
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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An Unveiled Threat?

A photograph taken exactly a century ago shows members of the Liverpool Ecclesia on a picnic out in the country. Most of the men are wearing what today would be called "casual clothes" but all the women are formally dressed and wearing hats, the elaboration of which varies inversely with their ages. On a similar occasion Corinthian women would have been wearing shawls, not veils as was once thought. Julia Booth argues that wearing hats at our services today is nothing more than a relic of a fashion which is now out-dated

It all began with two apparently ordinary little events. What began, you ask? Well, a process of thinking that eventually led me to see how the church – our church among others – has effectively, if unwittingly, restricted both the power of the God it worships and the liberty of the individuals it comprises.

One evening I arrived at the home of two elderly, widowed sisters who, as a result of physical problems, were unable to attend Sunday meetings and were therefore holding a little Breaking of Bread service in their front room. I liked that. For some reason, which I guess has to do within my personality, I had always enjoyed these small, homely, informal services much more than the traditional ones, and experienced a deeper sense of the nearness of Christ. There was no doubt that he was there; didn't he say he always is? In fact, we should all have been aware that we were sharing something good together with him, and therefore joyful in spirit. We were. So, why did I lose sleep that night trying to solve the riddle that had formed in my head, "when is a church not a church?"

You see, none of the sisters present in that front room was wearing a hat. Yet they were all older than I, all of longer membership in the meeting and all had demonstrated on previous occasions their firm adherence to established traditions. Our ecclesia didn't even possess its own meeting-room; why then, I asked myself, did God require the womenfolk to wear headcoverings to share a meal with his Son in our hired hall but not in their own homes? Perhaps He didn't; The God I had come to believe in through Scripture does not keep changing the rules and confusing people, so the obvious deduction is that any confusion arises out of our own thinking. Significantly when I put it to one of the Arranging Brethren that there was real inconsistency of reasoning in this case, he mistakenly assumed I had been offended by these sisters' behaviour, and the ecclesia made yet another rule – hats must be worn at home for the Breaking of Bread!

My second story also concerns the matter of hats – or should it be a matter of veils or scarfs? No indeed; we're talking about hats with a capital "H"! It was the occasion of an ALS fraternal, and an extremely windy day I must add, which was why I had tied a scarf around my otherwise rather

wild and desperate-looking hair. I was watched very closely, however, by two elderly members of the meeting as I unpacked my large, floppy hat from a bag and replaced the scarf. The brother sighed with relief; according to him, God didn't like gypsies in the meeting – well, *he* didn't anyway. According to the sister, it was a disgrace not to wear your best clothes. After all, you would dress up to see the Queen, wouldn't you?

I would, yes, and wear a hat, if she expected me to do so, but not even my erstwhile counsellors would have denied that a scarf would suffice while walking the dogs at Balmoral, and that it would be unusual to wear hats at the royal dinner-table. To equate our worship of Christ with paying homage to an earthly monarch is to ignore Christ's own teaching that God's only command is for us to emulate his love in service for one another. No reigning King or Queen would ever demand that we love them, so we honour them by obedience to the accepted rules of etiquette. The Almighty does not require that a woman curtsy before Him but that she loves justice and mercy and walks humbly with her God, just like a man.

Royals have always dictated the fashions and social convention of their time, but the spirit of God's law never changes; He was, and is, as unlike any King or Queen as he was unlike the whimsical gods of the Greeks and Romans. As for fashion, if neither Peter nor Paul liked women's fancy hairstyles, what might they have said about some of our ladies' huge, flowery or feathery coverings that get in the way and are more suited to the Ascot races?

I believe social convention was at the root of Paul's advice to the church at Corinth, but the various arguments put forward for using headcoverings in our present society often become seemingly illogical, and very few people I have met actually accept any of them. If sisters are mostly wearing hats simply to "keep the peace" then it follows that someone, somewhere, is making rules that God never made.

I am sure this arises out of an insistence that Paul's advice to a particular problem at Corinth is more important than the problem itself, which isn't necessarily ours! A proper understanding of the thinking and feelings of the early Christians would show that what some have called the apparently disjointed, contradictory and unsubstantiated nature of Paul's writing arises from the fact that he is addressing *them* not us, and does not explain himself to a readership of centuries later. Paul did not need to tell the Thessalonians who "that man of sin. the son of perdition" was because, as he says two verses later, "Don't you remember? I told you all this when I was with you." (2 Thessalonians 2: 3,5). One thing is clear; the church at Corinth was young, large, cosmopolitan and factious. It needed Paul's unifying influence and especially his reminder that respect for Christ was paramount. Any practice was to be rejected if it brought his name into disrepute.

In our time, surely no-one outside our faith would even begin to

consider that hatless women bring disgrace upon the church. Neither would any of them be persuaded that headcoverings somehow glorified God by symbolically disguising the glory of man - somewhat contorted reasoning that I once accepted myself in the absence of a more convincing argument in favour of headwear. As such, it was a shock to discover that some of us are not concerned about the man in the street; the wearing of hats is seen as neither a prerequisite for women's acceptable worship of God nor as a demonstration of holiness to outsiders, but as a symbol of unity and humility amongst ourselves. How can such a symbol have a unifying influence, however, when all those concerned are divided in their understanding of what the symbol represents, and how can there ever be a "symbol" of humility? This is a paradox, and a return to the philosophy of the Pharisees, who assumed that God looked on their outward demonstrations of faith rather than their hearts. In either case, any compulsory requirement for the act is in conflict with the spirit of Christ.

The man in the street, it must be said, probably never notices our headcoverings anyway, because we mostly do not wear them in front of him. It's as if some magic takes place between organ voluntaries; magic that only works when women's heads are covered, because hats are plonked on and pulled off at the beginning of one and the end of the other. I have always dismissed *any* kind of superstitious behaviour, and it certainly has no relevance for the female Christian.

Jesus Christ personally sought out the womenfolk as much as the men to offer them life and teach them the law of love, and only he, the Son of God, comes between any woman and her Creator.

There will always be a wide range of beliefs and understanding among Christians, just as there will be differences of personality and experiences in life, and we will never grow in grace or mature in spirituality if we continue to base our fellowship on mundane and petty things, insisting on obedience to unwritten rules, when the written ones are already more than long enough. Total conformity of doctrinal opinion on minutiae cannot possibly exist, and if our mutual need for God's grace and mercy does not unite us in fellowship, then we will want more than a hat to help us!

We each have an individual conscience, but the fact of Christ's indwelling seems to take second place to an assumed dependence upon "the meeting". We preach liberty in Christ and then make slaves of each other. Jesus threw overboard the religious paraphernalia of his time which had been the bane of Judaism and had rendered the Temple sterile. He was angry with the Jewish leaders who laid guilt upon guilt, anxiety upon anxiety, and deafened the people's ears to the gentle voice of God. Unnecessary rules laid down by the church create doubts and fears and intrude upon the grace and mercy of a Father who demands nothing more than that we love Him, and that we accept what he is anxious to offer us - peace of mind and eternity. Any witch-hunts within communities like ours are really no less than a



veiled return to Catholicism with all its horrors of hell.

The Jewish world was a cloistered one and so, quite frequently, is ours, with too much emphasis on the extended family and too little attention given to learning through life's experiences - being "in" the world while not of it. Dr Samuel Johnson criticised the practice of sending young people into monasteries and thus depriving them of those experiences of life which are essential to true development of character; they became "institutionalised". We should take heed of his words and have mutual respect for each other's God-given powers of reason, remembering that it is thanksgiving that gives glory to God, not lip-service to doubtful duties.

That women cannot possibly need hats, long hair or short hair - or even husbands - in order to approach their heavenly Father is surely indisputable, and their liberty to do so should not be restrained. Indeed, it cannot, and this fact was the assured conclusion of my own thinking on the matter.

However, we must all refrain from giving offence - or should it be rather refrain from taking it? Once again there is a need to be careful with words written for the benefit of a society very different from our own. It is true, of course, that the spirit of Paul's message remains; idol-worship always was, and always will be, an excuse for self-indulgence. Yet Paul's warning about the exercise of liberty in Christ was specifically about meat offered to pagan gods, which could have far more serious consequences for the "weak" brother than sisters not wearing hats! The simple Christian message in those days was that Christ had risen, and that only the God whose Son he had claimed to be had the power to give eternal life; there were no other gods. Paul seemed to be inferring that the weak-minded might consider the eating of the "food of the gods" tantamount to a sanction of all religious worship in vogue at the time, and therefore be persuaded in his own mind that he could "sin, that grace might abound"; that God had in fact blessed Venus or Diana. You had to be strong to accept that an idol like that was nothing.

It comes across in Paul's writings that he was far too spiritually minded to have intended dragging his readers down into endless arguments about material things. He reprimanded some of the early Christians for needing milk when they should have been weaned off it, and it seems he was never happier than when he could address a more enlightened readership - as ours emphatically should be. It was the risen Christ he preached; a heavenly priest and King, who has destroyed all barriers between Heaven and earth, and expects his subjects to aspire to his higher plane of thinking.

Nearly 2,000 years on, our actions prove that human nature hasn't changed at all, and that each successive generation of believers has to struggle against the conflicting and fear-inducing opinions of those who seem unable to accept individual freedom to express the love of God, and therefore thwart any progress up the spiritual ladder.

New Testament scripture teaches that the church is a collective term for the people of God, and it is repeatedly declared that God does not dwell in any confined space. Yet, very early in its history, the established church returned to a form of Judaism, with its materialistic notions of consecration and holiness, and as a worshipping body we have never been able to eliminate this. Jewish law was for schooling a nation; Christ's law is for mature individuals who can recognise the outworking of that law in love, and therefore make a confident, personal response.

All this led me to the firm belief that God accepts women in the meeting room in the same way he accepts them elsewhere, and I found it refreshing and encouraging to learn of others reaching the same satisfactory conclusion – Bill Robinson, for example, and Ian and Averil McHaffie, in their various articles on headcoverings. Reasoned consideration of the matter will inevitably highlight the need for every generation of believers to reflect the light of God within the context of the secular social customs of their time. Of what spiritual value is it to us if we preserve in aspic, as it were, long-forsaken customs of the established church while, at the same time, we assume God frowns upon all its other traditions and shun them?

