

The Endeavour Magazine

For Christian Thought and Action

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The Endeavour Magazine No 133

For quite some time now I have wanted to retire. Developing circumstances have reached the point where I have to inform readers that E132 will be the last issue until another editor is appointed. There is therefore likely to be some delay in the appearance of E133. In the meantime, I will try to respond to correspondence and enquiries as soon as I can and will keep any material sent to me for transfer to the next editor. Producing the magazine has only been made possible by readers submitting articles. May I take this opportunity to thank all those who have responded in this way, so making my task much easier. I would also particularly like to thank Ruth Marsters who has been handling the subscriptions and distribution since 1994.

Editor

Thanks to the Editor

Les has produced the magazine regularly for the last 16 years, one of the longest stretches as editor. Like his predecessor, Ron Coleman, he taught himself computer technology in order to set the magazine for printing. He suffered at times from the faults that can occur when a computer glitch messes up the paging or OCR (Optical Character Recognition) struggles with difficult-to-read type! However, Les has successfully gathered and produced a wide range of challenging material. His own scholarship and study has been a major contribution. It is not easy to produce a magazine which is prepared to allow varying and sometimes contradictory viewpoints, trusting that readers will have the maturity to analyse issues for themselves. Les has had to bear the brunt of attacks on the very principle of having a magazine which is prepared to reassess. After all, some will say, since we have 'The Truth' and nothing but the

truth, why should anyone wish to reassess? But the history of our community has shown that dogmatically stated certainties have been demonstrated as unsound, especially in the areas of science and 'signs of the times'. Endeavour has always been willing to rethink, and Les has led with his own, very valuable contribution. In addition to editing the magazine, and with much-appreciated help from Alex Green, Les has made the magazine and articles by Wilfred Lambert available on-line. He has also published and distributed a range of booklets by various authors some of which are still available.

A new editor has not so far been appointed, so the magazine will be in abeyance until some further decision is made.

On behalf of the Committee I therefore wish to express our gratitude to Les for his dedication and his hard work, and wish him and Mavis a productive and peaceful retirement.

Ian McHaffie

NOW AVAILABLE

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Appendices include 'Freedom Won and Lost', 'The Influence of the Holy Spirit' (an analysis of varying Christadelphian assessments), and 'The Divine Purpose with Israel' by George McHaffie (reprinted from *Endeavour* 1967).

These books were advertised for sale in 2003, along with ***TIMEWATCHING AND ISRAEL*** and orders were received, but Ruth died before her two autobiographical books could be published. Those who put in orders should now have received their copies, with apologies for the 10-year delay, but if anyone has not received what was ordered, please say.

Copies of ***TIMEWATCHING AND ISRAEL*** were distributed in 2004 to those who ordered them. The two volumes are now out of print, but a reprint is planned.

Please send orders to:

Ian McHaffie, 176 Granton Road, Edinburgh. EH5 1AH,
or contact by email: mchaffie@tesco.net
Cheques, please, to 'Ian McHaffie'.

The means by which we live have outdistanced the ends for which we live.
Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power.
We have guided missiles and misguided men.

Martin Luther King

Mystery

When we say that something is a mystery, we usually mean that something that puzzles us has, as yet for ourselves, found no answer. We might say that 'It is all Greek to me!' meaning that we fail to understand the matter though others may do so. Some knowledge may be being withheld from us, knowledge that might just clarify our understanding but may sadly

also prove to be beyond our understanding, leaving us still faced with what to us might be described as a mystery. Such is the everyday meaning of the word, something being hidden, inexplicable, obscure, secret.

I understand that the Greek *musterion*, from which we get our word mystery, comes from the root *muo* meaning to close or shut the eyes or mouth. It occurs 27 times in the NT, once in each of the three Synoptic Gospels, 4 times in Revelation and 20 times in Pauline epistles. The meaning of the word is not quite the meaning of the word in everyday English. It is used by Paul particularly in the sense of a truth revealed, something that was not known previously but is now being revealed or has been revealed – was a secret of God which is now being made known by revelation. Here are the verses where the word is to be found:

Mat 13:11 Mk 4:11 Lk 8:10 Rom 11:25 16:25 1Cor 2:7 4:1 13:2 14:2 15:51 Eph 1:9 3:3,4,9 5:32 6:19 Col 1:26,27 2:2 4:3
2 Thess 2:7 1 Tim 3:9, 16 and Rev 1:20 10:7 17:5, 7.

Readers might like to look at them before reading what I have to say about them.

The word is used when each of the synoptic gospel writers is telling how Jesus explained his parable of the sower to his disciples, the twelve and others. He refers to the mystery or mysteries of the Kingdom of God or heaven. Now Jesus began his preaching by announcing that the time was fulfilled and the Kingdom of God was at hand. We need to remember that the word Kingdom is an abstract noun meaning reign, rule or rulership. The implication of the announcement was that God was about to exercise his reign or rule to accomplish his purpose in some way through Jesus.

We might ask what mystery or secret about the Kingdom of God was there that the Jews didn't already know about from their scriptures? They knew, or thought they knew, from the OT, what future God had in store for them and so would expect Jesus to give reality to those hopes and expectations. But Jesus soon ran into trouble with the Jewish leaders and even his own disciples had difficulties with what he said and did. Why, in Lk 24, on the road to Emmaus, does Jesus have to take two of his disciples through the OT to help them to understand how God was bringing in his reign/rule through Jesus? Jesus had preached that the Kingdom of God was at hand, i.e. was about to begin, but the Jews couldn't see what they were expecting actually happening, and Jesus' close disciples were similarly misguided. They needed to modify their understanding of how God was going to fulfil his promises to Israel and mankind in general i.e. modify how they understood their own scriptures.

The implication of this is that the gospel of the kingdom or reign of God cannot be read straight from the OT without the revelation that came with Jesus. There is surely a warning for us here to be careful in seeking to base our own expectations of the future on passages from the OT unless they have been clearly explained in the NT. We are just as likely to make the same sort of mistake that was made by the Jews, including Jesus' close disciples.

In referring to the Kingdom of God as a mystery, or divine secret, Jesus is implying that God was doing something new, there and then, in Jesus that had always been part of his plan but had not been understood by Israel and was now being made known by Jesus. The mystery or secret was now being revealed. However, Jesus could not speak too openly about it for he knew that that would bring down the Jewish and Roman authorities on him and bring a quick end to his ministry. So he taught in parables leaving the hearers to work out the inner meaning for themselves. Jesus' understanding of what God was doing through him, would have been for the Jews what we now call **politically incorrect** (Tom Wright). He was announcing and inaugurating God's rule, reign or kingdom, but not in the way that Jews had anticipated. They needed to review their understanding if they wanted to be part of the new thing that God was doing through Jesus, creating a new people of God. The parable of the sower and other parables were not told to keep people out but to stir their imagination and lead them to seek further enlightenment, while keeping the enemy at bay by not being too

explicit, which would no doubt have brought Jesus' ministry to a premature end.

Paul of course is the perfect example of how Jews had to change their understanding of God's plan and purpose. This no doubt is why the word *mysterion* features so largely in his writings. He too has become an agent of enlightening both Jews and Gentiles. In particular he was the **only** apostle to the Gentiles, born out of due time as it were. That some of what he said was difficult to understand is indicated in 2 Peter 3:14,15,16: 'And when our Lord waits patiently to act, see it for what it is – salvation! Our beloved brother Paul has written to you about all this, according to the wisdom that has been given him, speaking of these things as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them which are difficult to understand. Untaught and unstable people twist his words to their own destruction, as they do with the other scriptures.' (Tom Wright)

When he wrote some of his epistles, Paul was in prison where he was likely to get opportunity to make his captors aware of the Christian hope, and in Eph 6:19 he asks for prayers to be said that he might make known the secret truth/mystery of the gospel. In Eph 1:7-9 he speaks of God making known the secret of his purpose in Jesus i.e. to sum up the whole cosmos in the king (Christ) – yes, everything in heaven and on earth in him. At the end of chapter one, he makes it clear that Jesus has been given all authority in this age and in the age to come (cf. Mat 28:18). God has put all things under his feet and made Jesus head over the church. This is surely the fulfilment of Jesus saying that the kingdom of God was at hand, about to be inaugurated. Paul makes it clear that for him Jesus rules, he is Lord and Caesar is not. In 1 Cor 15:20-28 I believe he is saying that such will be the situation until the powers that be acknowledge Christ's supremacy. The present reign of Jesus will continue until all other rulers and authorities have submitted to him, when he will hand over the kingly rule to God the Father.

But how will the rulers of this world learn of this purpose and eventually submit to it? Paul makes this clear in Eph 3:1-11 when he refers to what was not known to previous generations but has now been revealed through Jesus and through Paul's ministry. Not only is the distinction between Jew and Gentile to be abandoned, by both becoming sharers of the promise in King Jesus, but, as we have already seen, the whole cosmos is to be made one in Christ. In verse 9 Paul describes his part as making clear to all what was hidden in prior times but has now been revealed in Jesus. He says the plan is this: that God's wisdom, in all its rich variety, is to be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places – through the church!

As the church, we are not meant to be just waiting for Jesus to return to begin his reign and then put things right, we are meant to be teaching the world, and particularly the rulers and authorities, how God in Christ wants them to respond to him now. Are we up to the challenge? Jesus seeks to exercise and broaden his reign through the church. This gospel is the mystery that Paul felt he was privileged to teach to both Jew and Gentile.

Les Boddy

Fred Barling

Towards the end of his life,
Fred distributed the following leaflet on the Trinity.

Introduction by Fred Barling

Non-Trinitarians rarely fully comprehend why others are trinitarians. Sometimes this is because it has never occurred to them to find out. Sometimes it is because they just do not want to know, assuming that trinitarianism and belief in the unity of God stated so emphatically in Deut 6:4 must be incompatible.

Michael Ramsay's talk on this vexed subject is reproduced for the information it contains

and the respect for Scripture which it reveals. It is hoped that it will enable fair-minded non-trinitarians to see that the issues are perhaps not as sharply black-and-white as they are sometimes thought to be. Christian charity demands that theological judgments be both informed and just.

God and Jesus Christ

(Given as an address at Fairacres, Oxford, in May 1975.)

I see three possible ways of discussing God and Jesus Christ. One way might be to take one of the early credal definitions like the formula 'Jesus is Lord' and think about its implications. Another way might be to take as basis the fact that Christians worship Jesus as divine, and always have worshipped Jesus as divine, and to ask what are the implications of that. A third way, however, I am going to follow. Christians from the beginning have believed in God and believed in Jesus Christ, and the act of believing in God and the act of believing in Jesus Christ have been so interwoven, that though the acts are not in every respect identical they do interpret one another.

Let us look at the first Christian age witnessed to by the New Testament writings. Here we find the first Christian community spreading itself around the world, conscious of two new creative things. One of them is a new intensity of belief in God as Creator, sovereign, ruler of the world, mighty and gracious, especially gracious. The other is the awareness of Jesus as the dominant figure eliciting great devotion from them. These two thrusts, so to speak, run together, the thrust of an intensified faith in God and the thrust of a devotion to Jesus.

Think of the first. The theme of all the New Testament writings is God himself. In the synoptic gospels the theme is the kingdom of God penetrating into every corner of human life. The Pauline epistles are punctuated by outbursts of praise to God for the new realisation of his greatness, goodness, mercy and sovereignty. Here are people more than ever certain that God is real, near and sovereign, not least in face of all the world's suffering. Who is this God? He is still the God of Abraham, Moses and the Prophets, the God to whom Jesus prayed in the synagogue and in the temple as well as in lonely places. It is a vindication of the God of the Jews. But it is not only the vindication of a tradition of theism, for *this* theism has found mighty fulfilment, has reached a climax in power and in grace. It is a fulfilment characterised not by that which is fulfilled so much as by what it is that fulfils; an ancient theism vivified by a new manifestation of God's power and love.

This has happened as a result of the mission and work of Jesus. How has this been brought about by Jesus? Perhaps in part by the teaching of Jesus, bringing a new dimension to the understanding of God brought by the prophets. Perhaps by Jesus's own consciousness of the Father, when he prayed 'Abba, Father' and no doubt communicated something of that intense consciousness of the Father to his disciples. But chiefly no doubt by the whole impact of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as itself a new act of the power and love of God which made God more than ever real and near. Anyhow, it is through Jesus Christ and what he is and what he has done that this new realisation of God has come. But primarily we note that Christianity is about a renewed theism.

