
THE

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The Endeavour Magazine

For Christian Thought and Action

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Our object is to promote a faithful, Bible-based response to issues which confront us both in thought and in day-to-day living. *The Endeavour Magazine* is published so that the range of views which exist within our Christadelphian Brotherhood may be discussed and represented, and so that issues of wider concern may also be studied and analysed. We therefore encourage discussion and criticism of what appears in our pages, provided it is done in a Christ-like spirit and with a concern that truth should prevail. 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, and help us all to a deeper understanding of our faith.

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Editorial: "With Unveiled Face"

In a recent widely circulated letter the "Appeal Committee" told us:

One of the greatest differences between Christadelphians and so called Christian denominations is the fact, to quote the words of Brother Thomas; "God Manifestation not human salvation was the great purpose of the Eternal Spirit. The salvation of a multitude is incidental to the manifestation, but was not the end proposed". This is a fundamental doctrine not a mere intellectual exercise. In recent years this truth appears to have been pushed into the background with a greater emphasis being given to human salvation. There has been a tendency to concentrate on service to our brethren and sisters and our fellowmen, forgetting that the overriding purpose is that all the glory might be to God and Him alone. Lest we see all our work in these terms, let us be reminded of the essential separateness of our calling which requires us to be holy (unspotted from the world - 1 Peter 1:15).

It was new to us that there was a conflict between giving glory to God and loving brothers, sisters and fellowmen. We had imagined that the second was a consequence of the first, and that to be sons of God required us to love not merely our friends but even our enemies.

"You must be perfect - just as your Father in heaven is perfect. For he makes his sun to shine on good and bad people alike, and gives rain to those who are good and to those who are evil" (Matthew 5:44-48).*

The apostle John puts it more forcefully:

"We love because God first loved us. If someone says he loves God, but hates his brother, he is a liar. For he cannot love God whom he has not seen, if he does not love his brother whom he has seen. The commandment that Christ has given us is this: whoever loves God must love his brother also."

In the parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus described unforgettably how we should treat those less fortunate than ourselves. Paul teaches that persecutors should be blessed, vengeance eschewed, injustice tolerated (Romans 12:29 - 13:14).

Love in fact became the lodestone of early Christianity, preaching as it did that the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross was the sign of God's love for humanity in general. The breaking of bread became known as the *agape* or love feast and in later years the assiduity of the Church in

* Quotations are from the Good News Bible except where otherwise indicated.

looking after their own poor, and even the poor of Rome, was noted (with some irritation) by the emperor Julian the Apostate. It is bizarre to describe such behaviour as unholy and failing to keep ourselves unspotted from the world; it was in fact the fault that Jesus was charged with when he associated with "tax collectors and other outcasts" – by the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who grumbled "This man welcomes the outcasts and even eats with them!" Jesus replied by telling the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son, which are a picture of God's dealings with humankind.

How do the authors of the circular manage to arrive at the strange notion that human salvation was only incidental to God's manifestation of Himself? Scrutiny of Dr Thomas' *Phanerosis*, which they claim as their source, (no easy task, for every page reference in the index of Bible quotations in my recent edition is wrong) answers the question. They do it by failing to quote *any* of the numerous New Testament texts referring to "salvation", "Saviour", or "save". This is not an oversight but deliberate policy. On page 120 we read

Now the phrase *all his saints* is comprehensive of Messiah and all his brethren, who collectively form "the Man of the one Spirit", or Paul's "New Man". Hence the same things are affirmed of them that are predicated concerning Him. Their feet will be like hinds — swift in the pursuit of their enemies, whom they will overtake and destroy. These will fall before their power; and as Malachi says, they will trample them as ashes under the soles of their feet and, when they have got the victory, they will rule with Messiah as "princes in all the earth." (Ps 45:16). The resurrected "Elohim ruling in the earth". The Elohim of "Messiah's salvation".

This is the teaching of the Old Testament, with which the New Testament is in exact conformity; for they harmonize upon every subject, as might be expected from the declaration of its writers, that they taught none other things than Moses and other prophets had predicted.

When we turn to the New Testament writers we find that this claim is completely false. The quotation which is said to equate the New Testament with the Old is Acts 26:22b,23 which comes from Paul's attempt to convince King Agrippa of the truth of the gospel.

"What I say is the very same thing which the prophets and Moses said was going to happen; that the Messiah must suffer and be the first one to rise from death to announce the light of salvation to the Jews and to the Gentiles."

So the claim in *Phanerosis* is quite untrue. All that Paul says here that is common to the two is that the Messiah would suffer, would rise from the dead and announce salvation to Jew and Gentile. Nothing about

destroying enemies and trampling them under the soles of the feet of the victors. Note too that Paul's words show that he regarded his primary task was to preach *salvation*. It was not to preach manifestation with salvation as merely incidental.

So it is quite wrong to claim that Paul said that the New Testament and the Old "harmonize upon every subject". Paul, as we shall see shortly, makes it clear elsewhere that the Old Testament is no more than preparatory to the New. For the moment we will content ourselves with the writer to the Hebrews who said:

"The Law is not a full and faithful model of the real things; it is only a faint outline of the good things to come." (10:1)

How did the author of *Phanerosis* come to a conclusion which is so obviously untrue? Briefly because he founded his exposition on an eccentric understanding of the Hebrew names of God in the Old Testament, based upon their etymology. Today it is universally recognised that etymology is rarely, if ever, a reliable guide to what a word means in current usage. His understanding of the plural form *Elohim* was that it denoted an actual plural and therefore that "God was a multitude". Hebrew scholars do not support this and it has indeed been refuted from within our own community. How untrue it is can be judged by what is said about Jesus:

The words that came out of the mouth of Jesus are to be received as the direct teaching of the Eternal Spirit . . . He was speaking of himself, and not of the flesh which he had anointed. That flesh was the *caphporeth*, coverlid . . . (*Eureka* Vol I, p 103, a passage to which we are referred in the Circular.)

This belief that Christ only *seemed* to be a man but was really God is an ancient heresy known as "Docetism" which is rejected by the apostle John:

"... anyone who acknowledges that Jesus Christ came as a human being [AV "is come in the flesh"] has the Spirit who comes from God. But anyone who denies this about Jesus does not have the Spirit of God" (1 John 4:2,3).

It is not surprising therefore that what emerges about the nature of the glory of God is both confused and mistaken. We have noted already that *Phanerosis* fails to quote any of the New Testament passages about salvation and remains firmly rooted in the Old. It fails equally to quote any of the New Testament passages which describe the nature of the manifested glory of God. It is difficult to understand why the original author did this but even more difficult to understand why something so

obviously incomplete is being foisted at great expense on to others in our brotherhood. The "Appeal" circular, attempting to justify their position quotes Numbers 14:21.

"But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD". (AV)

Presumably this verse has been chosen to show that "Salvation" is incidental to "Manifestation" for it continues:

"Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles . . . have not hearkened to my voice; Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it."

On this evidence salvation is not even a by-product of manifestation!

When we turn to the New Testament the situation is entirely different from what the circular represents. The glory of God is manifested supremely in his Son.

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ ." (2 Corinthians 4:6 AV).

"But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw God's glory and Jesus standing at the right-hand side of God."

(Acts 7:55).

"God's plan is to make known his secret to his people, this rich and glorious secret which he has for all peoples. And the secret is that Christ is in you, which means that you will share in the glory of God."

(Colossians 1:27)

"The word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us . We saw his glory, the glory he received as the Father's only Son."

(John 1:14).

It is in John that the reflection of God's glory in Jesus is most frequently mentioned. *But none of these passages are quoted in "Phanerosis"*. In some instances they must have been consciously avoided. The prayer of Jesus in John 17:21 that the disciples may be one in him and in the Father is quoted (p 121), but the connected and immediately following words in the next verse are not. "I gave them the same glory you gave me so that they may be one...."

It is in John that the connection of glory with suffering becomes marked.

"Judas accepted the bread and went out at once. It was night. After Judas had left, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man's glory is revealed;

now God's glory is revealed through him. And if God's glory is revealed through him, then God will reveal the glory of the Son of Man in himself, and he will do so at once.' " (John 13:30-33).

The glorifying of Jesus through his death is now certain and, by giving himself, Christ reveals God's true nature. It is a strange thought that the supreme glory of God lies in the Cross. Had God remained aloof, majestic, serene, untouched by sorrow and unhurt by pain, men might have feared God but they would never have loved God. It is in the Cross that we see the hurt that man, God's problem child, gives him. How untrue then it is to separate God's manifestation from human salvation. The mistake that the authors of the "Appeal" circular have made, under the influence of *Phanerosis*, is to regard the Old Testament as normative. Paul shows us the proper perspective in his second letter to the Corinthians. (3:7-18)

"The Law was carved in letters on stone tablets, and God's glory appeared when it was given. Even though the brightness on Moses' face was fading it was so strong that the people of Israel could not keep their eyes fixed on him. If the Law, which brings death when it is in force, came with such glory, how much greater is the glory that belongs to the activity of the Spirit! . . . We may say that because of the far brighter glory now, the glory that was so bright in the past is gone. For if there was glory in that which lasted for a while, how much more glory is there in that which lasts for ever!

Because we have this hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses who had to put a veil over his face so that the people of Israel would not see the brightness fade and disappear. . . . The veil is only removed when a person is joined to Christ. . . . But it can be removed, as the scripture says about Moses: 'His veil was removed when he turned to the Lord' Now 'the Lord' in this passage is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is present there is freedom. All of us then, reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces; and that same glory, coming from the Lord, who is the Spirit, transforms us into his likeness in an ever greater degree of glory."

Signs of the Times

In our last issue (No 93, June 1995) Les Boddy described the kind of watching the disciple of Christ should engage in. In this complementary article he investigates how disciples should approach the subject of the signs of the times.

Red Sky in the Morning

The expression "the signs of the times" is used frequently in our community but many who use it seem to be unaware that they do so in a sense that differs from the way it is used in the New Testament. When Christadelphians are asked where the expression might be found in the Bible they often suggest the Olivet Prophecy (in chapters Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21). This, however, is not the case and the mistake betrays a hidden prejudice which is very hard to overcome once it has been adopted. The phrase occurs but once only in the Bible, in Matthew 16 (not Matthew 24) and since it is on the lips of Jesus himself, we owe it to our Master to try hard to understand his meaning and to be faithful in our use of his language. In this chapter, Matthew presents us with the Pharisees and Sadducees who come to Jesus to trap him, asking him to perform a miracle to show his credentials. Jesus comments on their ability to predict fine or wet weather in the immediate future, depending on the current state of the sky, and contrasts this with their apparent inability to "discern the signs of the times" (AV) or, as the GNB translates, to "interpret the signs concerning these times." The latter gives the clue, if it is needed, that Jesus had in mind "these times", that is his own times. For Jesus to say "How evil and godless are the people of this day", things must have been seriously amiss. For people to ask for a miracle and to fail to recognise what God was doing before their very eyes was clear evidence of a sad state of affairs.