It was social convention that once prohibited women's voices from being heard, too, but in an age when they are free to speak, can anyone seriously claim that women displease the Creator by reading His Holy Scripture aloud in fellowship with His Son?

Since Christ pulled down all the barriers, what right have we to rebuild them? "Playing safe" was the game of the man who buried his single talent, and he didn't get very far. The wise man or woman knows that no-one will ever have all the answers to everything, so they get on with their work, confident that Christ lives and forgives; there are more important things to do than worrying about man-made mountains.

Women at the Time of Jesus

"The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there." This epigram of L P Hartley's (the opening words of his novel "The Go-Between") struck such a chord with historians that in the remarkably short space of twenty years it was to be found in the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*. Only too often history has been, in the words of Professor Barraclough, "the attempt to discover on the basis of fragmentary evidence the significant things about the past."* No such criticism could be made of Ian and Averil McHaffie's booklet "All One in Christ Jesus" from which they have kindly allowed us to reprint Chapter 3.

* Geoffrey Barraclough, *History in a Changing World*, 1955, p 29

(3) Women at the Time of Jesus

In the ancient world the position of women varied from culture to culture and within any particular civilisation depending on social class, civil law and religious attitudes.

Sources

It is not easy to interpret the different sources available, and caution must be observed against picking out a view to fit one's own preferences.¹ Questions need to be asked such as: What social group are we dealing with? Does this refer to rich or poor, rulers or ruled? Is the writer stating his own preference or is he speaking on behalf of others. How much does his thinking and attitude find approval elsewhere in his own time and later? In making comparisons, is like being compared with like? It is difficult to answer these questions, but it is useful to be aware of the limitations in the available material.

Sources for Judaism are the Mishnah and the Talmud, the Apocrypha, the New Testament, writers like Flavius Josephus and Philo (both first century AD), and occasional inscriptions.

The Mishnah ("Oral Teaching") is a book of rules compiled in Palestine in the second century AD but using material going back at least to the time of Jesus. It represents the combined teaching of Jewish sages who sought to expound idealised rules for every aspect of life. They aimed to serve God by preserving ritual purity, defining that which was clean and unclean (food, objects, animals, people), and upholding the separation of Jew from Gentile. It is a matter of debate how far these rules were accepted or put into practice.

The Talmud ("Study") comprises the Mishnah with various commentaries upon it by later Rabbis. There are two versions, one produced in Palestine, the other in Babylon.

¹ Katharina von Kellenbach, for example, in *Anti-Judaism in Feminist Religious Writings*, (Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1994) objects to the way she considers Judaism has been blackened in order to show Christianity by contrast to be better in its treatment of women. We have tried to avoid this pitfall.

The Legal Position

In official Judaism, women were legally possessions of their fathers and, after marriage, of their husbands.

She continues within the control of the father until she enters into the control of the husband at marriage.

(Mishnah: Ketuboth "Marriage Deeds" 4:5)

By three means is the woman acquired and by two means she acquires her freedom. She is acquired by money or by writ or by intercourse.... And she acquires her freedom by a bill of divorce or by the death of her husband....

(Mishnah: Kiddushin "Betrothals" 1:1)

Thus a wife was acquired in virtually the same way as property:

... Property for which there is security can be acquired by money or by writ or by usucaption [habitual use].

(Mishnah: Kiddushin "Betrothals" 1:1 & 1:5)

As was said centuries earlier,

He who acquires a wife gets his best possession. (Ecclesiasticus 36:24)

Women were expected to stay secluded within the house and to attend to household duties.

... These are works which the wife must perform for her husband: grinding flour and baking bread and washing clothes and cooking food and giving suck to her child and making ready his bed and working in wool....

If she brought slave women as her dowry they could do these jobs instead, but, Rabbi Eliezer says: Even if she brought him in a hundred bondwomen he should compel her to work in wool, for idleness leads to unchastity....

(Mishnah: Ketuboth "Marriage Deeds" 5:5)

The wife was regarded as an inferior. She had to obey her husband as a master, but on the positive side the husband was obliged to be faithful to her and treat her kindly.

The law ... commands us also, when we marry, not to have regard to portion, nor to take a woman by violence, nor to persuade her deceitfully and knavishly; but demand her in marriage of him who hath power to dispose of her, and is fit to give her away by the nearness of his kindred; for, saith the Scripture, "a woman is inferior to her husband in all things." ² Let her, therefore, be obedient to him; not so that he should abuse her, but that she may acknowledge her duty to her husband; for God hath given the authority to the husband. A husband, therefore, is to lie only with his wife whom he hath married....

(Flavius Josephus (30-100 AD), *Against Apion* 2:25)

² Footnote in *The Works of Flavius Josephus* (1886) by William Whiston (translator): "This text is nowhere in our present copies of the Old Testament."

Children had to respect their father before their mother. If there was danger to life, the husband had to be saved first.

A man must be saved alive sooner than a woman, and his lost property must be restored sooner than hers.

(Mishnah: Horayoth "Instructions" 3:7)

A husband had the right to claim anything his wife found and he could force a vow upon his wife or annul any vow she had made.

According to Josephus, husbands had the right to divorce wives but not vice-versa.

... when Salome [sister of Herod the Great] happened to quarrel with Costobarus, she sent him a bill of divorce, and dissolved her marriage with him, though this was not according to the Jewish laws; for with us it is lawful for a husband to do so; but a wife, if she departs from her husband, cannot of herself be married to another, unless her former husband put her away. However, Salome chose not to follow the law of her country, but the law of her authority, and so renounced her wedlock.

(Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 15.259)

Nevertheless, a woman who was mistreated could apply to the courts for a divorce. Financial safeguards built into the law also protected the wife, so that casual divorce was difficult for the husband. According to Mark 10, however, women did divorce husbands, though perhaps Jesus intended his comments for a wider audience than just a Jewish one.

And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." (Mark 10:11-12)

Ironically, only widows and women who had been divorced were legally independent from control by men.

Religious Life

In Solomon's Temple the women had access along with the men but in Herod's Temple, according to Josephus, women were excluded from the inner court.

... there was a partition built for the women ... as the proper place wherein they were to worship....

There was also on the other sides one southern and one northern gate, through which was a passage into the court of the women; for as to the other gates, the women were not allowed to pass through them; nor when they went through their own gate could they go beyond their own wall. This place was allotted to the women of our own country....

(Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 5.199)

The Mishnah describes the separation of the women from the men in the

Temple:

Beforetime [the Court of the Women] was free of buildings, and [afterward] they surrounded it with a gallery, so that the women should behold from above and the men from below and that they should not mingle together. (Mishnah: Middoth "Measurements" 2:5)

In former times women in the synagogues may have been called on to read from the Torah but later they were forbidden to do so.

Our Rabbis taught: All are qualified to be among the seven [who read], even a minor and a woman, only the Sages said that a woman should not read in the Torah out of respect for the congregation.

(Babylonian Talmud, Megilla "The Scroll of Esther" 23a)

Any man could be called on to read from the Law but it was considered a disgrace for a woman to do so, just as it was thought a "disgrace" were a man in rags to do so.

Women and Education

The comments about women being eligible to read indicate a basic literacy, and it is reckoned that the ability to read and write was higher among the Jews than among other peoples. Since women were expected to keep the Law, they must also have been given teaching on its content. After the Exile in Babylon Ezra taught the Law to all who would listen.

And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. (Nehemiah 8:2-3)

Ezra was helped in teaching the people.

Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

(Nehemiah 8:7-8)

Since women attended the synagogue on the Sabbath, they would continue to receive instruction and exhortation. The words spoken by Mary the mother of Jesus, Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist, and Anna the prophetess indicate that they, at least, had a good grounding in the Old Testament Scriptures.

The Mishnah mentions the teaching of Scripture to sons and daughters, though some texts omit the words "and to his daughters":

"... he may teach Scripture to his sons and to his daughters."

(Mishnah: Nedarim "Vows" 4:3)

[The law] ... commands us to bring [our] children up in learning and to exercise them in the laws, and make them acquainted with the acts of their predecessors, in order to their imitation of them, and that they may be nourished up in the laws from their infancy, and might neither transgress them, nor yet have any pretence for their ignorance of them.

(Josephus *Against Apion* 2, 26)

Since Timothy's father was a Greek (Acts 16:1) and presumably not a believer, he was taught the Scriptures by his mother and grandmother who were obviously well educated.

I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you.

(2 Timothy 1:5)

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

(2 Timothy 3:13-14)

Beruriah, the wife of Rabbi Meir (2nd century AD) was said to have studied "three hundred laws from three hundred teachers in a single day" (Babylonian Talmud: Bavli Pesahim 62B). She was able to discuss the meaning of Scripture competently with her husband (Berakoth 10a).

Yet there was disagreement about the extent to which women should be taught, as indicated by the omission of "and to his daughters" from some texts of Nedarim 4:3, quoted above. Another passage in the Mishnah illustrates divergent views.

Certain merits may hold punishment in suspense for one year, others for two years, and others for three years; hence Ben Azzai says: A man ought to give his daughter a knowledge of the Law so that if she must drink [the bitter water] she may know that the merit [that she had acquired] will hold her punishment in suspense. R. Eliezer says: If any man gives his daughter a knowledge of the Law it is as though he taught her lechery. R. Joshua says: A woman has more pleasure in one *kab* [measure of something] with lechery than in nine *kabs* with modesty.

(Mishnah: Sotah "The Suspected Adulteress" 3:4)

The context is the application of the "Bitter Water Rite" (Numbers 5) to a woman suspected of adultery. It was thought that studying the Law enabled an individual to build up merit. A well educated woman therefore might be inclined, it was thought, to indulge in immoral behaviour (e.g. adultery) in the belief that her acquired merit would compensate for her sin. Why the same

danger did not apply to men is not clear, but several quotations present women as basically licentious. Because men find women sexually attractive, there is a tendency among some male writers to transfer their sexual desires on to the woman and assume it is her nature rather than theirs which is responsible.

Even the sound of a woman's voice is lustful.

