
THE

Endeavour

MAGAZINE

June 1998

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The Endeavour Magazine

For Christian Thought and Action

June 1998

No 99

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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.

Correspondence and articles for the next issue, our Centenary issue, should be sent to the Editor by October 22 at the latest, please.

Les Boddy, 14 Meadow Drive, Healing, Grimsby, N.E. Lincs., DN41 7RU.

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A FAREWELL AND A WELCOME

In 1964 an undated note, written hastily in the B.O.A.C. Passenger Lounge in London, fell through the letter box of the McHaffie household. It was received with delight for it bore the message that a certain Brother Ronald Coleman (who was known to be of 'good report' and 'worthy of double honour') had agreed to review 'the new hymn book when it appears' for *The Endeavour Magazine*.

The hymn book duly made its debut: the review was received and published in the Autumn issue of 1964. It bore the hallmark of the impeccability, the careful scholarship and extensive knowledge which, over the years, we came to realise was (and still is) characteristic of Ron. His contributions have always been of the 'stuff' which most often exists only in editors' dreams. He has the added virtue that not only has he faithfully followed Dr. John Thomas in being determined to conduct an independent search for truth, but similarly he has felt it his duty to share his findings.

Since January 1989 Ron has held firmly the editorial pen, and we are indeed grateful for the arduous work which he, supported by Sister Peggy (always 'for better'), has put into it. The 'pen', however, is now but a metaphor, for Ron moved into the electronics of the 1990s, learned how to command his wee, friendly mouse, became familiar with the new vocabulary, and though I believe he still considers the spell-check beneath his dignity, he has avoided disaster by always remembering to 'save'.

But with or without the wonders of technology, editing is no easy task, for pleasing everyone is an impossibility. Articles which seem excellent to some seem the reverse to others, and *vice versa*. The editor is therefore left with the problem of trying to steer a middle course.

Thinking back to the *Endeavours* of more than thirty years ago, I recall some of the comments received, and how both writers and editors at least found common ground in that quite often none of them could win. One subscriber thought the magazine 'wishy-washy' while another thought it 'too intellectual'. And after struggling long and hard to produce an impressive editorial on a vital matter, any illusion of success was soon shattered by one reader's comment: "I was not particularly impressed with the Editorial. What is needed is stirring words on important issues."!

However, another reader, more encouragingly, waxed lyrical and expressed rather well, I think, one of the main aims:

But the editor has merit, And deserves true credit,

For putting each side, When opinions divide.

And now, as we say thank you very much and farewell to Ron's editorship (but not to his contributions), we welcome gratefully Brother Les Boddy at the helm. Hopefully, after our new editor's vast experience of teaching Maths to the modern schoolchild, he won't find us too problematic, but if we venture on to biblical numerology we must try to remember the importance of getting our sums right!

Ruth McHaffie

Obituary Heather Burr 1935-1998

Heather Burr (née Mander) was an excellent organiser and teacher, sympathetic to others and ever ready to see the good in other people.

Born in Birmingham, she was baptised into Jesus at Kings Heath Ecclesia on 21st January 1953 when she was 17. She was educated at Kings Norton Grammar School and then at Shenstone Teacher Training College where she trained as an Infant Teacher.

She taught in inner-city Birmingham where many of the children were from deprived and disturbed backgrounds. She made it her business to get to know the families, their circumstances and problems, enabling her to treat each child as an individual with individual needs.

Following the 1960 Birmingham Campaign there were moves to promote Sunday School work in the city. A school was started at Rae Street, near the city centre, and she taught there throughout its existence from 1961 to 1972. When the Christadelphian Midland Sunday School Committee started a course for teachers, to be held annually at Avoncroft College near Bromsgrove, she was appointed to the committee. She used to recount how, at the first meeting, being the only sister there among five brethren, they started proceedings by saying, "First, we need a secretary" and with one accord they all turned and looked at her! Her response, "It can't be me - I can't type" was met by "You can write, can't you?" and so she got the job. The Avoncroft course included lectures, discussions and demonstration lessons. She recalled an occasion at one of her demonstration lessons before a full audience when (unknown to her) some of the children had been primed beforehand by an adult to disrupt the lesson deliberately. She kept control! Her performance at these sessions has been described as 'captivating' and 'inspiring'.

From 1959 to 1970 she also gave valuable service on the Sunday School Union Committee. She produced the first Infants Activity Book, revised the Lesson Notes for Infants, was an Examiner, took part in Forums and led workshops at the CSSU Annual Conference. She attended virtually every Christadelphian Summer School at Selly Oak from 1966. She met her husband Bob there, and for many years organised the sessions for the children. She contributed widely to the success of the School, whether in comments in discussion, chairing meetings, suggesting future plans, promoting the sale of third-world goods or arranging the social evenings. She will be greatly missed this year.

At day-school she became a Deputy Head, but retired from full-time teaching in

1972, aged 37, when she married Bob and moved to Aylesbury. She continued to teach in Sunday School and the Young People's Class and is well-remembered for her Treasure Hunts and Christmas plays. Both hunts and plays were generally in verse! A notable production was a mime of the story of Ruth. When the Sunday School lacked scholars she would go to a nearby street, tell Bible stories to the children playing there and invite them to Sunday School.

Her ability at story-telling was remarkable. If a small child became fractious or unsettled she would sit the child on her lap and tell a story. It was always a different story, created out of the situation, not a previously memorised story. Every time it was something unique and new. In this way she could hold a child totally absorbed for as long as she wished. When the story ended, there was almost always a request to continue! Heather was similarly talented at the piano, being able to play a tune without music, harmonise and adapt it at will: an enviable asset, especially for a teacher!

It was a major conviction of Heather's that Christianity is a way of life involving service to others, whoever they may be. She was greatly influenced by the spirit of Isaiah: "The kind of fasting I want is this: Remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free. Share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear..." (Isaiah 58:6-7)

She was constantly thinking of ways of helping people. She was hospitable to those who were lonely or troubled, and shared her time, energy and possessions. She raised money for Bible Mission welfare and promoted the sale of Africraft goods. She used Traidcraft and other third-world products where possible. She participated in fund-raising activities for Save the Children Fund, and spent half a day each week with the League of Friends of Stoke Mandeville Hospital. In 1996 she helped serve meals to the homeless in Aylesbury town centre at Christmas time. Had she lived, she would have wished to do much more.

After suffering from a brain tumour for about a year, Heather died on 12th May 1998 aged 63.

We are grateful to have known her. In Christ's name she influenced so many for good, ourselves and our children included. Her life of service was an example and inspiration for us all. May we meet again, by God's grace, in the Kingdom, when the words of the apostle will be proved true that "there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:39)

Our deep sympathy in their present loss is with Heather's husband Bob and their son Adrian, and with her extended family, members of her ecclesia and all her many friends.

Ian McHaffie

Obituary

Bill Robinson

1927-1998

Bill and Sheila met and married as Methodists and were later baptised as Christadelphians after Bill, in the course of his work in ICI laboratories at Northwich, met the late brother Ross Longley. Many brothers and sisters have cause to be thankful to Ross who introduced Bill and Sheila to Bible truths and Bible study.

Bill and Sheila then moved to Hull where they lived in a caravan while Bill pursued his studies in Chemistry at Hull University. They returned to Warrington and Bill worked for a while at Liverpool before moving to settle in London, where he took a teaching post at the Hackney Technical College as Head of the Maths/Science Faculty. He stayed there for the rest of his working career, continuing his own studies at Birkbeck College to obtain a Ph.D. in X-ray Crystallography.

After his baptism Bill, with his characteristic zeal and enthusiasm, entered into work for his Lord, becoming both a speaker and a campaign leader in this country and abroad. He had a great love for language and a flair for languages. He was fluent in French, German and the Scandinavian languages, and for many years assisted the CBM's work in Scandinavia. Then in his maturity there came a *cri de coeur* from Greece, and, never one to resist a challenge, Bill started to learn that most daunting of tongues, Greek. It says much for his determination that he became fluent also in Demotic Greek. He was and is greatly loved by our members in Greece. During his last visit there he baptised two new children of God, Yianna and Panayiotis, in the sea at the Gulf of Corinth although at the time he was already ill and weakened by the disease which ultimately triumphed.

When they moved to London, Bill and Sheila joined the North Finchley Ecclesia which later became the Barnet Ecclesia and has great reason to be grateful for Bill's many, many years as finance brother, for Bill was not only a polyglot but also a wizard with figures. When Barnet was acquiring a property for conversion for ecclesial use, his wizardry ensured that all debts were repaid within 7 years. (He would have made a wonderful Chancellor of the Exchequer: he watched every penny and every fluctuation in interest rates!)

His was a questing mind, and he was not content to accept at face value the dogmas of the 'elders'. His increasing understanding of the Greek New Testament led him to study the true position of sisters in the early church, and he was not afraid to publish his conclusions. Taking up the cause of sisters, he published some of his findings in this magazine in 1987-88 and later, in June 1993, published his more detailed findings in the form of a 32-page A4 booklet under the title "The Hair-do: a choice of hair styles for sisters in Christ", a study of 1 Cor 11:1-16. The criticism which came his way roused the mischievous imp

in him to consider other 'shibboleths', and sadly his later years were clouded by controversy; but his spirit was unquenched. He loved the Summer School and its opportunities for open discussion, and his many contributions both to the School and to the Endeavour Magazine have been greatly appreciated. This magazine also owes its 1987-1996 Index to Bill.

Many people will have reason to remember Bill for the help and encouragement he gave to them. (If the writer may be allowed a personal reminiscence — some 15 years ago I experienced a fire in an underground train, a somewhat unnerving event! When I got to the surface it was at a station with no other transport facilities, and my instinct was to turn to Bill for help. He hurled himself into his car to rescue me — a knight errant still in his soft bedroom slippers!) Others will remember how he encouraged them to think for themselves and to share their thoughts with others in print.

He had a great love for music, particularly Baroque Music, sang in the Nat. West Choir and was able to accompany hymn-singing on both piano and organ.

He loved and was greatly loved by his family: three children, all married, and six grandchildren.

In all his work Bill was unstintingly backed up by Sheila, and our warm and loving sympathy is with her and the family in the loss of so vital a man; husband, father and grandfather. May our Lord soon come to raise his faithful servant.

Margery McGregor

The
supreme
need
of
the church
is the same
in the
twentieth century
as in the first:
it is
men
on fire
for Christ.

(J.S.Stewart)

THE KING'S CONSORT

In the same autobiographical style that she adopted in her recently published book "The Glass Curtain", Julia Booth reflects on the common experience of injustice in our lives and asks us to consider to what extent we really portray the love of God in our everyday dealings with one another.

Following the death of Princess Diana there was a sense of outrage at the injustice of it all; that this glamorous woman whom everyone loved or loved to admire was taken away just when she was doing so much that was so good. From some quarters, however, and at a respectful distance from the funeral, came the repeated suggestion that it was equally unfair to make such huge claims of this Princess, whose achievements had depended largely upon the royal title which she had nevertheless despised. After all, there must be thousands of men and women who have done far more to help the victims of war, famine, social deprivation and the like, but the nation has seldom been aware of their deeds and their passing away has never made media headlines. Even more outrageous, perhaps, was the way in which the media had turned against the future King of England and made him a scapegoat for everything that his ex-wife should not have been.