But then the second thrust is this devotion to Jesus as the dominant figure. The Christians believe that Jesus has been raised from death and is the Lord. They believe that his death has been a unique means of bringing salvation to the world in spite of all its shame and scandal. And both for the present and for the future Jesus is dominant. For the present, the life that is lived is a life described as Christ living in us, or, in the Johannine literature, eternal life as a life of fellowship with Jesus here and now. Looking to the future, in the more apocalyptic writings in the New Testament, it is Jesus who will be returning as judge. Jesus too is the goal of a Christian's life of moral discipleship, which is to grow up into the full realisation of Jesus' sufferings and risen life. It is the goal of the Church to grow up into all things unto

him who is the head, even Christ. And that indeed is the goal of creation itself, to be finally united in Christ as centre and head. Thus Jesus is a dominant figure, and already, language of worship is being used towards him.

Now these two realisations—an intense belief in God and a devotion to Jesus—needed some thinking out, both for the clearing of the minds of the Christians themselves, and for being sure what they wanted to say in their worship, and what they wanted to say to the world to whom they were proclaiming the gospel. So then there come about two questions which could not be separated. The one question was, ‘What do we believe, and say about this Jesus?’—and this has been called Christology. The other question, ‘What in the light of Jesus do we believe about God different from what we believed before?’ arises because the upshot of all this must be not only that Jesus is somehow divine, but also that God is Christ-like. God is Christ-like and in him there is no un-Christ-likeness at all. Those are the two things with which Christian theology has ever since the first age been concerned. How we understand the place of Jesus and our devotion to him? How we understand God in the light of Jesus, God’s own Christlikeness—the overhauling of our picture and concept of God in the light of Jesus? Now it is fair to say that through the ages, notably I think in the patristic period, it has been easier for Christians to give honours to Jesus as divine than it has been to have our concept of God fully and completely Christianised or Christified. But both processes are again and again necessary and the two really interpenetrate one another.

II

Let us pick it up at this point. I won’t go over all the ground of the beginnings of Christology, but in the New Testament writings there are varieties of titles used about Jesus. The title Christ was often used simply as a proper name like Jesus, but essentially it links Jesus with the fulfilment of the Old Testament—God’s anointed one. It roots Jesus in the biblical theism. The title ‘Lord’ could be used in a variety of senses, but it specially linked Jesus with the resurrection. In virtue of the resurrection Jesus has lordship. The title ‘Son’ speaks specially of the intimacy of Jesus with the Father, an intimacy that goes back to the gospel traditions about Jesus’s own prayer and claim. But there are three main ways in which the New Testament writers give expression to belief about Jesus, three ways not mutually exclusive, because some of them occur in the same writer. They are broadly these—and they are ways which must all be legitimate, ways which recur with emphasis within Christian history.

God through Jesus Christ, and specially through his death and resurrection, reveals himself to men. Call that, if you like, a functional way of thinking of God’s revelation in Jesus: what God has done and shown through Jesus. It is certainly very prominent in St Paul and St John and we could be sure that the Lord Jesus would reject no-one who talked as the apostles talked in that way.

A second mode of expression about the place of Jesus—*Jesus is the perfect mirror or likeness of God in humanity*, the image of the invisible God. ‘He that hath seen me has seen the Father.’ The perfect, flawless mirror of the divine glory. That, in St Paul, St John and *Hebrews*, is a meaningful way of speaking of the relation of Jesus to the Father, and it is a way that has sometimes been specially concentrated upon, people finding it helpful to grasp.

A third way is *this—The eternal Son or Word or Wisdom* (for all terms are used) who had shared with the Father in the creation and management of the universe, *became man as Jesus*. This, we find in St Paul and in *Hebrews* and in St John, and it was this that came to be affirmed later at the Council of Nicea. The Eternal Word, Wisdom or Son made man, made flesh.

There were, then, those three ways of thinking of Jesus in relation to God, all of them in the context of the worship of Jesus as divine, though the modes of formulation are indeed different. But this is very important: what does all this imply about God and God’s essential

character? And here, the exciting thing is that amidst this discussion of Jesus and the role of Jesus, there peeps through a realisation that in the whole story of Jesus in history, God was uniquely giving his own self to man, and this comes out in imagery. 'God spared not his own Son.' That is anthropomorphic imagery, it is a kind of Abraham and Isaac imagery—yet this idea of God giving at great cost, however anthropomorphically expressed, was not the way that God had normally been thought about or talked about. Again, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.' When Christ was doing it, God was doing it: 'God commends his own love towards us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.' The love of Jesus in history is God's own love in action. 'God so loved . . . that he gave.' 'God sent . . .' These expressions, which come from Paul, John and *Hebrews*, and are present just a little in the Petrine writings as well, are striving to say that God in giving Christ to the world was in a way giving himself.

It is when we come to the Fourth Gospel that this insight into God's self-giving in Jesus that has been peeping out comes blazing out. The Fourth Gospel writes with great authority. I for one no longer think that the writer probably is the Beloved Disciple and that his authority is the authority of being himself an eye-witness. I think that he draws upon historical traditions of great value, but that his authority is rather the authority of a Christian with an inspired insight into the meaning of Jesus, an insight into truth about God, and one who is enabled to draw the two together. 'Believe in God, believe also in me.' What I call these two thrusts of the renewed theism and the belief in Jesus, he sees perfectly together as one. And he has these particular insights—that the Father/Son relation in the story of Jesus, which is the meaning of love, reflects in history a Father/Son relationship that is eternal, that love is in essence more than unitary. Though we cannot now pursue this, it is the insight on which the doctrine of the Trinity is really based—that in God there is the self-giving love of relationships, and it is a self-giving love of relationships that is disclosed in the Jesus story in the world. But the other insight in John is this, that the self-giving love in the Passion of Jesus, which John calls the glory, is the manifestation of what the eternal glory of deity is like, for the eternal glory of deity is the glory of self-giving love. This is seen in the Passion. The Passion is not thus something contrary; the Passion is the way in which, in terms of self-giving love, the very glory of deity is disclosed. Hence the imagery on the eve of the Passion: 'Glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory I had with thee before the world began.' 'God so loved ... that he gave.'

Let me at this point quote a sentence of Karl Barth which sums up this unity of God and Christ very strikingly: 'In Jesus Christ God actuates and proves his Godhead by the fact that he gives himself the suffering and limitation of human nature.' This self-giving of God towards man disclosed in the particular history of Jesus is not something that God did once in a while; it is rather something of what it means for God to be God. It is the most Godlike thing that God could ever do, to give and to send his Son.

III

I need not go over Nicea and Chalcedon, because you know all that from back to front! So I think, perhaps, I will take a jump to the modern world, and comment about some of the things that appear to be troubling Godly people today. I believe that at this time, great difficulty is being felt not about the deity of Jesus as such, so much as about the particularity of God's revelation in Jesus. 'If God is sovereign, gracious and loving, the kind of God that you say Jesus has revealed, why is it uniquely or only specially in this particular bit of history that we find God? Why not find God in the whole process if we can?' I have put very crudely what is being felt and said, and in two ways the particularity of God in Christ is being found difficult. First, today, religions are far more mixed up with one another than they ever were. In the first age of Christianity they had never heard of Buddhism or Hinduism and did not know that Islam was going to come; Christianity could therefore hold the intellectual field and the religious field to a very large extent. But now, as Christians, we are so far more aware and involved with African and, specially, with Asian religions, with their experience of

God and of the divine, that the question is being more and more posed— ‘Yes, God revealed himself to you Christians in this way, but how can you be sure that he has not also revealed himself to other people in their way, and so on? Can you really make such an exclusive kind of claim?’ The other difficulty is felt more amongst some intellectuals and philosophers whose mode of thought finds it difficult to take the idea that God can be certainly and exclusively found in one person and in one set of events, rather than in any experiences of God that human beings are likely to find.

I think that we Christians should be sensitive to the difficulties that are being felt. But I make these two comments. It is necessary for us to combine our belief in the revelation of God in Christ as the perfect image of God and our key to the understanding of the world, with the recognition of the divine Logos or Word at work far and wide in different religions and elsewhere in the world. It is really important that we should avoid any idea that other religions are evils to be destroyed, and that, having destroyed them and created a vacuum, we should then implant Christian truth on the scene. That has not worked, will never work, and does not deserve to work because it simply is not true. It is not true that other religions are all darkness. They are full of light, of which Jesus Christ is the fulfilment, and it is very necessary for us to approach other religions both with a great reverence for them, as well as with our belief in Jesus as identical with the Word who is the light of the world in all creation.

As regards the particularity of the gospel, here I would say that God is primarily commending himself and making himself known to the human race—not first of all to the human reason, but first of all to the human conscience and imagination through acts of love and humility. It is his own humility that God is anxious to teach the world in order to evoke humility from us proud human beings. It is the divine humility which is shown in the specific incarnation, the infinite One identifying himself with one finite human life. And it is the divine humility that is seen in the particularity and the scandal of the cross. The foolishness of God is wiser than men and God, in his foolishness, has chosen to make his most significant revelation of himself to the world through a particular act of divine humility in becoming man, through a particular act of the bearing and suffering of sin upon the cross. I believe that there, particularly in God’s bearing of suffering sin on the cross, we have a word that, being particular, is also universal. I doubt if there can ever be a substitute for the universality of the divine Word through Jesus on the cross.

The God whom Jesus has revealed to us is a God who is the Creator of the world, who is at work in all the world, who is at work in all history. He is also a God who does things in particular and has with a special intensity revealed himself in the coming of Jesus and specially in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, in order to show that living through dying is not only the climax of the life of Jesus but is a key to our understanding of the world in which we live.

Michael Ramsey

Comparative & Superlative

To whom, then, will you compare God?’¹ This verse is remarkable for two reasons. Firstly, ‘it is here that Hebrew monotheism finds in the Old Testament its culminating expression.’² Secondly, it draws our attention to an important feature of language. ‘Human beings think in analogies. We seek comparables within our experience to deal with something outside our experience.’³ In all our learning we use the known to explain the unknown, and hence we may speak and write using similes.

We often - either consciously or unconsciously - make comparisons in our daily life. We need only think of the way in which we determine which goods to purchase in the

supermarket where we may look for the cheap, cheaper or cheapest article. Here I am reminded of the slogan painted on the front of my grandfather's grocery shop; 'quality is the true test of cheapness.'

We may rank items in order of preference and to do so use an ordinal⁴ system of numbering; first, second, third etc. In the English language we also express degrees of adjectival quality by using the comparative morpheme⁵ '-er' and the superlative morpheme '-est.' These particles are attached as suffixes to the basic stem of the adjective as in the example 'great,' 'greater,' 'greatest' thus enabling us to rank qualities in a particular order, as a measure against a standard adjective. An important feature of Biblical Hebrew is that each word has a three (or very occasionally a two) consonant stem to which are pre-fixed or post-fixed other consonants or vowels. However, this is not the way in which either comparative or superlative words are constructed in our Hebrew Old Testament.

For the use of a positive comparative we may do no better than recall the well-known phrase in Ecc 4:9 that 'two are better than one.' In this example, a higher (not highest) degree of an adjectival quality is expressed when the preposition *min*⁶ (= from) is used with the noun or adjective being surpassed. Hence a word for word translation from Hebrew to English would be 'good the two from the one.' This shows that a literal, word for word translation often leads to awkward English phrasing. Here we have an example of Hebrew idiom (a phrase with a meaning that cannot be worked out from the individual words within it). A second type of comparative is a comparative of exclusion as seen in Gen 29:30: 'He loved Rachel rather than Leah.' Thirdly, we find a comparison of capability in Ps 65:4 'They are too strong for me.'

Syntax is the way in which words are arranged to form phrases and sentences. This is particularly applicable to the construction of the superlative whereby the highest degree of the adjectival quality is expressed, for in the Old Testament a literal translation (which makes perfect sense in English) is often given. For example, in Ezra 7:12 the title King of Kings is applied to Artaxerxes the King of Persia who ruled over empires in which many petty kings acknowledged him as the supreme or greatest king. Other well-known examples spring to mind; song of songs (Song 1:1) which means the choicest song, holy of holies (Exod 29:37) or the most holy. Vanity of vanities (Ecc 1:2) may be translated futility utter futility. Finally, a kind of superlative sense is given to a word by connecting it with a divine name. Examples are found in 1 Sam 14:15 'a very great trembling' = a trembling of God and Isa 51:3 'a splendid garden' = a garden of YHWH.

John Stephenson (NZ)

Notes

1 Isa 40:18 (NIV).

2 Israel w. Slotki, *Isaiah*, Soncio Press, London, 1961, p 188.

3 John D W Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, Word, 1987, p 91.

4 As distinct from cardinal numbers which indicate the amount or quantity of something.

5 A morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit of language.

'This preposition denotes *away from*; the comparison is viewed from the outside, from a distance.' Bruce Waltke *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind, 1990, p 264.

Greek Gems

John 16:16,17,19 KJV A little while ...