(Babylonian Talmud: Kiddushin "Betrothals" 69a)

Do not look upon any one for beauty,

and do not sit in the midst of women;

for from garments comes the moth,

and from a woman comes woman's wickedness.

Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good;

and it is a woman who brings shame and disgrace.

(Ecclesiasticus 42:12-14)

Women, like unmarried men, were not allowed to teach schoolchildren for fear that being in the presence of the opposite sex they would easily fall into immorality.

An unmarried man may not be a teacher of children, nor may a woman be a teacher of children. (Mishnah: Kiddushin "Betrothals" 4:13)

A further element contributed to cut women off from education. Women were exempt from carrying out time-required aspects of the Law, as this would interfere with their household duties:

The observance of all the positive ordinances that depend on the time of year is incumbent on men but not on women....

(Mishnah: Kiddushin "Betrothals" 1:7)

Women were therefore not obliged to attend festivals though they often did so. But exemption from time-required laws easily turned to exclusion, so that women became excluded from active personal participation in study of the Law or active involvement in religious activities in the synagogue even when time-relatedness was irrelevant.

Women are excused from such devotions as twice-daily recitation of *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-9, 11:13-21; Num. 15:37-41), use of phylacteries during prayer (mandated by Deut. 6:8), active participation in public worship (especially in leadership roles), and most important of all, in participation in communal study of sacred texts. (Judith Wegner, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah*, OUP, 1988)³

Women were additionally restricted because for part of each month they were

³ Judith Wegner, brought up in an orthodox Jewish community in London, was herself originally excluded from Talmudic study. Thirty years later, after becoming a wife and mother, and Assistant Attorney General for the State of Rhode Island, she earned a doctorate in Judaic studies. She was the first woman to read from the Torah in a prominent American conservative synagogue.

regarded as ritually unclean. Attendance at the Temple even in the Court of the Gentiles was then disallowed.

The Temple mount is still more holy, for no man or woman that has a flux, no menstruant, and no woman after childbirth may enter therein.

(Mishnah: Kelim "Vessels" 1:8)

Thus, in the thinking of many who produced the Mishnah, women were generally denied the opportunities open to men to develop spiritual understanding and stimulus, to appreciate for themselves the meaning of God's will and revelation, and to teach and encourage others apart from their own children.

The value seen in studying the Law, but apparently often denied in practice to women, is described by Rabbi Nehorai (2nd century AD).

I should lay aside every trade in the world and teach my son only Torah. For every trade in the world stands by a man only in his youth, but in his old age, lo, he is left in famine. But the Torah is not that way. It stands by a man in his youth and gives him a future and a hope in his old age.

(Babylonian Talmud: Kiddushin 82B)

Demeaning Statements about Women

Rabbi Juda ben Elai (150 AD, but echoing statements made earlier) said:

There are three Benedictions which one must say every day: "Blessed be He who did not make me a Gentile"; "Blessed be He who did not make me a woman"; "Blessed be He who did not make me an uneducated man."

(Tosephta "Additions": Tractate Berakoth "Benedictions" vii, 18)

This statement should not necessarily be taken as intentionally demeaning to women, but reflects the exclusion of women from religious study, the learning or teaching of the Law, and active participation in congregational worship. For a meeting to take place in a synagogue, ten men needed to be present. Women, were classed along with slaves and minors, and could not be included to make up the ten (Babylonian Talmud: Berakoth, vii, 2). This exclusion of women, and the legal restrictions laid upon them, reinforced the view that women were inferior beings. Some comments are particularly derogatory.

It is not possible to have a world without either a spice dealer or a tanner. But happy is the one who makes his living as a spice dealer, and woe is the one who makes his living as a tanner. It is not possible to have a world without either males or females, but happy is the one whose children are males, and woe for him whose children are females.

(Babylonian Talmud: Kiddushin 5:14 C-D)

"And the Lord blessed Abraham in all things" (Genesis 24:1):

What is the meaning of "in all things"?

("All One in Christ Jesus" - p 15)

Rabbi Meir says, "He had no daughter".

Rabbi Judah says, "He did have a daughter, and her name was 'with all'.

(Babylonian Talmud: Kiddushin 5:17A-C)

Rab and R. Judah were walking down the road, and a woman was walking in front of them. Said Rab to R. Judah, "Lift up your feet before Gehenna."

(Babylonian Talmud: Kiddushin 4:3A)

Women were not allowed to bear witness in court.

... the witnesses must be men, not women or minors.

(Jerusalem Talmud: Yoma "The Day of Atonement" 43b)

According to Josephus this was because of the "levity and boldness of their sex".

... let not a single witness be credited; but three, or two at the least, and those such whose testimony is confirmed by their good lives. But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex; nor let servants be admitted to give testimony, on account of the ignobility of their soul; since it is probable that they may not speak truth, either out of hope of gain, or fear of punishment.

(Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 4:219)

Women, it is presumed, do not lead "good lives". On the basis of Sarah's denial in Genesis 18:15 it was argued that women are liars.

On occasions the evidence leads in other directions. Rabbi Hisda is reported to have said, "Daughters are dearer to me than sons" (Baba Bathra 141a). The anonymous Palestinian Jew described as Pseudo-Philo (first century AD) presents a favourable view of women; this is thought so unusual that the suggestion has been made that this anonymous writer is in fact a woman.

Domestic Life

In home life we can see a more positive picture. In addition to the usual time-consuming but essential household duties (food, clothes, looking after children), the wife had the huge responsibility of ensuring that the purity laws were kept. These involved thought, knowledge and ability, and any mistake affected her husband and his religious service. It was considered great merit to a wife to encourage and enable her husband and sons to do the study of the Law from which her fully occupied home-life precluded her:

Wherewith do women acquire merit? By sending their children to learn Torah in the Synagogue and their husbands to study in the Schools of the Rabbis. (Babylonian Talmud: Berakoth "Benedictions" 17a)

Naturally she was expected to adhere to the Law in her everyday morality, as was her husband.

Conclusion

It appears that women were considerably restricted by the legal framework and were discouraged from religious involvement outside the home. In domestic life they had considerable influence and responsibility, though they were nevertheless regarded as inferior to men. The demeaning comments are not typical of Judaism alone but of the ancient world in general. Even in modern times such attitudes are regrettably common. Nevertheless, these comments devalued women and suggest that those who spoke in such a way regarded women as "things" rather than people.

Jesus' message particularly appealed to these who were devalued by the religious system – those not able to keep to the Law with its requirements as defined by the scribes and Pharisees. "... this crowd, who do not know the law, are accursed," said the Pharisees of those who believed in him (John 7:49).

Jesus' counter-claim was revealed in his prayer:

"I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes."

(Matthew 11:25)

In Jesus they had access to God in a manner denied by the traditional interpretations:

"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

(Matthew 11:28-30)

It is no wonder that this new approach was seen as liberating by those who had previously felt unable to approach God acceptably.

Against this background it is instructive to see the positive attitude Jesus adopted towards women. They were regarded by Jesus and the early ecclesias as valued, individual human beings in the sight of God, not as possessions of men and not as "things". From the beginning they played a prominent and active part.

("All One in Christ Jesus" - p 17)

Something Old, Something New

"If I were pressed to present my own analogy for the relationship between the old and new covenant forms of Israel, it might be to liken the old to the bulbs that have recently burst into new life in my garden with a glorious display of daffodils. Alternatively it might be to liken the old to the caterpillar which, after pupating, gives rise to a butterfly . . ." Les Boddy explores the implications of Paul's analogies in Galatians 3 and 4.

Prophetic Announcements

John the Baptist looms large in the early parts of all four gospels. Luke tells us that an angel of the Lord told Zechariah that many would rejoice at the birth of his son John for "He will be a great man in the Lord's sight. . . . From his very birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and he will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go ahead of the Lord, strong and mighty like the prophet Elijah. . . . He will get the Lord's people ready for him." (Luke 1:15-17)¹ After the birth, Zechariah himself, speech restored and filled with the Spirit, prophesies about John saying "You, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High God. You will go ahead of the Lord to prepare his road for him, to tell his people that they will be saved by having their sins forgiven." (Luker 1:76,77) Here in Luke's first chapter we are being told in no uncertain terms that the time for the restoration and salvation of God's people was at hand.

In Matthew 3 we are told that John, at the beginning of his ministry, came preaching that the kingdom (rule or reign) of God was near, that God was about to send punishment, and the way to escape was to confess their sins, repent and be baptised in preparation for the one who was to come after him. Matthew presents John as fulfilling Isaiah 40:3, as do the other evangelists, Luke giving us the longest quote from Isaiah 40 finishing with "All mankind will see God's salvation." Here we have a strong hint that the restoration and salvation which John is heralding will involve not only his own people, the old covenant people of God, but all mankind. Clearly something momentous is about to take place!

That John was demanding a radical change in the people of Israel is indicated by the fact that he warned them not to think that they could escape punishment by claiming to be descendants of Abraham. This reference to Abraham would certainly have touched a raw nerve among the people of God, as we can see from later controversies involving Jesus and Paul.² It should have warned them that they were about to be asked to participate in

¹ Quotations are from *The Good News Bible*

² John 8:31-41; Romans 4; Galatians 3,4

a reassessment of their relationship with God. But not only did John warn them not to rely overmuch on being already sons of Abraham, he also invited them to submit themselves to baptism, a baptism not unlike that which converts to Judaism were expected to undergo before joining the ranks of the holy people of God. By implying that those who already considered themselves to be the children of Israel needed such a purification, just as much as the new convert, John was telling the house of Israel that they must be prepared to go through a renewal process if they wished to remain as the people of God and so be a part of the community that he, John, was getting ready for the Lord. Something new was afoot!

Wedding Bells

John was the forerunner, pointing ahead to someone new who was about to appear on the scene, someone who would baptise not with water but with the Holy Spirit and fire. Later, when Jesus himself had gathered disciples together, some of John's disciples went to Jesus to ask him why his disciples did not fast like they did. (Matthew 9:14). Jesus then likens his own disciples to the guests at a wedding party (the sons of the bridechamber - AV) suggesting that, to his mind, there was something like a wedding going on when and where it was simply inappropriate to be fasting. This for Jesus was undoubtedly part of the something new for which John had prepared the people. Jesus immediately takes the opportunity to reinforce the point with two parables. There are problems, Jesus says, in mending an old coat with new cloth, and in putting new wine into old inelastic wineskins. In such a simple everyday way he tried to help John's disciples, and others listening, to understand that God now required a new thing of them which would involve learning to leave behind some aspects of the old.