Of course, very little in this mortal life of ours is fair, and we know that, injustice comes in many different guises, sometimes affecting individuals at a personal level but frequently arousing the indignation of the masses too. It was keenly felt by the Jewish leaders of Jesus' time who begrudged the monetary demands of their Roman overlords, and it was the basis of a scathing attack upon the Protestant Church of Ireland at the beginning of the nineteenth century by a certain Reverend Sydney Smith, incensed as he was that they levied tithes upon the Catholics for the upkeep of their own church buildings:

"I admit that nothing can be more reasonable than to expect that a Catholic priest should starve to death, genteelly and pleasantly, for the good of the Protestant religion; but is it equally reasonable to expect that he should do so for the Protestant pews, and Protestant bricks and mortar? On an Irish Sabbath, the bell of a neat parish church often summons to church only the parson and an occasional conforming clerk; while two hundred yards off a thousand Catholics are huddled together in a miserable hovel, and pelted by all the storms of heaven."¹

It is very easy for us to look at Ireland and despair, either for the arrogant interference of King Henry VIII and his Tudor successors or for the hostile attitudes of its people ever since; we shake our heads and wonder at the things men and women will uphold in the name of God or, to be more precise, justice.

¹ "Landlord or Tenant - A Review of Irish History" by Magnus Magnusson

Yet, when the Pharisees challenged Jesus' authority to teach, smarting from his unprecedented cleansing of the temple and no doubt angry for their own part that he hadn't directed his attentions to Israel's foreign oppressors, their urge to condemn was turned upon themselves (Mark 12: 1-12). As for Caesar, the Jews should have been grateful that he gave them a stable government and the freedom to worship the God of Heaven. Jesus didn't waste his time arguing about the injustice or otherwise of paying taxes to an Emperor who also liked building exotic pagan temples.

The disciples were equally concerned about matters of justice and rewards, and must have been horrified by the socio-economic implications of paying a full day's wage to a man who only worked for an hour! (Matt.20: 1-16) Again, however, Jesus was merely presenting the other side of the coin, as it were, and forcing people to stop pointing their fingers. "Listen, friend," the owner answered one of them, "I have not cheated you. After all, you agreed to do a day's work for one silver coin. Now take your pay and go home. I want to give this man who was hired last as much as I have given you. Don't I have the right to do as I wish with my own money? Or are you jealous because I am generous?" (Good News Bible) The message of the parable is that God will give according to NEED, and he piles generosity upon justice. In begrudging this bounteous treatment to others, the self-righteous are themselves playing at being God instead of remembering who they are really supposed to be - the King's consort who understands and emulates his goodness.

Children are very impressionable beings and have a keen sense of fair play. Judging a tree by its fruit was a maxim that adults learned from Jesus, but for children it is a natural thing to do, and they are not easily fooled into believing that something bad is really good. Consider this little story:

"A little girl reached up on tiptoe to peer through the window and watch her father striding away along the road, his back turned once again as it always was, Sunday after Sunday. There was no glance or wave, he didn't realise that she was there, anxiously following every step until he had disappeared around the corner, straining to see him through the tears that welled up in her eyes.

Thirty years later that same father, engaged in happy fireside conversation and reminiscing about past times, first learned of the agony he had unwittingly put his daughter through each week, in the belief that it was right to send her to that particular Sunday school, and now it was his turn to weep. If only he'd known that on each occasion she was shut alone in the front room of a strange house because the two boys there refused to play with her and bullied her instead; that she was always blamed for the mischief they deliberately perpetrated; that she was teased and admonished all the way to church in the car; that the Sunday school room was an austere classroom where they sat in rows at desks and did exams and no-one made friends with her."



Of course, it would hardly occur to a Christadelphian, especially perhaps in the 1940s, that any brother or sister in Christ could be cold-hearted, cruel and unjust, or that their offspring would ever resort to such behaviour as bullying - that is the way of the world! It is indeed, and we are all a part of it, unfortunately. For one little girl at least, such an inauspicious introduction to Christadelphian ways was never forgotten but used later, among a host of both good and bad experiences, to weigh the claims of men and women that they really portray the love of God.

HRH Prince Charles was educated in circumstances which, mercifully, fell just short of breaking his spirit. The loneliness and the bullying were more than the average schoolboy would have endured. Yet, although not actually condoned, this was accepted by his family as part of a toughening-up process befitting the future King of England. By contrast, none of Jesus' childhood contemporaries would have seriously entertained the idea that they were consorting with the heir to the throne of David, and doubtless he was left in peace to enjoy as normal an upbringing as that of any carpenter's son. The full thrust of injustice was to hit him squarely in adulthood, when it was all the more heartbreaking because it came from people who should have known better, since they were supposed to be his bride.

It has been said that a man's greatest enemy, apart from himself, is often found amongst his own associates, and men and women can be just as much at war with one another within the church as without. The bride of the absent King is a complex creature of many moods and many faces, sometimes usurping the throne in her desire to be seen and admired, careless of those who are pushed aside. Yet the King has chosen and no facet of the jewel he claims is less highly favoured than any other. The watchers of Luke 12 are the ones who will recognise and warmly meet the king, because they are content in the meantime just to concentrate on being what they know he would like them to be in their everyday dealings with humankind.

There are other, and worse, instances than that of a little girl weeping at a window for the love that has just deserted her. In an ideal church they would never be allowed to happen, but the bride has been weighed in the balance and found wanting.

Glory to her Saviour King!

Julia Booth

Kindness in ourselves is the honey
that blunts the sting of unkindness in another.

W.S.Landor

God has a secret method by which he recompenses his saints:
he sees to it that they become the prime beneficiaries of their own benefactions!

I.D.E.Thomas

Our business is to see that no one suffers from our injustice. O.Chambers

ZEAL

Most of us probably feel that we could be more zealous in the service of our Lord. We almost certainly wince when we hear or read Jesus' words to the Laodiceans: "I know what you have done; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. How I wish you were either one or the other! But because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am going to spit you out of my mouth!"¹ How should we respond to our Lord's evident desire for us to be on fire for him? Someone has said that zeal is like fire, in the chimney it is one of the best servants, but out of the chimney it is one of the worst masters. If we needed it, here is the warning that there is a nasty side to this matter of zeal. The same warning comes in the scriptures in various ways. For example, Paul does not use the word zeal (Greek *zelos*) in his list of the fruit of the spirit but does use it in his list of the works of the flesh (Gal.5). He also says of his unbelieving compatriots that "they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (Rom.10:2 AV) or, as the GNB puts it: "they are deeply devoted to God; but their devotion is not based on true knowledge." We must then remember that in both Greek and English the word zeal can have good and bad senses; it can refer to hearty and persistent endeavour or enthusiasm, but can also be used of fanaticism and extremism. In this article, an attempt will be made to distinguish between ways in which zeal should feature in the life of the disciple of Christ and those aspects of zeal which the disciple would do well to avoid.

The zeal of the Lord

Let us begin by looking at some examples of how zeal is associated with God in the Old Testament. At the time when Hezekiah was king in Jerusalem and Sennacherib threatened to lead the Assyrians against Judah, Isaiah was sent to Hezekiah with a message of encouragement, assuring him that Sennacherib would not be allowed to execute his plans. Amongst other things, Isaiah tells Hezekiah that: "There will be people in Jerusalem and on Mount Zion who will survive, because the LORD is determined to make this happen." (the zeal of the LORD shall do this.AV).² Later, in Isaiah 59, the prophet speaks of God's displeasure at the lack of justice and says of God in verse 12: "He will wear justice like a coat of armour and victory like a helmet. He will clothe himself with the strong desire (zeal) to set things right and to punish and avenge the wrongs that people suffer." Again, in Isaiah 63:15, a prayer is offered to God beginning with these words: "LORD, look upon us from heaven, where you live in your holiness and glory. Where is your great concern (zeal) for us? Where is your power? Where are your love and compassion?" These passages make it clear that God's zeal involves his great concern for his people, his strong desire to right wrongs and eradicate injustice, and also his sheer determination to see that his will prevails.

¹ Rev 3: 15,16 Quotations from GNB unless otherwise indicated.

² 2 K 19:31; Isa 37: 32; cf Isa 9:7

There is however another side to the zeal of God. In Ezekiel 5, the LORD takes Jerusalem to task and warns the people of trouble to come. In verse 3 he says: "You will feel all the force of my anger and rage until I am satisfied. When all this happens, you will be convinced that I, the LORD, have spoken to you because I am outraged (in my zeal) at your unfaithfulness." Again, in chapter 16, referring to Jerusalem's idolatry and associated immorality, he says in verse 38: "I will condemn you for adultery and murder, and in my anger (zeal) and fury I will punish you with death." Further on in Ezekiel's prophecy, at 23:25, God says to Jerusalem: "Because I am angry with you, I will let them deal with you in their anger." (AV: "And I will set my jealousy (zeal) against thee.") Here we need to take note that the one word *zelos* in Greek and its corresponding word in Hebrew can mean both zeal and jealousy. The jealousy of God is often spoken of in the Old Testament. For example, in Exodus 20:5, among the ten commandments, we have God declaring: "Do not bow down to any idol or worship it, because I am the LORD your God and I tolerate no rivals (AV—I am a jealous God). I bring punishment on those who hate me and on their descendants down to the third and fourth generation." Repeatedly, in passages such as Ex 20:5, 34:14 Deut 4:24, 5:9, 6:15 Josh 24:19 Nah 1:2, when warning his people of the dangers of idolatry, God is described as a jealous God (AV), a God who will tolerate no rivals (GNB). With this sort of background, it is hardly surprising that zeal found a central place in Jewish piety. Corresponding to God's own zeal, the loyal Israelite was expected to show a passionate and consuming zeal focused on God and on the doing of his will.

The zeal of the people

By the time of Jesus, there was a strong tradition of zeal among the Jews. In the New Testament we have a whole chapter in Hebrews celebrating the lives of those Old Testament characters who were particularly remembered for their faith. There is undoubtedly an overlap in the meanings of the words 'zeal' and 'faith' and so it should come as no surprise to us to find that in the O.T. and in the inter-testamental literature the Jews remembered those of their forefathers who were thought to have shown great zeal in their lives. Amongst these were people like Simeon and Levi (Gen 34), Phinehas (Num 25) and Elijah (1 K 18). A quick reading of these passages soon reveals that the issues at stake in all these displays of zeal related to the maintenance of the separateness and distinctiveness of the Jews as the people of God. Idol worship, inter-marriage and circumcision were the problems that led to these particular displays of zeal, so intense that those named above were all prepared to kill in order to maintain what they regarded as true religion. The victims were sometimes foreigners and sometimes their own people who were regarded as traitors.

It was the same kind of fervour that moved others in Israel to similar acts of zealotry particularly at the time of the Maccabees, about 200 years before Christ.