'A little while, and ye **shall not see** (theoreō, behold) me: and again, a little while, and ye **shall see** (horaō, know, understand) me, because I go to the Father.' Then said some of his disciples among themselves, 'What is this that he saith unto us, "A little while, and ye **shall not see** me and again, a little while, and ye **shall see** me": and, "Because I go to the Father?"'

... Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, 'Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, "A little while, and ye **shall not see** me: and again, a little while, and ye **shall see** me?"'

Theoreō is to see physically, 'behold', from which 'theatre' is derived, whereas from *horaō* is derived the (irregular) verb *oida* which means to know, to understand, to see the inner meaning, the spiritual significance.

Three times over, these verbs are used to explain the difference between seeing Jesus as a human being in his physical appearance and their recognition of him as unseen spirit power after the resurrection. The presence of Jesus to us now is an invisible influence in our lives which requires spiritual vision to see the meaning of his life which is to glorify God.

John 19:30

'And (Jesus) having bowed his head, passed over, handed on, (*paradidōmi*) the spirit.'

The verb *paradidōmi* is translated into Latin as *trado* from which is derived tradition and trade 'passed on to another'. Judas handed Jesus over (*paradidōmi*) to be arrested. Jesus breathed out his life breath – the spirit of God – for His disciples to receive, if they open their hearts, mind and eyes to see the glory of God in Him.

Hebrews 12:2 KJV 'For the joy set before him'

'... looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who **for** the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.'

Here the Greek text does not support the KJV (most translations agree with the KJV). The preposition in Greek is *anti*, 'instead of': 'for' is not correct. (In English, 'anti' usually is taken to mean 'against' but the Greek word means 'instead of'). Thus the English translation is:

'Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who, **instead of** the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.'

The joy was set before him in the wilderness when he was tempted by the thought of becoming king of the world without the trials of his ministry and the suffering of the cross. Our gratitude to the Lord for his choice is inexpressible.

Hebrews 3:1-2 'He was faithful to Him who appointed Him'

'Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; who was faithful to him that **appointed** him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house.'

Here the verb 'appointed' is inaccurate. The Greek word is *poiō*, meaning do or make. The writer to the Hebrews is confirming that Jesus was 'made'. In fact, Jesus was made twice by God: once born of Mary with a human frame, and a second time a spirit being at his resurrection. The translators believing in the pre-existence of Jesus deviate from the 'making' of Jesus by using 'appoint'. This is unwise, especially as the writer to the Hebrews quotes the Psalmist who prophesies '*Jesus was made lower than the angels*' (2:7). It would be very difficult for any translator to deviate from the Hebrew text here.

Sheila Harris and Roy Boyd

New Booklet

The Spirit of God

God is the supreme power, manifested in Jesus through the Spirit. This booklet is designed to show that the Spirit, the breath of God, the expression of His mind and character, was the motive power which created the world, inspired the prophets and infused the birth and life of Jesus. Through His risen life we may receive the Spirit, if we look to Him and, beholding His glory, may be changed into His likeness.

Copies may be obtained from the author at no charge.

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Creation & Evolution: How should Christadelphians respond?

When discussing creation and evolution it is important to remember that the heavens declare the glory of God, and that the Bible points us to Creation to enrich our understanding of God's truth. Nature is God's self-evident witness; day after day and night after night it reveals knowledge of God's eternal power, righteousness and divine attributes, so much so that God holds all men morally accountable and without excuse.¹ God even scolds his most beloved servants when, oblivious to the implications of the natural world surrounding them, they "hide counsel by words without knowledge."²

These simple truths came home to me with force during the 90's soon after joining the Anglo-Australian Observatory in 1988 for work. Like many people I had thought that modern biology was at odds with belief in God and the Bible, and imagined that Genesis could be harmonised with scientific evidence by appeal to the 'gap theory' as proposed by Thomas Chalmers in 1814³ and recommended in 1848 by John Thomas in *Elpis Israel*.⁴ In 1990 I was appointed to the role of Telescope Operator and for 17 years took my turn at the controls of the giant instrument to probe the immensity of creation in time and space. It was a deeply humbling, awe-inspiring and formative experience. Directly engaged in frontline research at the wheel of one of the world's finest telescopes I saw with my own eyes what most people would only later read about in books or see on TV and the internet. I soon realised how utterly wrong and naive I had been, and that many dominant voices in many religious communities are hopelessly ignorant of science and speak nonsense against its discoveries. I determined to seek where the truth in Genesis lay and in time found my answers in the New Testament's teaching about Jesus Christ; for whom all things were made, in whom all things hold together and for whom the ages were created from the beginning (Jhn.1:1-17, Col.1:15-18, Heb.1:1-2).⁵

We would be wise to pause and reflect here. Sadly even the best of us utter things we do not understand, things too wonderful for us to grasp, things we do not know.⁶ For if God truly exists, and if the Bible is his Word, then like Abraham our faith in God and our understanding of the Gospel⁷ should be consolidated and enriched when we consider the awesome spectacle the heavens reveal today. This has certainly been my own experience. But there is a flip side, for the Creation is no more a respecter of persons than its Creator. As Thomas Huxley famously expressed it, 'Sit down before fact like a little child, and be prepared to give up every preconceived notion. Follow humbly wherever and to whatever abyss Nature leads, or

you shall learn nothing.’ Applying this essential humility in hand with the Scriptures leads to an important realisation:- for if the heavens declare knowledge,⁸ and provide compelling reasons for faith, and if Nature is witness to God’s goodness,⁹ and if Creation reveals God’s eternal power and invisible qualities to all humanity,¹⁰ then when God’s own witness demonstrates that evolution is true it follows that evolution also declares the glory of God, and is a witness of His eternal creative power, and is a source of knowledge about God’s ways and character that can provide assurance for faith in Him and the Gospel. And if evolution is true then those who oppose it are confounding the wisdom and power of God, and perhaps doing harm to the Gospel.¹¹

So is evolution true?

This is a scientific question. For many years most scientifically informed Christadelphians held out against the growing weight of evidence for evolution in hope that something new would turn up that would recast the data back in favour of a more literal reading of Genesis in which the species were

created separately from the beginning and mankind did not share a common ancestor with apes.¹² New evidence did arrive in the form of the genetic code and the study of the genome,¹³ and the findings settled the question in favour of universal common descent as surely as DNA evidence settles a paternity dispute.¹⁴ While the implications of these and other discoveries will take time to sink in and be properly integrated with our beliefs, the writing is on the wall for all to see. We were wrong, the scientists were right, and evolution as a historical fact is now proven true beyond reasonable doubt.

We may be surprised, affronted, perhaps even angered to hear this so plainly stated, and some will protest loudly and say it isn’t so. This is to be expected, but arguing the case for evolution and addressing those objections is not the burden of this paper. Our concern is for the growing number of Christadelphians, especially our young people, who, discovering that evolutionary biological descent is now an undeniable proven historical reality that is regarded by scientists as “*among the most reliably established and fundamentally important facts in all of science*”,¹⁵ now find their faith wavering or their beliefs at odds with our community. Tragically, inevitably, some will reject the inspiration of the Scriptures with sorry consequences for themselves, their ecclesial family and friends.

In view of these developments, what should we do?

We must humbly face these facts with open hearted honesty. We do not need renewed exhortations to hold fast to untenable ideas. Fifty years ago, well before the genomic revolution sealed the case for universal common descent, the Watford ecclesia acknowledged that the problems for our beliefs were undeniable then and urged our community to ‘*diligently enquire how we might resolve these matters in an atmosphere of calm, sincere, conscientious study, unhindered by the rumours, mistrust, suspicion and hasty judgments that have been all too prevalent in the past.*’¹⁶ This has not happened. Instead many well-intentioned but misguided books, pamphlets, magazine articles and lectures have issued from a variety of sources providing mistaken assurance that we were right and science was wrong. Some ecclesias even made rejection of evolution a condition of fellowship. We must confront the fact that our community has been poorly served on this subject and our children left ill-equipped and badly exposed. Today every young person studying ecology, genetics, zoology, anatomy or related disciplines such as medicine will be confronted by an avalanche of data unknown to their parents showing that ‘*nothing in biology makes sense without evolution.*’¹⁷ As scientific knowledge is now readily available to all via the Internet, and as our mistakes are now publicly lampooned,¹⁸ we can no longer hide our ignorance or sweep these issues under the carpet.

b. We must dismiss the false perception that evolution means disbelief in God as this only serves the atheist’s agenda. Many practicing scientists are theists¹⁹ as a browse through any reasonable bookstore will reveal. A survey in 1996 revealed that 40% of scientists in the

US believe in a personal God who answers prayer, much the same as a previous survey in 1916.²⁰ A case in point is Francis Collins²¹ who led the Human Genome Project²² and wrote the New York Times best seller *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*. He coined the term 'BioLogos' to describe evolution as a creative act, and the group who now bear that name describe themselves as '*a community of evangelical Christians committed to exploring and celebrating the compatibility of evolutionary creation and biblical faith, guided by the truth that all things hold together in Christ.*'²³ These examples can be multiplied, and they are joined in these sentiments by a growing number of Christadelphians who both accept the evidence of science and hold a strong commitment to Bible truth.²⁴

c. Likewise we must discard the notion that evolution disempowers God, or supplants his role as Creator. We have no such problem with the mysterious and invisible force of gravity, to which science attributes the creation of all the stars and the galaxies in the Universe, the sun, the moon and the all the planets, even the very elements from which we are made, because we accept gravity as part of God's creation. Similarly we understand God's rule in the kingdoms of men – raising up whomsoever he wills and determining events – to be inscrutable. So too may we understand the wonderful interplay of time, chance and the seemingly infinite capacity of biology to adapt as providing endless opportunities for the finger of God to invisibly guide and effect his purpose as, how and when he wills.

d. We must seek to understand the Bible in harmony with the findings of science, as our early Christadelphians once did. We should be careful not to place God's Word at odds with His Works as this is a false dichotomy and a proven recipe for unbelief. By forcing a choice between evidence *or* faith, evolution *or* creation, science *or* Bible, preachers of many stamps have made the Bible look false, creating stumbling-blocks for the young, and handing the mantle of truth and reason over to the atheist. Our early Christadelphian leaders disagreed with those who set scientific evidence in opposition to the Scriptures²⁵ or spoke disparagingly of science in general.²⁶ They believed that '*true science and true religion are twin sisters, and the separation of either is sure to prove the death of both*'²⁷ and that '*The inconsistency spoken of between nature and scripture, arises not from antagonism, but from the misinterpretations of both. It is man's interpretation of the one set against man's interpretations of the other. It is not nature versus scripture, but false science against true theology, or false theology against scientific fact.*'²⁸ Furthermore, just as we appeal to scientific evidence to assert the Bible's credibility when preaching, so we erode the Bible's credibility when we deny scientific evidence or set the Bible against it.

e. We must engage honestly with the evidence. As the natural world is God's witness we cannot dismiss inconvenient scientific evidence as '*the wisdom of men*' or resort to the shallow 'I believe God not men' as such pious claims backfire the moment it is pointed out just how many men - mostly non-Christadelphian scholars - stand between us and the oracles of God (and we too are men). Sound Bible study engages many fields of research and scholarship - history, archaeology, botany, geography, geology, cartography, astronomy, medicine, linguistics, languages and translation studies - indeed, we are entirely dependant on many lines of scholarship just to read the Bible in our own language let alone study its deeper nuances. Of course scientists are not immune to mistakes, nor does science have a monopoly on all truth. But neither do we. So if we find our beliefs contradicted by sound evidence from Nature then we must respect that evidence as God given, humbly engage it on its own terms and seek out the truth. We cannot dismiss undeniable facts merely because they conflict with our beliefs, as Christadelphians do not claim inspiration, and biology cannot be an exception to Creation's witness.

f. We must not treat our interpretation of Genesis as though we ourselves are inspired and our views cannot be broken.²⁹ This is an old and common problem. History is replete with churchmen who imagined their literal reading of a Scripture to be more sacred than the

evidence of creation itself. We must learn from their mistakes and humbly interpret God's Word hand in hand with the knowledge shown daily by his Works – as the Bible does itself. We've been here before; this should be Christadelphian home territory. We have long rejected literal readings about heaven, hell, Hades, Paradise, the Devil, Satan, demons and fallen angels that sinned – most of which are embedded in the very literal Gospel narrative about Jesus. Our literary interpretation of these devices is a defining feature of the Christadelphian faith that in no way detracts from the literality of Jesus in the Gospels.

