

‘Dear Brothers and Sisters’

I’m rather conservative in nature, and tend to like keeping things as they are. And often that’s a good policy: ‘If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!’ But when there are good reasons to change, then I should change. I used to use the phrase ‘Dear Brethren and Sisters’ at the beginning of a talk or to start a meeting. It’s a phrase very frequently in use. It is regularly to be seen in letters, on Christadelphian websites and in our publications. But a problem with it was pointed out to me, and I therefore changed. I always now try to say ‘Dear Brothers and Sisters’.

There are two problems with the traditional wording. ‘Brethren’ (the plural of ‘brother’) is archaic English, and when we normally speak in current English it is strange to continue to use the language of Shakespeare just in this one expression. The second problem has wider implications. When addressing believers, the expression regularly used in the New Testament letters, especially by the apostle Paul, is the Greek word *adelphoi*. This was translated as ‘brethren’ in the King James version, and some translations in more modern English say ‘brothers’. However, if we address a meeting of the ecclesia by the term ‘brethren’ or ‘brothers’, it gives the impression that we are ignoring the sisters. Presumably this is why the words ‘and sisters’ were added.

But what is the meaning in the New Testament? Does Paul call the believers ‘brothers’ – which looks a decidedly masculine term? In the 1973 version of the NIV, Rom 12:1 reads:

Therefore, I urge you, *brothers*, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship. [Italics added.]

But the latest version of the NIV (2011) says ‘brothers and sisters’.

Therefore, I urge you, *brothers and sisters*, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

Is this a change in meaning, or is it what Paul meant when he wrote *adelphoi*?

The NIV translators normally say ‘brothers and sisters’ when they consider that *adelphoi* refers to the believers. Here is their translation of Rom 1:13:

I do not want you to be unaware, *brothers and sisters*, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles. [Italics added.]

The translators provide a footnote after ‘brothers and sisters’ which says:

The Greek word for *brothers and sisters* (*adelphoi*) refers here to believers, both men and women, as part of God’s family; also in 7:1,4; 8:12, 29; 10:1; 11:25; 12:1; 15:14, 30; 16:14, 17.

Paul uses *adelphoi* regularly in 1 Corinthians also:

I appeal to you, *brothers and sisters*, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. (1 Cor 1:10, italics added.)

There is a footnote after ‘brothers and sisters’, as at the beginning of the letter to the Romans, which indicates the verses in which the translators have said ‘brothers and sisters’:

The Greek word for *brothers and sisters* (*adelphoi*) refers here to believers, both men and women, as part of God’s family; also in verses 11 and 26; and in 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 6:8; 7:24, 29; 10:1; 11:33; 12:1; 14:6, 20, 26, 39; 15:1, 6, 50, 58; 16:15, 20.

The NIV translators are not doing this with the purpose of being ‘politically correct’ but because they consider ‘brothers and sisters’ (i.e. male and female believers) is what the apostle means when he writes *adelphoi*. Their understanding agrees with what Paul specifies in different words at the beginning of each letter:

To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 1:2-3)

To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. (Rom 1:7-8)

Paul is addressing the believers, male and female, directly, and he makes it clear that he is addressing *all* the believers (not just the men, or the leaders, or the elders, or the wealthy, or the literate) by his repeated use of ‘all’ and ‘you all’.

Is Paul consistent in his usage? When he writes *adelphoi* does he sometimes mean ‘brothers (only)’ and at other times ‘brothers and sisters’? I can see no good reason to suggest that Paul chops and changes. By *adelphoi*, when addressing the recipients of his letters, I think he does always mean ‘brothers and sisters’. This has important implications for our understanding of Paul’s teaching. Take 1 Cor 14:26. If we read the NIV version produced

originally in 1973, we see:

What then shall we say, *brothers*? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. [Italics added.]

This has a very masculine appearance. It is easy to think that Paul is commenting on how the men speak in meetings. And instruction for women to be silent in verse 34 appears to confirm this picture. If, however, we read the new NIV produced in 2011, we see:

What then shall we say, *brothers and sisters*? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. [Italics added.]

According to the 2011 translation, both men and women speak in the meetings: ‘*brothers and sisters...each of you* has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation.’ And this is confirmed by what Paul encouraged earlier:

I would like *every one of you* to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified...Now, *brothers and sisters*...Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church. (1 Cor 14:5,6,12) [Italics added.]

Again, he is addressing brother and sisters, and indicating that he wishes both to speak in the meeting – but in a controlled, intelligible manner. In whatever way the words about women being silent are understood (verses 34-35), they cannot be taken to mean the opposite of what Paul has consistently been saying. Paul is aiming at constructive speaking in which the church is built up – by the spoken contributions, one at a time, by both brothers and sisters.