In the first two chapters of the first book of Maccabees we have an account of how the Maccabean revolt began. After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC, his Macedonian generals carved up his empire between them. Judah sat uneasily between the Ptolemies based in Egypt to the south and the Seleucids based in Syria to the north. Initially under the control of the Seleucids, Judea soon passed into the hands of the Ptolemies and enjoyed relative prosperity for about a century before returning again under the control of the Seleucids. For about thirty years there was relative peace in the area but this was not to last for the Seleucids, who saw themselves as the heirs of Alexander's vision of uniting all peoples within Greek culture, introduced hellenizing policies which led to conflict with the Jews. The trouble started in earnest when Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), in dire need of finances after his first campaign against Egypt in 169 BC, decided to ameliorate his situation by relieving the Temple of its treasures. He was ordered by Rome, the rising super-power in the west, not to attempt a second campaign in Egypt, and Jerusalem took the brunt of his anger. The privileges granted to the Jews by his predecessor, Antiochus III, were taken away and the Seleucids, the most zealous of Alexander's successors, now embarked on a severe attack on Judaism. Circumcision, sabbath observance, the regular Jewish festivals and the Temple sacrifices were all banned on pain of death and the people were encouraged to eat 'unclean' food. Many Jews gave in to these pressures, some more readily than others. However, some met Seleucid zeal with Jewish zeal and resolutely continued, as far as it was possible to do so, observing the Law and refusing to participate in the worship being imposed by Antiochus. There are graphic descriptions of all this in the first chapter of the first book of Maccabees.

In the second chapter, we are introduced to Mattathias Hasmoneas, a Jewish priest living at Modin about 20 miles north-west of Jerusalem. He and his five sons were so incensed by what was happening in Judea that they rent their clothes and put on sackcloth in mourning. One of the king's agents arrived in the village to check that the decrees of Antiochus were being observed. The people were summoned in order to publicly demonstrate their loyalty to Antiochus by offering the required sacrifices. Mattathias was invited to be the first to do so but he refused saying: "Though all the nations that are under the king's dominion obey him, and fall away every one from the religion of their fathers, and give consent to his commandments: yet will I and my sons and my brethren walk in the covenant of our father. God forbid that we should forsake the law and the ordinances. We will not hearken to the king's words, to go from our religion, either on the right hand, or the left." (1 Macc 2:19-22).³ As soon as he had finished, one of the other Jews went forward to sacrifice on the altar. "Which thing when Mattathias saw, he was inflamed with zeal, and his reins trembled, neither could he forbear to shew his anger according to judgment: wherefore he

³Bagster's Septuagint with Apocrypha

ran, and slew him upon the altar. Also the king's commissioner, who compelled men to sacrifice, he killed at that time, and the altar he pulled down. Thus dealt he zealously for the law of God, like as Phinees did unto Zambri the son of Salom. And Mattathias cried throughout the city with a loud voice, saying, Whosoever is zealous of the law, and maintaineth the covenant, let him follow me. So he and his sons fled into the mountains, and left all that ever they had in the city." (Verses 24-28)

Just before he died, Mattathias spoke at length to his sons saying: "Now have pride and rebuke gotten strength, and the time of destruction, and the wrath of indignation: now therefore, my sons, be ye zealous for the law, and give your lives for the covenant of your fathers. Call to remembrance what acts our fathers did in their time, so shall ye receive great honour and an everlasting name. Was not Abraham found faithful in temptation, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness? Joseph in the time of his distress kept the commandment, and was made lord of Egypt; Phinees our father in being zealous and fervent obtained the covenant of an everlasting priesthood. Jesus (Joshua) for fulfilling the word was made a judge in Israel. Caleb for bearing witness before the congregation received the heritage of the land. David for being merciful possessed the throne of an everlasting kingdom. Elias for being zealous and fervent for the law was taken up into heaven. Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, by believing were saved out of the flame. Daniel for his innocence was delivered from the mouth of lions. And thus consider ye throughout all ages, that none that put their trust in him shall be overcome. Fear not then the words of a sinful man: for his glory shall be dung and worms. Today he shall be lifted up, and tomorrow he shall not be found, because he is returned into his dust, and his thought is come to nothing. Wherefore, ye my sons, be valiant, and shew yourselves men in the behalf of the law; for by it shall ye obtain glory." (Verses 49-64). What a panoply of faithful and zealous forefathers to lay before his sons to encourage them to continue the struggle against the recent tide of anti-Judaism!

Jesus and zeal

The memory of all these struggles must still have been strong in the time of Jesus. From time to time, there were Jews prepared to try to take on the might of Rome but without success; they were unable to persuade enough of their people to take up arms and the Romans were just too much for them. The Zealot movement did not really become a serious problem for the Romans until events leading up to the siege of Jerusalem. And so it is unlikely that Simon, called the Canaanite by Mark and Matthew, and called the Zealot by Luke (in Luke 6 and in Acts 1), was that kind of zealot. (Canaanite here is probably a transliteration into Greek of the Semitic word meaning 'the zealous' and does not mean 'a man from Canaan'.) It is much more likely that he was zealous for the distinctive

traditions of Israel: circumcision, the food laws, sabbath observance etc. like many others among his compatriots. This is confirmed by the use of the word 'zelotes' in Acts 21:20, 22:3 and in Gal 1:14 where it is used to describe Jews and Christian Jews who were noted for their devotion to the Law and the traditions of the fathers. The achievement of the Maccabees, in preserving the right to keep the Law and in maintaining the distinctive features of the Jewish faith, had no doubt left its mark on the people of God, some being more zealous than others.

The only use of the word 'zeal' in the Gospels is to be found in John 2:17, a quote from Psalm 69:9 which the disciples remembered as they reflected on what Jesus had done and said when he visited the Temple. What a tremendous scene, as William Temple observes, and goes on to describe how "the Lord dominates the multitude by the righteousness of his energy and the energy of his righteousness!"⁴ How could his disciples fail to notice their Master's zeal and see it as a fulfilment of the psalmist's words: "My devotion to your house, O God, burns in me like a fire."⁵ This incident, so important to John that he puts it at the beginning of his gospel, rather than at the end like the other evangelists, is usually referred to as the cleansing of the Temple, as though cleansing was all that was necessary. However, although Jesus was moved by zeal for his Father's house to do and say what he did and said on this occasion, all the evidence suggests that he was not concerned about a Temple 'made with hands' but with one 'made without hands'. John tells us in his own words that "the temple Jesus was speaking about was his body." (2:21) If Jesus' real concern was another temple, one that he would build, a 'made-without-hands' temple, then he could hardly have been implying by his words and actions that all that was necessary was a clean-up operation on the existing Temple.

Surely N.T.Wright is correct to see this incident as an acted parable of judgment.⁶ "Jesus intended to symbolize the imminent destruction of the Temple. He believed that Israel's god was in the process of judging and redeeming his people, not just as one such incident among many but as the climax of Israel's whole history. The judgment on the Temple would take the form of destruction by Rome, which (like Babylon, according to Jeremiah) would be the agent of the wrath of YHWH. The specific reasons for this judgment were, broadly, Israel's failure to obey YHWH's call to be his people; more narrowly, Israel's large-scale commitment to national rebellion, coupled with her failure to enact justice within her own society, not least within the Temple-system itself."⁷

In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus is recorded as accusing his contemporaries of having made the Temple a hideout for thieves (AV den of robbers). Wright

⁴ Readings in St. John's Gospel, p. 39. ⁵ John 2:17; Ps 69:9

⁶ N.T.Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, p. 416, but see the whole section on Jesus' Action in the Temple, p. 413-428. ⁷ *ibid* p. 417

points out, on page 419, that the Greek word in question (*lestes*) does not mean 'swindler', but 'one who robs with violence'; its regular use in the time of Jesus was in reference to brigands or bandits. Barabbas and the two who were crucified with Jesus were '*lestes*'; crucifixion was the punishment reserved, not for thieves or swindlers, but for revolutionaries. In Jesus' day, the Temple had become a talisman of nationalist violence, the focal point of the hope of national liberation, the guarantee that YHWH would act for Israel and defend her against the pagans. In this sense, as a 'made-with-hands' temple, it had effectively become an idol, ripe for destruction, having outlived its usefulness, standing in the way of the fulfilment of God's desire that his house should be a house of prayer for all nations. That purpose required for its fulfilment a different temple of which Jesus spoke, one not devoted to the promotion of nationalist violence, one that would unite the nations in the service of God and would do away once for all with the Jew/Gentile divide. The Jews had to learn that, if they wanted to participate in the fulfilment of God's plan, they would have to leave behind much of what they thought God should be doing for them, for he had other ideas that Jesus was trying to tell them about.

The transfiguration

The transfiguration of Jesus gave him another opportunity to try to get the message across to his disciples. A puzzling feature of this incident is the appearance of Moses and Elijah in the vision, explained in different ways by different commentators. R.T. France⁸ summarises some of these as follows:

- "The significance of *Moses and Elijah* here has been variously understood as
- (a) representing the law and the prophets (though the fact that Elijah is not represented among the prophetic writings of the Old Testament is against this);
 - (b) two of the three Old Testament men of God who traditionally did not die (Enoch was the other; according to Dt 34 Moses did die, but his burial by God had developed by the first century AD into a belief in his 'assumption');
 - (c) two great leaders who talked with God at Mount Sinai;
 - (d) the two whose 'return' was expected in connection with the Messianic age.
- The last seems most relevant in this context, where their appearance underlines the Messianic role of Jesus, though none of the others is thereby ruled out. It may also be relevant that both Moses and Elijah in their God-given missions experienced rejection and suffering. Jesus is thus indicated as the one in whom the pattern of God's Old Testament servants reaches its ultimate fulfilment."

G.B. Caird⁹ also reminds us that "Luke gives us a clue to the nature of the trial (i.e. Jesus' expected trial) when he tells us that Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke of his departure which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem....The Greek word which Luke uses for death is an unusual one—*exodos*; and it is clear that he used it because of its Old Testament associations with divine deliverance. At

⁸ R.T. France, Tyndale N.T. Commentary, Matthew, p.263.

⁹ G.B. Caird, Pelican N.T. Commentary, Saint Luke, p.132.