Jesus refuses their demand for a miracle, leaves them, and goes on his way saying, "The only miracle you will be given is the miracle of Jonah."¹ What would "this miracle of Jonah" be? Jesus gives an answer to this in Matthew 12:40 where he says, "In the same way that Jonah spent three days and nights in the belly of the big fish, so will the Son of Man spend three days and nights in the depths of the earth", apparently hinting at his burial and resurrection. He goes on to remind them of Jonah's preaching at Nineveh and how they should have recognised that there was someone in their presence who was greater

¹ Quotations are from the Good News Bible

than Jonah. They were being rather like Jonah themselves, unwilling to go forward in a new venture with God. Speaking of judgment, Berkouwer² says:

"For what man does to his fellow man is without gospel. It is like Jonah who wants to die in merciless anger against Nineveh (Jonah 4:3,9) at the same time as God in his mercy is making a new opportunity for the thousands and thousands of sinners there (4:11)."

The preaching, teaching and miracles of Jesus, miracles which the religious leaders ascribed to the power of Beelzebul, would lead to thousands and thousands being saved in spite of the disapproval and blindness of the leaders of the day.

That Jesus' talk of signs of the times refers to his own times is confirmed in Luke's version of the saying, to be found in 12:56:

"Hypocrites! You can look at the earth and the sky and tell what it means; why, then, don't you know the meaning of this present time?"

In his lament over Jerusalem, Jesus says:

"If you only knew today what is needed for peace! But now you cannot see it! . . . because you did not recognise the time when God came to save you!" (Luke 19:42,44).

When John the Baptist in prison sent some of his disciples to Jesus to ask him if he were really the one that John said was going to come, Jesus replied:

"Go back and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind can see, the lame can walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf can hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is preached to the poor. How happy is he who has no doubts about me" (Luke 7:22,23).

Jesus spoke to the crowds about John, referring to him as a prophet, more than a prophet, God's messenger, greater than any man ever born, (Luke 7:24-28) and Matthew adds that John is the Elijah whose coming was predicted. "Listen", says Jesus, "if you have ears!" (Matthew 11:14,15) That the people of those days were contrary and stubborn is highlighted when Jesus compares them to children in the market-place unwilling to agree to respond and cooperate in the playing of their wedding and funeral games. The signs were there, the Messiah was in their midst, God was working out their salvation but their minds were on other things, signs of a different nature.

When asked by Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come Jesus answered "The kingdom of God does not come in such a way as to be seen. No one will say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!'; because the

² G C Berkouwer. *The Return of Christ*. P 417, Eerdmans 1972

kingdom of God is within you"³ ("among you" is better.) Luke 17:20,21. As Berkouwer says (p 248):

"The words Christ uses are . . . against an expectation of the Kingdom oriented to the spectacular and unusual . . . The kingdom is much closer than is often supposed. Because it is not a supernatural structure, *it can easily escape notice*. But it is in the midst of you. They were looking the wrong way for the wrong things when all the time the answer to their searching was in their midst."

At the beginning of his ministry at Nazareth, Jesus chose deliberately to read from Isaiah 61 where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.

He has appointed me to preach the Good News to the poor,

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives.

And recovery of sight to the blind.

To set free the oppressed,

To announce the year when the Lord will save his people."

(Isaiah 61; Luke 4:17-19)

He followed this reading by saying: "This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read" thus proclaiming that the year when the Lord would save his people had arrived, just as he elsewhere (Luke 11:20) proclaims that the kingdom of God has arrived. Jesus' contemporaries should have heard the voice of God in what he said, should have seen the finger of God at work in his miracles, should have realised that the promised salvation had arrived. The signs of the Messiah were there to be seen but they did not respond.

In a book entitled "Miracles", edited by C F D Moule,⁴ the editor wrote a short chapter on "The Vocabulary of Miracle" which closes with these words:

"One additional observation is perhaps worth making, namely that there seems to be in the NT and, indeed in the whole Bible, a lack of specific words for omens - that is signs presaging future events. *Semeion* (the Greek word for sign) in Matthew 24:3 is used thus . . . and there are, indeed, in the apocalyptic passages of the NT, references to events which are going to indicate a crisis. But there seems to be no actual word in the Hebrew or Greek Bible exactly equivalent to portent . . . If there is any significance in this, it is, perhaps, that *the Bible is more interested in signs of God at work then and there, than in signs which foretell the future.*" (p 238)

³ The Greek word *parateresis* translated "observation" in the AV and "in such a way as to be seen" in the GNB, is used of astronomers observing events in the heavens and of priests observing the sky to see, for example, the first sign of the new moon.

⁴ C F D Moule, *Miracles: Cambridge Studies in their Philosophy and History*. Mowbrays, 1965

A A Hoekema in his book *The Bible and the Future*⁵ says forcefully that "the signs of the times refer primarily not to what is still future but to what God has done in the past and is revealing in the present." (p 129) If Moule, Hoekema and others are right, and I believe this to be the case, then we misrepresent Jesus when we speak of signs of the times as describing "certain happenings or situations which are said to precede or point to the Second Coming of Christ. On this view the primary orientation of these signs is toward the future, particularly towards the events surrounding the Parousia" (Hoekema, p 129).

The Shepherd's Warning

Let us then examine Matthew 24 briefly since many believe that it contains information about signs of the times relevant to ourselves in the twentieth century. Firstly, as a matter of principle, we need to remember that Jesus was speaking to his first century disciples and that what he said first and foremost would be relevant and helpful to them in their circumstances. It is unlikely that Jesus would speak over their heads to a future generation particularly when he says "All these things will happen before the people now living have all died" (Matthew 24:34). We must surely take this seriously even if some of the ideas in the discourse are difficult for us to understand. The early church certainly knew about false prophets and Messiahs (Acts 5:34-37, 13:4-12) about false teachers (2 Corinthians 11, Galatians 1:6-10, 2 Peter 2, Jude 4) about earthquakes (Acts 16:26) and about famines, persecutions and other signs (Acts 8:1-4, 11:27-29, 12:1-23, Romans 15:25-28, 1 Corinthians 16:1-5). Such signs have been part of the church's experience throughout the Christian era and, as Travis⁶ says, they

"are not like the signs which say 'End of Motorway 1 mile'. They are in fact more like the hazard warning lights which warn us of dangers along the way. Jesus spoke of signs, not to satisfy curiosity or to make calculation possible, but to strengthen faith and to warn of dangers that his followers could expect. The signs are signs of the conflict between good and evil, between God's purpose and all that opposes it, which will go on until Christ finally defeats evil and brings in his perfect world at his coming. The keynote of Mark 13 (and also of Matthew 24) is not in predictions so much as in exhortations – 'Keep awake, be on your guard!' (verses 32-37) – and the promises – 'the person who holds out to the end will be saved (verse 13 in both Mark 13 and Matthew 24)'".

Most of the discourse was fulfilled by events leading up to the

⁵ A A Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, Eerdmans 1972

⁶ Stephen H Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Christ*, p 123. Hodder & Stoughton 1982

destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple but some of it may concern the return of Jesus. Jesus uses the second person plural "you" in verses 4 to 28, strongly indicating that these words were particularly addressed to his first disciples. Then the pronoun disappears in verses 29-31 where he speaks of the coming of the Son of Man, resurfacing in verses 32-35 containing the Fig Tree parable. This would suggest that this latter section refers back to the first section, verses 4 to 28, indicating that all those things would be fulfilled in that generation. There are no grounds here in Matthew 24 or in any Christian teaching anywhere in the New Testament for taking this reference to the budding of the fig tree as a reference to Jews returning to Palestine in the twentieth century and of this being of particular significance in God's scheme of things as a herald of the closeness of the return of Christ.

The fact is that there is no plain teaching in any of the New Testament books concerning a return of the Jews to Palestine. Had this been an important part of Christian teaching it surely could not have failed to have been recorded in the writings of the early church. The vast majority of Jews in the time of Jesus lived in the diaspora and it would have been just as appropriate then, if not more so, to include teaching about their return to Palestine in the gospel message if it really held the place in apostolic teaching that some ascribe to it today. The silence of the New Testament on this matter speaks volumes. Confirmation that the fig tree does not refer to Israel comes from Luke's version of the saying: "Remember the fig tree *and all the other trees* " (Luke 21:29) which makes it clear that Jesus was warning his first disciples of problems they would encounter in their near future and encouraging them not to lose faith or patience.

The Last Days

Interest in signs of the times is usually closely associated with an insistence that we live in the last days, implying that the signs tell us that Christ is about to come. This view appears to take no account of the Biblical use of the phrases 'last days' and 'latter days'. On the day of Pentecost Peter said about the speaking with tongues which the crowd had just witnessed:

"...this is what the prophet Joel spoke about: 'This is what I will do in the last days, God says: I will pour out my Spirit on everyone.' "
(Acts 2:16,17)

Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1 reminds Timothy "that there will be difficult times in the last days." Was he speaking of the late twentieth century? Of course not, as the rest of the paragraph makes abundantly clear. Paul wanted Timothy, there and then in the last days, to beware of people who "will hold to the outward form of our religion, but reject its

real power. Keep away from such people," he says. The writer to the Hebrews opens his letter with an emphatic statement that God
 "in these last days has spoken to us through his Son."
 (Hebrews 1:2).

In 1 Peter 1:20 we read of Christ that

"He had been chosen by God before the creation of the world and was revealed in these last days for your sake."

2 Peter 3:3 warned its first readers that

"you must understand that in these last days some people will appear whose lives are controlled by their own lusts. They will mock you and will ask, 'He promised to come, didn't he? Where is he?'".

These and other passages make it clear that the last days have been here for nearly two thousand years! This certainly ought to make us hesitate before we make special claims for our own time as the last of the last days.

The signs of the times are commonly understood to be signs observable in the present world relating to the Jews and their treatment by other nations as well as to political machinations between the nations, focussed particularly on the Middle East, signs that supposedly indicate the nearness of Christ's return. Those who engage in such sign-watching usually find it difficult not to get involved in predicting the very near return of Christ and even in date-setting. Most of the centuries of Christian history are littered with the failed predictions of such people. The kind of evidence put forward by them is never to be found on the lips of Jesus or in the writings of his apostles. This should make us wary of listening to, or encouraging, such speculation.