We are so accustomed to the word *adelphoi* being translated ‘brothers’ that we can slip into masculine assumptions. About four years ago, I was pasting a notice on to our ecclesial noticeboard in the street when a lady came up and said to me: ‘What does the word ‘Christadelphian’ mean?’ I replied that it came from the Greek word for ‘brothers’ and the word for ‘Christ’, so means ‘Brothers of Christ’. She then said: ‘Are there no women in your church?’ – and I thought, ‘Oops!’.

In 1 Peter 2:17 there is the word *adelphotes*. The King James translation says:

Honour all men. Love the *brotherhood*. Fear God. Honour the king.

The 1973 NIV translation says:

Show proper respect to everyone: Love the *brotherhood of believers*, fear God, honour the king.

The 2011 version says:

Show proper respect to everyone, love *the family of believers*, fear God, honour the emperor.

Since *adelphos* means *brother* and *adelphé* means *sister*, why not translate *adelphotes* as ‘sisterhood’ rather than ‘brotherhood’? Because ‘sisterhood’ would give an impression that there were no men believers! But does not ‘brotherhood’ tend to convey the impression that there are no women? Hence the newest version of the NIV says ‘the family of believers’, which seems to be much more faithful to the original meaning. In Greek *adelphos* and *adelphé* are the same basic word, with a masculine ending when it means ‘brother’ and a feminine ending when it means ‘sister’. But when translated into Western languages – Latin, French, German and English, two entirely different words are used: ‘*adelphos*’ becomes *frater*, *frère*, *Bruder*, *brother*, ‘*adelphé*’ becomes *soror*, *soeur*, *Schwester*, *sister*, respectively. It is unfortunate that, until recently, translations into these languages, by using ‘brothers’, gave a misleadingly masculine impression which is not present in Greek when it says *adelphoi*.

There is a lot more that can be said about gender in translation, but next time you are about to say or write ‘brethren and sisters’, please pause for a nanosecond and change to ‘brothers and sisters’. And please consider using translations, like the current NIV, which say ‘brothers and sisters’ rather than ‘brethren’ or ‘brothers’. Not only will you avoid antiquated language but you will be more accurately representing the manner in which Paul and the New Testament writers referred in an inclusive way to the believers who had been brought together into the new family in Jesus.

Ian McHaffie

The church should be a community of encouragement.

Fred Catherwood

Fred Barling

Fred Barling was one of the 'young Turks' who pioneered the Campaigns movement. Many of them benefited from new Government financial support for University education. This gave them a disciplined approach to Bible study, not afraid to question received understandings. They were explorers, but not rebels, remaining loyal to the Christadelphian community. Tom, Fred's older brother, once summed it up by saying 'our generation brought Jesus to the fore in the brotherhood, not that His name was never mentioned, but prophecy and the Old Testament tended to predominate.' This thrust in Fred's ministry was certainly seen when in 1952 at the Central London Bible Class he gave a series of 12 lectures on *Jesus, Healer and Teacher*. This series became a turning point in many of our lives for we had not heard the gospels explored in this way before, though, reading them now – they were republished by the Christadelphian in 2005 – they read less original, but this is a tribute to the continuing work of his generation.

Fred came to the fore in our community when in 1949, aged 30, he debated in public with Ernest Brady of the Nazarene fellowship on his understanding of the nature and sacrifice of Christ – we have come to know the Nazarene position as 'Clean Flesh'. The debate became known as 'The Netherton Debate'.

Fred was an energetic soul – he played rugby both for the Wasps and in trials for the Welsh team – and never did anything by halves nor gave up. A brother once said to him, 'Fred, you are like your Welsh corgis! Once you get your teeth in you never let go!' To be assaulted personally by his energy could be tiring but the community greatly benefited. He originated the London autumn Bible Classes mentioned above, giving the early studies, many resulting in published books, *Law and Grace* being the most well-known. But for me, his greatest contribution must be *Jesus, Teacher and Healer*. If you attended one of the campaigns he led, it had drive and purpose, the grounds of your faith, as well as those we reached out to, being challenged. Perhaps not too good a listener but he was, above all, a compassionate man and heard and responded to the cry of any in need.

It was his compassion that brought about a change in his relationship with the community. When, after a lengthy examination of Ralph Lovelock's views on Creation, his ecclesia decided to withdraw his fellowship, Fred argued vigorously on Ralph's behalf, not on the grounds of his views but on the justice of the action they proposed. His intervention was not a flash in the pan for it was conducted over many months community wide. He didn't like the treatment meted out to Ralph and chose to take a back seat but remained active at a personal level. He devoted time to charity work and, if asked, he would still speak, and attended the Summer School in 1987. He allowed the articles he wrote for the Christadelphian in 1946, that prefaced his debate with Ernest Brady, to be republished by brothers and sisters in Australia and it is the Preface to this reprint of 1990 that reveals the development that had been taking place in Fred's life in his understanding of the gospel. I am sure he would have wanted to modify the emphasis in some of his early works. God's love now drove Fred as never before and this was especially so for his work with muscular dystrophy sufferers.