Jerusalem Jesus was to accomplish the New Exodus, leading God's people from a greater bondage than that of Egypt into the promised land of the kingdom. Like Moses of old, he was now standing on the brink of a great sea, the ocean of iniquity through which he must pass and in which he must accomplish another baptism (Luke 12:50). He has always obeyed the Father, but the road he has travelled hitherto has been well marked by the feet of prophets and forerunners, like Moses and Elijah. Now God is about to lead him into a path never before trodden by human foot, a path which will lead him to Gethsemane and Calvary. Henceforth, as pioneer of our salvation (Heb 2:10, 12:2), he must journey alone, and not even Moses and Elijah can bear him company. Others, indeed, like John the Baptist, have suffered and died in God's service, but the death that awaits this man is more than martyrdom." On the next page, commenting on Peter's proposal to build three booths, Caird comments that "what Peter did not realize was that Moses and Elijah belonged, with John the Baptist, to the old order that was passing away, and that a moment later he would see them vanish, leaving Jesus alone, and hear a voice say, *'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!'*"

The disciples

But did he listen? And did James and John listen? The evidence of Luke 9:51-56 would suggest that they had not yet properly understood Jesus. At this point, Luke tells us that Jesus had made up his mind to set out on his way to Jerusalem, deciding (controversially?) to go via Samaria. The Samaritans in the village where he wanted to stay (the night?) would not receive him because it was clear that he was on his way to Jerusalem. Caird, on page 140, tells us that "Samaritan antipathy towards Jews was directed most strongly against pilgrims going from Galilee to Jerusalem for the festivals, and most pilgrims preferred the longer route through Perea. James and John wanted to emulate Elijah (2 Kings 1:9-16); but we must recognise that in this respect Elijah was typical of the whole Old Testament, which knew no other way of dealing with the enemies of Israel than to call down God's curse upon them. This is why Elijah had to disappear from the mountain to give place to Jesus, with his new way of loving his enemies and dying for them, and of the new conception of God which that way implied." Mark (3:17) informs us that it was Jesus who called the brothers 'Boanerges', which means 'Men of Thunder', and it is clear that their way of showing zeal was not to Jesus' liking, for Luke tells us that he rebuked them before moving on to another village. We should not miss the significance of the fact that both Moses and Elijah were remembered for acts of zeal in which they were both prepared to kill and that the transfiguration vision must have been intended to teach the disciples that the time for such nationalistic zeal was over; self-preservation would not fulfil the purpose of God.

No one could have accused Jesus of giving any hints that he intended to take the kingdom by force of arms. He counselled his followers to learn to love their

enemies (Mat 5:44) and when there was any hint of some of them wanting to take him by force to make him king, he made it abundantly clear that he did not want to go down that road by fleeing to the hills (John 6:15). It is true that he said "...I did not come to bring peace but a sword." (Mat.10:34) but the context makes it clear that this is figurative language, rather like the words of Simeon to Mary in Luke 2:35: "And sorrow, like a sharp sword, will break your own heart." Jesus, in Matthew 10, is warning his disciples that association with him was likely to bring them experiences of discord among their families and friends, presenting them with some hard decisions to make. Jesus' words: "Whoever tries to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will gain it," can be taken on both a personal and on a national level; in which case Jesus is warning that the instinct of self-preservation will lead to disaster on both fronts.

On another occasion, towards the end of his ministry, Jesus says to his disciples: "But now whoever has a purse or a bag must take it; and whoever does not have a sword must sell his coat and buy one." (Luke 22:36) These are strange words from one who had previously spoken of loving one's enemies, but are they to be taken literally? His disciples apparently thought so, for they responded: "Look! Here are two swords, Lord!" Caird, on page 240 of his commentary, says: "The story of the upper room ends with a conversation which shows how deep was the gulf of misunderstanding which still separated the disciples from Jesus. He begins by reminding them (in words drawn from the mission charge to the seventy) of the halcyon days of the Galilean mission, when they were able to go out on their missionary tours relying wholly on hospitality for their maintenance. Now times have changed: Jesus is about to be executed as a criminal, and they, as the criminal's accomplices, will find every man's hand against them. The instruction to sell their coats and buy swords is an example of Jesus' fondness for violent metaphor, but the disciples take it literally, as pedants have continued to do ever since. The words '*It is enough*' indicate, not satisfaction with the disciples' military preparedness, but a sad dismissal of the subject." However, the point was lost on Peter, for, once in Gethsemane, no sooner did he see the armed Temple guards prepare to arrest Jesus than he drew his hidden sword and struck the High Priest's slave, cutting off his ear. Jesus once more had to rebuke him with the words: "Put your sword back in its place! Do you think that I will not drink the cup of suffering which my Father has given me?" Matthew records that Jesus continued saying: "All who take the sword will die by the sword." (26:52) and Luke alone tells us that Jesus put matters right by touching and healing the slave's ear. Had Peter raised his sword to defend his Master? Even such a worthy motive was not pleasing to Jesus. Or had Peter raised it to escape from arrest himself, the motive of self-preservation coming to the fore once more?

Saul

After the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus and the beginning of the church at Pentecost, it did not take long for friction to arise between this new sect within Judaism and those Jews who perceived it as a threat. The matter was brought to a head by the outspoken teaching of Stephen, given such wisdom by the Spirit that when he spoke, his opponents could not refute him (Acts 6:10). Here we have a classic case of two forms of zeal in head-on collision. What were the issues at stake? Nothing less than Moses, the Law, the Temple and God himself! The opponents of Stephen obviously felt that all that they held dear, all that kept them apart from the Gentiles and constituted them and them alone as the people of God, was under threat, including their understanding of God and his ways. So much were they insensed with what Stephen said that "they covered their ears with their hands. Then they all rushed at him at once, threw him out of the city, and stoned him." (7:57, 58) Their zeal manifested itself in the desire to kill. Jesus had warned his disciples about the danger of this happening: "You will be expelled from the synagogues, and the time will come when anyone who kills you will think that by doing this he is serving God. People will do these things to you because they have not known either the Father or me." (John 16:2, 3) How ironic, that those who so zealously felt that they had to defend Moses, the Law, the Temple and God, even to the point of killing their fellow-Jews, were judged by Jesus not to have known God at all! The lesson would seem to be that zeal which expresses itself in such a manner is not godly zeal.

"And Saul approved of his murder." (Acts 8:1) His zeal soon led him to try to destroy the church. He went from house to house dragging out the believers, both men and women, and threw them into jail. It was not long before he was on the road to Damascus, armed with letters from the High Priest, pursuing his quarry, those traitors who were followers of the Way, in order to arrest them and bring them back to Jerusalem to face charges. But before he could do so he himself had to face up to the charge of persecution: "Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4) Stephen had said to his audience: "Was there any prophet that your ancestors did not persecute? They killed God's messengers, who long ago announced the coming of his righteous Servant. And now you have betrayed and murdered him." Stephen, in his turn, was persecuted, Saul playing his part in the sad affair. Of course, neither he nor the others involved thought of themselves as persecutors but rather as 'defenders of the faith', doing nothing but the will of their God. How true it often is that those who pursue others in the name of religion, in the name of truth, in the name of God, have need to engage in a reappraisal of their own religion and to find God anew where they thought he would not be. This was just such an occasion for Saul but he had had to be stopped in his tracks to make him do it. And Saul became Paul,

not losing any of his zeal but finding that it needed to be redirected. The persecutor became the preacher of that which he had persecuted, but the process was unlikely to have happened overnight for it is not easy to redirect zeal without demotivation.

When Paul looked back on his pre-Christian days, there was one word that he felt described him through and through: 'zealous'. "You have been told how I used to live when I was devoted to the Jewish religion, how I persecuted without mercy the church of God and did my best to destroy it. I was ahead of most fellow Jews of my age in my practice of the Jewish religion, and was much more devoted to [zealous of] the traditions of our ancestors." (Gal 1:14, 15) "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up here in Jerusalem as a student of Gamaliel. I received strict instruction in the Law of our ancestors and was just as dedicated to [zealous toward] God as are all of you who are here today. I persecuted to the death the people who followed this Way." (Acts 22:3, 4) What he cared about most were God, Moses, the Law and the Temple, and he cared so much about his understanding of them and their place in his life that he was prepared to pursue to the death any who in his view threatened them, just what the followers of Jesus seemed to be doing. To him, his Judaism was the truth and the only way he could share God with others, be they Jew or Gentile, was by them accepting his form of the truth, the Jews were the people of God and the only way Gentiles could know him was by becoming Jews too. The Jesus sect was suggesting otherwise, calling in question what to Paul was at the heart of his religion, hence his righteous indignation. Evidently Paul saw himself in the same light as Phinehas, Elijah, Mattathias etc., zealous for what made the Jews different from other peoples, zealous to maintain the Jew/Gentile divide, to keep God Jewish, to insist that the people of God should keep the sabbath, circumcise its male children, eat only 'clean' foods and not share a table with Gentiles etc. and willing to persecute any of his people who would undermine these institutions. But Saul had reckoned without Jesus.

Later, writing to the Philippians, he was able to say: "As far as keeping the Jewish Law is concerned, I was a Pharisee, and I was so zealous that I persecuted the church. As far as a person can be righteous by obeying the commands of the Law, I was without fault. But all those things that I might count as profit I now reckon as loss for Christ's sake... I no longer have a righteousness of my own, the kind that is gained by obeying the Law. I now have the righteousness that is given through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is based on faith." (Phil. 3:5-9) Clearly Paul had come to let Christ have the place in his heart that used to be filled by the Law. This was no easy step for a Jew to take, to let a crucified Messiah take the place of the Law in his life. But Paul and others did it, giving up the Law, the Land, the Temple, Jewish exclusivism in order to become the new people of the God who revealed

himself in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and to take the gospel of grace to the nations.

Paul was converted from Jewish exclusivism to the Gentile cause. As a Christian, he now protested against exactly what he had defended so vigorously as a Pharisee. He now understood that God was ready in Christ to accept Gentiles as Gentiles into his family and that this had always been his intention. His new understanding came from a new understanding of scripture: "Consider the experience of Abraham; as the scripture says, 'He believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous.' You should realize, then, that the real descendants of Abraham are the people who have faith. The scripture predicted that God would put the Gentiles right with himself through faith. And so the scripture announced the Good News to Abraham: 'Through you God will bless all mankind.' Abraham believed and was blessed, so all who believe are blessed as he was." (Gal. 3:6-9) Here we need to be careful not to add to the Gospel features which Paul never refers to; it is clear that he felt that some things that had been a cause of his pride and boasting as a Jew when he was a Pharisee had now to fade into the background. There was no longer only one place where God could be worshipped in spirit and in truth, no longer only one dwelling place for God, no longer any particular attachment to one land, no longer only one nationality for God's people, no longer any need for Mosaic animal sacrifices and no longer any need for obedience to features of the Law that had kept the Jews separate from other peoples: circumcision, sabbath observance, eating kosher food etc. These had all been part and parcel of the Jew's boast in the past, Saul's boast in the past, that they and they alone were the people of God.