While on holiday in Somerset recently I stayed in a guesthouse owned by a descendant of John Napier. Readers who have wrestled with logarithms will probably know that John Napier, Baron of Merchiston, Edinburgh, is well-known to mathematicians as the inventor of logarithms. As a teacher of mathematics myself, I have long known of some of Napier's contributions to mathematics, but not of his interest in theology. In his own day Napier was more renowned for his book on the Revelation of John published in 1593 than for his work on logarithms published in 1614.

Like John Thomas, John Napier sought hard to understand the Apocalypse and finished by writing his book entitled "A Plaine Discovery of the Whole Revelation of St John", in which he identified the Pope as antichrist and predicted that the end of the world would occur at the latest by 1786. In his own words:

"The last Trumpet and vial beginneth anno Christi 1541 and should end anno Christi 1786 . . . not that I mean that that age, or yet the

world, shall continue so long because it is said that, for the Elect's sake, the time shall be shortened; but, I mean that, if the world *were* to endure, that seventh age should continue until the year of Christ 1786".

Napier was born in 1550, and so did not live long enough to see his prophecy proved wrong by the patience and grace of God. He died of gout in 1617 and clearly saw himself as living in the beginning of the end, hoping that the end would come sooner rather than later. His mathematics stood the test of time but his prophesying did not, like that of an even greater mathematician and interpreter of prophecy, Isaac Newton, born twenty five years after Napier died.

Although books could be filled with such examples it does not seem to stop others trying to get it right. And this in the face of repeated warnings about false prophets and the repeated New Testament insistence that the time of the return of Christ cannot be known in advance. Jesus taught quite firmly and positively that the time of his return is known only to the Father and that his followers had to learn to live with this lack of knowledge and not endeavour continually to lift the veil from what God has chosen to keep to Himself. What our Lord did tell his first disciples was that they could expect to hear of, and maybe experience themselves, wars, rumours of wars, earthquakes and famines, false Messiahs and false prophets, deterioration in human relationships and even betrayal, but they were not to lose heart. Such signs have been more or less the common experience of all generations ever since, but the faithful have learned not to be led to abandon their faith because of them. The key word for the disciples is "Watch" in the sense in which this was explained in the previous article – Be on your guard! Keep alert! Stay awake! Be sober! We would all do well to remember Jesus' opening words to the Olivet Discourse:

"Watch out, and do not let anyone fool you" (Matthew 24:4).

As the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) put it:

"As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin, and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity; so will he have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and be ever prepared to say, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen."

Personal Mark

"If the Gospels are read by a modern reader without any knowledge of their origins and consequent character, positive misunderstanding is likely to be the result" (D E Nineham). Ron Coleman attempts to describe the origins of the earliest gospel.

Some twelve years ago the actor Alec McCowen committed one of the gospels to memory and, beginning at the Mermaid Theatre in London, recited it to great acclaim many times in public throughout Britain, America and even in Warsaw. The gospel he chose was Mark (in the Authorised Version), one might think because it is the shortest of the four. Actually length weighed little, if at all, with him, as he disclosed in his subsequent book *Personal Mark*. What attracted him was its vividness – he says of the first verse that "it is probably the most stunning opening line ever written". Mark's delight is to record the facts of the life of Jesus in the simplest and most dramatic way and thus his is the nearest of the gospels to an eyewitness account. His story rushes on – he likes the words "and straightway" and "immediately" which occur nearly 30 times. He frequently tells the story as a child might, eagerly piling incident upon incident, connecting them only by an "and" – there are 34 instances in the third chapter alone.

Mark often puts in little details that are lacking in Matthew and Luke. He alone tells us that the rich young man ran up and knelt before Jesus and that Jesus looked straight at him with love. Although Matthew and Luke tell us that he was saddened by Jesus' reply it is left to Mark to say that "gloom spread over his face".¹ On the question of looks, while Matthew says that Peter took Jesus aside (to dissuade him) after he had told them of his forthcoming death, it is Mark alone who says that Jesus turned "and looked at his disciples" when he rebuked Peter, thus showing that the rebuke was not a private matter, as implied by Matthew. Mark adds in his account that "Jesus made it very clear to them" that he was going to die.

Similarly, in the story of the little child that Jesus used as a model of citizens in the Kingdom of Heaven, Matthew and Luke omit Mark's "he put his arms round him" (9:36). So too, when the disciples scolded those who were bringing their children to Jesus to be blessed, it is only Mark who says Jesus was angry (10:13) with the disciples, and only he who says "He took the children in his arms . . . and blessed them." (10:16)

In the story of the stilling of the storm it is only Mark who tells us that Jesus was asleep in the stern of the ship with his head on a pillow.

¹ Quotations are from the Good News Bible except where indicated otherwise

And that when they woke him the disciples said "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to die" (4:38). On the last journey to Jerusalem it is only Mark who says "Jesus was going ahead of his disciples who were filled with alarm" (10:32). This brings the loneliness of Jesus overwhelmingly before us. When Jesus was rejected at Nazareth, Mark (6:1-5) once again lays bare Jesus' soul: "He was greatly surprised, because the people did not have faith". In consequence "He was not able to perform any miracles there, except that he placed his hands on a few sick people and healed them." Matthew says simply "Because they did not have faith, he did not perform many miracles there." No "not able", no "great surprise".

Mark seems specially aware of the emotions of Jesus. Twice he records that Jesus sighed deeply. One occasion was the healing of the deaf mute (10:31), not recorded by the other synoptists, and the second when the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus into performing a miracle, (8:12) which is recorded by Matthew and Luke but without mention of the deep sigh. When the Pharisees tried to tempt Jesus to heal the man with the paralysed hand on the Sabbath (3:1-6) Matthew is silent about the feelings of Jesus, Luke tells us that Jesus looked round but Mark tells us that "Jesus was angry as he looked round at them, but at the same time he felt sorry for them because they were so stubborn and wrong".

Inspiration and the differences between the gospels

Anyone drawing attention to differences of this kind is liable to be accused of promoting a belief in partial inspiration. But these (and many other similar differences) are there. What explanation can be offered? I believe that there is one, perfectly compatible with inspiration, which adds credibility to the narratives. It was pointed out in the Editorial in our May 1994 issue (No 91) that the "Foundation Clause" does not adequately represent the beliefs of those who drafted it. In a resolution approved by the Temperance Hall Ecclesia eighteen months earlier (19th February 1885), three different modes of inspiration were recognised. The Holy Spirit could move and guide writers either to record its own words; or to record their own knowledge in words which it superintended; or to adopt material from outside sources that it approved or required to be recorded.

It was not incompatible with inspiration then for the writers of Scripture to "record their own knowledge in words which [the Holy Spirit] superintended." This was summed up by Robert Roberts' in his account of the Bradlaugh debate: "The Scriptures never show us the preternatural brought to bear where the natural is sufficient." Surely then it is no denial of inspiration to recognise that the differences between the synoptists reflect their own particular points of view. This

explains why Matthew has Jesus saying "Kingdom of Heaven" where Mark and Luke write "Kingdom of God". Why else should Mark alone record the Aramaic words with which Jesus raised Jairus's daughter and healed the deaf mute? And why else should Luke, a doctor, omit from Mark's account of the healing of the woman who had "suffered terribly from severe bleeding" and had "spent all she had on doctors" the significant words "but instead of getting better she got worse all the time"?

So what can we know of Mark himself to account for his point of view? Actually we are told very little about him as a person, but it is possible to piece together other information to give us some idea of his character. We cannot begin this task better than by quoting two verses peculiar to Mark from his account of the arrest of Jesus. "A certain young man, dressed only in a linen cloth, was following Jesus. They tried to arrest him, but he ran away naked, leaving the cloth behind." (14:51,52). If that young man was not Mark then these two verses are utterly unimportant, uninteresting and unnecessary. Many such incidents must have occurred that night which would not be worth recording. But if the young man was Mark himself it is a different matter. He is recording the part he himself played in that never-to-be-forgotten night and however small it was it has interest for him and for us.

From these two verses we can deduce that Mark was not then a disciple and therefore not an eyewitness of the previous ministry of Jesus. Tradition tells us that the story of that ministry came from Peter. Yet the style is not Peter's, for Peter's first epistle contains some of the most polished Greek in the New Testament whereas Mark's is, to say the least, rather rough - indeed the Greek of one writing in a foreign language. How was Mark able to absorb so many of Peter's memories but reproduce them in his own style?

The answer begins with the story in Acts 12 in which Peter, released from prison by the angel is at a loss momentarily where to go to meet his companions. When he had "considered the thing" (AV) he "went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark where many people had gathered and were praying." If we go back a bit further to the return of the disciples from the Ascension we read that "they went *up to the room* where they were staying". We are told² that "staying translates a word often used in the papyri to refer to a temporary residence." We know from the accounts of the appearances of Jesus after the Resurrection that the disciples were temporarily residing in Jerusalem and it seems very likely that it was in the same house as that in Acts 12 since upper rooms of this type had a separate entrance at the top of an outside stairway. Going back a very short distance further in time it seems very likely that

² *Translator's Handbook on "The Acts"* United Bible Societies

it was in this room that the Last Supper was eaten. Mary seems to have been one of the wealthy women who followed Jesus and "ministered unto him of their substance" (AV), a widow who had a house with "a large upstairs room" set apart as a guest chamber. We know too that her nephew Barnabas was a wealthy man and had been a landowner in Cyprus (Colossians 4:10 tells us that Mark was his cousin). We deduce that she was a widow because, if her husband had been living, she would have been described as "Mary, the wife of So-and-so" rather than "Mary the mother of Mark". Consequently when we read in Mark 14:13, "Jesus sent two of them with these instructions; 'Go into the city and a man carrying a pitcher of water will meet you. Follow him to the house he enters, and say to the owner of the house: The teacher says 'Where is the room where my disciples and I will eat the Passover meal? Then he will show you a large upstairs room, prepared and furnished, where you will get everything ready'", we are probably being introduced to Mark, "the owner of the house". He would naturally be so described if his father were dead and he was the only son. If Mary's husband had been alive we can scarcely imagine that he, obviously not a disciple, would allow his wife to make these arrangements.

We can imagine Mark then as a young man, very much under the influence of his mother, but not at this stage a follower of Jesus, observing the goings-on in the house with interest. While Jesus and his disciples, the visitors, were eating the Last Supper in the Upper Room, there could well have been another and rather different Passover being celebrated downstairs.

Since Mary was wealthy there might have been enough male servants, with Mark, to make up the required number of 12. Otherwise there could have been a joint Passover with a neighbour (Exodus 12:4) But this Passover would have been a shorter affair than the one in the Upper Room, with its long addresses by Jesus. We can imagine that by the time that Passover was finished Mark would have gone to bed and that perhaps the last thing he heard as he fell asleep was the sound of Jesus and his disciples singing the last two of the six Psalms (113-118) which were sung, two at the beginning, two in the middle and two at the end of the paschal meal. And then, later, he would be awakened by the sound of the guard which had arrested Jesus tramping through the city street and the shouts of the crowd "Jesus is taken".