He wrote: 'There are two dimensions of NT teaching of the Atonement which have to feature as prominently in our thinking as they do in Scripture itself. They are these:

1. The Cross is primarily, and overridingly, God's demonstration of the nature and extent to his love...consequently, theorising about the Atonement which does not have conscious awareness of this fundamental truth at its starting point must be hopelessly awry...This means that brethren who are not driven to consider or expound this deep and delicate subject...are scarcely the best qualified to pronounce upon it...
2. And the complementary truth, equally crucial, is that we have to see acceptance of the Cross as laying the obligation upon us to show, in our turn, God's own love towards sinners, whatever their offence, and whoever they may be.'

Many found that the treatment of Ralph Lovelock made it impossible for them to remain in the community. Though Fred shared their feelings he remained. He would say: 'I found Christ through the Christadelphian community' and he repayed with loyalty. At the end of his life he worked in the Torquay Ecclesia. During this time he strove to challenge the lives of neighboring brothers and sisters through short articles in a local periodical publication he produced, **PROBE**. His widow, Joy Bamford – he died in 1990 – has agreed for selected articles now to be shared, through Endeavour, with a wider audience. There are many in our community who give thanks for Fred's work in opening their eyes to the riches of God's grace in Jesus. Fred still remains one of our community's leading Bible scholars.

Ken Drage

But Now . . .
(Probe No. 12, September 1989)

Nowhere is the concern of the NT with the topic of time more evident than in HEBREWS. There, from the outset, the advent of Jesus is seen as a culminating point in human history.

The process of divine revelation – revelation which, by now, was preserved in the sacred Scriptures to which such a distinctively powerful appeal is made in the Epistle – is presented as having come to fullness and finality. In the very mode of God's latest 'speaking' – that is, in One standing in a uniquely intimate relationship to Him as 'Son' – ultimacy had been attained, signalling that a climax had been reached in the affairs of men. What had happened 'in time past' had been transcended by what had occurred 'in these last days'.

For that reason the significance of the former was henceforth to be understood strictly in terms of the latter. Whatever the topic under discussion – sanctuary, sacrifice or priesthood – the fact had to be faced that THEN had yielded place to NOW; YESTERDAY to TODAY. Everything to do with the Mosaic system had to be understood to have been of only an interim, purely anticipatory, nature. notwithstanding the fact that the design of the Tabernacle had a divine origin, its structure was but 'a figure for the time then present' (Heb 9:9); 'the holy places made with hands' were no more than 'figures of the true' (Heb 9:24); the entire Law was merely 'a shadow of good things to come...not the very image' of them (Heb 10:1). All this was because what had been accomplished in and by Christ was, by its very nature a once-and-for-all – and an all-sufficient – event: 'now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself' (Heb 10:26). He entered 'into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us' (Heb. 9:24).

Such is the extent to which the writer of HEBREWS stressed what might be called the 'now-ness of the privileges conferred on those who believe the Gospel, and the role of the present as the dimension of time with which those who preached the 'good news' were – not indeed exclusively, but certainly principally – concerned in their day (cf. Acts 3:24; Rom 16:25-26).

Jesus himself had sounded the keynote when, in the synagogue at Nazareth, having read the words of God through Isaiah with their commission to him 'to preach the gospel to the poor', he announced, 'This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears' Luke 4:17- 1). His words later to the Pharisees were to the same effect: 'The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it' (Luke 16:16). His emphasis was similar when he informed the Samaritan woman at the well, 'The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth', thereby indicating that the time for concern with sacred localities and ceremonial procedures was over (John 4:23).

Of necessity his message would not have been 'good news' if it did not also embrace the future in its scope. He therefore made plain to the Pharisees regarding himself as God's Son, 'Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth.' This he did having first declared concerning the immediate spiritual resurrection of men and women which his teaching could effect, 'Verily verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live' (John 5:25-29). It was this double truth of which Paul reminded Timothy when he wrote that Christ 'hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel', for, by then, the Lord's resurrection had vindicated his claim, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life' (John 5:24; cf. John 11:25-26; II Tim 1:10).

It is for this reason that the NT writers were so confident about their own TOMORROW: for them TODAY took care of that. The paraphrase by J.B. Phillips of the words of Paul in Romans brings this fact out beautifully:

Since then it is by faith that we are justified, let us grasp the fact that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have confidently entered into this new relationship of grace, and here we take our stand, in happy certainty of the glorious things he has for us in the future.

This doesn't mean, of course, that we have only a hope of future joys – we can be full of joy here and now even in our trials and troubles. Taken in the right spirit these very things will give us patient endurance; this in turn will develop a mature character, and a character of this sort produces a steady hope, a hope that will never disappoint us (Rom 5:1-5).