Boasting

This is precisely the kind of boasting that Paul attacks repeatedly in his letters. When Paul says to his Jewish-Christian readers in Rom 2:17: "you depend on the Law and boast about God" and in 2:23: "You boast about having God's Law", he was not so much attacking their pride in keeping God's Law but attacking their pride in **having it** in contrast to the Gentiles who did not, their pride in being God's people when the Gentiles were not. These things may have been true but they were no reason to think that that was the way God wanted things to remain forever. Later, in Rom 3:27, Paul pursues the argument by saying: "What, then, can we boast about? Nothing! And what is the reason for this? Is it that we obey the Law? No, but that we believe. For we conclude that a person is put right with God only through faith, and not by doing what the Law commands. **Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles also? Of course he is.** God is one, and he will put the Jews right with himself on the basis of their faith, and will put the Gentiles right through their faith." A new era had arrived and this is the sense in which Paul can speak about the time before faith came (Gal 3:23) and go on to say in verse 25: "Now that the

time for faith is here, the Law is no longer in charge of us. It is through faith that **all of you** are God's sons in union with Christ Jesus....So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles..." To continue suggesting that the Jewish boast of being special to God remains valid, either now or in the future, is not to follow Paul's reasoning but the reasoning of those he was arguing against. When he said in Rom. 10:2 of unbelieving Jews that: "I can assure you that they are deeply devoted to God (AV they have a zeal of God); but their devotion is not based on true knowledge," he knew what he was talking about. "They have not known the way in which God puts people (i.e. all people) right with himself, and instead, they have tried to set up their own way (i.e. their own Jewish way that kept God's blessings to themselves, refusing entry to Gentiles unless they accepted in full the Jewish way of life)." Here again, Paul was not accusing Jews of seeking to curry favour with God by law-obedience but rather was accusing them of self-satisfaction, of pride in being God's people to the exclusion of Gentiles, and of refusing to follow the new understanding that had come through Jesus. This is what the whole argument is about in both Galatians and Romans. The gospel that Paul preached, that he was so jealous of, so zealous for that he could say: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel that is different from the one we preached to you may he be condemned to hell!" (Gal 1:8), was not a gospel of Jewish superiority; it was for all on an equal footing. Jewish zeal for Jewish exclusivism was, is and always will be out of place in the freedom that Christ has won for all mankind. Equally out of place is Gentile exclusivism as Paul so clearly explains in Romans 9-11; God has not written off the Jews. What he has done is opened up a way of salvation that is accessible to all without giving priority to either the one or the other: Jews are no more special than Gentiles and vice versa.

Christian zeal

We have already noted how Paul remembered his Jewish zeal in Phil. 3:6 where he wrote: "I was so zealous that I persecuted the church." Here he uses the Greek noun *zelos* (zeal) and the greek verb *dioko* (to persecute) and remembers how they both featured negatively in his life prior to his conversion. Elsewhere however, he can find positive uses for both in his own christian life and the lives of those he was writing to. In Rom. 12:11, he encourages the Roman church to work hard, not to be lazy and to serve the Lord with a heart full of devotion (zeal). The Corinthians are exhorted to set their hearts on (AV covet earnestly) the more important gifts like faith, hope and love and the gift of proclaiming God's message (12:31; 14:1, 39) and to avoid that form of zeal that results in envy and jealousy (13:4). Titus is reminded that Jesus gave himself for us, to rescue us from all wickedness and to make us a pure people who belong to him alone and are eager to do good (2:14).

Instead of pursuing and persecuting people Paul encourages the Romans to be

given to (*dioko*) hospitality (AV) or to open their homes to strangers (GNB), to bless those who persecute them and to aim at (*dioko*) those things that bring peace and that help strengthen one another (12:13,14; 14:19). The Corinthians are told in 1 Cor.14:1 that it is love that they should strive for (*dioko*) or follow after (AV). To the Philippians, Paul says of himself that he keeps striving (*dioko*) to win the prize for which Christ Jesus has already won Paul to himself, running straight (*dioko*) towards the goal (3:12, 14). Timothy is exhorted to avoid the passions of youth and strive for (*dioko*) righteousness, faith, love and peace, together with those who with a pure heart call out to the Lord for help (2 Tim 2:22). What a change all this is to the pursuing and persecuting that Paul engaged in before he gave himself to Christ!

The end of the matter

Is there anything that we can learn from all of this? Surely that there is nothing worse than misdirected zeal! Consider what it did for Paul and how he bitterly regretted it all, how he had closed his mind to the message of Christ thinking that he knew better what God wanted to be done. His loyalty to what he had learnt at the feet of Gamaliel and to the traditions of his fathers was so great that it prevented him from seeing and admitting his own misunderstandings. What was true of Paul was also true of many of his compatriots who sadly remained blind to what God was busy doing for them in Christ.

And the problem is still with us today. The world is full of people denying others the right to live whilst claiming privileges for themselves, and all this in the name of their God. Zealotry, religious fundamentalism and ethnic cleansing have a lot to answer for in the modern world. We were reminded on a recent TV programme that some Jewish zealots dance and read their scriptures at sunset at a shrine in Hebron dedicated to Dr. Goldstein who machine-gunned 29 Moslems at prayer in Jerusalem, and this in the name of the God of Abraham! Similar problems exist in other places in the world, in what was Yugoslavia and still in Ireland to name but two.

In our community we have thankfully given up the killing of others in the name of God but zeal of the wrong kind is sadly still in evidence. Have we not learnt the lessons spelt out for us on the pages of the New Testament? The Jews of Jesus' day were far too concerned with their national survival and with defending the prerogatives of the Jews as the people of God to be able to hear what God wanted to say to them through his Son: "whoever wants to save his own life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mat.16:25). The Jews had to learn to be prepared to give up what they thought God wanted them to have so that he could give them what he really wanted them to have. Anyone who thinks that their own religion and way of life is so sacrosanct that it merits pursuing, persecuting, expelling and even killing (if only metaphorically), needs maybe to stop and ask whether God might not be saying something else to them that they cannot hear because of the wrong kind of zeal which is blinding them.

Les Boddy

The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved

Continuing and completing his series on the evangelists, Ron Cokeman now turns his attention to the fourth evangelist. Was he a priest? Did he merit his nickname? Was he the author of all the New Testament Johannine literature? These are some of the intriguing issues that are dealt with in this article.

It might perhaps have seemed egoism on the part of John for him to have referred to himself in his gospel, on five occasions, as "the disciple whom Jesus loved", which could be read as suggesting that he occupied a special place in the regard of Jesus. Did not Jesus love equally the other ten? But there is good reason for thinking that John used the third person in this way for the opposite reason to what it might seem.

To begin with he does not make it plain, as he might well have done if he had been concerned with his status among the twelve, that he was one of the first two disciples of Jesus. In verses 35-42 of his first chapter we have the story of the meeting of Jesus with John the Baptist, when John said to his followers "There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." This saying is repeated on the next day and we are then told of the effect on two of John's disciples. They went with Jesus and spent the rest of the day with him. "One of them was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. At once he found his brother Simon and told him 'We have found the Messiah'. Then he took Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, 'Your name is Simon, son of John, but you will be called Cephas.'"¹

We need not suppose that this is the whole story of the encounter between Peter and Jesus, and that it was an immediate recognition of Peter's character by Jesus. Andrew and his companion had spent several hours with Jesus on the previous day and the same might be expected on this occasion. *Andrew and his companion.* Surely that companion was John himself? But modestly he does not mention it. Nor indeed that he was a cousin of Jesus and of John the Baptist.

Also relevant is the nickname that Jesus gave to John and his brother, 'Men of Thunder' (Mark 3:17). This was no compliment. When Jesus was setting off on his last fateful visit to Jerusalem and the disciples had arranged to stay at a Samaritan village "the people there would not receive him because it was clear that he was on his way to Jerusalem." James and John asked "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" no doubt with the precedent of Elijah in mind. But Jesus turned and rebuked them. (Luke 9:51-55). Might not that have been a momentary regression by the brothers to a previous intolerant attitude? In that case John's description of himself may well have been a recognition of what Jesus had saved him from, as in John Newton's

¹ Quotations are from the Good News Bible.

famous hymn, "Amazing grace (how sweet the sound) / That saved a wretch like me!"

Was Zebedee a priest?

A suggestion that I saw more than half a century ago,² and have not since seen controverted, may be relevant. Were Zebedee and his sons priests? The instinctive response would no doubt be that it is an unlikely suggestion, perhaps even an extraordinary one, since it is clearly stated that they were fishermen. However there is no reason why this should be incompatible with priesthood. How was the priesthood constituted? All members of the tribe of Levi were Levites and entitled to take part in the services of the Temple as they did to a very considerable extent. But only those who were descended from Aaron could be priests and actually offer sacrifices.³ Aaron left twenty-four grandsons and it was from these that there descended twenty-four courses of priests, each course going on duty at the Temple for a week.⁴ A course went on duty on the morning of one Sabbath and came off duty on the evening of the next. Thus there would be two courses at work in the Temple on Sabbaths but only one on other days. At the return from the captivity there were representatives of only four courses, but these were divided up by lot eventually into twenty-four courses under the old names. Consequently in the time of Jesus a priest would be engaged in the service of the Temple only one week in twenty-four plus the three pilgrim festivals. What did priests do at other times? Joachim Jeremias supplies the answer.⁵

"The priests lived at their homes for ten or eleven months (according to whether the distance from Jerusalem, and the journey to and fro five times a year, took up more or less time). Only very occasionally did they exercise their priestly function at home, such as declaring a leper clean after his healing before he went up to Jerusalem to obtain a final declaration of cleanliness after offering the prescribed sacrifice. The tithes and other special taxes were the priests' income, but these were by no means sufficient to keep them in idleness throughout the year. On the contrary they were obliged to follow some profession in their own district, mostly manual work. . . . [However] in many places priests assisted in the local court of justice, probably in an honorary capacity, sometimes if they were trained as scribes, because of their learning and sometimes to satisfy biblical precepts, e.g. in cases of assessment of votive offerings . . ."

We know that the mother of Jesus had relatives who were of priestly descent. Zacharias was a priest, and his wife Elisabeth, Mary's cousin, was also 'of the

² *Some Gospel Scenes and Characters* Peter Green 1937

³ Numbers 16:8-10 ⁴ Luke 1:5

⁵ *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*. Joachim Jeremias pp 198-200

daughters of Aaron'.⁴ It is not improbable therefore that her sister Salome, the mother of John and James, had married a priest. It is possible that Zebedee might even have been of the High Priest's family. The High Priests office had long ceased to be determined by right of descent. It was an object of ambition and the Romans put up and pulled down High Priests at their pleasure.

If this is the case it casts a most interesting light on the approach of Salome to Jesus as recorded in Matthew 20:20-21: "Then the wife of Zebedee came to Jesus with her two sons, bowed before him, and asked him a favour. 'What do you want?' Jesus asked her. She answered, 'Promise me that these two sons of mine will sit at your right and your left when you are king.'" This was not arrogance on her part, as has often been supposed. She envisaged the Kingdom of God as a continuance of the sort of life she was accustomed to, where in their local community the Zebedees would have had an elevated position as a priestly family. Even more so if he had been of the High Priest's family. The reply of Jesus to his aunt though firm, was gentle. As was his remonstrance to the indignant ten.

If Zebedee was a priest it might be expected that James, the elder son, was eventually to have his father's business, while the clever young son, John, might have a chance of becoming a learned priest. The learned priests (mentioned in Luke 2:46 as the 'Jewish teachers' to whom the twelve-year old Jesus was listening and asking questions) spent all or most of their time in Jerusalem in the study of the Law. This would explain why John had a house of his own in Jerusalem, and a degree of intimacy with the High Priest which gave him access to his palace. Similarly it would explain how he knew what went on in the Sanhedrin (7:47-52 11:47-53).