Mark was not then a disciple. But he must have heard much of this wonderful new prophet of whom his mother was a devoted follower. So he jumped out of bed, and picking up the coverlet, ran out to see what was happening. But when one of the soldiers snatched the coverlet, Mark left it in his hand and ran away in panic. Unlike the disciples, who also ran away, Mark was not to be blamed for this, for he owed no

loyalty to Jesus, although he showed a certain timidity. We need not suppose that he was absolutely naked. It is said that the Greek can equally mean "undressed", so that that he was left wearing his undershirt.

After the Resurrection it seems likely that Mary's house would continue to be a venue for the apostles and for visitors to Jerusalem. Mark would thus get to know them, including Barnabas his cousin. This explains why Barnabas chose Mark to accompany him and Paul on their first missionary journey. At this stage Mark could well have been a Christian merely by association rather than through any deep conversion of his own. All went well on the journey to begin with while the party was traversing Cyprus, home territory for Barnabas. But when they crossed over to mainland Pamphylia it was a different story. Acts tells us, very briefly, (13:13): "Paul and his companions sailed from Paphos and came to Perga, a city in Pamphylia where John Mark left them and went back to Jerusalem". We can only speculate why this was, but when Paul proposed a second journey and Barnabas again wanted his cousin to go, Paul sharply disagreed. Acts 15:37 tells us "Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them, but Paul did not think it was right to take him, because he had not stayed with them to the end of their mission but had turned back and left them in Pamphylia. There was a sharp argument, and they separated; Barnabas took Mark and sailed off for Cyprus" – back to familiar ground.

The consequences of the quarrel between Barnabas and Paul

This break-up of the team of Paul and Barnabas shows us that personality clashes happened then as now, and in this case must have been harmful to the preaching of the gospel, for Paul and Barnabas were one of the finest missionary partnerships that could be imagined. Paul was the visionary, full of fire and eloquence, but as strict with others as he was with himself. Barnabas, on the other hand, was a man of gentleness and sympathy (the nickname the apostles had given to Joseph the Levite meant "the Encourager"). Earlier he had smoothed the way for Paul's acceptance by the Jerusalem church (9:27) and had sought Paul out in Tarsus to help him with his own successful work in Antioch (11:23-5).

Barnabas, being more tolerant, had thought it right to overlook his cousin's defection and give him a second chance. Paul differed. Who was right? Paul appears to admit that he had had a short fuse in the past when he described himself to Philemon "as being such an one as Paul the aged" (AV). There is a tendency among us to imagine that all the great names in the New Testament were perfect but they could not have been so different from us. One commentator says he would have

liked to hear what Demas had had to say about "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (AV). But of course the underlying cause of the difference was a fault of Mark's.

We cannot be certain what made him decide to go back. It may have been fear of the road they were due to travel, which, infested as it was with bandits, was one of the most difficult and dangerous in the then world. He may have felt that the more extrovert Paul was pushing his uncle into the background for until now the order of names has been first Barnabas and then Paul and here we read "Paul and his companions sailed from Paphos and came to Perga" (13:13). Chrysostom said Mark wanted his mother – perhaps not so unlikely as it seems. The underlying reason was surely that Mark had drifted into discipleship, and when he came up against fear and danger in Pamphylia he was not robust enough to face it.

In later years however we find a very different Mark, for whom there is no trace of criticism, even from Paul. We find him in prison in Rome with Paul, as related in the greetings at the end of the letter to the Colossians: "Aristarchus, who is in prison with me, sends you greetings, and so does Mark the cousin of Barnabas. (You have already received instructions to welcome Mark if he comes your way.)" In another prison letter, to Philemon, he is named as a fellow-worker: "Epaphras, who is in prison with me for the sake of Christ Jesus, sends you his greetings, and so do my fellow-workers Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke". And when Paul is waiting for death he writes to Timothy: "Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he can help me in the work. (2 Timothy 4:11) What brought about the change?

A clue can be found in the only other mention of Mark in the epistles (1 Peter 5:13): "Your sister church in Babylon, also chosen by God, sends you greetings, and so does my son Mark." The affectionate reference suggests that it was through Peter that Mark the deserter was changed into the valued helper and companion of both Paul and himself. When Mark returned to Jerusalem from Cyprus he could well have fallen in with Peter who knew from his own experience what it was to have failed (more than once) and who in consequence could sympathise with Mark. He would be better able to help him than Paul, and so bring about a true and deep conversion.

One of the marks of a true conversion is that just where a man is weak there he becomes strong. Moses, the spoilt child of Pharaoh's court, who in a moment of sudden anger killed the Egyptian, becomes "a humble man, more humble than anyone else on earth." The fierce, bigoted and self-seeking Boanerges becomes the Apostle of love. Vacillating Peter becomes the Rock. Levi, who left his religion for gain, becomes Matthew, who leaves all for Christ.

The First Gospel

But how did Mark become the author of the gospel that bears his name, almost certainly the first to be written? We have to realise that for something like 30 years after the Ascension the early Church felt no need for a record of the life of Jesus on earth, and what he taught. It was not that they were not interested in that life, but in view of the imminent expectation of his return a *written* record did not seem necessary. But we can imagine the members of the ecclesia (whether it was in Rome or elsewhere) gathering round Peter on the first day of the week and asking him questions. When he spoke they were listening to one who had been in close companionship with the Lord who could tell them what he had heard and seen. And Peter would draw from his store of memories what his hearers asked for. "Tell us about the man who asked the Lord what he should do to earn eternal life". "Tell us what happened when the Lord was transfigured on the mountain". And so on. How anxious their questions and how close their attention! Peter would not give them a serial narrative in chronological order but detached memories as they came back to him. Soon they would be saying among themselves "Should not one of us put down in writing these marvellous stories? Then we could study them at our leisure." Many said this but Mark appears to have been the first to do it. Eusebius, earliest historian of the Church, quotes a few sentences in which Papias records what a contemporary of Mark had told him:

"Mark, being the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately all that he [Peter] mentioned, whether sayings or doings of Christ; not however, in order. For he was neither a hearer nor a companion of the Lord; but afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter, who adapted his teachings as necessity required, not as though he were making a compilation of the Sayings of the Lord. So then Mark made no mistake, writing down in this way some things as he [Peter] mentioned them; for he paid attention to this one thing, not to omit anything that he had heard, nor to include any false statement among them." *Ecclesiastical History* (iii.39)

It would however only be after Peter's death that the idea of making his reminiscences into a book would suggest itself. This would require editorial material and other short documents like those mentioned by Luke in his gospel preface to be included. The story of John Mark commenced anonymously with the flight of a lad fearful of arrest by the Temple Guard, and it ends anonymously in the middle of a sentence. But there are two lessons to be drawn from his life and work. The first is Paul's declaration "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me". The second is that God depends on us to work His purpose out, for what could we have known of Christ without the gospels, the writing of which was a work that Mark started?

Finding Founders and Facing Facts

In "A Letter to a Czech Friend" the Christadelphian author says of a number of early Czech protesters who opposed Rome, "As for their faith it is my faith and the faith of my Brethren in Christ worldwide". Ruth McHaffie shows that Jan Hus (one of those highlighted) believed fervently in the trinity, the immortality of the soul, and that the Son and the Holy Spirit would help him to escape the snares of Satan.

VII JAN HUS, "WHO FAITHFULLY PRESERVED TRUE BIBLE CHRISTIANITY..."¹

Throughout the world there are those counted as heroes by their countrymen, often with impressive statues standing as reminders of their bravery. Visitors to the Old City of Prague in Czechoslovakia gaze wonderingly at the Memorial to "Magister Jan Hus" who was burned to death in July 1415 for preaching his reformatory views. It is that memorial, in particular, which must surely capture the imagination of Christadelphians when they tour Europe, for none could have "protested" more vigorously than he against the debased 15th century Roman church.

Brother Alan Eyre explained in *A Letter to my Czech Friend* (*The Christadelphian*, Jan-April, 1992) how he felt "overwhelmed" by that "enormous statue" in the city where so long ago sincere believers held fast "to apostolic truth",² and where Hus taught in the chapel. There, our Brother informed readers, the "people could gather to hear the Word of God preached instead of the false teaching of a corrupted Christendom". Martin Luther after reading some of Jan Hus' sermons was similarly moved to comment,

On reading, I was overwhelmed with astonishment. I could not understand for what cause they had burnt so great a man, who explained Scriptures with so much gravity and skill. In truth I want to defend Hus, and if all Bohemia should reject him, which God forbid, he shall be ours!³

The courage, the beliefs and the times of Hus have been well documented by historians supported by an eye witness account and his own discourses. The 20th century Professor Matthew Spinka, in particular, in his amply referenced *John Hus: A Biography* and in his translation of *The Letters of John Hus* gives a comprehensive picture.

¹ *The Christadelphian*, 1992, p 8

² *Ibid.*, p 45

³ Quoted by J. Otter in *The Witness of Czech Protestantism*, p 23

Hus was born of poor parents in Southern Bohemia about the year 1372, and by the time he was five or six years old the Western Roman church had suffered the "Great Schism", which meant that it had the doubtful privilege of two rival popes. Some thirty years later, owing to the king's neglect of his German States, there existed also two rival emperors. Both church and state affairs were riddled with avarice and intrigue while Hus was developing into a brilliant, if light-hearted, young priest. It was not long before he became a serious, devout scholar and a popular leader. Bitterness was rife between Germans and Czechs, and though Hus encouraged the use of his native tongue and preached in it, he was not, as alleged, a fanatical nationalist. He made it clear that he liked "a good German better than a bad brother".

As time went on he observed with horror the superstition encouraged among worshippers, the kissing of images, the "Holy days" which were "occasions for violent drinking bouts and debauchery", and the pilgrimages which were regarded as opportunities for immoral behaviour. He deplored the avarice of the priests and the pope's pride as the cardinals knelt to kiss his golden slippers.⁴ And though Hus did not oppose indulgences in principle,⁵ nor did he deny the doctrine of purgatory,⁶ yet he vigorously opposed the priests' exploitation of the people. In Rome, he considered, "there is the summit of all Antichrist's wickedness: of pride, miserliness, adultery, hypocrisy and simony".⁷ And he saw the abuse of church worship as a sign of the imminently approaching Day of Judgment.⁸

Finding Bible Truth

When reading the February instalment of *The Letter to my Czech Friend* (Frantisek), we find the writer commenting that Hus did not have "a chance to do half of what he intended", that we cannot expect him to have "cleared away all the entrenched rubbish of centuries" and to have "re-established the whole of Bible truth in all its apostolic purity". These comments are only partially correct, however, for brilliant scholars such as Hus had access to the Scriptures. And though both then and now, as explained in our *Glad Tidings* (No 1300), when seeking after truth the "search is made more difficult because man-made teachings and ideas have become woven into the Christian message, yet "when reading the Bible for ourselves, none of these things need distract us [nor need they have distracted them] from the Divine message". This

⁴ M. Spinka, *John Hus: A Biography*, pp 192, 199

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 134

⁶ *Ibid.*, p 145

⁷ *Ibid.*, p 199

⁸ *Ibid.*, p 213

is especially so if, in general, the teachings in the Bible are (as Frantisek was told) "clear enough to be understood by anybody, even a child". Jan Hus had the opportunity to acquire, and the ability to learn by his own independent enquiry, a close approximation to that all important "whole counsel of God".