Yet in the early decades of our community these posed far greater challenges than any literary adjustments we ourselves may need to make to our own readings of early Genesis.³⁰

g. We must recognise that the Bible makes us wise for salvation 'through faith in Christ Jesus' and that '*All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*'³¹ Genesis is written that we may be *spiritually* complete; that we may not be deceived as a novice on moral issues, but trained in righteousness and equipped for every good work. We must follow this functional intent of the Bible, and respect God's choice of literary genre. We must not fall for the anachronistic treatment of Genesis as a literal historical record,³² for Genesis was not written to answer the concerns of modern Westerners whose culture, paradigms and expectations are radically different from those of the Ancient Near East. In fact Genesis is a *revelation*, rich with symbols, types and allegories. God has not given us a modern science textbook, and the Bible generally describes natural phenomena using the language and false concepts of the day. Those who look to Genesis to determine the age of the earth, the origins of its geological features, fossils or any other natural phenomena including the species are making the same mistakes as those such as Bro Griffith, who, when writing to *The Christadelphian* magazine, concluded from the Bible that the earth must be flat,³³ or like earlier Church Fathers who imagined that the Bible defined the motions of the sun and the planets.³⁴ Such misuse of Scripture makes both us and the Bible look foolish.

h. We must not add clauses opposing evolution to our doctrines to be rejected, nor raise differences on these matters to the level of fellowship. The facts of evolution are matters for scientific enquiry, to be determined by carefully weighing up the evidence, not affirmation, ideology or misplaced emotions. We should be content to affirm the very clear Biblical principles outlined at the start - that the heavens declare the glory of God, that creation is a faithful witness to his ways - and leave the how and when as matters of uncertain detail.³⁵ Furthermore within our community we have always had faithful adherents to many different views on these matters.³⁶ Applying a simple standard of truthfulness, none should presume to speak for 'the Christadelphians' when propounding their view.

i. Nor should we impose modern biology on people who are not interested or cannot accept it, as like other scientific subjects – chemistry, geology, physics etc – biological evolution is not a Bible subject, it does not change the Gospel and it is not essential for faith. Belief in or rejection of gravity does not influence baptism, so why single out evolution? We should respect the views of others when exhorting or teaching and patiently give people time to come to terms with the extraordinary discoveries of science that have overturned many areas of knowledge since our community was founded. All that is essential is that individuals be free to consider evolution as the handiwork of God and that we do not require rejection of God's witness as a condition of baptism or fellowship.

j. We must give full weight to the fact that the foundation of our faith is Jesus Christ, and not the events in Eden.³⁷ This is extremely important. The basis for our belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who rose from the dead is the testimony of eye-witnesses, many of whom received the power of the Holy Spirit to declare with signs and miracles the truth about the Christ they had personally known, seen with their eyes and touched with their hands. Even Paul '*received (the gospel) through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*'³⁸ These apostles knew that

Jesus was a real man who had a real human mother, who shared our nature with all its passions, who died by crucifixion at the hands of sinners, was buried but rose from the dead to receive immortality, and much more. The essential truths of the Gospel of Salvation that was preached so effectively it *'turned the world upside down'*³⁹ were based on the apostle's personal experience of Jesus with almost no mention of Adam, Eve or the events in Eden found in the book of Acts. This is the apostolic faith which we believe; it was foreshadowed by and is enriched by the Hebrew Scriptures, but it stands firmly on its own foundations of the personal witness of literal people about the literal things they had seen and heard. As it is in these personal reports of the apostle's eye-witness testimony of Jesus in which we stand, not the books of Moses, our faith in Jesus Christ and the Gospel ought not be threatened by any scientific conflicts with Genesis, or any proposed literary reconciliation that invoke a metaphorical Adam, Eve or Eden, or for that matter any proposed or perceived difficulties with the Old Testament generally.

k. For this reason we must not cultivate an Adam based faith. Unfortunately the story of Genesis ch.3 is often taught as the literal foundation of the Gospel, sometimes as nothing less than *'the rationale and basis'* for Jesus Christ and his Gospel of salvation,⁴⁰ and that the existence or need for Jesus Christ would collapse were Eden's events found to be metaphorical or non-literal. This belief is often the most difficult hurdle to overcome for many Christadelphians when confronted by scientific challenges to their understanding of Genesis, yet it is deeply flawed on several counts.

First, although Jesus literally arrived well after Genesis was written, Creation and the events in Eden were *teleologically subsequent to his appearance, yet temporally antecedent to the event*; which is to say God not only foreknew his coming, but created the world for the purpose of bringing him into being. The New Testament is clear that Jesus was the Logos of God *'through whom he created the world.'*⁴¹ *'He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.'*⁴² *'For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.'*⁴³ With Jesus as the Logos (or Reason) God created all things from the beginning, the events in Eden cannot be the foundation, cause, rationale or basis of his appearance, but spiritual shadows cast by his impending arrival.

Second, we're all familiar with Eden's imagery and literary devices; a talking snake who beguiles an innocent woman with a lie, a tree of knowledge of good and evil whose fruit magically opens the eyes to make one wise, the mother of all living miraculously formed from a sleeping man's rib, another tree with supernatural power to grant immortality to the eater, the tragedy for all creation when the young woman (who didn't even have a mother) was tempted and ate the forbidden fruit. On such a slender thread the fate of all the world hung! As an allegory Eden's story is deep, powerful and profound, an inspired revelation of man's relationship with God, and of the first principles of temptation, sin and redemption. On this we all agree. As a literal historical record however it is weak, for like other divine revelations it employs highly symbolic and fantastic imagery to convey its message. Some may be shocked by the idea that Eden is more literary revelation than literal historical record, much as orthodox Christians are horrified that we do not believe a literal supernatural devil tempted Jesus. But in view of the fantastic elements woven into the story it should come as no surprise that 'literal historic record' is not the defining genre of these early chapters in Genesis, and seek a better explanation. A serious scholar will follow all the evidence, and we have only begun to draw attention to what is obvious from the text. Dig a bit deeper, and all attempts to read early Genesis literally prove difficult. Whatever our personal views on Eden (and there are many), surely we can all agree that the primary value of Eden is its allegory, and respect the decision of more cautious scholars should they choose to leave it there.

Third, we believe the Bible's teaching about Adam because we believe in Jesus, not the

other way around. We must not reverse that order; a talking snake must not become the basis of our faith, much less *'the rationale and basis'* for Jesus Christ. We view the shadows of Eden and the books of Moses through the lens of Jesus Christ. Of course, sometimes Paul will reverse the argument when expounding Messiah to his Jewish brethren as in Romans 5, and as Jesus himself did when teaching the Jews. Arguing from a preconception to establish a new truth in the audience's mind is an effective rhetorical technique used throughout the Bible, but even this does not establish Eden's literality, for both argued from Jewish myths in much the same way.⁴⁴ The point is that the Gospel's need for a literal Jesus is *fundamental*,⁴⁵ and the evidence strong and persuasive, whereas references to Adam are either *rhetorical or symbolic*, and the physical evidence non-existent. Which isn't to say Adam was *not* a literal man either; perhaps he was. So why allow alternatives? The answer is that Adam's pre-historicity combined with the genre of the narrative⁴⁶ precludes certainty, and honesty requires that assertions about Eden's *literality* be cautious. Adam's mire proves deep when visiting Eden in the light of science, and many extrapolated belief structures risk collapse under weight of contrary evidence. However, when faith in Jesus Christ does not *require* a literal Eden, then questions about early Genesis' *literality* and *historicity* remain interesting to explore for their own sake, but ultimately prove to be uncertain details, not foundations, and thus no longer stumbling blocks to faith.

Finally the Bible's clearest teaching is that Adam is long dead and gone – the man of dust has perished and returned to the dust. It is Christ who is alive. Perhaps it is by design that the ambiguities surrounding the first man should only add new force to these most basic of Bible principles.

In Conclusion

It seems that God's laws that govern biology are far more powerful and creative than we previously recognised and that many of our old arguments, debates and entrenched positions extrapolated from Genesis' opening three chapters have now been superseded. This is a blessing to not let slip. And it may be that the discoveries of science concerning biology have only just begun, that the best is yet to come. Creation's wonder and expanse are more accessible today than ever and they inspire people to ask life's biggest questions.⁴⁷ Let us open our eyes then to the unfolding glory, truth, wisdom and beauty of God's creation as it is revealed through science, and let us humbly ensure we do not obstruct the Gospel, or darken God's counsel through words without knowledge.⁴⁸

Jonathan Pogson (Au)

Notes

1 Ps.19:1-4, Ps.50:6, Rom. 1:20

2 Job 38:2

3 'My own opinion, as published in 1814, is that it (The Beginning) forms no part of the first day' but refers to a period of indefinite antiquity when God created the worlds out of nothing. The commencement of the first days work I hold to be the moving of God's Spirit on the face of the waters. We can allow Geology the amplest time for its various revolutions without infringing even on the lateralities of the Mosaic Record 'while Nature herself bears witness to the need of a creative interposition, more especially for the later part of the work of the third day.' Chalmers, Thomas. *Posthumous Works of the Rev. Thomas Chalmers*. Vol. 1. 1848.

4 'Fragments, however, of the wreck of this pre-Adamic world have been brought to light by geological research, to the records of which we refer the reader, for a detailed account of its discoveries, with this remark, that its organic remains, coal fields, and strata, belong to the ages before the formation of man, rather than to the era of the creation, or the Noachic flood.' Thomas, *Elpis Israel*, p. 11 (1990 ed.).

5 'Astronomy leads us to a unique event, a universe which was created out of nothing, one with the very delicate balance needed to provide exactly the conditions required to permit life, and one which has an underlying (one might say supernatural) plan' - Arno Penzias, co-discoverer of the microwave background radiation, 1978 Nobel Prize recipient in physics, Margenau, H and R.A. Varghese, ed. 1992. *Cosmos, Bios, and Theos*. La Salle, IL, Open Court, p. 83

6 Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered what I did not

understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know...therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes. Job.42:3,6

7 And he brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. Gen.15:5,6

8 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. Psa.19:1-2

9 Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness. Act.14:17

10 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. Rom.1:19,20

11 This is not a new problem as the following complaint from Augustine shows:-

'Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens, and the other elements of this world, about the motion and orbit of the stars and even their size and relative positions, about the predictable eclipses of the sun and moon, the cycles of the years and the seasons, about the kinds of animals, shrubs, stones, and so forth, and this knowledge he holds to as being certain from reason and experience. Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; and we should take all means to prevent such an embarrassing situation, in which people show up vast ignorance in a Christian and laugh it to scorn. The shame is not so much that an ignorant individual is derided, but that people outside the household of faith think our sacred writers held such opinions, and, to the great loss of those for whose salvation we toil, the writers of our Scripture are criticised and rejected as unlearned men. If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven, when they think their pages are full of falsehoods on facts which they themselves have learned from experience and the light of reason?' - Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (translated and annotated by John H Taylor, S.J.; Newman Press, New York, 1982)

12 'Both humans and chimps have a broken copy of a gene that in other mammals helps make vitamin C... It's hard to imagine how there could be stronger evidence for common ancestry of chimps and humans.' – Michael Behe, *The Edge of Evolution*, pp 71–2

COMMENT. This remark is especially significant because Michael Behe is best known as a champion of Intelligent Design.

13 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Genome_Project

14 <http://phylointelligence.com/genetics.html>

http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Common_descent

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evidence_of_common_descent

<http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/comdesc/>

*NOTE. We have avoided citing original scientific papers in favour of more accessible on-line sources to condense and simplify what is now a vast field of research, evidence and information.

15 'Over the past 150 years, this initial list (Darwin's evidence including the biogeographical distribution of species, homology of structure, the occurrence of vestigial organs and atavisms, and the already well established process of extinction) has been supplemented by countless observations in paleontology, comparative anatomy, developmental biology, molecular biology, and (most recently) comparative genomics, and through direct observations of evolutionary change in both natural and experimental populations. Each of thousands of peer-reviewed articles published every year in scientific journals provides further confirmation (though, as Futuyma (1998) notes, "no biologist today would think of publishing a paper on 'new evidence for evolution' ... it simply hasn't been an issue in scientific circles for more than a century"). Conversely, no reliable observation has ever been found to contradict the general notion of common descent. It should come as no surprise, then, that the scientific community at large has accepted evolutionary descent as a historical reality since Darwin's time and considers it among the most reliably established and fundamentally important facts in all of science.

Gregory TR *Evolution as Fact, Theory and Path* Evo Edu Outreach (2008) 1:46-52

COMMENT. This paper is highly recommended reading for anyone questioning whether evolution has been proven true.

<http://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs12052-007-0001-z.pdf>

16 "At the same time, we are strongly of the opinion that the problems that undoubtedly exist should be frankly admitted by us as a community, for we do naught but dishonour to the word of God by pretending that these problems are not there. Our Brotherhood bears a responsibility to those in search

of Scripture truth, and especially to those of tender years, to turn its attention to the solving of these difficulties in an atmosphere of calm, sincere, conscientious study, unhindered by the rumours, mistrust, suspicion and hasty judgments that have been all too prevalent among us in recent times.”