In John's gospel, John the Baptist himself is said to have recognised that he was only the friend of the bridegroom and therefore of diminishing importance (John 3:27-30). The aptness of the comparison may escape us today because of our different customs. The friend of the bridegroom, the *shoshben*, then had a much more important role in a Jewish wedding than today. It was he, not the bride's parents, that arranged the wedding, bringing bride and groom together, sending out the invitations and presiding at the wedding feast. John could not help having at the back of his mind the Old Testament picture of Israel as the bride of God. He thus recognised that Jesus had come from God, he was the Son of God and Israel was his bride thus anticipating the passages in the epistles which speak of the church as the bride of Christ.³

In spite of this striking leap of faith, John later had difficulty in understanding the words and deeds of Jesus as the fulfilment of that new thing that he had himself foretold. Thrown into the dungeons of the fortress

³ 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:22-32

of Machaerus in the mountains near the Dead Sea for rebuking Herod, we can imagine the despair of this child of the desert within the narrow walls of his underground prison. In Matthew 11:2 we read of him sending his disciples to Jesus with the question "... are you the one John said was going to come or should we expect someone else?" Jesus answered with words that echo verses from Isaiah (29:18, 19:35; 56:1; 61:1) indicating that these were being fulfilled in his ministry of healing and of preaching the good news to the poor. John's last few weeks were thus cheered by the words of his kinsman "I assure you that John the Baptist is greater than any man who has ever lived." Whatever then this new thing was, this restoration and salvation of Israel, it was obviously so unexpected that even the forerunner found it difficult to cope with the novelty.

Listen to My Servant

When Jesus responded to John's baptism, so identifying himself with this movement of renewal, the heavens opened, the Spirit of God came down on him like a dove, and a voice said, "This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased" (Matthew 3:17). That sentence is composed of two quotations. "This is my own dear son" is a quotation from Psalm 2:7 which was generally recognised as a description of the Messiah, the mighty King of God who was to come. "With whom I am pleased" is a quotation from Isaiah 42:1 the first of a series of servant songs (see also 44:1ff; 52:13ff), where the Lord says: "Here is my servant, whom I strengthen - the one I have chosen, with whom I am pleased. I have filled him with my spirit, . . ." Later on in his gospel (12:17-21) Matthew quotes the first four verses of Isaiah 42 which makes it clear that Matthew would see in the voice from heaven a clear allusion to Isaiah 42:1. He would thus understand, as David Holwerda says⁴ that, "... the story of Jesus' baptism is intended to proclaim Jesus as God's anointed servant". This is further reinforced by the second occasion of a voice from heaven (at the Transfiguration - there were only two instances of this) where the voice from the cloud says "This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased" and adds "listen to him".⁵ The disciples needed to listen carefully to him to catch the sense in which he was engaged in bringing about God's new work for their restoration and salvation, and we, of course, need to do the same. Who was this servant and what was he to accomplish? In Isaiah 44:1 we find the Lord saying "Listen now, *Israel*, my servant . . ." so identifying His servant. Sadly, *Israel* repeatedly failed to be God's servant as Isaiah tells us in 42:18-20. "Listen, you deaf people! Look closely, you that are blind! Is anyone more blind than my servant, more deaf than the messenger I send? *Israel*, you have seen so much, but what has it meant to you? You have ears to hear with, but what have you really heard?"

⁴ David E Holwerda. *Jesus & Israel, One Covenant or Two?* p 43 Apollos, UK 1995

⁵ Matthew 17:5. So also Mark 9:8 and Luke 9:35.

The challenge of these verses must surely be faced personally by each one of us and particularly as we try in some small way here to assess who Jesus was and what he came to accomplish. In Isaiah these servant songs seem to hover between addressing the nation and some yet unknown individual as the servant. (In 49:3 the servant is identified with the nation, but in 53:8 he is distinguished from the nation for "my people" cannot mean anything other than "Israel".) However Matthew's gospel and the rest of the NT say clearly that the servant is Jesus. He is the Israel who completely and utterly fulfils the function of the servant of the Lord. He alone achieved what Israel could never have accomplished. As Holwerda again puts it; he is the "... one who by representing Israel renews Israel". C H Dodd similarly says: "The Messiah is not only founder and leader of the Israel-to-be, the new people of God; he is its 'inclusive representative'. In a real sense he is the true Israel, carrying through in his own experience the process through which it comes into being."⁶ What was new to the people of God of Jesus' day was that in order to inherit what God wanted them to have they had to be prepared to be renewed in His way, in and through His servant, the Israel of His choice, His beloved Son.

Israel, My Son

As has been said already, the voice from heaven uses words that bring Psalm 2:7 to mind, "You are my son", which in turn seems to refer back to the covenant with David in which God said "I will be a father to him and he shall be a son to me" (2 Samuel 7:14). That Jesus was son of David, the Son of David, has already been flagged in the genealogy in the first chapter of Matthew. So too in the second chapter, by the record of his birth in Bethlehem, referred to throughout the Old Testament as the "city of David". "Hence the voice from heaven announces that Jesus is this davidic king whose throne is everlasting and whose kingdom embraces the nations of the world. However, the rule of this Messianic king will not be inaugurated with wrath and fire, as John the Baptist expected, but by a humble servant who walks the way of righteousness." (Holwerda, p 44).

But Matthew has already quoted another 'son' passage from the Old Testament in verse 15 of his second chapter, where "I called my son out of Egypt" is seen as referring to Jesus returning from Egypt where his parents had fled to escape Herod's plan to kill their child. "When Israel was a child I loved him and called him out of Egypt as my son" says Hosea (11:1) recalling the message that God instructed Moses to give to Pharaoh - "Israel is my first-born son. I told you to let my son go so that he might worship me. . .". When Matthew says "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet" he is not claiming Hosea's words are a prediction - which manifestly they are not. He is saying that the escape of Israel from Egypt is a *type* of God's future deliverance of the new Israel from sin. The

⁶ CHDodd *The Founder of Christianity* p 106 Collins 1971; p115 Fontana 1973 etc

quotation has a significance which may escape us today but which Matthew's readers would be well aware of. Mary, Joseph and Jesus would not have been living among foreigners in Egypt but with their own people. Every city in Egypt had its colony of Jews - there were more than a million in Alexandria.

R T France supports this view when he says:

"It is not surprising to see the exodus taken as a type of God's future acts of deliverance; ... But a natural typological use of the exodus might be to see the new people of God as parallel to the Israelite nation and their deliverance from sin as the 'fulfilment' of the exodus event. What Matthew in fact offers is bolder than that, the proposal that Israel described in this connection as God's 'son' finds its fulfilment not in a community but in an individual 'Son of God' ... " 7

Israel then finds its fulfilment in an individual son of God - Jesus, called from the Egyptian diaspora!

After his baptism by John, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness where, as Matthew tells us in chapter 4, he is tempted by the devil challenging him to prove that he is God's son. It cannot be merely coincidence that Jesus responds to these temptations by quoting three times from Deuteronomy 6-8. Israel, after the exodus were now at the end of their wilderness journey, but Moses was not to go into the promised land and so he rehearses the events of the past 40 years and encourages them to be faithful and loyal to God. They need to "Remember that the Lord your God corrects and punishes you just as a father disciplines his children." (AV as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord God chasteneth thee), Deuteronomy 8:5, a verse that is in the immediate context of Jesus' first quote "Man cannot live on bread alone ..." (Deuteronomy 8:3) in response to the first temptation. Is not this clear evidence that Jesus saw himself as the embodiment of Israel, Israel in person, God's Son, the only begotten son of the Father, the son as God had always wanted his son to be?

Just as Isaiah's servant can refer both to an individual and to a community and God's son can refer either to the whole of Israel or to the King of Israel, so too with Daniel's son of man. There is little doubt that when Daniel, in 7:13, during his vision sees "what looked like a human being" (a son of man) that this, like the beasts in the first part of the vision, is a symbol for a whole community. What is promised to the son of man in verse 14 is later, in verses 22 and 27, promised to "the people of the Supreme God". It is of course well known that in the gospels Jesus takes over the phrase 'son of man' and makes it his own. When put under oath by the High Priest to say whether or not he was the Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus said: "So you say. But I tell all of you: from this time on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right side of the Almighty and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Matthew 26:64). Then at the end of Matthew's gospel, Jesus finally declares to his disciples "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples ..." (Matthew

⁷ *Matthew - Evangelist and Teacher* R T France p 207 Paternoster 1989

28:18,19). Could there be a clearer fulfilment of the son of man verse in Daniel 7:14, "He was given authority, honour, and royal power, so that the people of all nations, races and languages would serve him"? As C H Dodd says, "The human figure of Daniel's vision has acquired a new identity. It is this historical Person in whom, as its "inclusive representative", the new Israel, the people of God, is to emerge from apparently irretrievable disaster - 'raised to life with Christ' as Paul was to express it." (p 117)

Resurrection - Not Replacement

As far as the resurrection of Jesus is concerned, it is commonly suggested that the most likely source for his 'third day' predictions is to be found in Hosea 6. In chapter 5 of Hosea, at verses 14 and 15, we find that God threatens to attack Israel and Judah, tear them to pieces, drag them off and abandon them. The people respond at 6:1 by saying "Let's return to the Lord! He has hurt us; he has wounded us, but he will bandage our wounds, won't he? In two or three days he will revive us and we will live in his presence." Here there would seem to be a hoped for national revival or resurrection of the people of God. If this is any part of the background to Jesus' saying in Matthew 16:21, "I will be put to death, but three days later I will be raised to life" then there is further evidence that "Jesus saw his mission as the 'fulfilment' of Israel's hopes and destiny, and so understood this Israel-text as a pointer to his personal destiny" (R T France, p 259). Dodd's comment on this use of Hosea 6:2 is that "the resurrection of Christ is the resurrection of Israel of which the prophet spoke".⁸

As a final illustration of the theme so far developed in this article, let us consider John's account of Jesus' visit to the Temple recorded in John 2. When Jesus was challenged by the Jewish authorities to justify his cleansing of the Temple by performing some miracle, Jesus replied: "Tear down this temple and in three days I will build it again." (2:19). Dodd comments: ⁹

"We must recognise . . . that the saying is, like so many others, figurative: the temple stands for a way of religion and a community embodying it. The manifest disintegration of the existing system is to be preliminary to the appearance of a new way of religion and a new community to embody it. And yet it is the *same* temple, first destroyed, that is to be rebuilt. The new community is still Israel; there is continuity through the discontinuity. It is not a matter of replacement but of resurrection." France, having quoted most of this statement by Dodd, further comments (p 227) "Not replacement, but resurrection. A resurrection is in one sense a replacement. The new body is not the same as the old; indeed it needs to be very unlike it if it is to function adequately in a new sphere of existence. But there is a continuity of identity; the resurrected person is the same person as the one who died. In one sense all is new; in another sense there is no change. Is this then a suitable model for understanding Matthew's view of the new people of God?"