Every Man's Right to Interpret the Scriptures – and the Conclusions Reached

At the beginning of the 15th century a number of the theological works of the reformer, John Wyclif, were carried from England to Bohemia and Romania. They received popular acclaim but were deeply frowned upon by the ecclesiastical authorities. Hus was in agreement with some of Wyclif's teachings though he was carefully discriminating in those he accepted, sometimes interpreting them in his own way. But despite any disagreement he had, he was convinced that Wyclif's books should be read for the value they contained, and he publicly opposed their suppression and burning. Hus was one of the comparatively few Bible students in the history of Christianity who accepted that not only he and his supporters had the right to interpret the Scriptures in their own way, but so also had other brethren.

Writing to a follower of Wyclif he commented, "Know, dearest brother, that our people will hear nothing but Holy Scripture, particularly the evangels and epistles...".⁹ Referring to his own attitude toward the Scriptures he made it clear that he desired "to hold, believe, and assert whatever is contained in them as long as I have breath in me".¹⁰ It is true that Hus was never in a position to "preach the full truth" but this was not only because (as claimed in the *Letter to Frantisek*) he was unable to "get away with it". It was also because, in the Christadelphian sense, he never knew it. The "truth" of Jan Hus was not Christadelphian "truth". He believed, for example that Jesus was "Very God and Very Man",¹¹ and when referring to our Saviour's mother, (in the fragment *On Faith*) he described her as "the most worthy Mother of God,...".¹²

Accepting "nothing but Holy Scripture" meant for Hus (unlike Wyclif) that after the bread and wine were consecrated they were changed into the non-material body and blood of Christ, that is, he believed in "transubstantiation". As he put it, "To believe that in the sacrament of the altar exist the true body and blood of Christ is the

⁹ W. Schwarze, *John Hus*, p 60.

¹⁰ M. Spinka, *John Hus, A Biography*, p 189

¹¹ A. Wratishaw, *John Hus*, p 351

¹² *Ibid.*, p 365

faith by which the faithful adhere faithfully to the catholic truth".¹³

In addition to the treatises which Hus wrote we have in his private letters excellent opportunity to examine the beliefs he held. In 1404 he wrote *A Protest to John Hubner about the Charges against Wyclif*. His letter included the statement,

By these three things the whole Trinity has been offended: by apostasy, God the Father, Who according to clean and spotless religion powerfully binds His bride to Himself; by blasphemy God the Son, Who is the power of wisdom of God; by simoniacal ordinations God the Holy Spirit, Who out of supreme benevolence wisely and peacefully ordains His house, Whom out of wickedness they contradict.¹⁴

Church Councils and Corruption

In 1409 a Council was convened by the authorities in an effort to rid the church of the "Great Schism". By subversion of the voting system the king managed to gain approval for the deposition of the two popes, and the election of one other. But as the two ageing gentlemen refused to be deposed the church found itself with three popes instead of two. The latest addition to the office died shortly afterward but was replaced by a successor. In 1414 another Council was held, this time in Constance, with a view to terminating so extraordinary a state of affairs, and on the same occasion it was also intended to rid the church of imputed heresy.

Jan Hus was requested to attend in a voluntary capacity, ostensibly so that he could answer to the charges frequently made against him. He was promised safe passage but as might be expected of the times and of the dubious characters involved, he found himself in a deadly trap. From his letters it would seem that he was not altogether deceived by the promises made, nor naive enough to be surprised by the promises broken. He not only drew up his "Last Will" before departure but also wrote to his friends,

Perhaps you will not see me in Prague before my death; if the Almighty God will be pleased to return me, we shall meet so much more gladly; and of course when we meet each other in the heavenly joy.¹⁵

From Krakovec, on 19th October 1414, he wrote to "To His Parishioners upon His Departure for Constance",

Master John Hus, in hope a priest and servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, to all the faithful and dear brethren and sisters in the Lord Jesus, who have heard and received the Word of God through me: grace and peace from

¹³ M. Spinka, *John Hus: A Biography*, p 72.

¹⁴ *The Letters of John Hus*, Translated by M. Spinka, pp 3-5

¹⁵ M. Spinka, *John Hus: A Biography*, p 224

God our Father and from the Holy Spirit, that they may abide spotless in His truth....

But I trust in our merciful, wise, and mighty Saviour that He will grant me, by reason of His promise and through faithful prayer, the wisdom and bravery of the Holy Spirit to remain steadfast, so that they would be unable to swerve me to the wrong side.... He is God and we are His creatures; He is Lord and we are His servants; He is the king of the world and we are but puny weaklings; He is without sin and we are sinners; He lacks nothing while we are in need. Since He likewise suffered for us sinful, why should we not suffer as well? For our suffering in grace is our cleansing from sins and our deliverance from eternal torments; and death is our victory.¹⁶

On arrival in Constance he was at first allowed to move freely, but after a few weeks he was arrested and subsequently endured months of miserable imprisonment and deprivation, uncertain of his fate. At his trial he was accused of holding beliefs of Wyclif which had been declared heretical but many of which, in fact, he did not accept. In particular, he was falsely charged with rejecting transubstantiation. When he refuted charges successfully then others were drawn up. He stoutly refused to recant beliefs which he never held, but his earlier defence of Wyclif and his own well-known denunciations of church corruption, especially in relation to the abuse of indulgences, were enough to have ensured his condemnation even before the trial began.

On 20th June 1415, he wrote from prison, "To His Friends in Constance",

Now it remains that I either recant and abjure and undergo appalling penance, or that I be burned. May the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God, in whom I believe and trust, grant me, on account of the intercessions of all the saints and just men, the spirit of counsel and fortitude, that I may escape the snares of Satan and remain in His grace to the end.¹⁷

And again from prison in Constance, on 29th June 1415 (the "feast day" of Peter and Paul), he wrote "To John of Chlum",

...Christ, the king of glory, who crowned apostles Peter and Paul this day, introducing them into the kingdom of heavenly fatherland, Peter by crucifixion and Paul by beheading.... Now Peter and Paul reign with the heavenly king, and already are joined with the angelic choir; they already see their king in his splendour, and are already free from weariness and full of unspeakable joy.¹⁸

¹⁶ *The Letters of John Hus*, Translated by M. Spinka, pp 122-123

¹⁷ M. Spinka, *John Hus: A Biography*, pp 172-173

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 203-204

The End Result

A week later Jan Hus was consumed in the flames of merciless martyrdom – the victim of state and church chicanery.

It is not for us to decide whether or not he was acceptable before God. But one fact is indisputable. If it were necessary for him to hold the basic beliefs of Christadelphians in order to be acceptable then, sadly, we can be certain that he will be rejected. With his ashes thrown in the Rhine and with his worthy character assassinated, he is gone for ever – unless he should be brought back to suffer the ignominy of an “enlightened rejector”.

If Frantisek, the recipient of the *Letter to my Czech Friend*, were to investigate the doctrines of the astoundingly brave Jan Hus and of the other “protesters” to whom his attention was directed, he might come to the conclusion that they were indeed among those who “faithfully preserved true Bible Christianity through the long ages of Papal darkness”. But if he were to compare their “true Bible Christianity” with the Christadelphian Statement of Faith (Amended or Unamended), he would find it more than a little strange that his enthusiastic correspondent could comment that while we can only marvel at their courage “As for their faith, it is my faith, and the faith of my Brethren in Christ worldwide” (*The Christadelphian*, 1992, p 8).



IS JESUS GOD?

“The majority of New Testament scholars in this century have doubted whether the claim that Jesus was God is to be found in the New Testament.”

(A.N. Wilson, Letter to *The Spectator*, 7th March 1987)

“A.N. Wilson is fully justified in saying that ‘you would be hard put to it to find one [professional theologian] in the Western world who believes that the historical Jesus claimed to be a divine being’. He is right to feel aggrieved that, in the journalists’ ignorance, he alone is pilloried for what the professional theologians teach as a matter of course. But the ignorant journalists have a point. If the church claims for Jesus something he did not claim for himself, who should sensible people believe, Jesus or the church that says it worships Jesus?”

(J.C. O’Neill, Letter to *The Spectator*, 22nd June 1991)

J.C. O’Neill (b 1930) is a United Reformed Church Minister and was Professor of New Testament at Westminster and Chestnut Colleges, Cambridge. He is the author of several books on Acts, 1 John, Galatians, and the Pelican Commentary on Romans.

The Throne of David (3)

In this concluding article Bill Robinson shows that the occupant of the Throne is "King of Kings and Lord of Lords".

(1) The initial Jewishness of The Acts

Surprisingly, in this book wherein the hope of life is extended to the Gentiles, the first few chapters are decidedly Jewish. In the church's early days, as was pointed out at the end of the previous article, its members were regular attenders at temple and synagogue and to all outward appearances were seen to be faithful Jews. An analogous position in modern times may be seen in the growth of *The Methodist Connexion*; for many years it was formally a part of the Church of England, its founder John Wesley remaining an ordained Anglican minister till his death. The parallel between Wesley and the Apostle Peter must not be taken too far, however: to this day Methodism is Anglicanism without the frills, whereas Christianity diverged markedly from the Judaism it had sprung from, as God's revelation was progressively made known to His new Israel. Salvation is indeed from the Jews (John 4:22)¹, but only in the line through him who so defined it.

But the church of the first few chapters of Acts was wholly Jewish, bearing little resemblance to the modern church: its followers met regularly with non-Christian Jews in their places of assembly, their Christian devotions taking place in the privacy of their own homes. Consider the evidence in more detail:

(1) All those present at Pentecost were "Jews and Proselytes" (Acts 2:10, KJV).

(2) "Every day they met together in the temple courts" (Acts 2:46) and in Acts 3:1 we read of Peter's and John's "going up to the temple at the time of prayer."

(3) Apparently they continued to observe the Law without question. For example, some of the believers were Pharisees and wanted Gentile converts to follow the full rigours of the Law (Acts 15:5). And later, when Paul came to Jerusalem after his third missionary journey, he was informed of the make-up of the Jerusalem church: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law" (Acts 21:20).