So then John might originally have had some of the faults of the Scribes, proud, fanatical, hot-tempered, a true son of thunder. The change in him could well have begun when he became a follower of his cousin, John the Baptist. It is quite conceivable however that when the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said "There is the Lamb of God" John did not realise that he was seeing another cousin, the son of Joseph of Nazareth. For although Nazareth was only some 25 miles from Capernaum there seems to have been an estrangement between the families. Why else should the thirteen year old Mary,⁶ after the angel's visit, undertake the long journey to Bethlehem in the south (60 miles direct, or 85 miles avoiding Samaria).

Jesus may well have had a special regard for John because he was the first of

⁶ **Jeremias** *ibid* p 364 "The betrothal ceremony which.... took place at an extremely early age began the transfer of the girl from her father's power to her husband's. The usual age for a girl's betrothal was between twelve and twelve and a half; but there is incontestable evidence of betrothals and marriages at an even earlier age."

his relatives (after John the Baptist) to recognise him. For as John himself points out (7:5) "Not even his brothers believed in him". Jesus' heart must have longed for family affection, and family unkindness and ill-will must have been a grief to him. So on John's side, his description of himself as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' might have been objective recognition that Jesus had done more for him in that long conversation on that first afternoon and evening than had been necessary for some of the other disciples. The situation, in short, of the lost sheep and the lost coin.

The Silent Observer

During the years of the ministry we find John and his brother, with Peter, forming a kind of inner circle of the Twelve. They were taken into the room where Jairus' daughter lay; they are with Jesus on the mount of the Transfiguration; chosen by Jesus to be near him in the Garden of Gethsemane. John too had a special part in the drama of the Last Supper, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. And there are indications that he may have been there on occasions when there were no other disciples present. Was John perhaps there when Nicodemus came to Jesus by night? Or when the disciples at Sychar had gone into the town to buy food and Jesus wearied with his journey, sat by the well-side, was there not perhaps a faithful friend sitting not so near as to disturb, but ready to help Jesus if necessary?

When Jesus in the Temple stooped down and wrote in the dust, then straightened himself and found he was alone, do we owe this account to Jesus, or is it not more likely to John, in the background, distant enough not to embarrass the woman, but near enough to hear what passed? In Gethsemane, though Peter and James slept while Jesus prayed, did not John remain awake? Who else could have reported the words of Christ's prayer to the other evangelists? From whom did Luke get the detail of the agony, so great that "sweat as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground". For these words could not have come from Jesus himself.

We hear little about John through the whole period of the Acts. He does however figure, with Peter, in the incident of the lame man healed at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple (Acts 4) which led to their appearance before the Sanhedrin. Did John perhaps see in this incident a warning that he must not endanger the responsibility he had for the mother of Jesus? We cannot think that, apart from this, he would have been any less prominent in the work of the Church than James, who paid for it with his life, the first martyr. It would only be after his death that John undertook the work by which we remember him.

John the Writer

And so we come to the authorship of the New Testament books that bear John's name. This has been the subject of argument for more than a century. For most of the time it was denied that the Gospel was the work of the apostle John

because it presents such a different picture of Christ from that of the Synoptists, not only in the form of the preaching, but also in the chronology. John has a different account of the beginning of the ministry. In the Synoptics it only began after John the Baptist was imprisoned. But in the Fourth Gospel there is a considerable period in which the ministry of Jesus overlapped that of John and preceded the preaching in Galilee. In the other three gospels the main scene of the ministry is Galilee and Jesus does not reach Jerusalem until the last week of his life. In John on the other hand there is hardly any reference to Galilee but a record of a continuous presence in Jerusalem. In addition to the early years, after chapter 10 Jesus is in Jerusalem all the time, which would mean a stay of some months from the wintertime of the Feast of the Dedication to the following spring. Slotting this into the Synoptics makes the closing weeks of Jesus' life far more understandable.

Then there is the profound difference in the manner of the teaching. There are no extended parables in John, such a vivid feature of the other three gospels. There are none of the short, simple but supremely striking pronouncements that marked his mission in Galilee. No healing of those possessed by devils and evil spirits. In effect the fourth gospel speaks of the Kingdom of God only once, the occasion when Jesus tells Nicodemus that a man cannot enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born again (3:35). In Matthew, however, Jesus speaks of the Kingdom 53 times, in Mark 17 times and in Luke 41 times. Nor does the noun 'repentance' or the verb 'to repent' occur at all in John.

On the other hand there are long, detailed and involved speeches of great spiritual depth. These led to the theory that the John who wrote the gospel was not the apostle but another John. 'John the Elder' who, though he knew and used the synoptics, wrote in Ephesus among Greeks and Gnostics, no earlier than the end of the first century. He was a witness to the 'Christ of faith', not to the Jesus of history, and his theology was the product of a long period of evolution in the First Century church. This was the result of 'Form Criticism', profoundly disturbing to many, if not most, non-scholarly Christians. It was especially disturbing because it suggested that the synoptics were gravely mistaken in their understanding of Jesus and his mission, and needed this correction.

The latter half of the present century has seen a dramatic reversal of opinion on the subject, gradually gathering momentum and culminating in John Robinson's *The Priority of John* published in 1985, shortly after the author's death. By 'priority' Robinson does not mean that he believed that John wrote necessarily before Matthew, Mark and Luke, but that John was not dependent on their accounts, and wrote from his own observation and experience.

One of the strong influences which had led to the now questioned belief about the Fourth Gospel was that the milieu of the Synoptics was of Palestine, and

Jewish, but that that of the gospel of John was the diaspora and Hellenistic. This however has had to be abandoned in the light of the discoveries at Qumran. "Every student of the fourth gospel and John's epistles must have remarked the great antitheses - light and darkness, truth and error, spirit and flesh, life and death - which sound a kind of counterpoint through John's thinking and writing. This is the language of dualism; and not so long ago it was fashionable among scholars to find in it clear evidence that John's thought was moulded by the dualistic categories - Greek and metaphysical - which are to be found in the second-century Gnostics. The discovery of the scrolls has made them think again, for the closest parallels to John's antitheses are now acknowledged to occur ... in the Qumran documents written just before the time of Christ."⁷

Another difficulty was that the Messiahship of Jesus is only gradually revealed in Matthew, Mark and Luke. In John it is divined at once and not hidden. The critics of John as the author of the fourth Gospel tended to treat the other three as if they had told us all there was to know about Jesus, with the inference that any additional aspects of his character different from what they recorded, though ultimately true, were not evident at the time of his ministry. But as John himself says, with a touch of hyperbole, "Now there are many other things that Jesus did. If they were all written down one by one, I suppose that the whole world would not hold the books that would be written." (21:35) The "many other things" he had in mind were no doubt the very different events of the Galilean ministry with which the Synoptists are almost entirely concerned.

It is now recognised that the evidence from John for a long pre-Galilean ministry is compelling. "After this [the meeting with Nicodemus] Jesus and his disciples went to the province of Judea, where he spent some time with them and baptized. . . . This was before John had been put in prison" (John 3:22,24). Matthew's comment "When he heard that John had been arrested, Jesus *withdrew* to Galilee (4:12, REB) supports the idea that it had been a long sojourn in the south. The importance of this is that it explains the very different style adopted by Jesus in his preaching and discussion in and around Jerusalem from that of Galilee. It has been described as 'rabbinic' and this is quite understandable in view of the kind of audience that Jesus would encounter and that John ('a learned priest') would wish to record. The teaching of the Synoptics is direct and abounds in illustrations; in John it is more akin to Rabbinical argumentation; parable is replaced by allegory; yet most of the discourses of John have a synagogue or Temple setting."⁸

Another charge against John's accuracy is that the style of his narrative of the

⁷ A M Hunter *According to John* 1968 p 29-30

⁸ C R Beasley Murray, *Introduction to the New Testament* (in Manson's *Companion to the Bible*. 1963)

events, and his report of the actual words of Jesus, are practically indistinguishable from one another. The deduction formerly was that John had 'invented' the words of Jesus but it seems more likely that John had adopted the style of his Master, the style which the twelve-year old Jesus already no doubt had when he disputed with the rabbis in the Temple.

Nor should it be supposed that John attempted to give a verbatim account of what Jesus said. In his *Readings in St Johns Gospel* William Temple said "A good photograph is vastly preferable to a bad portrait. But the great portrait painter may give a representation of a man which no photograph can emulate. Because St John is the portrait painter, consciously submitting his mind to be interpenetrated by his subject, and then giving forth what his mind contains, he is not careful to distinguish between what the Lord historically 'said' and what that saying has come to mean for him in his lifelong meditation."⁹

The Apocalypse

In a nutshell, most current thinking is based on the belief that there was a long ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem and the south. So if it is accepted that the Apostle John is indeed the author of the Gospel there is little difficulty over the Epistles. But what of the Apocalypse? The problem here is two-fold. When was it written? And what is the explanation of the extraordinary Greek in which it is written? The Greek of the Fourth Gospel is not classical Greek, for example it does not reach the standard of those sections of Luke's work which are. Nevertheless "it is clear, individual and strangely impressive Greek. St John uses a small vocabulary, builds his sentences simply, is sparing of adjectives and likes the perfect tense."¹⁰ Hunter then summarises a considerable argument as to whether John's Greek was "simply vernacular Greek" (the *koiné*) or was a translation from the Aramaic, and comes to the conclusion that while it was not a translation "there are sufficient Semitisms - Jewish idioms, Hebrew and Aramaic glimmering through John's Hellenistic Greek - to warrant the belief that his mother-tongue was Aramaic."

The Greek of Revelation however is *sui generis*. It is not a beginner's Greek with mistakes due to ignorance. It is the Greek of someone who seems to have a quarrel with the language, defying from time to time its very structure. Various attempts have been made to justify it as the work of the apostle John, for example that the Apocalypse was written at an early date when John was a poor Greek scholar and that he had improved following his 30 years in Ephesus. Or that the Gospel, though early, had the attentions of a redactor. Or that John deliberately wrote thus in an attempt to imitate the style of the then many current apocalypses. But all these seem unconvincing and lacking in evidential support.

⁹ *Readings in St John's Gospel* pp xvi, xvii

¹⁰ *According to John* p 18 A M Hunter 1968

There is however an alternative, suggested many years ago, which has been confirmed by events earlier this year and reported in the daily press. It happens from time to time that people under anaesthesia, or suffering from a particular brain injury, and who are under the influence of some overmastering emotion such as fear or anger, suffer partial aphasia and revert to the language and accent of their youth. An instance quoted originally was of a Methodist local preacher, Welsh in origin, but who having lived in Lancashire for thirty years, had not the slightest trace of Welsh accent or phraseology. However, when recovering after an operation he spoke with so strong a Welsh accent and such queer Welsh phrases that he could hardly be understood. In another instance a Russian woman who had left Russia at the age of seven and who could no longer speak Russian was injured in a motor accident and reverted to the Russian which she had previously forgotten. On the other hand she could no longer understand English. Several such incidents were reported earlier this year.

So when, confronted by the awe, the joy, the immensity of the visions that John saw, he, like Balaam who "heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open"¹¹ may well have reverted to the Aramaic and thought of the youth who had dreamed of the Messianic Kingdom by the shores of the Sea of Galilee, but who, in his old age, could only filter it through the Greek.