Watford Ecclesia, Letter to *The Christadelphian*, 1966, commenting on their withdrawal of Bro Lovelock from fellowship.

17 ‘I am a creationist and an evolutionist. Evolution is God’s, or Nature’s method of creation. Creation is not an event that happened in 4004 BC; it is a process that began some 10 billion years ago and is still under way.’

Theodosius Dobzhansky, *Nothing in Biology Makes Sense Except in the Light of Evolution* (1973)

18 <http://bcseweb.blogspot.com.au/2009/12/creation-watch-report-from-redditch.html>, Dr. Hellowell lecture in Redditch, UK

19 ‘Many practicing scientists are also religious. Following the publication of God and the New Physics, I was astonished to discover how many of my close scientific colleagues practice a conventional religion. In some cases they manage to keep these two aspects of their lives separate, as if science rules six days a week, and religion on Sunday. A few scientists, however, make strenuous and sincere efforts to bring their science and their religion into harmony.’ Paul Davies, *The Mind of God*, preface, p.15

20 Larson and Witham, *Scientists are still keeping the faith*, Nature 386 (2 April 1997) 435–36.

21 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Collins

22 http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/home.shtml

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Genome_Project

23 <http://biologos.org/>

24 <http://berea-portal.com/forums/>

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Evolutionary-Creationism-A-Christadelphian-Perspective/285058394842055>

25 ‘There can be no conflict between the genuine sense of God’s messages to mankind and the real facts and authentic conclusions of science. But false constructions of Scripture, on the one side, and the crude hypotheses or fanciful guesswork of men of science on the other, may and will contradict and clash, while they depart equally from the truth.’

Roberts, *The Uncertainties of Modern Science*, *The Christadelphian* (14.161.499), 1877.

26 ‘We should be seriously misunderstood if the last paragraph conveyed the slightest contempt on our part for the sciences.’ - Roberts, *How Readest Thou?*, *The Ambassador* (3.28.193), 1866, when commenting about ‘science falsely so called’.

27 ‘Let the truth be known, and Jew and Gentile would gladly re-echo Professor Huxley when he said: “True science and true religion are twin sisters, and the separation of either is sure to prove the death of both.”’ - Roberts, *A Vain Show*, *The Christadelphian* (35.404.72), 1898; brother Roberts also noted, ‘his remark is true in the abstract, and true of the Bible—that there is no conflict between the Bible and true science.’, *ibid.*, p. 73.

28 WJD *The Bible as a Law of Life and Immortality* *The Ambassador of the Coming Age* (1864) 1:93-94

29 ‘We are fully aware of many objections that have been raised by sceptics in the name of science. We respect these difficulties and we can sympathise with the unbeliever’s point of view. It is obvious, however, that there is grave danger of misinterpretation, whether we study the ancient writings of Hebrew prophets or the book of Nature, and we entertain a rude conviction that there is in one respect at least, a humiliating resemblance between the ignorant disciple of Christ and the learned scientist. Each is inclined to place over much confidence in his interpretation where his studies have been imperfect, and each is disposed to treat with contempt matters which he has not studied at all. We may leave it an open question as to whether there are any instances of irreconcilable discord between Nature and the Bible as we now possess it. There can be no question, however, that in many cases the apparent contradiction is through faulty interpretation on one side or other, or both.’

Islip Collyer, *Vox Dei*, “Final Considerations” p.116 (1921), p.145 (1963)

30 The Roman church is by no means the only one guilty of misinterpreting Bible teaching in such a way as to create a conflict with science or with reason. All denominations have failed in this respect, to a greater or a lesser extent. We ourselves have not been altogether free from this error. Though our important and distinctive doctrines have been established upon a sure Bible foundation (a cause for gratitude, not pride), we have occasionally been unnecessarily dogmatic in our interpretation of Scripture, when convincing Bible evidence has been wanting; and when time has exposed the flaws in our adventurous expositions, our confusion has been almost as painful as if the real foundations had been shaken. We must not permit our self-criticism to distract us from our main point, which is: that

that which is described as conflict between science and the Bible, may, in fact, be conflict between science and unsound Bible exposition. -Watkins, *The Inspired Scriptures - Our Sure Foundation: 10 - Difficulties*, The Christadelphian (99.1172.55), 1961..

31 2 Tim.3:15-17

32 'I have tried to show throughout this book that we must let the Bible speak for itself. We must not twist it, to make it mean what we think it ought to have said. We must let it make its own message clear to us. It is necessary to make due allowance for figures of speech in the Bible. We must not treat poetry as if it were prose, or parables as if they were literal truth. We need to be very, very careful not to read the Bible as if it had been written by Englishmen; instead, we must read it in the light of the Hebrew idiom that shine through into the English translation.' - Alan Hayward, *God's Truth*, ch 23

33 DEAR BROTHER WALKER.—Seeing that the veracity and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures are denied by many on the basis of the revolving globe-earth theory, even to the extent of rejecting the ascension of Jesus into the heaven of heavens as a “geometrical impossibility.” the matter surely cannot be set aside as of no importance, and beyond the province of a magazine devoted to the defence of Biblical teaching and the overthrow of pagan and papal dogmas. The globe-earth theory is essentially pagan in its origin, and no amount of ingenuity has yet succeeded in harmonizing it with the cosmogony of the Bible. It is supposed that the theory was first introduced into Europe by Pythagoras, in the sixth century B.C., and he was a rank pagan. Through Copernicus and Galileo the theory has acquired a distinct Romish taint.

1.—Is it not a fact that the Bible teaches that there are but two great lights and but one sun?

2.—Is it not a pure speculation, unsupported by any natural fact, the theory that the “dots in the heavens” are great suns?

3.—Is it not a fact that the enormously extravagant distances and magnitudes of the so-called “dots” have for their bases, the unproved assumption that the earth is a revolving globe, speeding through space at 68,000 miles an hour, and with an orbit of 190 millions of miles?

5.—Is it not the teaching of Scripture that the earth, that is, the dry land, is a stationary body, founded upon the seas, and established upon the floods, and with its foundations in the deep? Believing, as I do, with you, that it is “necessary to bring everything to the test of the Word of God,” I present these questions in all good faith for your serious consideration.

Faithfully yours, in the pursuit and defence of all divine truth, T.GRIFFITHS

The Christadelphian : Volume 50, 346–348. (this citation is a shortened extract)

34 Alan Hayward observes ‘in fact they (the early Church Fathers) were only defending their own wrong interpretations of the Bible. And in the long run they harmed their own cause, by giving people the impression that Christianity was opposed to the scientific method of seeking knowledge. Luther and his contemporaries also meant well when they opposed Copernicus and Galileo because ‘the Bible said’ the sun goes round the earth. But they, too, had mistaken their own interpretation for Bible teaching. Thus they, too, made many people think that Christians were prepared to hide their heads in the sand. There are many indications that history is in danger of repeating itself.’ Alan Hayward, *Creation & Evolution*, p.79

35 GENERAL PRINCIPLE.—That God made man of the dust of the ground.

Uncertain Detail.—But as to whether it was a direct action of the Father’s formative energy, after the manner in which sound creates geometric figures in sand scattered loosely upon a tightly extended vibrating surface or by the expert manipulation of angelic hands, we cannot be sure. There are grounds for a strong opinion in favour of the latter, but it would be unwarrantable to insist on the reception of that opinion as a condition of fellowship. It is sufficient if the brother or sister believe that ‘God made man of the dust of the ground.’ (Robert Roberts, *True Principles & Uncertain Details*, The Christadelphian (25.183), 1898).

36 ‘There is much misunderstanding in the brotherhood as to what constitutes ‘Christadelphian orthodoxy’ on the subject of creation. To set the record straight, here is a brief summary of our community’s witness about geology and the age of the earth. Brother John Thomas taught that the days of Creation were 24-hour periods, but he argued that they did not refer to the original creation of the earth. He considered that geology proved an immense age for the earth, and that geological strata belonged to an earlier creation, long before Adam. He said explicitly that the sun, moon and stars were ‘pre-existent for millions of ages before the Adamic era’ (*Elpis Israel*, ch 2). Brother Robert Roberts wrote that ‘The Bible and Geology are sufficiently in agreement to make the acceptance of both possible’ (*The Visible Hand of God*, ch 2). He went on to write at length in ch 5 of the same book about geology in relation to the Flood. He concluded that the geological evidence, which he repeatedly referred to as ‘facts’, compelled (his word) the conclusion that the Flood was local, and not worldwide – ‘co-extensive only with the Adamic-inhabited portion of the globe’, as he put it. Brother C.C.Walker, like his predecessors, accepted the facts of geology. But he rejected Brother Thomas’s

method of harmonising Genesis with geology, because, he said, ‘there does not appear to be any evidence at all that some six thousand years ago an existing cosmos was reduced to such chaos as is described in Genesis 1:2’ (*The Word of God*, ch 3). Instead, he advocated the view that the days of creation were symbolic days, covering vast periods of time.

Brother A.D.Norris, when he wrote the book *Believing the Bible* more than thirty years ago, invited his readers to choose between the various views of Creation then current in the Brotherhood. These included the views of both Brethren Thomas and Walker, but there was no mention of ‘Flood Geology’, or the ‘Young-earth’ theory. Such notions only began to circulate within the brotherhood about twenty years ago. This book opposes those modern ideas, and urges a return to the view that the earth is very old – not merely because our pioneers taught this, but because the facts point that way.”

Alan Hayward, A Preface for Christadelphian Readers, *Creation and Evolution* (1985)

37 ‘For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.’

Apostle Paul, 1 Cor.3:11

38 Gal.1:11-12

39 Act.17:6

40 ‘If the Genesis account is metaphorical there is no literal serpent, no tree of knowledge of good and evil, no lie, no fruit, no sin, no sentence of death; Jesus Christ, our Saviour and his Gospel of salvation have no rationale or basis, as set forward by the Apostle Paul in Romans etc.’ The Lampstand Committee, The Lampstand Vol.19 no.3 May-June 2013 p.138 *Evolution and our Statement of Faith*
COMMENT:- this is an extraordinary admission; it is hard to imagine a more explicit affirmation of an Adam based faith.

41 Heb.1:2

42 Jhn.1:2,3

43 Col.1:16

44 In Luke 16:19-31 Jesus tells the story of Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom which included life after death suffering hell torments. In 2 Pet.2:4 and Jude:6 Peter and Jude speak of angels who sinned and were cast into hell (or ‘Tartarus’) to be chained in darkness until their judgment, a clear reference to the Jewish myths propagated by the pseudepigraphical books of Enoch. Likewise Jude:9 talks about the archangel Michael disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, referring to the pseudepigraphical *Assumption of Moses* and Paul makes reference to ‘Jannes and Jambres’ who withstood Moses, again referencing Jewish mythical writings expanding on the Exodus story about the Egyptian magicians. In each case important spiritual truths were developed or argued from examples that were mythological and literally untrue. Therefore the reference by Jesus, Paul or any other apostle to a story to make a spiritual point does not of itself establish its literality.

45 1Cor.15:12-19

46 A recent outstanding contribution to understanding Genesis in view of the Ancient Near East culture is *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* by John H. Walton, 2009, ISBN-10: 0830837043

47 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? *Psa.8:3,4*

48 *Job.38:1-21*

1 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:

2 ‘Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

3 Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me.

4 Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.

5 Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?

6 On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone,

7 when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

8 Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb,

9 when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band,

10 and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors,

11 and said, “Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed?”

12 Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place,

13 that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it?

14 It is changed like clay under the seal, and its features stand out like a garment.

15 From the wicked their light is withheld, and their uplifted arm is broken.

16 Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep?

17 Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?

18 Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this.

19 Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness,

20 that you may take it to its territory and that you may discern the paths to its home?
21 You know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is great!’

Job 40:3-5, 42:2-6

3 Then Job answered the Lord and said:

4 ‘Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth.

5 I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further.’

2 ‘I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

3 “Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?”

Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

4 “Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.”

5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;

6 therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.’

Human Involvement in Revelation

Without referring to any other problem areas with reading the Bible, here are a few thoughts about human involvement with revelation and scripture which I think need airing and discussing.

Have you ever had to admit that you have misrepresented someone, thought evil of someone, only to find that they were innocent of whatever fault you had in mind? Have you ever changed your mind about anything you have sincerely believed up to that point in time? Well you are no doubt in good company, for we all at times misunderstand and misrepresent others, including God Himself and the Bible, even when we are aware of that as a possibility. We have a tendency to judge quickly and to take a stand about things as we see them, there and then, expecting others to think likewise. Many things are often far more complex than appears to be the case at first glance.