Such was the consideration which had led Paul to tell the Corinthians, 'If any of you is **in** Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come' (II Cor 5:17 RSV). His perspective was thus identical

with that of the writer of HEBREWS, as both his preaching and epistles reveal.

It was God, he told the Areopagites, who had ‘determined the times before appointed’, and, having ‘overlooked’ the ignorance of past generations, ‘now commandeth all men everywhere to repent’. Men and women had to face the fact that a climactic stage had arrived in human history and that their response to it would determine their ultimate destiny when it culminated on the Day on which the resurrected Jesus will dispense final judgment (Acts 17:26-31). The need to repent forthwith was therefore crucial: it brooked no delay.

And no less urgent in Paul’s view was the need for repentance by those, believers already, who were in danger of lapsing and thus receiving the grace of God ‘in vain’. He reminded those at Corinth of the assurance of help promised to Jesus through Isaiah – ‘I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee’ – and then drew the lesson, ‘Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation’ (Isaiah 49:8; II Cor 6:1-2).

Now...now...now...The words run through the NT like a refrain, so fundamental was the contrast between the past and the present, now that Jesus had lived, ministered, died, risen and ascended. For his birth was but first of a series of events which were no accidents of history: it was ‘when the time was fully come’ – neither sooner, nor later – that God ‘sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law’ (Gal 4:4).

Neither had his Ministry just chanced to begin when it did, for the word of God had first come to John the Baptist in the fifteenth year of Tiberius, and it was on hearing that John had been ‘cast into prison’ that Jesus ‘began to preach’ (Matt 4:12-17), saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel’ (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 3:1-2).

It was ‘in due time’, too, that ‘Christ died for the ungodly’ (Rom 5:6). Even the ‘hour’ of the Crucifixion was God-appointed (John 12:23; cf. 7:30; 8:20; 12:27; 13:1; 17:1). Likewise it was on the promised ‘third day’, when the Jews had fulfilled ‘all that was written of him’, that ‘God raised him from the dead’ (Acts 13:29-30; cf. Matt 16:21). Finally there followed the ‘forty days’, during which he ‘showed himself alive’ to his disciples, before the day came for him to be ‘taken up’, and for the words of Psalm 110:1 to become a glorious reality (Acts 1:2-3; Heb 1:3).

Such was the evidence then, as it still is, that what God accomplished in and through Jesus took place at a pivotal point in human history. For this reason (and the same was done later, in HEBREWS), Paul drew a parallel between the Corinthians recently redeemed from the bondage of sin and the Jewish forefathers led out of Egyptian bondage by Moses. It enabled him to add, ‘All these things...were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come’ (I Cor 10:11). His words indicated that a new age had dawned, a new dispensation had begun.

This fact had been signified by the words of Jesus regarding the Cup, spoken at the Last Supper – ‘This is my blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins’ (Matt 26:22; cf. Jer 31:31-34; Heb 9:15). As Peter later put it to his readers, ‘Ye were redeemed...with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you’ (I Peter 1:18-20).

The purpose of both Paul and Peter in thus indicating the momentous significance of their generation was twofold: it was firstly to underline the privileges enjoyed by the Christian; then secondly, to stress the responsibilities entailed.

Both apostles insisted that the benefits of the Lord’s death were available immediately to sinners of every race. For each of them the words of God through Hosea meant that men and women of all ethnic origins could now, on the basis of faith in Christ, become members of the ‘nation’ of which Jesus himself had spoken (Matt 21:43; Hosea 1:9; 2:23). Baptism obliterated their past: what mattered was their present standing before God. ‘You’, he wrote to the Ephesians, ‘hath God quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins’. And more!: not only had they participated, as they rose from the waters of baptism, in the Lord’s resurrection; they had also had conferred on them the benefits of his ascension, having been elevated to ‘sit in heavenly places’.

The awfulness of their previous condition was highlighted. ‘In time past’, wrote Paul, ‘ye walked according to the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience’; adding, ‘among whom also we all had our conversation in times past’; and then urging his readers, ‘Therefore remember...that at that time ye were without Christ.’ If we ask why there was such heavy emphasis on their – and his own! – past, the answer is supplied by him in his triumphant assertion: ‘**BUT NOW**, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ...**NOW** therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God’ (Eph. 2:1-19).

It was on the basis of this glorious fact that both Paul and Peter could point out to their readers the responsibilities

which they had assumed at baptism. In brief, the whole of the rest of their lives had now to be at the disposal of Christ. The fact that Christ 'died for all' meant, wrote Paul, 'that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again' (II Cor. 5:15). We find his words echoed in those of Peter: For as much as Christ hath suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God' (I Peter 4:1-2).