Ron Coleman

¹¹ Numbers 24:16 AV

Studies in Ecclesiastes

Wilfred Lambert continues his study of the book of Ecclesiastes with some guidance on understanding verses that, for the ordinary reader, are rather difficult to unravel.

Temple Worship (5:1-2, 4-6)¹

The end of ch. 4 marks a distinct break in the flow of the thought, and ch. 5 begins with a topic not previously dealt with: temple worship, a theme running through vv. 1-6 with the exception of v. 3, which will be dealt with later. Three aspects of temple worship are dealt with: sacrifice, prayer and vows.

The chapter begins with advice not to enter the temple without due forethought and, in our opinion, the RSV gives the right sense of the explanation for this caution: "to draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for

¹Quotations, unless otherwise stated, from the Revised English Bible.

they do not know that they are doing evil." The NEB and REB prefer "better draw near in obedience", but, since Jewish law required sacrifices of various kinds at appropriate occasions, obedience should surely result in sacrifices and so not contrast with them. The 'listening' of the RSV implies seeking the will of Him whose temple it was, and this then makes the verse agree with the teaching of the prophets: "For I require loyalty, not sacrifice, acknowledgement of God rather than whole-offerings." (Hosea 6:6, cf. Amos 5:21-25)

The advice on prayer (v. 2) is to be cautious in what one says and to be brief. This reminds one of Jesus' similar caution: "In your prayers do not go babbling on like the heathen, who imagine that the more they say the more likely they are to be heard." (Matt. 6:7)

In the matter of vows to God, the important thing is to deliver as promised and not to delay or withhold (vv. 4-5). Better not to vow than to default.

Qoheleth here is fully in line with Jesus and the prophets in shunning a legalistic application of the Law, but we should not forget the context in which he worked if we are to grasp the impact his words would have. At the time of writing, in the post-exilic period, the Law was of course generally observed and formed the glue which held the Jews together as a community when they were no longer an independent nation. The temple of this period, however inferior to Solomon's as a structure, was the one place where sacrifices could be made. Thus Law and temple were at the core of Jewish faith. It was entirely different in Amos' time, before the book of the Law was found in Josiah's reign, when sacrifices were made at many places up and down the land as well as in Jerusalem, and when prophets were a major power beside the priests. Qoheleth, like Jesus, would have found himself against an established orthodoxy set up by Ezra and claiming Moses' authority. The running of the temple required resources, and offerings brought along by the people, and vows made to God, were no doubt a major source of income for maintaining the fabric of the building and supporting the priests. They could thus have been more concerned with the quantity of offering materials coming in than with the motives of the bringers, or than with defaulters among those making vows to God. Better, from their point of view, to have a hundred people make vows and half default, than only twenty vow and pay. There is no record of reactions to Qoheleth's teaching, but we may suspect that it would have been less than welcome to many.

Dreams and Words (5:3, 7)

These two verses are somehow related, and might even be two versions of one saying: "Dreams come with much business; the voice of a fool comes with much chatter."

"A profusion of dreams and a profusion of words are futile. Therefore fear God." The first half of verse 3 is the most difficult part, since it is not obvious why

dreams (if fanciful imagination is meant) result from much business. These are the only places where Qoheleth speaks of dreams, and it is not a common Wisdom topic, so no more can be said.

Unjust Government (5:8-9)

The theme here at least is well-known and easily grasped: officials abusing their power in oppressing the poor do so contrary to the will of God. The answer to the problem this creates is that there is a hierarchy, and while a human provincial governor is under another human but higher ruler, that ruler is under God. This last part is obtained by a very small correction of the Hebrew text which, as it stands in Hebrew MSS, ends v.8 with "higher ones (pl.) over them", which limits the scope of the verse to human rulers. By transferring the last letter of "higher ones" to the next word, and deleting the vowel letter before it (scribes before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 took great liberties in adding or deleting vowel letters), the meaning results: "a higher one over them," referring to God. The last verse of this section is the most difficult, as the very literal A.V. shows: "Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field." While the idea of arable land helping the ruler is not without meaning, it seems not to occur elsewhere in the Bible, and it is not a certain meaning of the Hebrew. "A field serving" can equally be rendered "a cultivated field" which is a more likely idea. Thus the RSV renders in its margin:

"The profit of a land is among all of them; a cultivated field has a king."

and the REB offers:

"The best thing for a country is a king whose own lands are well tilled."

while the RSV text prefers:

"But in all, a king is an advantage to a land with cultivated fields."

All three are possible translations, but no one is so convincing that it is obviously right and the others wrong. The first and last of the three seem to be praising the institution of kingship which the book does not normally do. The second one seems to say that a king who takes good care of his own lands is likely to be a good king. This seems quite a plausible sense, but a little too pedestrian a thought for Qoheleth, and lacking anything of the characteristics he normally displays. The king in question might be careful for his own estates, but indifferent to the needs of his kingdom.

Wilfred Lambert

(N.B. For corrections to Wilfred's articles on **Creation** and **Ecclesiastes** which appeared in the last edition, please turn to **Errata** on page 40.)

It is necessary to draw near to God, but it is not required of you to prolong your speech till everyone is longing to hear the word 'Amen'. C. H. Spurgeon.

Paul's Letters to Timothy & Titus

In a book entitled "Doubt", Os Guinness said that "keyholes can be as misleading as they are useful. The few words overheard may be vital-but what if the context which explained them is not? What if there is a mysterious other person in the conversation, sitting just out of sight? Who is he? What is he saying? Use the keyhole to jump to a wrong conclusion and you may be further off the track than if there is no keyhole at all." In this section from their booklet "All One in Christ Jesus", Ian and Averil McHaffie have made an honest attempt not to fall into the trap of engaging in Keyhole Theology in trying to make sense of the letters to Timothy and Titus.

These three letters are often thought of as instructions from the apostle Paul towards the end of his life as to how ecclesias should be organised for all time to come. The letters themselves give good reason, however, to question this interpretation, and indicate that they are an emergency response to particular problems which had arisen in Ephesus and Crete. In assessing, therefore, the teaching given, the context is once more crucial but as in Corinthians there is the difficulty that while Paul, Timothy and Titus knew precisely the situation in the ecclesias there, we do not.

Context

It is easy to underestimate the importance of knowing the right context, and all the facts of the situation. Automatically we tend to assume we can easily pick the context up when we read the words of Scripture. Two modern examples may warn us to proceed with caution.

On one occasion in the 1980s the electoral chances of President Trudeau of Canada were jeopardised by the portrayal of his wife as an empty-headed, unreliable companion. This image of her was boosted by the publication of a close-up photograph in which she was waving her arms foolishly in the air and appeared to be the worse for drink. Some time later the complete photograph was published. It had been taken when she had tripped on a flight of stairs and was attempting to regain her balance. A split-second, isolated shot by a photographer widely misled the public.

On 15th December 1989 the 6 pm news headlines on Radio 4 stated:

"The Archbishop of Canterbury today called for the forced repatriation of the Vietnamese boat people....."

Anyone turning off the radio at this point, or listening in a car and being temporarily distracted while driving, would have failed to hear the last three

¹ "Reflections on Church Order in the Pastoral Epistles, with Further Reflection on the Hermeneutics of *ad hoc* Documents" by Gordon D. Fee, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol 28, No 2 (June 1985) pages 141-151.

words of the sentence: "... to be stopped." The statement in fact said the opposite to that first understood.

In assessing the context of Paul's letters, particularly where he is dealing with issues which have been reported to him but which he does not state in his reply, we must be careful not to misunderstand. In these letters we possess the message which God wished Paul to convey to the people he addressed. We who read at a distance of 1,900 years are unlikely to pick up so accurately what is being said unless we acquaint ourselves with the whole background. It is not possible to do this, so we will always be handicapped by seeing only part of the overall picture.

The Context of Timothy & Titus

These letters are written to deal with major problems in Ephesus and Crete, but Paul does not write directly to the ecclesias there. The danger of which Paul had warned in Acts had been realised. "... from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." (Acts 20:30) If Paul had written directly to the elders, they would probably have ignored his letter. So, he worked through Timothy, as he explained at the beginning of the letter. "As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the divine training that is in faith.... Certain persons by swerving from these have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions." (1 Timothy 1:3-7)

False teachers had thoroughly corrupted the true teaching and practice of the Gospel in Ephesus, and much the same had happened in Crete. Paul's response was to commission Titus to appoint responsible elders in each town in Crete, but this was not possible in Ephesus where elders had been in place for some years and were themselves among the promoters of false teaching and practice.

Paul wrote to Timothy as an interim measure because he could not immediately go to Ephesus himself. "I hope to come to you soon but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth." (1 Timothy 3: 15) Since Timothy was already one of Paul's well-attested fellow-workers (Romans 16:2 1, 1 Corinthians 16: 1 0), and had been previously sent by Paul on a similar mission (1 Cor. 4:17), presumably Paul wrote in this way to give his written authority to the instructions Timothy would give in Ephesus.

The 'household of God' (KJV 'house of God') means the believers as a community, not the church building or a meeting of the ecclesia. It was necessary for these believers to be given (or given again) correct standards of behaviour. Although it is often assumed that Paul was giving instructions on

how to run meetings of the ecclesia, this is an assumption which cannot be demonstrated from the text. The contents of the letters to Timothy and Titus refer mostly to everyday behaviour and the personal morality of believers. Paul dealt with issues of immediate concern in the critical situation at Ephesus: younger widows were to re-marry and use their energies running a household; only widows aged 60 or over were to be put on the list; elders who ruled well were to receive double pay; no unsupported accusation was to be heard against an elder; Timothy was told to drink some wine for his health. Paul also warned against the love of money (6:10) for in pursuit of wealth some had already ruined their lives. These details show how much of Paul's letter was directed towards specific situations in Ephesus. The principles are eternal, but much of the detail is specific to the occasion

False Teaching

The precise errors of the false teachers are not clearly specified, but certain features are apparent:

(a) There was emphasis on myths and genealogies. These led to speculation rather than godliness.

... charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the divine training that is in faith. (1 Tim. 1:4)

(b) The Jewish Law was involved, though those desiring to be its teachers did not understand it properly, and pursued Jewish myths.

Certain persons ... have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions. (1 Timothy 1:6-7)

... there are many insubordinate men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially the circumcision party... (Titus 1:10)

... giving heed to Jewish myths or to commands of men who reject the truth. (Titus 1:14)

... avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels over the law, for they are unprofitable and futile. (Titus 3:9)

(c) It was not realised that immoral behaviour was incompatible with sound doctrine.

Now we know that the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully ... understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers ... and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine. (1 Timothy 1:8-10)

(d) Moral behaviour was rejected. God was blasphemed.

By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith, among them Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to

Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. (1 Timothy 1: 19-20)

- (e) They paid attention to "deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons"

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons....

- (f) Marriage was forbidden. Various foods were not to be eaten.

... [they] forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. (1 Timothy 4:3)

- (g) These false teachers were keen on controversy, and saw a chance in their religious activities to make financial profit.

... a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions, and wrangling among men ("those" NRSV) who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. (1 Timothy 6:4-5)

... they are upsetting whole families by teaching for base gain what they have no right to teach. (Titus 1: 11)

- (h) Myths or fables were attractive to some people.