We have been created with a faculty of curiosity/inquisitiveness, but humans often desire to know what cannot be known, what God has hidden from us. There are limits to what we can know and some things we can only know if God chooses to reveal them to us. It has been said that: ‘The plague of Christendom has been the passion of theology to define what God has not defined and to discover what he has kept secret.’ (Henry Van Dyke) It seems to me that there are two such major passions in Christadelphia: to know the truth - defined in words - and to know the future, as supposedly revealed in prophecy, largely from the Old Testament.

God can choose to reveal himself and his purpose in a variety of ways, not simply in and through the words of the Bible. He can do so in the whole of creation, in life experiences, by vision/dreams, by prophetic agency and by miracle. Whatever methods he adopts, there is always the possibility that his revelation will be misinterpreted and we are likely to come to wrong conclusions and so misrepresent God.

As humans we know that we can’t fully know what is in someone else’s mind unless they choose to reveal it to us. It seems to me that God has particularly chosen to communicate with humanity through the medium of humanity. ‘Hence, in the words of the great Anglo-Jewish scholar Louis Jacobs, the Torah needs to be understood as revelation through – as much as revelation to – human beings.’ (Sat Times, 31-5-14, Credo, Jonathan Wittenberg, a Senior Rabbi.) What is here said of the Torah applies even more so to the New Covenant. Do we not have the most complete revelation of God in and through the human life of Jesus

Christ?

We must then take seriously the role of humans in the revelation process and this must surely apply to what we have in the pages of the Bible, both OT and NT. What we have in the Bible was written by men, no doubt inspired by God, but not dictated by God to give a perfect, inerrant communication such as is claimed by some Jews for the Torah, by Islamists for the Koran, and by Mormons for their Book of Mormon. Communication between God and men is fraught with difficulties from both sides and, as in the rest of human life, communications often break down. God, as we have come to know him in Christ, will not force his love on anyone, rather he invites us into a relationship and awaits our response. It is a risky business, for we may not respond at all or we may even respond antagonistically. He does not prevent us from denying his existence or from making mistakes, and surely this applied just as much to the human authors of the scriptures as it does to ourselves.

In life in general we have to learn to live with a fair degree of uncertainty and that must also apply to our reading and understanding of the Bible. Just as the uncertainty does not stop us from leading our lives, nor does it stop us from having faith in God and finding good reason for doing so in the pages of scripture. We have to learn to read it in the light of the best/better revelation that came through the man Christ Jesus. Such reading will show that there is development and change in man's understanding of both God Himself and the revelation of His purpose in scripture, just as there is development and change in our own personal histories.

Recognizing the likelihood of misunderstanding and misrepresentation, and the common fact of development and change in our understanding, we should be able to accept that all creeds should be suspect to some degree and open to further investigation and correction where necessary. In particular, we should be humble enough to acknowledge that this applies to us too and so endeavour not to be over-dogmatic about what we read in the scriptures. Some might prefer to think of the Bible rather like a sort of car manual but that really will not work.

Les Boddy

A religion without mystery must be a religion without God.
Jeremy Taylor

Religious violence

Writing in *The Guardian* on 25 September 2014 about the Islamic approach to variations of view on religious matters, Karen Armstrong speaks of a largely held opinion that 'there is a violent essence inherent in religion, which inevitably radicalises any conflict – because once combatants are convinced that God is on their side, compromise becomes impossible and cruelty knows no bounds.' She also castigates theocracy as a 'bad idea' where humans define what the God or gods require as the basis of rulership.

The history of our Christadelphian community, in common with most denominations, has seen its quota of cruelty in many of the divisions it has experienced – psychological cruelty, where families have been sundered and ecclesias split over different perspectives in interpreting the text of scripture. Often there has been an ignoring of what the Apostle John says about 'hating your brother.'

There are currently a number of different views held in the brotherhood on various matters and so far open rupture has not followed. This article pleads for us to continue to avoid feeling that we must 'preserve the truth' by disciplinary action or wholesale 'disfellowships' and rather learn to live with differences, seeking to learn from each other as we search to

understand scriptures that require very careful attention and which may not be easy to understand. First, I have attempted to sum up what unites us by recognising that 'narrative theology' is a significant feature of scripture.

Narrative theology is a phrase frequently used by Biblical scholars to highlight the fact that the Bible consists largely of telling a story which has to be read as a whole, not restricting attention to minute portions – verses. If we follow this course faithfully we may perceive the following whole story, which affects our whole lives.

God created the world, seeking partners who should reflect his image and making this a matter of their free choice, not compulsion. The initial partners and their offspring disappointed God's desire. Sin entered and largely took over the thinking and doing of humankind (expressed pictorially in the early chapters of Genesis). A vast flood is presented as sweeping away the whole human race, except for Noah and his family. God covenanted never to repeat this experience again. In Abraham, He began to develop a family through whom all nations should be blessed. This was the beginning of Israel whom God chose as his witness to all mankind.

The story soon became very 'up and down', with an ongoing cycle of Sin, Punishment, Repentance and Restoration, with Sin predominating. God chose David as the means of perpetuating a dynasty who would rule for Him. Few of these monarchs lived up to this calling. Israel, as God's witness to purity and righteousness, failed and ultimately the kingdoms of Israel and Judah went into exile, a state where they felt unable to 'sing the Lord's songs in a strange land.'

A leader was promised who would reverse the situation. And this Messiah, Jesus, came, human yet sent by God to save his people from their sins. His life, death, resurrection and ascension to God provided the key sequence of events which opened a way of salvation from sin and death and related sorrows. Jesus had gained the victory. But although God's light was not obscured totally, yet for nearly two thousand years the gospel of Christ has not been the central concern of mankind. The witness for the gospel has been in the hands largely of religious institutions which have blunted its effect on human life. We await Christ's coming again to create a new heavens and a new earth, wherein sin, violence, cruelty and sadness will be banished and the glory of God fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.

Jesus as the promised Messiah opened the age of the Divine rulership in his death and resurrection. With his death and resurrection the creation of the new heavens and new earth, the Kingdom of God, was inaugurated. The return of Jesus will in due course see the consummation of the Kingdom of God, and at the end, God 'will be all in all.'

This is the gospel, to some extent acknowledged in the liturgies of the 'mainstream' churches, but corrupted by the idea of the human, failed stewards of the earth being taken away from the earth to 'their home in heaven.' God would finish with the earth and his original creative purposes would not be fulfilled.

For over a hundred years the Christadelphian community has maintained this hope of an earthly kingdom of God, perhaps with less conviction than used to be the case. We have to face facts and recognise that there is a growing movement toward a merely moral approach to the gospel. We need to bring these tendencies into the open and discuss them without fear of disciplinary action. The crux of our internal uncertainties lies in a concern to answer the question 'Who will be saved?' Do we believe that of the seven billion inhabitants of the earth only a few thousand, even a hundred thousand will enter the Kingdom of God and the rest be annihilated? What of the billions who have not heard the essence of the gospel at all? And there are at least millions who have not aligned themselves with the pleasure seeking, celebrity imitating, career ambitious, violence inclined majority of 'developed nations'. And

what of the billions who are hungry, sick and lacking water and sanitation? Do we grieve about them and try to make a contribution to their welfare? And do we still retain vestiges of Victorian days when we really did believe that the majority of mankind would be eliminated? Do we really believe that earnest Christians are outside the pale if they can't make the intellectual jump of demythologising scriptures which on the surface, taken literally, present the Devil, Satan and demons as living realities and not figurative representations of evil forces? And what about those who see Jesus at the very centre of their lives and live in accord with that belief? Do we believe that God has written them off for interpreting scripture in too literal a fashion (from a Christadelphian perspective)?

Remember that Jesus, by eating with publicans and sinners, contributed to the opposition that led him to the cross. Are we required to be much more fussy and exclusive in our attitude to others? And think about the following scriptures and their backing in the whole story in the Bible of the God whose love is unfailing and who will save all without distinction, though not all without exception. (Some as individuals or groups remain incorrigible.)

'For the grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all mankind.' (Titus 2:11)

'It is the will of God our Saviour that all mankind should find salvation and come to know the truth.' (1 Tim 2:4)

'We have set our hope on the living God, who is the saviour of all – the saviour, above all, of believers. (1 Tim 4:10)

“Have I any desire for the death of a wicked person?” says the Lord. “Is not my desire rather that he should mend his ways and live?”

(Ezek 18:23)

Alfred Ward

We should always approach God knowing that we do not know him.

We must approach the unsearchable,
mysterious God who reveals himself as he chooses;
whenever we come to him, we are before a God we do not yet know.

Anthony Bloom

Divorce, remarriage and costly discipleship.

Jesus made a seemingly unequivocal statement on divorce in Mark (10:2-12): 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery' (basically, no divorce, period).

This absolute statement is to be found in a section of Mark's Gospel which highlights *the cost of discipleship*. Disciples are called to take up the cross (8:34), to be 'servants of all' (9:35, 10:42-45), to make whatever radical sacrifices are necessary to enter life (9:43-48), to become like little children (10:15), and to give up family and possessions for the sake of the gospel (10:29-30). The followers of Jesus are called to a strict regulation of permanent faithfulness in marriage. The call to renounce the option of divorce would have been understood in the first century as an extraordinary call to *costly discipleship* (a much more rigorous form of discipleship than most of us practise today).

Matthew's exception clause

'And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, *except* for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery' (Matt. 19:9). Paul, like Mark and Luke, shows no knowledge of this Matthean exception. Matthew's emendation accepts that an absolute prohibition on

divorce would be intolerable. The episode with the Pharisees *reflects the dispute about the rightful grounds for divorce between the various rabbinic schools* as reported in the Mishnah. Those of the school of Shammai taught that divorce was only permitted when there was unchastity, or adultery involved. The school of Hillel was of the opinion that divorce was in order if, for any reason, the husband was dissatisfied with his wife – even if, for example, she burned his dinner one night.

Any interpretation of the exception clause must take into account that, in biblical times, the Greek word for ‘fornication’ or ‘sexual immorality’ (*porneia*) was a generic word for all sorts of sexual misconduct. It was also used to describe *idolatrous practices*. It should be viewed then as a catch-all term and does not refer to one specific offence. The word probably reflects the Hebrew expression ‘unclean or shameful thing’ used in Deuteronomy 24:1, which gives a permissible cause for divorce in Jewish tradition (this is translated as ‘something objectionable’ in the NRSV). Rabbinic opinion at the time of Jesus (as we have shown) on what counted as shameful or objectionable was divided. Matthew, therefore, *working within the Jewish tradition*, leaves the reader with a wide field of possible exceptions to the *no divorce, period* rule. The controversy over what Matthew actually meant when he used the word *porneia* has raged for centuries and continues to this day¹.

The teaching on divorce in Matthew is softened to make it more readily applicable as a rule for a Jewish community of Christians. It has long been recognized by many that in the modern world the radical demands of Jesus are unworkable. Matthew has been described as an ecclesiastical politician seeking to work out a balance between rigour and mercy, between the demands of discipleship and the realities of the community’s situation.

Dealing with confusion over guidance about divorce in scripture

We may have envisaged that on such a vital issue as divorce the passages of scripture which give guidance to us would be crystal clear. Nothing could be further from the truth. The law on this subject was not clearly expressed (as we shall see) so it has brought about a variety of interpretations.

Permit me to make a few statements which will illustrate the confusion. Under the old law polygamy was permitted (though for wives, multiplicity of husbands was not). Abraham, a giant of faith, had, effectively, three wives namely Sarah, Hagar, and Keturah, as well as a number of concubines. David, a man after God’s own heart, had plenty of wives. When condemned for committing adultery with Bathsheba, God reminded him of the many things he had given him, including ‘your master’s wives into your arms’ (2 Sam. 12:7-8). So it looks like God not only allowed polygamy but actively supported it.

In Matthew 19:4 we are told by Jesus of the Edenic ideal on how marriage was to be conducted *from the start* (i.e. one man one wife). If Genesis 2:24 was meant to make the marriage bond unbreakable then God, surely, would not have permitted divorce under his law. Why therefore wasn’t this Edenic principle enshrined in the Law of Moses?² And why didn’t Old Testament favourites like Abraham and David adhere to it?³

There are complex differences among the passages dealing with divorce in the New Testament. In Mark and Luke Jesus contradicts Moses and tells us ‘no divorce, period.’ Mark and Luke categorically prohibit divorce, but Matthew and Paul (1 Cor. 7:15 possibly thinking of the precedent set by Ezra and Nehemiah who stipulated that heathen wives be put away) entertain the necessity of exceptions to the rule.