The evidence put forward in this article certainly points to an affirmative answer to this question. It is true that John goes on to say that

⁸ CH Dodd *According to the Scriptures* (Chapter 3(iv)) Collins Fontana 1965

⁹ CH Dodd *The Founder of Christianity* (Chapter 5) Collins Fontana 1973

the temple Jesus was speaking about was his body and that, when Jesus was raised from death, the disciples remembered what he had said and believed it and the scriptures. Obviously the saying was understood to apply to Jesus' own resurrection. However, it is clear from the rest of the New Testament that the church, the body of Christ, knows itself to have participated in that resurrection and to have become a new temple for God although it still looks forward to the future resurrection of each member and of the full bride of Christ as well as to a renewal of the whole creation.

It should now be abundantly clear that the point of this article has been to illustrate how first John, then Jesus, followed by disciples, apostles and evangelists all came to understand, not without a struggle themselves at times, that the first century Jewish community, the people of God, Israel, was at a crossroads. God had chosen their time and generation to take the people of God through to a new mode of existence. He had sent His son to be the pioneer of the way which would take him to the cross and through death and resurrection to vindication as the true son, the true servant, the true Israel, the true Messiah. Jewish Israel, to remain part of God's people under the New Covenant, had to be prepared to follow their God-sent deliverer and Saviour, otherwise they would be left behind as God moved forward. He was taking the newly reconstituted people of God into a new phase of the outworking of His purposes, now no longer just for the Old Covenant people, but for what had always been His intention for the whole world. Jesus, the true Israel, was sent to take Israel through a resurrection experience with himself.

Reaching Maturity as the Church

If I were pressed to present my own analogy for the relationship between the old and new covenant forms of Israel, it might be to liken the old to the bulbs that have recently burst into new life in my garden with a glorious display of daffodils. Alternatively, it might be to liken the old to a caterpillar which, after pupating, gives rise to a butterfly representing the new. No doubt such things exist in God's creation to help point out God's way to us. Paul's analogies in Galatians 3:23-25 and 4:1-3 make the same point, that God wanted His people to come to maturity, to move from minority as a child to majority as an adult, to leave behind the guardians of their childhood and to trust in Jesus to bring them to God as mature sons and daughters to serve him in the new circumstances of the new covenant. Paul had yet another way, by picturing the process as an olivetreesuitably pruned and grafted to include branches from wild stock. Holwerda (p 167) comments as follows:

"The metaphor of the olive tree becomes a summary statement of all that Paul had been saying. The olive tree exists only because God chose to plant Israel in the midst of the nations. Because of unbelief among those who are Jewish Israel, Gentiles are grafted into the olive tree to share in the privileges that God gave to Israel. Gentile Christians become part of the olive tree, a part of Israel whom God

elected. Since their status has been created by grace and not by their own nature, any thought or attitude on their part that minimizes this grace by assuming another basis for membership in Israel will result in judgment. Specifically Gentile believers may not assume any kind of superiority over unbelieving Jewish Israel, over the branches cut off, because all believers live exclusively from the sovereignly given grace of God. Because Israel exists solely on the basis of God's grace and because that grace promises even to heal Israel's faithlessness (Hosea 14:4), the apostle has reason for hope even for the branches that have been cut off. God, who is sovereign and gracious, can certainly, and perhaps even more easily than with the Gentile branches, graft them in again. Of course, for this hope to be realized, those under judgment and presently cut off will have to come to faith, for that is the only way to be Israel (Romans 11:23)."

In the light of the foregoing considerations, perhaps we could now venture to propose a definition of the church as Israel in its new covenant form, the old Israel resurrected and reinvigorated by the grafting in of new stock. Just as there is one God, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one hope, one Spirit, there is also one covenant, one body, one church, one people of God, one Israel. As the Westminster Confession of faith puts it at the end of chapter VII: "There are not therefore two covenants of grace differing in substance but one and the same under various dispensations.": Jesus came to build a church, his church and the church of God, built round the new covenant centred on his own sacrificial death and resurrection which breathed new life into old Israel. As O T Allis says: "This church was founded at Pentecost. It was originally wholly Jewish and is proved by this very fact to be the continuation and successor of the Old Testament church. Gentiles were early received into it and soon came to constitute a majority in it: and the teaching that the middle wall of partition between the two was completely broken down was especially, but not exclusively, committed to Paul who was in a pre-eminent sense the apostle to the Gentiles. But no one emphasised more strongly than did Paul the vital oneness of the New Testament Church with the Old Testament Church."¹⁰

Second Fiddle?

Above all, neither Jesus nor any New Testament writer ever presents the church as playing second fiddle to Judaism, or as in any sense interrupting the literal fulfilment to Jewish Israel of Old Testament prophecies. As Allis says again on the same page: "Far otherwise it (that is the Church) constitutes the fulfilment of these prophecies to both Jew and Gentile in that gospel dispensation which the prophets foresaw but saw afar off and the full and glorious meaning of which was in the fulness of time made known by the Lord 'unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit' especially to the apostle Paul".

Sadly, much of our literature seems to suggest that God is more concerned with the literal fulfilment of Old Testament kingdom prophecies to Jewish Israel than with His new covenant church founded on the work of

¹⁰ *Prophecy and the Church*. O T Allis p 166 (1945)

his Son. We are in danger of encouraging Jews to hang on to their view of being God's favoured nation when this was one of the major factors which prevented 1st Century Jews from coming to Christ. Jesus' disciples had to be prepared to relinquish their trust in being sons of Abraham, in being God's favoured nation. They had to learn that they were no less culpable, in spite of their law, than the Gentiles whom they regarded as sinners. They had to recognise that God was not just the God of the Jews but also of the Gentiles, God having worked through the Jews for the benefit of all nations that all might be saved.

If Jesus is who the New Testament declares him to be, then first and foremost we should listen to him and remember in our reading of the New Testament that Jesus had a lifelong struggle with his own people, and even his own disciples, in getting them to understand how he was going to bring about the promised salvation, how the people of God needed to be radically transformed to begin to accomplish God's purposes with the world. The evidence of the New Testament, and particularly of the book of Acts, is that the first apostles and disciples had to learn 'on the hoof' where God wanted to lead them. They clearly had hopes and expectations about how God would proceed that they had to abandon and learn to be led by the Spirit of their Master where he wanted them to go.

Just as the Jews had, and still have, to learn to move on from the old form of the covenant to the new, not tying God down to their own understanding of the old covenant, law, promises and prophecies, but finding in Christ that freedom from the law which is the fulfilment of the law, so we too need to stop tying God down to our own understanding of how He should fulfil his Old Testament promises and prophecies when He has in fact shown us how He will proceed in the New Testament, according to the New Covenant brought, not by a servant in God's house, but sealed by the blood of the Son of the house. This does not amount to disparaging the law and the prophets but, just as we cannot have the daffodil without the bulb, or the butterfly without the caterpillar, so we must put them in their rightful place as shadows and forerunners of the new step forward in God's purposes that was effected by the only one capable of moving things on in the direction his Father wanted him to take, by the Son who is our Lord and Saviour.

The church then is, or should be, Israel matured, transformed, nay, resurrected - something old and something new - the people of God of the new covenant, taking salvation to all the world as God always intended, in fulfilment of his Old Testament promises and prophecies understood in the light of the revelation brought by his Son, the embodiment of Israel who pioneered the way through death and resurrection as the inclusive representative of his people, old and new alike. In him there is neither Jew nor Gentile and to continue to emphasise such distinctions, as Paul's enemies did, is against the spirit of the new covenant and can therefore bring no glory to the Saviour and Lord of the new community which is still Israel in essence.

Studies in Ecclesiastes (3)

The reader of Ecclesiastes may feel that the author anticipated Robert Burns "But, Och! I backward cast my e'e On prospects drear! An' forward tho' I canna see, I guess an' fear," (To a Mouse) but that is only because, to quote Matthew Arnold, he "longs to see life steadily and see it whole." (To a Friend). Wilfred Lambert, having discussed the ethos of the book (Issues 92 & 93), now commences a more detailed examination. (Quotations are from the Revised English Bible except where otherwise stated.)

The book of Ecclesiastes, to sum up our previous articles, was written between 500 and 200 BC by a Jewish Palestinian author steeped in traditional Hebrew wisdom. The problem he was grappling with was the lack of evident justice in human life and society at a time when Israel was a religious community under pagan overlords, no longer an independent political state, and when there was no generally accepted concept of life after death in which the wrongs of this life could be corrected.