Have nothing to do with godless and silly myths... (RSV)

... refuse profane and old wives' fables.... (KJV) (1 Timothy 4:7)

- (i) Some of this false teaching was taught by younger widows.

... they learn to be idlers, gadding about from house to house, and not only idlers but gossips² and busybodies, saying what they should not.... (1 Timothy 5:13)

- (j) Possibly some gave up worship of God and worshipped Satan.

... some have already strayed after Satan. (1 Timothy 5:15)

God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 3:25-26)

- (k) Some claimed to have special knowledge, though 'knowledge' was not a true description of it.

Avoid the godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge (*gnosis*), for by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith. (1 Timothy 6:20-21)

Turning Christian Teaching Upside Down

The closing comment by Paul gives a useful clue to the nature of some of the false teachings, for Christianity was challenged for several centuries by various

²The word translated as "gossips" or "tattlers" (*phylaroi*) suggests more than simply telling tales about people. It has the idea of talking nonsense, as explained in the next phrase "saying what they should not".

brands of heresy known as Gnosticism. Certain believers claimed to have superior knowledge (*gnosis*) beyond ordinary believers. A vast amount of literature from the ancient world details the various teachings of Gnosticism; "godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge" is an apt description of it.

Gnosticism had connections with Jewish thought, but Pagan and Jewish stories and myths became mixed together. A distorted interpretation of the Old Testament was the result. The God of the Hebrew Scriptures was considered evil because He created a material world. He was regarded as an inferior demigod, which could explain why Paul uses the word "blaspheme" of the activities of Hymenaeus and Alexander. The Gnostics were greatly interested in origins ("myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations"). They believed in a series of intermediate powers ("deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons"). Gnostic speculations involved a re-write of Genesis. The serpent, seen as an embodiment of "the female spiritual principle", was regarded as a benefactor of the human race by helping Adam and Eve to discover true knowledge (*gnosis*) contrary to the 'false' teaching of their Creator. Eve ("the mother of all living", Genesis 3:20) was identified with Artemis (whose great Temple was in Ephesus) and with Isis (salvation goddess from Egypt) and with Cybele ("the great mother" of pagan fertility religion). Eve was considered, therefore, as having a primacy over Adam. She played a key part in giving him life and in instructing him.

The spirit-filled woman came to him and spoke with him, saying "Arise, Adam." And when he saw her, he said, "You are the one who has given me life. You will be called 'the mother of the living,' because she is my mother, she is the female healer, and the wife and the one who gave birth" (Nag Hammadi Codex II, Tractate 4 *The Hypostasis of the Archons* 89.11-16)³

It was believed that Cain was good, Abel bad. If, as some maintained, the God of the Old Testament was evil, then commands like "Thou shalt not commit adultery" should be deliberately disobeyed. Morality was therefore reversed. These myths were not simply 'old-wives' tales' of a traditional folklore, but involved a direct challenge to Christian belief. Hence the description: 'godless' or 'profane': "Have nothing to do with godless and silly myths...." (RSV)

³The descriptions of Adam, Eve and the Serpent are complicated in this Gnostic literature, and they vary from book to book. We have given only a brief explanation above. For the full context and a further translation see *The Coptic Gnostic Library*, edited by Bentley Layton, Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7, Vols. 1 & 2 (1989), published by E.J. Brill under the auspices of The Institute for Antiquity and Christianity.

"...refuse profane and old wives' fables..." (KJV) (1 Timothy 4:7)

Differing and contradictory views were held among the false teachers. Not only were they leading believers astray but, as could be expected, they were indulging in bitter wrangling with each other.

The City of Ephesus

Ephesus was a centre for the worship of Artemis ('Diana of the Ephesians') - "she whom all Asia and the world worship" (Acts 19:27). According to Greek mythology, the city of Ephesus had been founded by the Amazons, famous women leaders who had slain their men-folk. Hence they had the epithet 'manslayers'. Artemis herself was a huntress and had engineered the death of the hunter Actaeon who came across her when she was bathing. According to mythology she slew many others. Initiation ceremonies re-enacted myths involving murder, patricide and matricide. Paul's criticism of prevailing attitudes at Ephesus echoes these myths. Is it simply a coincidence that he says: "the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers."? (1 Timothy 1:9) 'Manslayers' is the exact word used of the Amazons who gloried in their defeat of the men. The temple ceremonies at Ephesus were directed by a high priestess; the male priests were under her control. It is not surprising that believers in Ephesus risked contamination from this pagan atmosphere, nor that problems arose over women usurping the authority of men.

With this context in mind, and with the reservation that we nevertheless know very little about the actual events in Ephesus, we will go on in the next issue of Endeavour to examine 1 Timothy 2 regarding the position of brothers and sisters in relation to prayer and dress. **Ian and Averil McHaffie**

G.B.Caird

on

context:

If we wish to understand the sentence

'There is something wrong with the table',

we need to know whether the speaker is a housewife in the dining-room,
a mason on a building site, a statistician in a computing laboratory,
or an official of the Water Board.

The context of culture is important, for example, to a Frenchman attempting to translate into his own language the sentence

'I'm mad about my flat';

he needs to know whether the speaker is an Englishman
enthusiastic about his living-quarters
or an American furious about his puncture.

Letters to the Editor

In the last issue, Ron Coleman reviewed, at the authors request, a booklet entitled "The Devil and Demons—a new approach" written by **Bill Davison**, who has responded with the following letter:

Dear Ron

May I please reply, in the Endeavour magazine, to your critical review of my booklet. Contrary to what you say, at grass-roots level I know Christians who have an inordinate fear of the devil and demons I have a cousin in the Evangelical Church, a deaconess who speaks 'in tongues', and both she and the members of the congregation are literally terrified of the machinations of Satan - hence the Foreword. I attend Baptist 'Toronto Blessing' gatherings (with Ivan Stockley an ex-Christadelphian) where, in personal testimony and collective prayer, fear is often expressed of the devil - which dread, it is claimed, can be overcome by calling upon the person of the Holy Spirit to defeat the devil's wicked schemings. I have discussed my booklet with Elaine Pagels, Professor of Theology at Princeton University, author of "The Origin of Satan", and she speaks of "Christians dreading Satan's attacks" as 'proof' of his existence.

Regarding your pointed comment that, since persecution of Christians by the Roman authorities did not commence until after AD 64, this makes my interpretation of 1 Peter 5:8 invalid, and the whole treatise suspect; all I can say in mitigation is - if the Epistle was written between AD 63 and AD 67, or about AD64 or AD65 (alternatives proposed in "The Westminster Bible Dictionary"), then the concept that 'the devil as a roaring lion' refers to the persecuting power of Rome may be a reasonable supposition.

With reference to the overall theological presentation, I simply looked at the Hebrew and Greek texts and, without recourse to Christadelphian literature, drew my own conclusions. I appreciate that your overall view of 'the Devil and Demons' is different from mine, and you have every right to your opinion; nonetheless the booklet has been accepted by one of the Cambridge University Colleges as 'alternative' reading and, so far, 1162 copies have been requested by interested parties in this country and overseas - not all Christadelphians!

Finally, I shall be pleased to send a copy to any of your readers, free of charge, so that they can draw their own conclusions as to its validity or otherwise.

Sincerely your brother, Bill.

(Any readers who wish to take advantage of Bill's offer of a free booklet, now in its third enlarged edition, may do so by writing to him at: 49 Church Drive, Ravenshead, Notts. NG15 9FG. Bill has now received 1224 requests for his booklet which has recently been added to the library at Valletta University, Malta)

Ron's reply:

Bill Davison, no doubt unconsciously, has confirmed my statement that he is exceptional to have many Christian acquaintances with an overwhelming fear of the devil and demons. The 'Toronto Blessing' adherents are a fringe movement, not typical even of Evangelicals, and certainly not of Christians generally. And if the Holy Spirit, in which they believe strongly, cannot allay their fears, what chance has the answer that he puts forward?

As regards 1 Peter 5:8, the citation of the quotation from the Westminster Bible Dictionary (1944) is incorrect. What it says is that the date of 1 Peter "is set by its copious use of The Epistle to the Ephesians on the one side, and the death of Peter on the other, as between A.D. 63 and A.D. 67; it is most probable it was written about 64 or 65." The two periods are not stated simply 'as alternatives', but as a probable and a possible date. A good deal of work has been done on the problem in the last 54 years and the date of Peter's death is now generally given as 64, at Rome in the Neronian persecution.

That persecution was confined to Rome and there would have been no opportunity or occasion for Peter to write to the '12 tribes scattered abroad' at that time. Nor does the quotation itself make sense in relation to Roman persecution. One cannot 'resist' persecution by a dominant authority; flight or hiding are the only possibilities.

Actually there was only sporadic persecution of Christians for many years and not then by the Imperial authorities. The reason is set out clearly by G. B. Caird in his commentary on the gospel of Luke: (p 13)

"The policy adopted by Rome was that foreign religions, though illegal, might be tolerated, provided that they did not cause a breach of the peace or interfere with the official cult. Any violations of this privilege were dealt with, not in the regular criminal courts, but by police procedure, in the administration of which the authorities had wide discretionary powers. As a general rule, however, a magistrate would take no action on a religious charge unless he felt that either public opinion or national safety compelled him to do so."

Caird also says that until the fire of Rome and Nero's persecution, the authorities had officially regarded Christianity as a Jewish sect and therefore Christians had benefited from the exceptional tolerance with which Rome had treated the Jews since the time of Julius Caesar. (Caird's excellent commentary on Luke has recently been reprinted in the 'Penguin' series.)

ERRATA

We apologise to our authors and readers for the following mistakes in the last edition, No 98:

1) In the review of Barr's book on **'The Garden of Eden and Immortality'**, on page 38, the quote from Barr at the top of the page should read:

"As I have put it, they never had it, but they had the chance of it, and lost that chance: this is not so far away ... If people believe in 'the Fall', in 'original sin' and the like, this is not because of what they have read in Genesis, but on other grounds."

2) In the article on **Creation**, the following corrections need to be made:

a) p.16, last para. second line: for 'being' read 'bearing'

b) p.18, 9th line from bottom: for 'there' read 'here'

c) p.19, between lines 3 and 4 from bottom, add the extra paragraph:

The Babylonians and their Sumerian predecessors seem to have held unanimously that the universe arose from a single substance, but there is diversity of opinion as to what it was. The most commonly held view was that earth was the prime element from which all else arose. A less common but well-known view considered water as the prime element. Least common was the idea that time was the original source of everything. Basically they agreed with modern scientists that the complex universe we know developed out of a single element.

d) p.20, line 22: delete 'the' before 'divine blood'

e) p.20, second paragraph, line 4: delete 'the' before 'prescience'

f) p.20, fourth line from bottom, read 'to slay in the future'

3) In the article on **Ecclesiastes**, on p. 23, in the third line of the first paragraph: after 'Unfortunately' add 'human nature got the better of,'.

Nobody makes a greater mistake
than he who does nothing
because he could only do a little.

Edmund Burke