What about remarriage? Luke excludes it altogether; Matthew thinks that divorced women cannot remarry without committing adultery but leaves the door open for husbands to remarry if their first wives are guilty of *porneia*.⁴ Paul distinguishes between the command of the Lord and his own ‘opinion’ (or judgment), whereas Matthew is imaginative and presents

his exception clause as something that Jesus actually taught (thus demonstrating the New Testament's own modelling of flexibility in adapting Jesus' words to new situations).

Looking for a solution

Divorce, of course, must be understood as a matter of exceptional (and tragic) qualification to the ideal vision. Marriages do break down irretrievably, and when that happens the question is, what to do about it?

Implementing an interpretation of the binding power of scripture (with rules that originated in very different social conditions) to one who has suffered, for example, spousal abuse or even violence, is rather inappropriate. To require people to stay in difficult marriages against their inclination would be to impose a harsh law contrary to the spirit of love. Viewing divorce through the lens of a *faith tradition* normally leads to misery for those involved in the trauma. They could well do without having to endure the likely extra burden of censure from their fellow brethren and sisters.

Why not follow Matthew's imaginative example and embrace the New Testament's model of flexibility in adapting the teaching of Jesus to a new and different situation? The absolute ruling on divorce is given within the context of a patriarchal society. We live in a modern society which does things very differently.

There are various other aspects of costly discipleship (apart from the taboo on divorce) with which we take a relaxed view. Most parents encourage a high standard of education for their children and are pleased if they enjoy lucrative careers. We like to go on vacation, to eat well, and to make financial plans for our futures. These activities do not fall under the umbrella of costly discipleship and are not exactly what Jesus meant when he summoned us to 'take up the cross.' We actually live in a culture which promotes the therapeutic ideal of individual fulfilment and which encourages human flourishing.⁵ Like Matthew, we have chosen to reject the rather harsh demands of Jesus for something much more congenial. Taking a *rational* view, through the lens of love, compassion and justice, divorce is accepted as a tragedy but one in which (in the majority of cases) the sufferers may expect to overcome with our sympathy, and non-judgmental (Matt.7:1-5) love and support. We may acknowledge and accept the reality and pain that separation and divorce will bring but it will be our responsibility to help people to redeem and transform this situation. The best antidote to such a trauma is to negotiate a successful remarriage. There is no logical or spiritual reason to equate this with adultery.

Keith Lowe

Notes

1 Zwingli and Bullinger (for example) both read porneia as referring to all manner of marital immorality, including spousal abuse and abandonment.

2 The simple solution is that Genesis wasn't written till after the death of these two giants of faith so the Edenic law on the marriage bond was simply never 'revealed' to them

3 Under the law of Moses (Deut. 22:13-19) a case is considered where a recently married man who finds that he "dislikes her (his wife) and slanders her and gives her a bad name," and accuses her falsely of not being a virgin. His punishment is to pay a whopping 100 shekels of silver to the girl's father "and he must not divorce her as long as he lives." One might ask – well what about the girl? Doesn't she get a say in the matter? Apparently not. A law with the 'binding power of scripture' is out of touch with reality (from a modern point of view).

4 Technical support from *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, Richard B Hays

5 The teaching of Jesus was localised in the time and situation of Galilee in the 1st Century and was not intended to have a universal application. He calls us to poverty but this sits rather uneasily beside the injunctions to pay tax. The sayings attributed to Jesus are sometimes inconsistent and scarcely represent a cohesive oral framework on which we can base our lives.

We either treat Scripture ahistorically, denying everything we know about its origin and development, or we treat it heuristically, recognizing that God's mystery comes through it, but has to be searched for and interpreted and can no longer be read off like an automatic computer print-out.

Richard Holloway

An Exploration of Romans 8:3-4.

The Acts of the Apostles informs us how the good news of Jesus was actually preached. The essential elements of the Gospel are all described, particularly in chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 13, 17 & 26. Jesus was a man approved by God and through whom God worked. God had foreseen that Jesus would be taken and consigned to death by wicked men, but God raised Him from the dead. Jesus now shares God's authority, and has been made both Lord and Messiah. He will return again to reign as King when there will be a universal restoration of all things in full accordance with the foreseen will of God. In the meantime, Jesus had promised to be always spiritually present with His disciples (Matt. 28:20; John 14:23). The duty of all mankind is now to simply believe these hard facts, repent of personal sins, and, as an expression of this repentance, to be baptized. These actions will bring about the reception of the Holy Spirit, and the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13). There is no mention in Acts of any exact mechanism whereby the forgiveness of sins is achieved. It is just simply stated that God will forgive us if we repent and believe in His Son, Jesus Christ. If there is any 'mechanism' for the atoning process mentioned in Acts, then it simply appears to be based on the Old Testament principle referred to in Isaiah 55:6-9: 'Let the wicked abandon their ways, and evil men their thoughts; Let them return to the Lord, Who will have pity on them; return to our God, for He will freely forgive. For My thoughts are not your thoughts.'

In the NT various metaphors are used to illustrate the effects of this free, divine grace, as well as the progressive saving activity of Christ's Spirit working within the individual lives of believers. Christ Himself described His death as 'a ransom' (Matt. 20:28). Paul also made use of the metaphor of redemption (illustrating the freeing of slaves), and others drawn from common Hellenistic social usage and from Jewish ritual practices such as sacrifice. Consequently Christ was described as our 'paschal lamb' (1 Cor. 5:7), 'a mercy seat' (Rom. 3:25, Weymouth, Tyndale), an 'expiation' (an expiatory sacrifice) (Rom. 3:25, RSV), 'the propitiatory victim' (Mace, Rom. 3:25), 'an atoning sacrifice' (Rom. 3:25 NIV) and as a scapegoat who was cursed for the sake of others (Gal. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:21). Paul also used the semi-metaphor of the law court, with believers being justified now (i.e. pardoned, acquitted) in individual trial before God (cf. Rom. 5:1,9; 8:1, 8:26-27, 8:33-34). Social metaphors that Paul used include the metaphors of 'reconciliation' (a term used in the political and domestic realms) and 'adoption' – we are now reconciled, and fully accepted as sons and daughters of God, and have been raised in status to be heirs of God (Rom. 8:17). Christ's death and resurrection were also portrayed as constituting a decisive defeat of the personal supernatural powers of evil (cf. Col 2:15; Eph 6:10-13; 1 Pet 3:18-22) though whether this is just a metaphor or a reference to some ontological supernatural reality, is a moot point. For Paul, and other authors of the New Testament, we are very much saved by a living person (Christ), with whom we are genuinely united – rather than saved by any intellectual 'theory of the Atonement' which details an exact 'mechanism' for the atoning process. Unfortunately, there has been a tendency in the past for Bible students to take just one of the above metaphors (e.g. 'ransom' or 'propitiation') and then in some way, absolutize and literalize it, in order to

attempt to turn it into ‘the mechanism’ of the Atonement. Behind all such ‘mechanisms’ however, there is probably only metaphor – and behind the metaphor there is mercy – the inexplicable mercy of God (cf. Isa. 55: 6-9; Deut. 4:25-31; 1 Kings 8:46-51, Dan. 9).

Now in Romans 8:3, we need to recognize that the main problems concerning a correct understanding of this verse have largely to do with a correct translation of the underlying Greek. However, both Biblical commentators and successive Editors of *The Christadelphian* magazine have disagreed in their interpretative assessments. Let us consider some of the difficulties.

1 Who exactly was it who condemned sin in the flesh – was it Christ or was it God, or a collaboration by both; and does ‘condemn’ mean ‘destroy’ or to ‘pass an adverse legal verdict against’?

2 What, or whose was the ‘sin’, which was condemned? There are at least three possibilities. i) Does the condemned ‘sin’ refer to the moral transgressions of actual sinners, which were figuratively considered to be ‘imputed’ to Jesus and then ‘condemned’ to destruction by His sacrificial death? ii) Or, was the condemned ‘sin’ a metonymical reference to Christ’s own human ‘liability to sin’, which was condemned (i.e. physically destroyed) by His death upon the Cross? iii) Or is the ‘condemnation of sin’ a reference to the morally sinless Christ destroying the effects of His liability to sin, by exercising His self-control, and co-operating (cf. Phil. 2:12-13) with the presence of God within Him (2 Cor. 5:19; John 10:38, 14:10)? i.e. Did Christ, whilst He was ‘in-the-flesh’, condemn (i.e. ‘destroy’) sin, by living a life of godly obedience (cf. Heb. 11:7; Rom. 8:13)? Furthermore, did Christ’s moral victory over Sin then simultaneously provide the grounds for the use of a law court metaphor (in Rom. 8:3) in which ‘Sin’ (personified as a slave master and as a litigant) is pictured as legally losing any claim of ownership over a unique human being (Jesus), because He was sinless?

Regarding the definition of ‘sin’, Robert Roberts wrote: ‘Sin in the flesh is metonymical; it is not the expression of a literal element or principle pervading physical organization. Literally, sin is disobedience or an act of rebellion. The impulses that lead to this reside in the flesh and therefore came to be called by the name of the act to which they gave birth. In defining first principles we must be accurate in our conceptions.’ (Robert Roberts, *The Ambassador of the Coming Age*, 1869, Vol. 6, p. 85.) (NB Metonymy is calling a thing by the name of something associated with it. E.g. Jews are sometimes called ‘the circumcision’.)

The problem here though, is that in the unique case of Jesus, human impulses that were liable to result in transgression, never actually did so. Although Jesus was severely ‘tested’ by the devil, He was nevertheless: ‘one who because of His likeness to us, has been tested every way, only without sin’ (Heb 4:15 NEB). The expression ‘without sin’ (Greek *choris hamartias*) in Heb 4:15 is the very same expression which is used at Heb 9:28 (without sin, *choris hamartias*) in reference to the returning Christ – which strongly suggests that the earthly Jesus was totally sinless in thought, and in word, and in deed. As Jesus’ human impulses never actually led to transgression, it is questionable whether Jesus’ controlled human desires could ever, by metonymy, be called ‘sin’. The Editor of *The Christadelphian* magazine, John Carter, seemed to momentarily grasp this salient fact, when in 1956, he came to the conclusion that: ‘Jesus had not to say with Paul that he failed to do what he would (Rom 7:15,16), or to bemoan that sin dwelt in him (Rom 7:17, 20).’ (John Carter, *The Christadelphian*, 1956, Vol. 93, p. 127.)

3 Should the Greek word *en* be translated as ‘in’ (i.e. ‘God condemned in the flesh’ as in the AV); or should it be translated as ‘through’ i.e. God was able to uniquely condemn (‘defeat’, ‘destroy’) sin through the instrumentality of human flesh, because His Son, Jesus, lived a totally sinless life? The AV does translate *en* as ‘through’, at Romans 1:24; 3:7; 6:11, 23; 15:13 and 15:19. The *Translators New Testament* renders Rom. 8:3 as: ‘God sent His Son...in order to deal with sin, and through [Gk. *en*] that human body [of Jesus] He

condemned sin.’ Lamsa’s Aramaic translation states ‘God sent His own Son...in order to condemn sin by means of his flesh’. John Locke’s translation from the Greek, is somewhat similar in sentiment: ‘God...[by] sending His Son in the flesh...put to death or extinguished or suppressed sin in the flesh to the end that, under this example of the flesh, wherein sin was perfectly mastered and excluded from any life, the moral rectitude of the law may be conformed to by us, who, abandoning the lusts of the flesh, follow the guidance of the spirit.’

4 Should the Greek expression *sarkos hamartias* (literally ‘flesh of sin’) be translated as ‘sinful flesh’, or, as John Carter and Louis Sargent (successive Editors of *The Christadelphian*) believed, as ‘Flesh of sin’, meaning ‘flesh that belongs to sin’ or ‘Sin’s flesh’ – with ‘Sin’ being variously personified as ‘a slave master’ (Rom 6:6,16,17,20,22; 7:14,25), ‘a king’ (Rom 5:21; 6:12), a militant enemy (who uses weapons, and takes prisoners; Rom 6:13, 7:23), a house occupant (Rom 7:17, 20), a pay master (Rom. 6:23) and a litigant in a Law suit (Rom 6:7)? Such Pauline personifications and metaphors regarding ‘Sin’, all picture the fact that humanity is normally (with the exception of Jesus) under the ethical control of the power of Sin. Although Jesus fully shared our human nature, He was nevertheless not under the control of Sin. All of His human desires were, by an act of His will, and the influence of God, fully controlled and harmonized with the will of God (John 8:29, 46). Consequently, Jesus came ‘in the likeness of Sin’s flesh’ (Rom 8:3). Joseph Thayer in his *Greek Lexicon* states that the word ‘likeness’ *homoiomati*, refers to a resemblance that almost amounts to an equality or an identity. Consequently, Louis Sargent stated with respect to Rom 8:3: ‘in the likeness of sin’s flesh’. In those words we pick up the metaphor of sin as a master who possesses men as his slaves; but Christ was not his slave because He rejected temptation, and so for Him it is the ‘likeness’ of sin’s flesh, though it is the same [human] flesh.’ (Louis Sargent, *The Christadelphian*, March 1965, Vol. 102, p. 127.)

