 'tree of lives' " (page 39), but with the Greek singular "tree of life", as correctly rendered in the English translations. On page 42 the statement in a context dealing with the Lord's Supper, "Drink *all* of it, yea, drink abundantly" appears to take 'all' of the Gospel saying as referring to the wine, though in fact of course it refers to the assembled disciples, all of whom were enjoined to partake.

The decision to include a short commentary on the Song of Songs in a series meant for beginners in Bible study seems to the reviewer a misjudgment. As a work for more mature Bible students it can only be recommended with substantial reservations. Readers would do much better to take *The Song of Solomon* by G. Lloyd Carr (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries), 1984, included by the author in his list "Further Reading" (page 69) and available from the Christadelphian Office.

Archaeology and the Bible

Published on behalf of *The Testimony Committee* (Christadelphian).
No editor named, [1990]. £1.00 post free.

Reviewed by **Wilfred Lambert**

One cannot complain at the price of this Special Issue, with its 92 pages containing many illustrations. It offers a total of 21 articles, divided into 11 "Main Articles" first, followed by 10 "Other Articles", written by a total of 12 authors. That the Testimony Committee would have at its disposal a dozen writers fully competent in aspects of Biblical archaeology is a cause for wonder, if not doubts, and a perusal of this issue confirms what might have been suspected, that of the dozen only some really know their subjects. Andrew Walker on "Archaeology and Assyria" and Kathleen Ritmeyer's "Pilgrim's Journey" (reprinted from the *Biblical Archaeology Review*) are generally acceptable, but on the other side "Archaeology and the Scripture Text" by Nick Lunn and "Archaeology and the Early Chapters of Genesis" by John Nicholls need substantial correction in purely factual matters.

The former believes that the Hebrew Old Testament was written on parchment (a Greek invention), and is unaware that the Dead Sea Scroll copies of Samuel and Jeremiah differ substantially from the later accepted Hebrew text (see *Endeavour* 80, January 1989, 24-5). The latter thinks that Enuma Elish is "an Assyrian epic of creation from the seventh century B.C." (It is a Babylonian text, and the earliest copies are from the 9th century B.C.) The Atrahasis Epic he dates to the 9th century B.C., but the largest surviving tablets of it are from the 17th century B.C. Of the so-called Temptation Seal he writes, "the connection with Adam's and Eve's disobedience ... is very striking." But in art-historical terms the snake, which alone provides the suggestion, is a 'terminal', not to be brought into the main scene, and T.C. Mitchell's *The Bible in the British Museum* (which is quoted for other things) says in this connection: "...there is no reason to connect the scene with the Adam and Eve story." John Nicholls further quotes R.T. Boyd as authority for a parallel to the tower of Babel: "...a clay tablet was unearthed which gave the following account

of a ziggurat: 'the erection of this tower highly offended all the gods. In a night they [threw down] what man had built and impeded their progress. They were scattered abroad and their speech was strange'. This is taken from an erroneous 19th century attempt at translation, and already in 1902 L.W. King, *The Seven Tablets of Creation* (1 pp. 219-221) knew that "there is no mention of a tower or building of any sort". A more reliable translation of the lines is: "[The gods] hated the father of all the gods, [and Marduk, in] his [temple] was despondent. [The people of Babylon] were impressed into forced labour, [small] and great had to bear the toil ... [He heard] their groaning, was upset in the daytime, through their complaints he could not sleep soundly in bed. Scattering discretion to the winds in his fury he determined to overthrow the dynasty. His outlook changed, his purpose was altered."

John Nicholl's continuing sentence about the alleged Ebla tablet with forty-two languages has already been dealt with in *Endeavour* 82, November 1989, 9.

Any attempt to confirm faith or interest outsiders by appeals to such disciplines as archaeology must be based on material which so far as humanly possible is factually correct. There is too much in this Special Issue which falls short in this respect, so that it cannot be recommended. Some of the authors rely uncritically on books which generally conform to their prejudices. Factual truth has to be sought with all impartiality and rigour.

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