Paul indicated to the Ephesians that the example of acceptable human life had been set by Christ by stating, 'truth is in Jesus'. He therefore urged them, 'put off concerning the former conversation the old man...and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and...put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness' (Eph. 4: 21-24).

As HEBREWS, too, was to indicate, there is 'a rest for the people of God' – one which will utterly transcend that held out to the Israelites in the wilderness. It was to urge his contemporaries, centuries later than the Exodus, not to fail to attain this greater Rest, as so many of their forefathers failed to reach the Promised Land, that David made his appeal in Psalm 95 (Num. 14:22-23); and it was to urge the same lesson on his own readers that the author of HEBREWS invoked that very Psalm, for its message and its relevance remained unaltered by the passage of time. Its call was still, 'TODAY, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts'; so, on that basis came the call, 'Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest' (Heb. 4:7-11). The Christian's TOMORROW is being determined TODAY as he awaits the Lord's coming, for as Jesus said, 'THEN he shall reward every man according to his works' (Matt 16:27-28).

As John wrote, 'NOW are we the sons of God'; and he added, 'and it doth not yet appear what we shall be'. He was content to exult in the fact that when the Lord comes, 'we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is' (I John 3:1-2). Likewise it sufficed for Paul to rejoice that 'in the ages to come', it is God's intention to 'show unto us the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus'. Into further detail he did not enter, nor was it permissible for him to do so (II Cor. 12:4) – or even possible so far is it beyond the capacity of mortals in their finitude to comprehend what is in store for the finally redeemed (cf. p.21-24). And what is certain is that undue concern regarding the believers' TOMORROW – let alone with its unrevealed details – can distract attention from the pressing duties of TODAY, resulting in that unawareness of lost opportunities exposed by Jesus in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matt 25:31-46).

As appropriate, Paul made use of the future tense. He did so to encourage hard-pressed disciples, assuring them that 'the sufferings of this present time' do not merit comparison with 'the glory which shall be revealed in us' (Rom 8:18). He reassured the Corinthians in similar terms, but what sustained him was the fact – certainly true in his own case – that 'the inward man is renewed day by day' (II Cor 4:16-18). Answering their perplexities about the resurrection he made it plain that death will – 'when this mortal shall have put on immortality' – be swallowed up in victory. But his last word was, 'Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.' And, by that, he meant, NOW! – while the opportunity is there!

Fred Barling

Does Science Support a Belief in the Existence of God?

There has long been a popular perception that as science unravels the secrets of the universe, so religion must inevitably retreat. Many atheist writers try to encourage this perception, and use science as a stick for beating religion, which they see as irrational, subjective and dealing in airy-fairy things that have no basis in reality. In contrast, science, they claim, is objective and rational, dealing with hard facts, the 'real' world. At the same time, other scientists, as well as philosophers and theologians, take the opposite view, and recognize in scientific discovery a confirmation that there is a Creator. In their perspective, science has uncovered a universe of such intricacy, interlocking harmony and order that it could only have been designed by a supreme intelligence. Science then, is used to support both sides of the argument; some use it to demolish belief in a Creator; to others it confirms the existence of God.

At one time there was no conflict between science and faith. The very earliest scientists and astronomers such as Kepler, Copernicus, Galileo and Newton were men of faith and believed that in discovering the laws governing the universe they were 'thinking the Creator's thoughts after Him'. It was however, the implications of the earliest discoveries in astronomy which led to a polarization between faith and science which is still with us. These men of science worked on the premise that the Creator sustains all things according to mathematical laws. So they found and

described those laws fitting them into a structure, which when complete, made the whole universe look like a vast piece of clockwork which runs its course because of its own inherent laws without any intervention from the Creator.

Everything in the universe, they realized, was made up out of atoms, little particles which obey unchangeable mechanical laws. Every effect had its cause, every phenomenon could be explained by reference to the laws of physics and mathematics, all of which could be defined and analyzed. But the question eventually arose: if everything can be explained in terms of natural law what need is there for a God to create and sustain the universe? The very laws they discovered seemed to remove the need for a Creator.

Seen in that light, it does seem that as science has advanced so faith has been forced to retreat before it. Philosophers refer to 'The God of the Gaps' to describe this supposed retreat. As long as there is a 'gap' in human understanding, then it is easy to see the hand of the Creator as an explanation. Long ago, there were numerous gaps in scientific knowledge, His hand could therefore be seen everywhere. But as advances in scientific discovery gradually filled in these gaps, so the need for God as an explanation was by degrees eliminated, until eventually He could be left right out of the picture. Belief in God can then be seen as coextensive with human ignorance, something to be invoked only until a more rational explanation can be found.

This perception lies behind the assault on religion by atheist writers such as Professor Richard Dawkins. Christians, he claims, are determined to defend the 'God-shaped gaps' and resist any scientific explanation. In that way, God will always 'win by default' as Dawkins puts it. This, of course, is a caricature of Christian faith. True faith sees the hand of God in the things we can explain, as well as the things we cannot. Either He is Creator of everything or nothing.