Chapter 1, verse 2

We now come to examine more carefully the author's meaning in his use of the Hebrew word *hebel* "vanity" (AV, RSV) or "futility" (NEB). This word occurs 70 times in the Old Testament, and that 35 of the 70 occurrences are in the short book of Ecclesiastes indicates its importance to the author. The cognate words in Arabic and Aramaic mean "breath, vapour, steam", and this supports the usual renderings in Ecclesiastes. Also the meanings in other Old Testament books are in agreement. For example, the Psalmist in 78:33, referring to the generation of Israelites who sinned in the desert and were not allowed to enter the promised land, states that God "made their days end in emptiness," that is, they suffered the privations of the journey through the desert without ever sampling the benefits of the promised land. For them the effort was futile. Similarly Jeremiah cautions Israel not to be worried about idols of pagan gods: "the carved images of the nations are a *sham* " (10:3). It was futile to bother about things that are nothing but products of human craftsmanship. Elihu, also, condemning Job's reasoning, says, "Job gives vent to *windy nonsense*" (35:16). In the same way the Sumerian and Babylonian texts which offer material not unlike Ecclesiastes use the word "wind" for futile activity (*Endeavour* [June 1995] 12-13).

All this evidence – many more Hebrew passages could be quoted – might seem to confirm the traditional rendering "vanity" and its more modern substitutes. But the problem remains that the repeated assertion "Everything is futile" is curious in an ancient Hebrew religious book, a book which, far from asserting a nihilistic approach to life, is deeply pious and

repeatedly urges its readers to enjoy life to the full, see particularly 9:7-10. What troubles the author is not a sense that there is no purpose in life, but that the problems that he perceives have no answer. It is an intellectual *frustration*, not an overall apathy. The meanings of words can be immensely varied, both over periods of time, and even at one time different writers can employ the same word with quite different nuances. The Hebrew word *hebel* is a key word for Ecclesiastes, but its meaning is to be found from careful study of his whole text. Taking over the meaning from earlier Hebrew books can result in Ecclesiastes appearing bewildering and contradictory. The author uses it, in a special restricted sense, to refer to his bewilderment that despite all his immersion in traditional Hebrew wisdom he yet cannot answer the questions which press upon his intellect. It is "frustration" rather than "futility", and his advice to the younger generation to enjoy all God-given gifts is then fully meaningful and apposite. That he could not find answers to the problem of life was no reason to reject what an all-powerful and all-wise God had given.

Chapter 1 verse 3

Another key term in the book confirms this conclusion. It is the Hebrew *yitrôn*, often rendered "profit". In the whole Old Testament it occurs only in Ecclesiastes - ten times - and other derivatives of the same root are used in the book with the same overtones. It has been suggested that this word was coined by the author, but it might have been borrowed from Aramaic. Its importance for the book is evident from its occurring in the very first question to be put: "What does anyone *profit* from all his labour and toil here under the sun?" The question we have to ask is, "What kind of profit is the author referring to?" It is not simply material wealth and gain because in 2:4-11 the author, writing as a king free to use the kingdom's resources for his pleasure, after stating that his every wish had been gratified, goes on to assert "it was *futility* (*hebel*), all of it, and a chasing of the wind, of no *profit* (*yitrôn*) under the sun" (2:11). Clearly the profit hoped for was not on the material level, as is confirmed by 2:13: "I saw that wisdom is more *profitable* than folly." Spiritual perception is considered "profit", and the only reservation added to this statement is that the wise and fool alike die, so the cultivation of spiritual perception does not result in permanent gain: "So I thought, 'I too shall suffer the fate of a fool. To what purpose have I been wise? Where is the *profit* ?'"

So we come back to the conclusion reached before. The author's concerns all go back to his problem that, lacking any clear conception of life after death, he could not perceive how the justice of God could be reconciled with the facts of life in human society. He saw humans as suffering the same ultimate fate as animals, and ventured to ask whether man might have a different fate, but only in the shape of a rhetorical denial.

Chapter 1 verses 4-7 and 9-11

Here the passing of successive generations of humans is first stressed, in contrast to the permanence of the earth. Next the endless cycles of nature are described; the (apparent) movements of the sun, the blowing of the wind in various directions, and then the flowing of water from rivers to the sea and somehow back to the rivers. The lesson is that the earth and life on it continues as always. Nothing is new. This is not an assertion that life is either good or bad, but that the constancy of the pattern of life raises questions but does not solve them.

Chapter 1 verse 8

The correct rendering of this verse is vital to a proper understanding of the whole book. The AV's "All things are *full of labour*" is a very neutral, literal rendering of the Hebrew. The REB's "All things are wearisome" seems to make the ancient author apathetic. The following words hold the key to the difficulty:

AV

Man cannot utter it:
the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
nor the ear filled with hearing.

REB

No one can describe them all,
no eye can see them all,
no ear can hear them all.

The REB is certainly giving the correct sense even if it is more periphrastic than the literal AV. Three phrases are stressing the vast number of "all things". The first of the three, literally "a man is not able to speak", is apparently made to refer to the "labour" by the AV, but the following two phrases certainly elaborate "all things", not "the labour", so the first is naturally taken in the same way. A very small emendation of the Hebrew text involving only the smallest change to the consonantal text (*yākōl* "is able" to *yekalleh* "can finish") gives an even clearer sense, as in the following literal rendering:

No one can finish describing [them]
No eye can be satisfied with seeing [them]
No ear can be filled with hearing [them]

So the writer is not asserting here that the whole of life is futile, but that the attempt to think out the problem of life involves so much material that the effort is excessive. At the end of the book the same point is repeated:

There is no end to the writing of books,
and much study is wearisome (12:12)

The last word here has the same Hebrew root (*yḡ'*) as the AV's "labour" in 1:8. The NEB consistently puts "wearisome" in both places.

Wilfred Lambert contributed the section on Babylonian wisdom literature to Wisdom in ancient Israel, Essays in honour of J A Emerton, (lately Regius Professor of Hebrew, Cambridge University.) Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Our Dear Doctor

Who was Theophilus? Ron Coleman attempts an imaginary, but not entirely improbable, answer to the question.

It might seem difficult to write much about Luke since, unlike the other gospel writers, he is mentioned only three times in the New Testament and these references are of the briefest. Writing to the Colossians, Paul says, "Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you." (4:14). In his second letter to Timothy he notes that "Only Luke is with me" (4:11). In the letter which Onesimus carried to Philemon, Paul names "Lucas" among those sending greetings (v 24). And that is all. But of course Luke wrote two long books (long for the period in which they were written, on bulky papyrus) and from them we can learn much about their author — always provided we are careful to distinguish between things that are definitely stated, and inferences. These last may vary from the 'almost certain' down through 'probable', to 'possible'. A final test would be whether these inferences fit consistently together.

First, though, the situation in which the gospel and "Acts" were written. The persecution of the Christians by Nero had completely altered their standing in the Roman world. Formerly they had been thought of as Jews, and accordingly entitled to all the considerable privileges that Jews had in the Empire. Now they were on their own in a precarious situation with their legal security gone and their faith classified as an illegal religion. It was necessary therefore to avoid the unfavourable notice of the civil authorities by retaining the goodwill of their neighbours who would be inclined to regard their religion as a barbarous superstition.

"Have Christians been condemned as the felonious followers of an executed felon? [Luke] will show that Christ and his disciples have justly been pronounced innocent by the representatives of Roman law. Is Christianity despised as an eccentric, foreign superstition? He will prove that it is the true fulfilment of the religious aspirations of the Old Testament, deserving all the tolerance that Rome has shown to the Jews, and that unlike the nationalistic creed of the Jews, it is a world religion, adequate to meet the spiritual needs of a world empire. . . . Are Christians suspected of antisocial behaviour? He will portray the author of their faith as a figure of nobility, grace, and charm, able to reproduce the same qualities in the lives of his followers and to raise to decency and dignity even the outcasts from the society of men. (GB Caird. Commentary on Luke. 1963)

Turning to the man himself, four facts are certain. Luke was a doctor, as our title suggests. "Luke, our dear doctor" (GNB) is more accurate than the AV, for both "beloved" and "physician" have changed their meaning since 1611 and "the beloved physician" now sounds rather affected. Secondly, he was a companion of Paul, not merely during Paul's imprisonment in Rome, but

also in many of the journeys described in Acts, since the narrative changes to the first person from time to time – the famous “we” passages.¹ Thirdly, he was not a Jew, for in the reference in the letter to the Colossians (4:11) he is included among those who are not “of the circumcision”. Fourthly, he had never seen Christ, for in the preface to his Gospel he clearly distinguishes between those who “from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” and those who, like himself, “had perfect understanding of all things from the first”, but had this knowledge at second-hand, not having been eyewitnesses themselves.

Scarcely less certain are three more facts. Eusebius, quoted by Jerome, says Luke was a “Syrian of Antioch”. Antioch, with its port of Seleucia, was the third most important city in the Empire. (Alexandria, whose population included a million Jews, was the second.) This does not necessarily mean that Luke was a Syrian for, like New York today, Antioch was a melting-pot of races. Just as “an American from New York” could be of Irish, German or Spanish descent, so “a Syrian from Antioch” could be of Greek, Cypriot or Italian descent. (Paul the Jew said he was “a citizen of Tarsus”). Scholars say that Luke’s Greek is the best in the New Testament, because he can adapt his style to the occasion, writing sometimes formal, classical prose, sometimes in a racy narrative style using the vernacular, and sometimes the semitic ‘Bible Greek’ in which the Septuagint was written. So it is likely that Luke was a Greek.

Luke had a close relationship with a very important person, for he addresses Theophilus as “Your Excellency”, and it seems reasonable to suppose that Theophilus too lived in Antioch. The Greek word (translated “most excellent” or “most noble” in the AV) was a title conferred on men holding high office in the Roman government. When the centurion Claudius Lysias wrote to the governor Felix, explaining why he was sending the prisoner Paul to him, he addressed him as “Your Excellency”. Paul himself, when speaking to the next governor, Porcius Festus, also addressed him as “Your Excellency”. So in this very commercial city Theophilus might well have been a noted financier with large business interests. The Romans, who were very practical in matters of local government, would frequently make use of such men, giving them official positions.