(4) At the end of the earliest period of the community's life its

¹ All quotations are from the NIV unless otherwise stated.

members hadn't left Jerusalem and their activity was centred on the temple: "Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 5:42).

(5) It seems evident that these early believers shared the belief of fellow Jews that " .. suddenly the Lord .. will come to his temple .." (Malachi 3:1). This would indicate they were holding tenaciously to Jesus' statement about destroying and rebuilding the Temple (John 2:19 etc) but had disregarded his qualifying comment that he was referring to the temple of his body.

(6) Gentiles are not mentioned in these early chapters of Acts. If they entered into the thinking of these Jewish Christians at all it would be in the sense that salvation would come to them only by their ultimately coming to Mount Zion to worship God there along with the diaspora Jews.

At this stage the earliest Christians did not in any way feel part of a new religion that was distinct from Judaism. They were, in fact, quite orthodox Jews who happened to have a few eccentric views, as other Jewish groups did. These particular eccentric views were that Jesus was Messiah and that the last days were upon them. It seems likely they used the Lucan psalms and it does not require a careful reading of these familiar passages to reveal that they are quite Jewish. The psalms are Mary's, Zechariah's and Simeon's songs, and the angelic doxology: Luke 1:46-55, 68-69; 2:29-32, 14. The common theme is the glory of God's people Israel (the literal Israel); even the "men on whom [God's] favour rests" in the doxology would be seen at this time solely as Jews. In short, this early Christianity was strikingly different from what we know today; Paul had not yet made his very significant input. These early spiritual forebears of today's Christians were in fact Messianic Jews.

(2) The crucified, risen and ascended Jesus is the Messiah

It was in this atmosphere that Peter delivered his great speeches recorded for us in Acts 2 and 3. His opening words, addressed to his "Fellow Jews" (Acts 2:14), state unequivocally that they were now in "the last days" (Acts 2:17, interpreting the "afterwards" of Joel 2:28). From Acts 2:22 on Peter reminds his audience of God's accreditation of Jesus being shown by the miracles that he did, and recounts how *they*, those he is addressing, assisted by the Romans, had crucified him. God, however, had raised him from the dead and Peter explains how David had declared to God: " .. you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay" (Psalm 16:10). Peter now

"confidently" emphasizes to his brother Jews that David is dead, his place of burial being known. Rather, Peter argues, was David talking prophetically of his descendant Jesus, whom God had raised to life, of which they are all witnesses. It is Jesus, not David, who ascended to heaven: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

The title *Christ*, to which we are all very accustomed, tends to disguise the profundity of this declaration of Peter's. We are being informed that Jesus is *King*, king in the Davidic line, and that he is now sitting upon the throne of David, at God's right hand. This is nothing less than the fulfilment of two very important prophecies. The first is in Ezekiel 21:25-27, where the profane and wicked Zedekiah is told that the kingdom is to be a ruin "until he comes to whom it rightfully belongs" and God adds: "to him I will give it". The other is Luke 1:32 the very passage we are examining in this study, where it is announced to Mary that "The Lord God will give [Jesus] the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end." The Lord's reign had begun, but it was from no earthly Jerusalem but the heavenly one, as confirmed by Galatians 4:26: "... the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother" and Hebrews 12:22: "... you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God."

(3) The two factions in the early church

Right at the beginning of Acts 6 there is a notable development. We read of "Grecian Jews" and "Hebraic Jews", that is *Hellenists* and *Hebrews*. The squabble over the distribution of food to the two groups is a small indication of a larger difference in attitude between these two divisions in Jewry, and thus also in the incipient Christian sect within Jewry. The Hebrews were Aramaic speaking Palestinian born Jews and the Hellenists were Greek speakers; they were either natives of Palestine or temporary settlers from the diaspora whose first language and culture was Greek. It is virtually certain that there was no actual linguistic barrier between the two groups – each would know the other's language but would be more at home in its own. The names of the seven who were charged with resolving the food problem indicate with fair certainty that they were Hellenists. Two of them stand out and receive special attention in the succeeding two chapters; one of them is Philip but it is the other who concerns us most: Stephen. It is clear he understood much more clearly than the original apostles what the significance of Jesus for traditional Judaism was, no doubt because of his greater experience of the Greek and Roman world.

The evidence for Stephen's understanding lies in his famous defence

consequent upon his being arraigned before the Sanhedrin. The charges were blasphemy against God and Moses, because he had said that Jesus would destroy the temple and do away with the Law (Acts 6:14). For all that false witnesses were used to press home the charges, there can be little doubt that Stephen had been making declarations along these lines in view of the nature of his defence (Acts 7).

Most significantly the concept of the importance of the land itself receives a strong rebuff in that Stephen concentrates on Israel's history before coming into the land. The only reference to being in the land is the building of Solomon's temple, where Stephen emphasizes that "the Most High does not live in houses made by men" (verse 48), going further than Solomon's own remarkable statement recorded in 1 Kings 8:27; it is a powerful confirmation of Jesus' own declarations to this end already referred to². Small wonder that the irate Sanhedrin, mob-like it would appear, "dragged [Stephen] out of the city and began to stone him" (Acts 7:58). His martyrdom and the ensuing persecution set off the first missionary activity outside Judea, carried on principally by Hellenists. These fled from the ravages led by Saul of Tarsus and carried the gospel to where they sought refuge. They were unnamed evangelizers, originally from Cyprus and Cyrene, and this first large-scale preaching activity took place in Syrian Antioch; it was here that the term *Christian* was first used (Acts 11:19,20,26b). The Jerusalem church, as a consequence, became predominantly Hebrew and hence more conservative; the scene was set for further conflict but happily this was ultimately to lead to the church's emancipation.

After Stephen's death Christ himself directly intervened, certainly in the vision to Saul and presumably in that to Peter in the Cornelius incident. These experiences caused a Messianic Jew and a Hellenist-born Hebrew of the Hebrews (Philippians 3:5) to realize that God's calling was not limited to Jews. Hitherto Peter would have felt as Simeon did in his song (Luke 2:32 citing Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6): salvation would come to the Gentiles by their becoming part of a God-fearing Jewish world. And Paul would have believed similarly though without accepting the fuller ramifications of Simeon's song. But it had now been shown them that citizens of *any* nation may come to God direct – through the only available means now afforded: Christ. The astonishment with which the church received the news of the opening of this door cannot be missed, even after all the intervening centuries: "So then, God has granted even

² The notion that God requires central locations for worship has continued to bedevil believers throughout the ages: Jerusalem, Constantinople and Rome are three such locations yet Jesus, Stephen, and subsequently Paul made it abundantly clear that "God .. does not live in temples built by hands; .. he is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:24,27).

the Gentiles repentance to life"³ (Acts 11:18).

(4) A problem from conservative Jerusalem

It was the activities of the Hellenists in Syrian Antioch that precipitated the conflict referred to above. "Some men came down from Judea [doubtless a delegation from the Jerusalem church] and were teaching the brothers: Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). Paul and Barnabas were deputed by the church at Antioch to go to Jerusalem to discuss the matter and "they reported everything God had done through them" (verse 5). The original demand for circumcision and adherence to the Law was repeated by Pharisee members and a long discussion ensued. This led to Peter repeating his experience with Cornelius and his household, arguing: "Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are" (verses 10,11). After Barnabas and Paul recounted how God had supported *their* work among the Gentiles James makes a remarkable speech. He cites Amos 9:11,12:

"In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name," declares the Lord, who will do these things.

In Acts 15:16,17, however, a modification of the Septuagint variant of the text is cited, not the Septuagint itself, and not the above version emanating from the Hebrew; rather surprisingly we observe that *Edom* becomes *men* who *seek* the Lord rather than *being possessed*. The reason for this difference between the Hebrew and Septuagint (Greek) versions is that the Hebrew script consists solely of consonants, and the two consonants *d* and *m* can refer either to *Edom* or *man* (*Adam* in Hebrew). Now the expression "David's fallen tent" is metaphoric no matter which variant is employed; David himself was not the subject of the passage. In the time of Amos it referred to the future restoration of the

³ Regrettably Peter later backtracked, albeit not completely, to the position he had been in prior to seeing the vision. Like many in later ages he found it difficult completely to slough off the ancient traditions and prejudices with which he had grown up. So we read of Paul rebuking him severely in Antioch when he refused to eat with non-Jewish Christians: Paul makes it quite clear that the Law is finished (Galatians 2:11-21). It is comforting to realize that Peter acknowledged his error, as the general tenor of his first letter indicates. In particular, in appealing to his readers to be holy as God is, he adds: "...for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:16). This is a quotation from Leviticus 11:44a and very significantly Peter omits verses 44b and 45, which constitute the command, now revoked, not to eat certain animals, then defined as unclean.

Davidic line, about to be extinguished, and, as was shown earlier, this was still awaited by Jesus' disciples, as well as by very many of their contemporaries. The context tells us, of course, that *David's tent* means *David's lineage, dynasty or kingdom*. But it is now evident from Acts 15 that the restored kingdom of Israel was understood, even by the Hebrew element, not to be the resumption of a royal Jewish dynasty ruling over a victorious Israelitish nation, but rather to be Jesus the Christ (King) ruling over the new Israel of God, the church, with its Jewish and Gentile elements of equal status. Jesus is reigning over a spiritual house. "And we are his house" (Hebrews 3:6)⁴.

The result of this conference in Jerusalem was a compromise. Gentiles were accepted, but were told by James "to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood" (verse 20). That this *was* a compromise is shown by the next verse: "For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath." It is not the custom today for the Christian community, almost wholly Gentile, to attend synagogue on the Sabbath or any other day; *it was* the custom when this compromise was reached. In any event, Paul, who was a participant in this great debate, wrote subsequently "... if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing" (Galatians 2:21). Since "... we are no longer under the supervision of the law" (Galatians 3:25) the only one of the four proscriptions that the Christian must abide by today is the abstinence from sexual immorality.

(4) Conclusion

We conclude therefore that it is quite unjustified to apply the Old Testament prophecies about Israel's restoration to the modern nation of Israel since the kingdom has *already* been restored. David's fallen tent was restored when Jesus ascended into heaven and he is reigning *now* upon the throne of David, seated at God's right hand. What is more, as we read in Colossians 1:13, the Father "has brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves"; we are already "with Christ .. in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). Those convinced that events in the Near East must so conspire that a beleaguered Jerusalem awaits relief from him whom their forebears slew are likely to be very surprised, should the King who has inherited David's throne return elsewhere, as a thief in the night, to be with his true Israel.

⁴ The author of *Hebrews* very possibly had Isaiah 16:5 in mind in penning these words; though its original context was confined to the downfall of Moab it may now be seen to have a far wider significance:

"In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it - one from the house of David - one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness."