When scientists recognize the hand of God in the universe it is not because there are gaps in their understanding for which there are no other explanations, but because of the order and harmony by which it holds together, the elegance of its laws. It seems to be fine-tuned to support life. And the probability of life emerging and evolving by blind chance is so infinitesimally small that it must have been created by a power beyond itself.

Science, however, can be a two-edged sword when it is used to find God, simply because it can tell us very little about Him, beyond inferring that He exists. The fact is that science deals with a limited spectrum of reality, with things that can be weighed and measured in a laboratory, or reduced to a mathematical formula. It is not qualified to study questions of meaning and purpose or the attributes and character of God. He cannot be seen down a telescope, nor can divine providence be analyzed in a laboratory. God is spirit, and spirit is a different kind of reality from the material universe of atoms and molecules, forces and waves. This is why science, on its own, has its limitations. If the hand of God can be seen in the petal of a flower, the wing of a butterfly or the structure of the atom this much on its own does not tell us whether He is the slightest bit concerned about the eternal welfare of men and women.

Many scientists have been moved by the wonders of the universe to conclude that behind them there must be a supreme intelligence. Something must have started everything in the beginning, and that something they are willing to call God. Many of them refer to 'God' in their writings, yet it is clear that the God of the scientists is not the One whom Jesus addressed as Father, certainly not a Being who makes any moral demands upon them. They mean no more than a vague and impersonal creative force within the universe or the sum total of the laws of physics. Paul Davies is a physicist who has written a number of popular scientific books and he concludes one of them with this thought:

...science offers a surer path than religion in the search of God. It is my deep conviction that only by understanding the world in all its many aspects – reductionist and holist, mathematical and poetical, through forces, fields and particles as well as through good and evil – that we will come to understand ourselves and the meaning behind this universe, our home. (Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics*, page 229)

This is far removed from the Biblical view of God. Significantly, there is no mention of divine revelation in Davies' list of paths to God. In fact, he specifically rejects religion as a less sure path than science. There are, however, limitations to the search for God in 'forces, fields and particles', in that He can be conceived only as a Supreme Mathematician, a Grand Designer. Such statements also give the unfortunate impression that scientists are the people best qualified to tell us whether there is a God.

To the writers of Scripture God can be known only in so far as He has revealed Himself. 'Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?' (Job 11:7). The implication is that the answer is no. What God had not revealed about Himself was unknowable. Nor would the biblical writers have regarded a merely intellectual assent to God's existence to be of any value. When the Old Testament speaks of the 'knowledge of God' or the New Testament of 'faith' their writers mean the submission of our whole being to One whom we

acknowledge to be far above us in power, worth and holiness, not a vague conviction that behind everything must be an intelligence. That is the difference between 'knowing God' and 'knowing about God'. The recognition that a power, a supreme intelligence stands behind the creation is only a beginning. On its own it is of no value. True faith goes beyond that and responds to the revelation that God has made of His character and purpose: 'He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him' (Hebrews 11:6).

When the scriptural writers invoke what reads like the 'design argument' this is not to prove that God exists, but to confirm what God has already revealed about Himself. In Romans chapter 1 the Apostle points to the created order as evidence for the hand of God: 'For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse (v.20). This passage, however, is not stating the design argument for the existence of God; it is one stage ahead of that. The Apostle is saying that certain aspects of God's character, namely His eternal power and godhead, so manifestly clear in the natural order, should have confirmed what He had already revealed of His moral order. The implication is that mankind should already have known these things, but deliberately rejected them (verse 21). Repeatedly in this chapter he uses such expressions as 'for God has shown it to them' (verse 19), and 'So that they are without excuse' (verse 20).

There are no definite proofs for God; there are only arguments which are more or less convincing depending upon whether we want to believe them. There are things we can deduce about God simply by looking around us at nature, such as His power and wisdom, but God is hidden behind nature, so that what reveals Him also conceals Him. When we claim to know God it is not because specially trained experts have been successful in investigating this Being, or because we have engrossed ourselves in the intricacies of science, but because He who was hidden has chosen to make Himself known through prophets and apostles, and above all, through the life of His Son who perfectly embodied the divine character: 'He who has seen me has seen the Father, so how can you say, "Show us the Father"?' (John 14:9).

Paul Wasson

Lessons from a Sheepdog.

This article is based on a lovely little book by Phillip Keller and is described as a true story of transforming love.

Many years ago Les and I bought some moderately priced books at our local Christian Centre. One small volume seemed to disappear unread into the vast collection of books in our possession until fairly recently when it caught my eye on the shelf and I began to read it. Pleasure, emotion and happy childhood memories of my own dog filled me as I was taken into the lives of one man and his dog. The book, entitled *Lessons from a Sheepdog* is dedicated to Lass, 'through whom God taught me life-long lessons'.