In the letter to Philemon the AV translators have transliterated the evangelist’s name, instead of anglicising it, and thus we learn that it was actually “Lucas”. If Luke been a free man he would most probably have been called Lucanus. Lucas is what has been called “a slave diminutive”, the sort of name that slaves used to be given, like “Pete” for Peter and “Sambo” for Samuel. Had Luke at one time been Theophilus’s slave? To most of us today it would seem rather strange for a doctor to be a slave. But it fits exactly. In the Greek world and in the Roman Empire generally, the learned professions

¹ 16: 10-17; 20:5-38; 21:1-18; 27 and 28.

were largely in the hands of slaves who worked for masters who took the fees they earned. It was one of the most profitable branches of the slave trade for merchants to buy handsome, clever young boys in the slave markets and train them to be companions, secretaries, doctors or other servants of wealthy men. Being a slave would also be consistent with Luke being a Gentile. In the Jewish world, whether in the homeland or in the Diaspora, there was little chance of a Jew being a slave. But in the Empire there were slaves a-plenty

If Luke had been a slave we can understand why, in the gospel, he emerges as a man with the deepest sympathy for the unfortunate, the oppressed, the sinner, and the suffering. He would have experience of this if not in his own person, at least in his own life. In one way the slaves in the Roman world occupied the same position as oil does in the modern world. The economy depended on them but it took them for granted. Even the best of men of that age showed hardly any sign of sympathy for this underclass. The poet Juvenal (known to us today for his epigram "*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes*") describes in one of his satires a Roman lady of fashion having her female slaves scourged in her presence while she was chatting to her friends or having her face made up.

Of course there were exceptions to this general attitude here and there. There were some kindly cultured masters who would make of a slave something more than a slave, even a friend. For we find in Paul's epistles at least four occasions when slaves are told to work hard for their masters, and not just for *the good and gentle*, but also for the harsh. Could Theophilus have been such a good master?

We will return to this later but for the moment let us appreciate that Luke's is the compassionate gospel and he gives a special place to women, most notably in the birth narratives. It is he who gives us the vivid picture of Martha and Mary and of Mary Magdalene. There are more good things about Samaritans than in the other gospels. The evidence for this is indicated in some of the phrases peculiar to Luke. "*Blessed are you poor*"; '*bring quickly the best robe*'; '*this man went down to his house justified*'; '*her sins which are many, are forgiven*'; '*salvation has come to this house*'; '*he gave him to his mother*'; '*ought not this woman to be loosed from this bond*'; '*he had compassion and bound up his wounds*'; '*not even in Israel have I found such faith*'.

In "*Personal Mark*", in our last issue, I mentioned as an illustration of personal touches in the gospels, that in Mark's account of the healing of the woman with a haemorrhage, who had spent all she had on doctors, Luke had omitted the words, "*but instead of getting better she got worse all the time*". Some might interpret this as a bit of self-defence for doctors, but I would suggest rather that it reflects Luke's own sensitivity to the failures he must have experienced many times in the course of his career, when, despite

best endeavours, a patient was lost. That Luke was sensitive is indicated by something he does include in his account which Matthew and Mark do not. "But Jesus said, 'Someone touched me, for I knew it when power went out of me'. The woman saw that she had been found out, so she came trembling and threw herself at Jesus' feet. *There in front of everybody, she told him why she had touched him, . . .*" (GNB). Luke knew and understood how embarrassed she felt.

Another characteristic of the gospel is Luke's interest in and sympathy for things which touch the home, the family and children. Some men have this delight in homely scenes and stories because they themselves have come from such a home. Others have the same feeling for an opposite reason - this is something they have never known. From the outside they are looking in. Is not this characteristic of the early life of a slave?

There is one further piece that has to be fitted into the jigsaw and that involves the easy confidence and accuracy with which Luke relates the story of the voyage to Rome in Acts 27 and 28. It is very easy for landsmen to blunder over the technical details of sailing. But Luke treads sure-footedly through these difficulties, frequently being interested in technicalities for their own sake. An example comes from verses 16 and 17 of Acts 27: "And running under a certain island which is called Clauda,² we [note the pronoun] had much work to come by the boat: which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship . . ." The interest here is that the crew had to undertake operations in the open sea in a gale that normally would have been done in the calm of a harbour, taking advantage only of the lee of Clauda. The longboat, towed astern in fair weather, would be half-full of water and a heavy swell would make things worse. "Undergirding" consisted of passing hawsers under the ship and then tightening them to prevent the planks of the hull from starting, something even more difficult in a gale than recovering a longboat. The incident doesn't advance the story at all, indeed it needs explanation for most readers. It just reflects Luke's special knowledge.³

But Luke was a doctor; not a sailor. How did he acquire this special knowledge? Well, the great grain ships which sailed the Mediterranean often carried up to three hundred people; we are told that this one had two hundred and seventy-six passengers (some of them very unwilling - they would be chained down in fetters). Josephus relates how in AD 63 he set sail

² Gavdhos is its present name. It was the scene of the 1941 sea battle of Cape Matapan between the British and Italian navies.

³ In his short story "The Manner of Men", Rudyard Kipling gives a fascinating and detailed account of the background to Paul's last voyage, in the guise of an imaginary conversation by the captain of the grain ship who has become an Inspector in the State-run grain import agency. The story was originally published in "Limits and Renewals" (1930) but was reprinted in 1991 in the Oxford World's Classics series "Mrs Bathurst and Other Stories".

for Rome in a ship which had six hundred on board - and it too was lost in the sea of Hadria! Would not a doctor be necessary in ships like these? Perhaps Lucas was such a doctor? If he was he would have to know the chief languages in general use. We can assume that he would already have Greek and Aramaic, but added to these would be Latin, possibly, and perhaps some other local dialects.

Before venturing on a possible explanation of these facts it might be useful to list them, distinguishing the various degrees of probability. I think we can say that it is certain:

1. Luke was not a Jew, possibly he was Greek.
2. He never saw Christ but was converted some years after the Ascension.
3. He was a doctor and a well-educated man, knowing at least Greek and Aramaic very well.
4. He was Paul's constant companion for many years.

But nearly as certain as these things we can say;

1. Luke had been a slave, and had a special sympathy for the suffering, the poor and the underprivileged
2. He was brought up in Antioch.
3. He had a close association with an important public man in Antioch.
4. He had worked on a ship.

The question we now face is, how did Luke come to be converted and how become a friend of Paul's? There is one solution which is not wildly improbable, in fact we might claim it as being distinctly possible. Like Onesimus who had not been profitable to Philemon, Luke might have been a bad bargain for Theophilus. Perhaps Lucanus was the son of wealthy parents who had died. Or maybe he had been kidnapped. One way or another he was exposed for sale in the slave-market at Antioch and had been bought by Theophilus and, under the charge of the slave-master, had become "Lucas". But doubtless because of memories of his former privileged life he was unmanageable, sullen and passionate. He was disciplined, scourged even, but with no improvement. It became clear that no wealthy client would pay a fancy price for him. Theophilus was in danger of losing heavily on his investment. What to do with him?

Theophilus however has many irons in the fire. Among his interests is that of shipowner. And so Luke is sent off to sea in one of Theophilus's ships. It won't matter there that he hasn't a good bedside manner. And then one day he is called to attend to a sick passenger, an odd-looking fellow, a Jew from Tarsus. We know that Paul had some chronic disease. Some think it was eye-trouble and that is why he wrote large letters when he added the farewell in his own hand to the letters he dictated. Others have supposed malaria or epilepsy, but we just don't know. And while Luke is doing what he

can for his patient, Paul was wondering why this handsome young man seemed so wretched and distressed. So he seized the opportunity to preach Christ to him, as he did to the Philippian gaoler. Luke was converted and Paul won for himself a lifelong friend and helper.

And so the sullen and un-cooperative Luke becomes a hard and diligent worker, fulfils his early promise and rises high in the service of Theophilus until either Theophilus frees him, or he succeeds in saving enough to buy his own redemption. Either way Theophilus is impressed by the change and the reason for it, becoming interested in and sympathetic to Christianity. Luke with the memory of his own youth and hard times becomes sensitive to the needs of the poor and the outcast.

You may think it a fanciful story. But if it is not true then there must have been some alternative history that produced the character we see behind the gospel and the book of Acts. We should remember that most of the people we see in the NT, and in the Old too for that matter, are like characters in a play. They appear only briefly on the page of history but they have full and varied lives both before and after their appearance.

There remains one difficulty which has not been considered. Luke begins his gospel thus: "Dear Theophilus. Many people have done their best to write a report of the things that have taken place among us. They wrote what we have been told by those who saw these things from the beginning and who proclaimed the message. And so, your Excellency, because I have carefully studied all these matters from their beginning, I thought it would be good to write an orderly account for you." (GNB) What opportunity would Luke have of conducting these enquiries if he was constantly travelling with Paul as he visited the churches in Asia Minor and Greece?

When Paul was arraigned before Felix, the governor was loath to come to a decision (perhaps influenced by his Jewish wife) and in consequence kept Paul in prison in Caesarea "on remand", as it were, for two years. It was not a rigorous imprisonment and Paul's friends were allowed to visit him. No doubt there would be messages to and from the apostles in Jerusalem. Luke would have been an obvious courier. During this period he would have ample opportunity to collect the material for his Gospel (and also for the earlier part of Acts). When in Jerusalem he might well have stayed at the house of Mary, Mark's mother, and met there many of the leading men and women of the Palestine churches. But there was another house in Jerusalem where he might have stayed. There are good reasons (which there isn't space to give now) for thinking that John the disciple had a house there. And living in that house would be the mother of Jesus. Mary was probably only thirteen or fourteen when Jesus was born and so at the time of Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea (56-58) she could be still alive and in her early seventies. Did Luke hear directly from her lips the unique story in the first two chapters of his gospel? For surely it could only have come from her?

Obituary

Charles Greenwood: 1917-1995

Charles spent his whole life in Southampton ecclesia – as a number of his contemporaries have done. He was baptised in 1934 and quickly displayed a solid and original approach to the study of Scripture and was soon distinguishing himself as a public speaker. He was a valuable member of any study group – one, now elderly, brother still remembers with gratitude an early address on Nehemiah being gently taken apart by Charles who finished his dissection with a big smile and the comment “you really must not rely on Bullinger for chronology” – thereby revealing that he knew perfectly well the source of the young brother’s “inspiration”.