Obituaries

John Harold Weaving: 1918–1995

As one of the founders of *The Endeavour Magazine* and as a promoter of its ideals, John Weaving has left a deep mark on the Christadelphian community. He was a person of many sides, who, from his student days until the moment of his death, somehow found time for a diversity of activities which few could match. Professionally he was a distinguished research engineer. Though a Birmingham boy, he obtained an Honours degree in Mechanical Engineering at London University, then a PhD at Cambridge for a thesis on the discharge of exhaust gases from the internal combustion engine. He could have stayed on at Cambridge, but the closeted life of a Cambridge don in the late 1940's did not appeal to him, so he returned to his home town and joined the Austin Motor Company as a Senior Research Engineer, in which capacity he pioneered a new type of gas turbine, among other things. When the company merged with British Leyland, he was chosen to set up a central research laboratory for all the divisions, and to manage it. He also held positions of responsibility in the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, the Motor Industry Research Association, and an EEC organisation looking into pollution caused by cars. For three years he was visiting Professor at King's College, London, and on retirement he became an independent engine consultant, among other things co-ordinating engine research in British Universities.

For most people a life of activities like these would be full already but for John Weaving that was only half the tale. He was a gregarious type, no loner, and the joys of family life did much to sustain him. However, he was no pubs and clubs man. His life had no room for such frivolities. He was a person of deep religious conviction, and as a young man was baptised a Christadelphian, though he had no such family background. For some time he was a member of the Acocks Green Ecclesia, but for the latter decades of his life, of Birmingham Central. The faith that he embraced was not a sterile fundamentalism but one in the line of the best reformers. It meant an open Bible and an open mind. Throughout his life he was a student of his Faith. His reading ranged from John Thomas to Rudolph Bultmann, and he took classes in New Testament Greek, and retirement allowed him to begin a course in Theology at Birmingham University. Being gregarious he wanted other to share his studies, so he organised classes of religious study, open to any interested, for week nights, half days, week-ends and even whole weeks, many, but by no means all, under the Endeavour aegis. He also

wrote articles, and for 15 years edited *The Endeavour Magazine*. Many can attest to the stimulus they received from such classes. He was not a great orator, but his conviction and willingness to listen as well as to speak made a deep impact. As a writer he was at times too impatient with those who did not share his wide reading, and presented conclusions in unfamiliar words for a traditional Christadelphian readership, not explaining fully the Scriptural basis for his reasoning. Some were provoked by this and saw it as attacks on the "traditions of the elders", distorting both his message and his purpose. But few of those who crossed swords with him could argue from the basis of so balanced a Christian life.

The Faith of John Weaving was equally in mind and heart. From student days and to his death he was committed to show Christian love by caring for deprived children. There was no personal basis for this, in that he did not have a deprived childhood himself. And his love for others did not stop at childhood. Hundreds of his acquaintances can tell of practical acts of help and kindness that he dispensed despite all kinds of personal inconveniences involved. For the children he began while still a Cambridge student a Sunday School in Nelson Street, in the middle of the Cambridge slums. A Youth Club on a weekday night soon followed, with seasonal parties and outings thrown in. There was no snoozing on Sunday afternoons for him! On returning to Birmingham he observed that while the City had demolished the old back-to-back slums, the social problems had moved out to the Council estates on city outskirts. So here, on the edge of Birmingham, he started a similar organization of Sunday School and Youth Circle at Turves Green, and the long term results of this in converts to the true Faith are still with us. More recently he joined with other kindred spirits to found a residential home for deprived children: Tutnall Children's Home, in the countryside some miles outside the city. This involved of course capital expenditure, and finding regular income to pay the ongoing costs. All these problems were overcome and the home opened with the resident parents, their own children, and foster children sent by the local authority because the natural parents were unwilling, or unable in the eyes of authority, to look after their offspring. Most recently it has become a specialised home for sexually abused children in need of special attention in addition to that ordinarily required by children from unstable backgrounds. As such it has flourished and is regarded as a home leading the whole area in this very specialised work. John Weaving was very much involved in the day-to-day running of it until his death.

What he achieved he did not achieve simply by talent for organization, or teaching or by scholarly genius, but through his transparent sincerity. What he could not do was to be insincere. The

Spirit of Christ had touched his heart.

The Endeavour Magazine started with the dual aim of encouraging more open discussion of the problems of our Faith, and of encouraging more practical Christian works in our community. Both these ideals shone brilliantly throughout his life, which he lived to the full, right up to the end. Our sympathy is with Pam, their children Roger, Michael and Rachel, and the other members of the family. W. G. Lambert

The family requested no flowers at the funeral except from the family, but contributions can be sent to Tutnall Children's Home, c/o Mr R E Weaving,

The Coach House, Astwood Road, Hanbury, Bromsgrove, Worcs. B60 4BF

Millicent East: 1921-1995

Millicent was one of the Standeven family, her father Percy being a well-known speaker for many years. She was one of the first Christadelphian sisters to go to university, winning a scholarship to Oxford in 1938 where she read English at St Hugh's College. One of her lecturers was the writer Tolkien (of *Lord of the Rings* fame). She subsequently taught English at Huddersfield Girls' High School and at Lily & Stone Girls' High School, Newark.

Baptised at Oxford in 1939, she married Arthur East ten years later. They set up home in Newark and for 40 years were strong workers for the ecclesia there. Modest and retiring, she cared for others and was always willing to help where she could. She was, however, a deep thinker, and this combined with her knowledge of languages, books, and the Bible gave her a life-long interest.

After retirement Arthur and Millicent worked for the Christadelphian Bible Mission, spending some time in Barbados helping the brotherhood there. They found this a rewarding time, meeting brethren and sisters from a very different background. They also took the opportunity to pursue their interests in the natural world – God's creation. On returning home they continued with teaching overseas, acting as Bible Mission team leaders.

They were regular attenders at the Christadelphian Summer School in Birmingham since the 1960s. This was an enjoyable time for them. They felt it important to support the School and in turn they received support from it. Arthur regularly sold some of his paintings there to raise funds for the Bible Mission. New and lasting friendships were made over the years in the relaxed and happy atmosphere where there was time to talk, study, and share ideas and experiences.

In 1988 they moved to Derby. Millicent was ill for the last two years of her life, bearing her suffering patiently and without complaining. She fell asleep in Jesus on 9th July. Our sympathies are with Arthur, John & Greta and the rest of the family.

Ian McHaffie

Are You Concerned About Age?

Bill Robinson considers again a subject covered more than 30 years ago by John Weaving in a series "Dating the Past". It is necessary to point out that such articles in no way support the theory of evolution. In the intervening years evidence of design in the universe has grown greatly, mostly from the work of modern theoretical physicists.

It is quite in order to ask children how old they are; they will normally tell you with evident relish. But it is not in order to put the same question to a mature woman. Age does concern us, and with increasing maturity it is looked upon as an enemy; if any proof were needed it is only necessary to note the flourishing market in wrinkle removers and like cosmetic products. Such products are indeed just that – cosmetic; the natural aging process continues apace in spite of all our efforts.

Many of us reflect just as seriously upon a bygone age. Mankind's mortality not only puts a limit on how many years we can look forward to; it also means we can at best relate back to great-grandparents and no further. In my own fantasy I can go back to the mid eighteenth century. I possess a photograph of myself as a child with my mother, grandmother and great-grandmother; this last mentioned was born in 1842, the year of Mozart's wife's death. In my imagination this takes me back to 1756, the year of Mozart's birth. It is a fantasy, a nonsense, but it has taken me back two and a half centuries.

But this is only a pinprick of time in relation to what has existed before and we are led to ask the ultimate questions: how long has there been life on the earth? And how old is the earth itself?

For centuries no one doubted that the earth was "young" and that it was the centre of the universe. It came as a very great shock half a millennium ago when this latter point was challenged:

"This fool wishes to reverse the entire science of astronomy; but Sacred Scripture tells us that Josue commanded the Sun to stand still, and not the earth."

Such was Martin Luther's response to Copernicus's conclusion that the earth went round the sun. It contradicted the then universal belief that the sun circled the earth. Later, when Galileo used the newly-invented telescope to prove that Copernicus was right, the Pope was anxious to show that Catholics were just as devoted to Scripture as the Protestants. But he was more subtle:

"God is all powerful and so could have established the machinery of the universe in such a way that man could never hope to

penetrate its mysteries. Moreover, he could arrange things such that all the evidence pointed to one particular mechanism at work – without it actually being that mechanism at all. Thus even if man were in possession of everything that constituted total proof of a particular mechanism, one still could not be absolutely sure that, in truth, it did correspond to reality.”

And in our day the spirit of Martin Luther and Pope Urban VIII is still strong. Two issues ago an article appeared in this magazine which exactly reflected the Pope's view¹. The author argued that God created the universe so as to look old, although it was new. This argument can just as readily be used to “prove” that God created the universe last week, or even an hour ago. With our mortal span it is relatively easy to accept Bishop Ussher's creation date of 4004 BC; it is a very long time ago. But just consider the possibility that creation *did* take place an hour ago. It has been pointed out that human beings of all ages, all replete with navels, would suddenly appear, the older ones having inbuilt memories of parents who never existed, of colleges, offices and factories they never attended. God would have provided them with photographs on mantelpieces and in wallets showing close relatives they had never in fact met, and they would be able to consult archives giving evidence of centuries old events that never took place. Common memories of great events such as World War Two would be given to millions of people and God would have put all these things on to a planet in the void of space, orbiting a gigantic sun. Countless numbers of other celestial bodies would also be instantly produced, *instantly* giving us the infinite universe. One could readily expand this fantasy, for it *is* another fantasy; it illustrates the barrenness of the created history hypothesis. There is no scientific answer to this hypothesis, though bringing the creation date to an hour ago – one hour one minute ago there would have been nothing – helps us appreciate how very unlikely it all is. And if we can accept the evidence, say, of the existence of our children, whose births we remember, can we not accept the evidence from many sources that tell us that the earth and life itself are very much older than 6000 years?

Now our contributor of two issues ago is no lone voice. “Nearly half the adults in the United States believe that God created the universe within the last 10,000 years. What reason do they give? ‘The Bible says so.’”² One must believe that the account in Genesis 1-3 is literally true

¹ Ian Cockcroft: *Creation and Created History*, Endeavour No 92, November 1994, p10-14.