Phillip Keller was born in Kenya and had grown up there, his father being a breeder of fine cattle, but he had moved to North America to complete his university studies in science and animal husbandry. Later, he became manager of a magnificent ranch in British Columbia, working, again, with cattle. Chancing upon a neglected ranch property for sale on the southern tip of Vancouver Island he bought it with the idea of having cattle on it. It soon became apparent to him that having bought the land he had no funds left for any cattle! So he bought the next best thing, sheep. But when his faithful old cattle dog, Paddy, became so baffled and bewildered by the sheep he realised he must get himself a new dog. Another problem surfaced, where could he buy a good sheepdog with the limited funds he had available?

Browsing through the paper one day he spied an advert:

WANTED
A GOOD COUNTRY HOME FOR PURE-BRED BORDER COLLIE.
CHASES CARS AND BICYCLES.

Telephoning the owner he heard a passionate plea. 'Please do come quickly. She's out of control! No one wants her.' On arriving at the house the desperate owner painted a picture of a crazy dog, absolutely uncontrollable. 'I can't do a thing with this creature. All she does is tear after the kids, chases boys on bicycles, jumps all the fences and races after every car that comes by on the road.' Requesting at least to see her, Phillip was taken to the back of the house and as they reached the yard, a flying, leaping bundle hurled herself at Phillip; it snarled and snapped and then collapsed in a heap on the ground. In horror he saw that the dog was tethered, not only from her collar to a steel post but from her leg as well. 'Crouched in the dirt, covered with dust, the dog glared at me, her ears laid back in anger. Deep, guttural growling, bearing her teeth, rumbling menacingly she made a pitiful sight.' She was a dog 'gone

wrong', totally useless, beyond hope, beyond help. But what else did Phillip see? He saw through that sad picture and in front of him was a magnificent creature with a beautiful head and body, a keen intelligence and a great capacity to learn. With compassion and empathy he looked at this creature and told the lady that he was prepared to give the dog a chance. To my mind comes the hymn from *Praise the Lord* that says, 'Something else I can see; something so special to me, shows I've potential to be, someone like you.' Phillip saw that potential in this distressed but wonderful dog. It was apparent to Phillip that here what was needed was a new master. In this angry, dusty dog, restrained by chains, glaring in cold defiance we see the plight of countless men and women, maybe ourselves included, people who have started out well with great potential and who have fallen by the wayside, often through no fault of their own. Not a few people end up grovelling in the dust of despair with misspent years and missed opportunities, sinners, immoral people, worshippers of idols, adulterers, drunkards, slanderers and greedy people. Perhaps we might see ourselves here. 'Some of you', says Paul to the church at Corinth, 'were like that, but you have been purified from sin.' (1 Cor 6:11) 'While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' 'You must put to death, then, the earthly desires at work in you'...At one time you yourselves used to live according to such desires, when your life was dominated by them.' (Col 3: 5,7)

A stranger had come into Lass' backyard that day, uninvited. It had been disturbing for her, even terrifying. A stranger from Galilee has come in to our lives and for some of us, when he did that, not only was it terrifying, it was disturbing and unsettling, maybe even annoying. He comes into each of our lives in a different way, at a different time, place or setting. Was it at a peaceful, settled time in your life that he came or was it a turbulent time or maybe a rather inconvenient time? Had you just started a new phase in your life, a new marriage, a new job or course of study? Were you just about to embark on some exciting adventure? Or were you maybe, like Phillip's new dog, at your lowest point, grovelling scared in the filth of humanity, a wreck, a nobody? Perhaps it was just at the right time for you in your life, just the best possible thing.

Abraham's life was fairly settled in Haran. Was it convenient for him to have to move? Moses wasn't too keen to leave his flocks in Midian and go to confront Pharaoh. David was quietly tending his sheep. Did the disciples expect on that ordinary working day to be called to an incredibly different life, just like that? Paul, who as Saul, was dashing to Damascus to get rid of the followers of the man who stopped him in his tracks. Not very convenient for him that day!

God and the Lord Jesus see beyond our situation, our ease, our complacency, our sins, our greed, our wretchedness and touch us with tenderness and love. They extend a hand to us and sometimes, like the dog, we snap and growl. We bare our teeth and are angry. Why Lord? Why me? Why now? What do you want of me? And sometimes, Go away! We have that marvellous example of Jonah who virtually said that. He went in the opposite direction to get away from the Lord.