Both John Carter and Louis Sargent believed that the rendition of *sarkos hamartias* in Rom 8:3 as ‘sinful flesh’ was a misleading and erroneous translation, especially as it totally obscures the legal metaphor that Paul is intending to use there. Furthermore, there is actually an adjective in the Greek (*hamartolos*) which does mean ‘sinful’ (e.g. see Mark 8:38 ‘sinful generation’; Luke 5:8 ‘sinful man’, 24:7 ‘sinful men’), but perhaps significantly, Paul did not use this adjective in Romans 8:3. But probably the clinching argument here is the fact that this expression ‘sinful flesh’ occurs nowhere else in the entirety of the Bible.

After many years of patient effort to understand the Scriptures, John Carter eventually came to realize that *sarkos hamartias* should be more properly translated as ‘Sin’s flesh’ (flesh which belongs to Sin, as in a ‘slave-master’ relationship), which preserves the Apostle Paul’s intention in Rom. 8:3, to portray personified ‘Sin’ as being a Litigant in a law suit. Previously in Romans, ‘Sin’ had been personified as a master who held a slave (6:20), and as a militant enemy who had taken a prisoner (7:23) – but Paul stated that the slave had since found a new master (Rom. 6:17-19), and the prisoner had been set free (8:2). Paul then uses in Romans 8:3, a different metaphor - a legal court room metaphor - which specifically deals with the vanquishing of Sin. This metaphor runs thus: Personified ‘Sin’ and ‘Jesus’ appear in God’s Law court. All Adam’s descendants who have previously come ‘in the flesh’, have all entered into the province of ‘king’ Sin. As a consequence, ‘Sin’ puts in a customary claim to be the master of Jesus - because Jesus has appeared in physical flesh. However - Jesus uniquely, always successfully resisted His liability to sin, and gave sin no foothold within His life. In this unique case regarding Jesus therefore, ‘Sin’ for the very first time, is pictured as losing his legal claims against a human being - and in this particular case, it is Man (Jesus) who is ‘justified’, legally and morally, and ‘Sin’ who is ‘condemned’, legally defeated. This unique legal situation completely reversed what is implied earlier in Romans (5:16,18, 7:14). There, it is Man(kind) who is ‘condemned’, and ‘Sin’ who is ‘justified’ in being a slave owner (Rom 7:14), and a king (Rom 5:21). By being united to Christ, and sharing in the power of His Spirit (Rom 8:4, 9, 13), believers can also share in Christ’s justified status (cf. Rom 5:1), as well as (in some increasing measure) His moral victory over sin (cf. Rom 8:13 =

Gal 5:24 = Col 3:5). This now explains the causal connection that exists between the verses 3 and 4 of Romans 8. The Greek word *hina* which commences verse 4, means 'in order that' (see NIV). Those who are directed by the holy Spirit, participate in Christ's legal and moral victory over sin - so that the essence of the Mosaic Law can now be fulfilled in us, if we walk according to Spirit (Rom 5:5; 13:8,10; 15:14; Gal 5:14).

With regard to the expression 'sinful flesh' in Rom 8:3, John Carter wrote: 'The translators [of the AV] have obscured [the Greek *sarkos hamartias*] somewhat. The RV margin substitutes the literal translation 'flesh of sin' for the text 'sinful flesh'...In the present context however, it becomes clear that 'sinful flesh' does not strictly set forth Paul's thought. It eliminates the [metaphorical] figure that Paul is using, and from that point alone is a loss. In the phrase 'flesh of sin' [or Sin's flesh] Paul is carrying on the figure of personification that He has used in chapters 6 and 7. Sin is represented as the owner of the flesh, because men and women of the flesh serve sin. In this fact we can see the reason for Paul's use of the word 'likeness' [i.e. 'likeness of Sin's flesh']...Paul was affirming two things: that Jesus shared our nature with its mortality and susceptibility to temptation, yet at the same time He never yielded to sin. He achieves what he means by saying that the flesh of Jesus was identical with the flesh over which sin reigns, but it is only the physical nature that He shares with other members of the race: He does not share their sinfulness. Jesus had not to say with Paul that He failed to do what He would, or to bemoan that Sin dwelt in Him (Romans 7:17, 20). He knew the flesh was weak, but He not Sin was the master. His flesh was not enthralled to Sin, and so Paul must avoid saying that it was the flesh owned by Sin [i.e. 'Sin's flesh'], while asserting its essential sameness as flesh. The word 'likeness' is thus seen to be a strong and important word in the definition of Paul's thought...Sin has been personified [in Romans 5-8] as a paymaster, as an owner by purchase, and as a ruler over subjects - expressive figures of man's slavery to Sin. But another figure is now introduced; he has spoken of being made free from Sin, of becoming slaves of Righteousness; but none of these figures deals with the vanquishing of Sin. In Romans 8:3 Paul pictures a contest at law, in which Sin claims a title to all mortal sons of Adam. But the case goes Against Sin. Sin is condemned by God the judge, and the issue is decided in Christ. Since Christ has not yielded to sin, Sin has lost his claim in the very domain that he regarded as his own - the domain of the flesh. So Paul's figure runs.' (John Carter, *The Christadelphian* 1956, Vol. 93, pp. 129-130.)

Knowledgeable New Testament translators have implicitly recognized the law court metaphor that Paul is using in Romans 8:3. Charles H. Dodd's paraphrased translation renders Romans 8:3 as follows 'Christ entered into this human nature of flesh and blood which is under the dominion of Sin. Sin put in its claim to be His [Christ's] master; but Christ won His case; Sin was non-suited, its claim disallowed, and human nature was set free. The result is that all the Law stood for of righteousness, holiness, and goodness is fulfilled in those [united to Christ] who live by Christ's Spirit.' [C.H. Dodd, *The Meaning of Paul for Today*, p. 182]

William Barclay's Revised Translation reads: 'God...by sending His own dear Son with a human nature like our sinful nature...sent Him to deal with sin, and to deal with it as a human person. He thus left sin without a case, and, because He won the victory over sin the legitimate demand of the law is satisfied in us too, in us whose lives are no longer directed by our lower nature, but by the Spirit.'

5 Should the Greek expression *peri hamartias* be translated as 'concerning sin' (i.e. meaning 'to deal with sin') as in the AV; or should it be rendered 'to be a sin-offering'. If it should be translated 'to be a sin offering', then this leads to viewing Romans 8:3 as primarily concerned with focusing upon the death of Jesus - either as a supposed demonstration that fallen human nature is worthy of death; or as the provision of an expiatory sacrifice that cancels the guilt of sin. However, neither of these explanations accounts for the causal link between Romans 8:3 and 8:4 - with the latter verse describing a state of moral empowerment for those united to

Christ. The context therefore, militates against the idea that *peri hamartias* here should be translated as 'to be a sin-offering'. Consequently, the vast majority of English New Testament translations render it 'to deal with sin' or as 'concerning sin'. In the majority of the ten occasions in the New Testament where the phrase occurs, it does not mean 'to be a sin offering' (See John 8:46; 16:8,9; 1 Peter 3:18; Heb 5:3; 10:18,26). Only in Heb. 10:6, 8 and 13:11 does it definitely mean 'to be a sin-offering'. Furthermore, even in the Septuagint, Josephus, Philo and the Jewish Pseudepigrapha, the phrase does not always mean 'to be a sin offering'. But perhaps the greatest objection to rendering *peri hamartias* in Rom 8:3 as 'to be a sin offering', is that it obscures the court-room metaphor that Paul is using, which illustrates Christ's moral and legal victory over sin, and Sin's dislodgment from the lives of those who are united to Christ, and empowered by His Spirit. Whereas previously, unbelievers could be metaphorically said to have had 'Sin dwelling within them' (Rom. 7:17, 20), now, obedient believers can now be described as being 'full of goodness' (see Rom 15:14; cf. Gal. 5:22). Romans 8:3 therefore, is focusing on the whole obedient life of Jesus, which represented a moral victory over, and a legal condemnation of personified Sin – just as Noah's obedient, and godly life (not his death!) constituted a 'condemnation of the world' (Hebrews 11:7).

In fact, in the unique case of Jesus, human physical flesh, and moral sin were separable. Michael Ashton, another Editor of *The Christadelphian* magazine, realized the implications of this when he wrote: 'Yet others believe that His [Jesus'] nature which He shared with us deserved God's condemnation (Rom 8:3), and that this was publically declared at His crucifixion (Rom 3:25). Although the word 'flesh' is often used in Scripture pejoratively, because in all mankind with the exception of Christ it has resulted in sin, flesh is not of itself condemned. While in man it is impossible to separate flesh and sin, in Christ they were separated. If flesh is worthy of condemnation, how in Christ could it be said that 'the Word became flesh'?' (Michael Ashton, *The Christadelphian*, Editorial, June, 1987, p. 227.)

Later in the same editorial he said: '...God by 'sending His own Son...and for sin...condemned sin in the flesh' (Rom. 8:3). This phraseology has created confusion in the minds of many, who believe it is saying that in the sacrifice of Christ, God was condemning flesh. If this is what is meant, we are asked to believe that our very natures, not only the disobedience which results from them, are worthy of God's wrath – and so also must Christ's have been. Any doctrine that makes the Son of God a child of wrath must be rejected...What the phrase in Romans 8:3 does mean is that sin was condemned by the sacrifice of Christ. Previously the ruler of every man, 'for all have sinned', in the [living] body of Jesus sin was destroyed. In Him the propensity to sin was fully controlled, every temptation was resisted, every thought brought into subjection. God is righteous, and always acts righteously. A world, bent on sin, and with no hope of release, could only be redeemed when 'the strong man' of sin was bound (Matt. 12:29), and the real choice of a new master to whom allegiance could be directed was offered to mankind. The sending of Christ to master sin on its own territory was a righteous act which furthermore 'declared (God's) righteousness.'" (Michael Ashton, *ibid.* p. 228.)

Overall then, Romans 8:3 declares a positive message of hope and deliverance. Although sinless perfection is impossible for Christ's disciples (Phil. 3:12), believers are nevertheless empowered by the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9-11; Heb. 13:21) to increasingly lead spiritually purified lives, that progressively lead to a closer conformity to the image of Christ (cf. Matt. 12: 33-37; Luke 6:45; Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5, 2 Peter 1:3-9, Rom. 6:9-22). A correct expanded paraphrase of Romans 8:3-4 therefore, would probably run something along the following lines :

What the Law could not achieve, hampered as it was by weak, godless human nature, God has done. God sent His own Son with a physical human nature just like ours, but He (Jesus) put (personified) 'Sin' to shame, and won a moral and legal victory over him. In this way, God was able to 'condemn' Sin, and show that it was in principle,

both wrong and unnecessary to human existence. This means that those who are united to Christ's living Spirit (presence) have a legal victory over Sin, and will also be able to progressively share in Christ's moral victory over Sin.

Tony Cox

The Funny Side of Life

There are three ways to get something done:
Do it yourself. Hire someone. Forbid your kids to do it!

They have a Dial-a-Prayer for atheists now.
You can call up and it rings and rings but nobody answers.

'I've decided to sell my Hoover...well, it was just collecting dust.'

A book just fell on my head. I've only got my shelf to blame.

A key ring is a handy little gadget
that allows you to lose all your keys at once.

Why do seagulls live near the sea?
If they lived near the bay, they'd be bagels.

One Sunday, a vicar felt he couldn't face conducting the morning service.
He phoned his churchwardens, and said he was sick. Then he drove 50 miles to a course
where no-one would know him and played golf.

Peter brought this to the Lord's attention.

'He will be punished,' said the Lord.

The errant vicar then proceeded to get a hole in one, not once, but twice!

'I thought you said he will be punished,' Peter said to the Lord.

He replied, 'Oh, he will suffer—who is he going to be able to tell?'

My personal trainer told me to bend down and touch my toes. I told him,
'I don't have that kind of relationship with my feet. May I just wave?'

You wouldn't be worried about what people think of you
if you knew how seldom they actually do.

When you have nothing important or interesting to say,
don't let anyone persuade you to say it.

Of course talk is cheap—supply far exceeds demand.

The people who followed the Lord were called the twelve decibels.

Oxymorons Act naturally. Almost exactly. Alone together. Clearly misunderstood. Good grief. Jumbo shrimp. Large minority. Pretty ugly. Random order. Sweet sorrow. Same difference. Tax return. Virtual reality