² *Creation and Time. A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation/Date Controversy*, Hugh Ross, 1994 (Introduction). The figure of 10,000 is adopted instead of the 6,000 based on Biblical chronology because, it is said, the genealogies in Genesis miss out many generations – rather inconsistently on the part of fundamentalists who maintain that the Bible is literally true and without error.

since the only alternative is evolution. This is ridiculously untrue. Genesis itself suggests that divine creation took a long time. As Hugh Ross observes:

"Examine the creation on any scale, from a massive galaxy to the interior of an atom, from a whale to an amoeba. The splendour of each item, its beauty of form as well as of function, *speaks not of instantaneous mass production but rather of patient attention to detail, of infinite care and delight.* Such delight with work in progress is expressed through Genesis 1 in the oft-repeated statement: 'And God saw that it was good.'"

So how should we look at Genesis 1-3? I suggest that the basis of any understanding should be the appreciation that the Bible is not a scientific textbook; it is a textbook of faith. The literal interpretation of these early chapters was an adequate explanation of the great beginning until the movements of the heavenly bodies was understood a few centuries ago. Within roughly the last couple of hundred years its inadequacy became all too apparent when geology and associated sciences showed that the earth itself, and life upon it, were millions of years old. One of the most important of these scientific techniques, radiometric dating, to be considered later in this study, has only been developed during the present writer's lifetime.

These opening chapters of Genesis are testimony to God's revealing Himself using concepts that would be understood by the first readers. The truth that was conveyed was the spiritual truth of a single transcendent God who was above and beyond nature, the creator of everything, sharply different from pagan ideas of gods who were part of nature. It is like a portrait painted by a great artist conveying the likeness and personality of the sitter in a way that an anatomical diagram would not. We should accept that God chose to reveal Himself to mankind not in an advanced technological age but when everybody lived close to nature; they could only wonder at such natural phenomena as the glory of the daily rising and setting of the sun and the progression of the seasons. The simple majestic language of the opening chapters of Scripture was the perfect medium for primeval mankind to comprehend all that was necessary in those far-off days. And we should remember that while God speaks to us in this narrative, He speaks to us through this ancient people.

The significant evidence that the earth and living matter are of the great age referred to will now be investigated.

The Evidence of Geology

Geology is the study of the earth mass – the whole bulk and not just the surface. By the simple observation of great land discontinuities, such

as a cliff face, distinct layers are readily seen. Frequently these layers, or strata, are horizontal, but very often they are not. And sometimes they are not even linear but undulating. Yet again some strata enclose different types of rock within them. We learn from volcanoes that rocks are formed by the cooling down of molten matter, or magma, so we conclude that successive strata were laid down over what must have been a very long time indeed. Terrestrial movements account for the inclined and undulating strata and these too point to the whole process happening slowly over millions of years. Within many of the layers are fossils, the calcified bodies of what once were living creatures. The calcification process is the replacement of the organic structure by minerals, yet preserving the original physical shape, and this too is not a speedy process. The opponents of this logic appeal to what they term *Catastrophism*. This postulates that the earth's crust buckled during the flood; fossils were formed instantaneously and animals which survived for a short period strove to find the highest, unflooded, areas until they too succumbed. All mankind save Noah and the other seven were drowned last of all.

This explanation is often referred to as *Creation Science*; if people want to believe this, just like wanting to believe the earth was created replete with a history that had never happened, then there is no argument which can refute it. Fresh evidence can always be made to fit, but it is against the whole natural physical order of things. Possibly the best known defenders of creation science are Morris and Whitcomb, the authors of *The Genesis Flood*. The complete inadequacies of the explanation have been shown by Alan Hayward in his *Creation and Evolution* and by Michael R Johnson in *Genesis, Geology and Catastrophism*.

The Greeks didn't have a word for it

From the time of the Greek philosophers until about a century ago all matter was deemed to be made up of a limited number of basic parts. From the earliest belief that these *elements* were earth, air, fire and water it was later realized that there was a much finer subdivision. By the eighteenth century the basis of modern chemistry had been established by such men as Lavoisier and Priestley; there were still *elements* and the smallest part of each element was called an *atom*. This is a Greek word meaning *indivisible*: no further subdivision was considered possible.

Around the turn of the present century a strange phenomenon was perceived: certain materials emitted a radiation. In 1896 Henri Becquerel observed that uranium salts emit rays similar to X-rays. X-radiation itself had only been discovered the previous year, by Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen. These developments intrigued Pierre and Marie Curie and

their subsequent work led to the realization that there were three different types of radiation that were electrically positive, negative and neutral; later Sir Ernest Rutherford called them alpha, beta and gamma rays. The Curies went on to discover two new elements, polonium and radium; they emitted radiation and Marie coined the word *radioactive* to describe the phenomenon.

As a result of this work it was now realized, in effect, that the word *atom* is a misnomer. Strictly, mankind had now entered the *tomic* (*divisible*) *age* and not the *atomic* one since this smallest part of an element is capable of being divided further. The particles that result are, not surprisingly, called *sub-atomic* and it is the disintegration of the atom that results in the emission of radiation. The atom was by now seen as consisting of positively-charged protons and negative electrons. In 1923 Rutherford stated that there had to be another sub-atomic particle, the neutron, having no electrical charge; in 1931 the Curies' daughter Irene and her husband Frederic (surname Joliot-Curie) discovered important properties of another penetrating radiation described the year before by Bothe and Becker. Early the next year Sir James Chadwick, having reviewed this work, interpreted the particles as the neutrons Rutherford had postulated. Though subsequent work has shown that there is a whole series of other sub-atomic particles, the three principal ones were now known.

The structure of the atom

There are about a hundred different types of atom and each may be visualized as spherical and having a massy ("heavy") nucleus surrounded by a shell of almost negligible mass ("weight"). The nucleus has a positive electrical charge, balanced by an equal negative charge carried by the outer shell. The outer shell is composed of electrons, each bearing unit negative charge, and the nucleus consists of protons and neutrons. The proton has unit positive charge, and the neutron, of the same mass as the proton, has no charge as has already been stated. Broadly speaking there is about the same number of protons and neutrons in each nucleus. However, the fundamental character of an atom, governed by the number of protons in its nucleus, is not altered by a variation in the number of neutrons, and such variations exist. This gives rise to the phenomenon of two or more separate atoms being identical in every respect save that they differ slightly in mass (and of properties depending on mass) owing to this difference in the numbers of neutrons in their nuclei. Each atom showing such variation is called an *isotope*. The chemical nature of the atom – what other atoms it can unite with to form compounds, and what kind of compounds, is determined solely by the protons and electrons.

The function of the neutrons is to separate the protons and thus reduce their mutual repulsion which would tend to make the nucleus disintegrate. In some cases disintegration does take place, as has been shown, giving rise to the emission of radiation. Neutrons or protons, or both, are destroyed in the process. If only neutrons disappear the chemistry of the element remains the same, but if a proton or protons disappear it becomes a different element. Uranium has two isotopes, uranium-235 (92 protons and 143 neutrons) and uranium-238 (92 protons and 146 neutrons). As might be expected (because of the fewer neutrons) uranium-235 is more fissile than 238 and advantage was taken of this in constructing the first atom bomb.

When uranium undergoes fission it splits into a succession of less fissile elements, and ultimately becomes the stable element lead, which is called the *daughter product*. At each stage of disintegration matter is lost and becomes energy – about 45 million times as much as burning the same weight of fuel. Hence the explosive power of the atom bomb, and the heat that fuels nuclear power stations.

Now this process of radioactive decay has gone on since creation and clearly affords a means of estimating the age of archaeological remains and of the earth itself.

The Measurement of Radioactive Decay

An estimate of the age of material which contains partly decayed radioisotopes may be obtained by ascertaining the ratio of undecayed to decayed matter; it is also necessary to know the *half-life* of the radioisotope under investigation. This means what its name suggests. The *half-life* indicates when *half* of the radioactive material is decayed and half, of course, remains. A further elapsing of this length of time means that a quarter remains; *it is not all consumed*. Clearly, after the passing of a third half-life time only an eighth will be left, and so on:

$$1 \rightarrow 1/2 \rightarrow 1/4 \rightarrow 1/8 \rightarrow 1/16 \rightarrow 1/32 \rightarrow 1/64$$

The half-life gives a measure of the potency of a material; substances with a half-life of a few seconds can be considered completely radiation-free after a minute or so, though a substance with a half-life of 28.9 years (that of the artificial isotope strontium-90) will not be safe for many years after that.

The Basis of Radiometric Dating

Whilst it is relatively simple to ascertain both the half-life of a given radioisotope and how much of it is present at a particular time, it is not always straightforward to find out how much there was present at the starting time (creation, say). When the daughter isotope (the product of the decay) is itself stable and remains within the sample being examined there is no difficulty. This is the case in one of the rock-dating methods:

the age of uranium-238-bearing rock containing the daughter isotope lead-206 is found to be roughly 1.5 billion³ years. The whole technique is not without problems of course but these are surmountable and will not be summarized here.

The decay of potassium-40 into calcium-40 and argon-40 is a more widely used method of dating than the uranium to lead method; this is because of its greater abundance. The two daughter isotopes are generated in the ratio Ca:Ar::8:1 so only one of the products needs to be measured; argon, a gas, is the one generally employed since the presence of naturally occurring calcium-40 obscures that obtained by decay. Now argon occurs naturally too - it is roughly 1% of the air we breathe - but the difficulties this presents are also surmountable.

A very old earth

The obvious inference from the long half-lives referred to above is that the earth is very old. This is met by recent-creationists with the retort that God created daughter elements at the same time as the original radioactive elements just to make them look old - the Pope's explanation. This is just another example of the purpose of God in creation being to deceive humankind, another example of the inconsistency of claiming the Bible is literally true but the book of nature is a forgery. There is however another piece of relevant evidence. This is the complete absence of nuclides⁴ with half-lives of say, a million years or so, which would be expected to be found if the earth is only 10,000 years old. As Hugh Ross writes⁵:

"...the universe cannot be very young because most radioactive elements no longer exist at all. The radioactive elements with half-lives of millions of years or less (except the byproducts of other radioactive elements with longer half-lives and the products of local or cosmic radiation) are completely gone. Enough time has elapsed for every bit of these elements to decay away. Therefore, the universe and the earth must be at least a billion years old".

The principal part of the next article will be an examination of radiometric dating. This has relevance to the age of the earth but even more to what happened in historical time; I refer to radiocarbon dating. Carbon is unique among all the chemical elements in that it has more compounds than all the other elements put together; it is the stuff of life itself.

³ The *billion* here is the American one, now used widely in Britain, exclusively so in financial circles since the early 70s; it is a thousand million, 10⁹ (1 followed by nine noughts).

⁴ A *nuclide* is an atomic species in which all atoms have the same atomic number (same number of protons) and mass number (same number of protons plus neutrons), ie, it is a particular isotope.

⁵ Hugh Ross: *Creation and Time. A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation-Date controversy*, chapter 9: *Scientific Evidences for the Universe's Age*, page 95.