He attended a top grammar school in Southampton (those were the days when such institutions were respectable) and on leaving was trained in the bakery business, establishing a successful concern which, despite many difficulties, he kept going during the 1939-45 war. He eventually transferred to grocery and was in this trade, as his father had been, until he retired. During the war, while still a baker, after speaking at Salisbury ecclesia, some 22 miles from Southampton, he missed his last train or bus and set out to walk the journey, realising that the dough for the next day’s bread had to be mixed and set to rise in time for early baking.

He married Ann Soper in 1941, a Southampton sister – a union which lasted happily until his death. They complemented each other well and exercised hospitality at their New Forest home while bringing up their five children, born between 1942 and 1954. “Charles”, said Ann on one occasion, “is one of those people who sees no reason why he should not be able to do anything he attempts” – and as proof of this he built his own house for the growing family, kept goats (for milk) and bees, while pursuing his own style of organic agriculture.

His dedication in all that he undertook for the ecclesias was obvious to all who knew him and he never spared himself in his service for Christ. In his maturity he developed a deep wisdom based on his knowledge of Scripture and his experience of ecclesial life, and this was exercised for the benefit of many, particularly Southampton members, over the years. Probably uniquely in our history he followed his father, Reg, first as assistant secretary and then as secretary, their successive tenures of office lasting for close on sixty years without a break until 1987. An unassuming gentle giant, physically as well as intellectually, we benefited for a number of years from his presence at the Selly Oak Summer School, not just as a speaker (though that was greatly appreciated) but from the warmth of his personality and his kindly, whimsical humour. A devoted husband and father and a modest brother in Christ.

Are You Concerned About Age?

Bill Robinson continues his survey of the reasons for thinking that we live on a very old earth.

In the concluding section of the first part of this article the general principle of radiometric dating was explained. Briefly this consists of measuring the extent of the decay which has taken place in radioactive materials and comparing the ratio of undecayed to decayed matter. Since the rate of decay has been measured for all such reactions it is then possible to determine how long it has been going on for the particular articles concerned. Radiocarbon is the single most useful method of dating for the archaeologist and while it has its limitations, both in terms of accuracy and for the time range where it is useful, it has transformed the chronology of the past. Until the 1960s prehistoric Europe was largely dated by what were supposed to be typological links between neighbouring countries, relating ultimately to the Aegean and thence to the historical chronology of ancient Egypt. Radiocarbon dating has shown that this assumption was wrong – there was no link between the Aegean and the remainder of Europe and European dates generally have been pushed back several centuries.¹

Radiocarbon Dating

Carbon is the fundamental constituent of all living matter; its most common non radioactive isotope has six neutrons and six protons in its nucleus and it is thus termed carbon-12. There is another form of carbon which has eight neutrons and six protons - Carbon-14. This is radioactive, gradually decaying into Carbon-12. Cosmic radiation from outer space interacts with nitrogen in the earth's upper atmosphere to produce C-14, which combines with oxygen to form carbon dioxide. This eventually becomes distributed evenly throughout the atmosphere. But as the radioactive atoms in this atmospheric carbon dioxide decay they are replaced by new ones created by cosmic radiation so that the proportion of C-14 carbon dioxide in the atmosphere remains more or less constant.

All living tissues take up C-14 and C-12 during life in the proportion in the atmosphere and, so long as they live, maintain it at that proportion. However, after death, while the quantity of C-12 remains constant, that of C-14 declines due to radioactive decay (which turns it back into ordinary non-radioactive nitrogen). As was explained in the first part of this article, the time that it takes for half the amount of any given quantity to decay can

¹ Archaeology, Theories, Methods and Practice. Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn, 1991 p116

be found by experiment. Therefore by measuring the intensity of radiation emitted by the sample, the time elapsed since radioactive decay started can be determined. This calculation depends on the assumption that the proportion of C-14 and C-12 in the atmosphere at the time of the test is the same as when the sample died.

Wilfred Frank Libby, who first developed carbon dating, fully realised this and obtained some Egyptian objects whose calendar-date age of 5,000 years was thought to be fairly certain. He found that their radiocarbon age closely approximated to this date so that the amount of C-14 in the environment could be assumed to be constant. More accurate determinations have since shown that this was not correct. Some long-term decreases in the proportion of C-14 are now known to have taken place, due to the burning of fossil fuels, but corrections for these changes can now be made by the calibration of radiocarbon datings with other independent dating systems. Such corrections have shown in every case that the sample was in fact *older* than the original determination.

Originally a comparatively large sample was necessary for analysis but the development of the Accelerated Mass Spectrometer has made it possible to use extremely small ones – as small as a fruit pip. This enabled the Turin Shroud, a relic which was believed to be the shroud in which Christ was wrapped after his crucifixion, to be tested. Previously the ecclesiastical authorities would not permit a sufficiently large sample to be taken. Samples of 50 mg were given to each of three laboratories who agreed not to compare results to avoid any suspicion of collusion. All got the same result within 80 years, showing that the age of the shroud was about AD 1,250 and could not possibly have been used at Jesus' burial.

There are three non-radioactive methods of dating covering the range for which radiocarbon is used which can be used to confirm or, if necessary, correct radiocarbon determinations, and two independent radiometric dating methods.

Dendrochronology

As the name implies², the basis of this is the determination of the age of a tree and involves counting the rings on a cross-section of its trunk. It was developed in the early years of this century by the American astronomer A E Douglass although of course it had been known for many years that the rings indicated the age of a tree. The rings are caused by the addition of a layer of xylem³ each year. Wet years give thicker rings than dry years and thus a distinctive pattern is set up. It is not necessary to fell a tree to perform the investigation; a sample may be extracted by boring, leaving the tree

² Greek, *dendron*: tree; *chronos*: time; *logos*: word, purpose, explanation or account

³ Greek, *xylon*: wood

unharmful. By comparing samples of wood from trees of different ages in a particular region Douglass showed that clearly defined overlaps occur. A living tree that is 250 years old shares a common pattern of 150 rings with a similar tree felled a century ago.

By overlapping patterns in this way researchers dated oaks in the Belfast area back to 5,829 BC.⁴ The oldest known man-made footpath in Europe is the Sweet Track across the Somerset levels and it has now been shown that it was built from oak and other timber felled in the winter of 3,807/3,806 BC. Archaeologists had shown that it was built between 4,000 and 3,800 BC but could not be more exact because there was a gap in the tree-ring chronology in the crucial period between 4,165 and 3,807 BC. This gap has now been filled which has enabled a continuous chronology for England for the years from 4,989 to 381 BC to be developed.⁵

By obtaining radiocarbon dates systematically from the long tree-ring master sequences, scientists have been able to plot radiocarbon ages against tree-ring ages (in calendar years) to produce calibration curves back to around 7,000 BC. This enables archaeologists to calibrate a radiocarbon date by reading it off against a calendar date. Broadly radiocarbon ages diverge increasingly from true ages before 1,000 BC, so that by 5,000 BC in calendar years the radiocarbon age is 900 years too young. This is due to the fact that there was then a greater concentration of C-14 in the atmosphere than today, due largely to man-made production of C-12 from fossil fuels.

Varves

In the period after the most recent ice age, the annual summer melting of the northern glaciers fed the lakes adjacent to the glaciers of Scandinavia with melt water carrying sand and clay particles. Over the years these particles gradually settled on the lake beds; at first the coarse particles formed a light layer and, later, progressively finer particles produced a dark layer. The thickness of these annual layers was determined by the amount of glacial melting occurring in particular years. A sequence of distinctive layers from a number of deposits was built up by Baron de Geer, a Swedish geologist ("varve" is the Swedish for "layer") who linked them with more recently laid down series in estuaries, to produce a combined dating sequence going back 12,000 years. Varve dating provides useful confirmation of tree-ring dating.

Layers in the Icecaps

These layers are investigated by drilling out cores from the Arctic and Antarctic icecaps. Each year's snowfall is frozen and preserved; the

⁴ New Scientist, 17 March 1988, p 48.

⁵ New Scientist, 16 June 1990, p 30

separate layers can generally be distinguished and counted for the last 2,000-3,000 years. Beyond that the stratification is no longer visible and dating is less certain but modern equipment is able to drill out cores of such length that their bases are shown to be of the order of a quarter of a million years old. The layered structure of the ice preserves a continuous record of snow accumulation and chemistry, air temperature and chemistry, and fall-out from volcanic terrestrial, marine, cosmic and man-made sources. At the Greenland Ice Core Project site, in Greenland, the annual layers can be traced back visually for more than 40,000 years,⁶ much like counting tree rings.

Uranium-series Dating

Two radioactive isotopes of uranium decay into a series of daughter elements. Coral contains both uranium and carbon so that a direct comparison of the two can be made. Measurements of coral obtained from a borehole off Barbados showed that dates obtained from uranium were consistently older than those from carbon, with a discrepancy of up to 10 per cent. The uranium dates however matched those from tree rings. The upshot was that radiocarbon dates could be calibrated up to 30,000 years before the present, whereas 11,000 years was the previous limit.⁷

Thermoluminescence Dating

This method relies on the presence in clay of tiny quantities of radioactive matter which emit alpha and beta particles (rays) which in turn bombard quartz crystals, knocking electrons out of place. The displaced electrons become trapped in irregularities in the clay lattice. If fired clay is reheated to a temperature above 380° C (most pottery is fired at more than 500° C) the electrons pop back into their original place and emit light. By measuring the amount of such light given off and the quantity of radioactive material present, the time that has elapsed since the original firing can be ascertained. The method can be applied to very recent material and also to that up to 35,000 years old. It is useful for sites where there is little or no radiocarbon evidence or for which the C-14 dates are doubtful.⁸

Besides the foregoing five systems confirmatory of radiocarbon, there are at least seven other independent overlapping methods of dating.⁹ Why then do fundamentalists continue to criticise, or even reject them entirely? This is a question which will be pursued in a further article.

⁶ Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia, Vol 20 p 744

⁷ New Scientist, 16 June 1990, p 30

⁸ The Archaeologist's Handbook. Jane McIntosh 1986, p 142

⁹ Electron Spin Resonance, Potassium-Argon, Fission Track, Obsidian Hydration, Amino-Acid Racemisation, Cation-Ratio and Archaeomagnetic methods. These are described in "Archaeology, Theories, Methods and Practice" - see footnote 1