Phillip drove home with Lass, for that was the name he had chosen for his new dog, back to his ranch where she would have a complete change of environment, a huge expanse of land to run in, no cars or bikes to chase, a new kennel, good food and sparkling water but, most important of all, a fresh start to her life with a new master. But she would not touch the food or drink and she would not enter the kennel. All friendly advances on Phillip's part were rejected which made him so sad that he decided after a while, rather rashly, he thought, he would let her run free. For weeks she hurtled about the fields round the ranch, Phillip calling to her in vain. But he left food for her and waited patiently. He worried for her well-being. She fled through the forest and into the high rocks, eventually, on some days, resting near some sheep on the grass. And Phillip waited patiently.

God gives us our freedom too. God waits patiently. Do we run wildly about? Maybe at first, some do forever, but for others a miracle takes place. They come to learn of God's work with humanity and how he will gently coax people, leading them into making a choice, of their own freewill. We have inherited the earth, God's great gift of creation, but in addition man receives another gift from him, the freedom to make choices. This freedom can lead to mistakes and setbacks. We see in the Bible the account of God's love affair with the human race, his plan for its redemption, a plan with freedom and love at its heart.

In those first few weeks, when Lass was completely untrusting, out of control, refusing any contact and, in spite of the fact that no rapport had been established between them, Phillip felt some overwhelming feeling growing within him – an enormous compassion for this beautiful dog. He said, 'an intense longing permeated my whole being for her to come to me, to get to know me, to learn to love me, to trust me, to work with me and be my friend'. Phillip's compassion was borne of his knowledge of the compassion and mercy God has for his children:

You disobeyed God in the past but now you have received his mercy. (Rom 11:30)

God's compassion and mercy are so abundant and his love for us is so great, that while we were spiritually dead in

our disobedience he brought us to life with Christ. (Eph 2:4,5)
For the Lord is full of compassion. (James 5:11)

One evening, when the sun was setting in a golden haze over the ocean, Phillip was standing, hands behind his back, contentedly gazing at the peaceful scene. He suddenly felt a soft, wet, warm nose touching his hand. She had come to him! He was ecstatic. Elation and delight swept through his senses. She had touched him. She now trusted him. She wanted him in her life. 'There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent.' And we think of the welcome the father gives his son after a lifetime of sin and debauchery. This son of mine was dead but now he is alive. He was lost but now has been found!' Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

Like Lass we were once lost and we have been found by a new master in whom we can truly trust and who has only our best interests in mind. Lass was not to know that Phillip had only good things in mind for her. She had to learn through those long weeks to trust him. Paul says to Timothy: 'I know who I have trusted.' We place our trust in the living God who is the saviour of all. 'God is to be trusted, the God who called you to have fellowship with his son Jesus Christ our Lord.' (1 Cor 1:9)

Quite naturally, as a sheepdog, Lass had to learn commands. In view of her early years, a daunting task! But with her apparent intelligence and alert mind these commands were soon obeyed. Come. Lie down. Sit. Stay. To the left. To the right. Such commands of a worker with sheep in the field, are not quite the commands given to a worker for the Lord. Or are they? Come unto me, Jesus says to us. Come unto me and rest. Lay down thy weary head upon my breast. Listen. Be still. And we have to learn too, as Christians, when to sit patiently, when to stay, when to listen, when to go one way or the other, when to say something and when to stay silent. Knowing the right thing to do, obeying the laws set down by our heavenly Father in a life of service to him are things that we have to learn to do.

Once a relationship had been formed between Phillip and Lass it was very obvious by her behaviour that she was happy. If it could be said that a dog can smile then Lass smiled. In her sparkling, shining eyes she exuded happiness. Everything was done with huge enjoyment. Lass was a joyful and willing dog. What a lesson for us here! I am constantly aware in myself that I do things grudgingly, sometimes unwillingly. Some days everything is a chore and I have to pull myself up and tell myself sternly that I am alive, well-blessed, able to serve my master and there are lots of things I can do. Worship the Lord with joy (Ps 100:2). Let your hope keep you joyful (Rom 12:12). Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord (Col 3:23).

Over time, when the relationship between the two of them had become stronger, it became apparent that Lass would do anything asked of her willingly, no question. She was instantly available for any task, no matter how hard or trying. Usually this involved lost sheep caught in difficult places and she would return scratched, bruised and with her coat covered in burs. But she had done the job willingly, without complaint. Are we ready and willing to do anything asked of us by our master? Are we there, alert, just waiting for his commands? I can only answer for myself. What about you? We make all manner of excuses. We don't want to be put out. It might be unpleasant, not quite 'our thing', a bit risky. It might be too much like hard work and we might, like Lass, get scratched and bruised. I am reminded of Isaiah in the Temple: 'Whom shall I send? Who will be our messenger? I answered, "I will go, send me!"' How this can make us feel ashamed!

The most difficult command for Lass to obey in the first few weeks of her new life was 'stay'. This meant her having to guard over some unruly sheep while her master was elsewhere. She always wanted to be on the move, where the action was. She would suddenly see the rooks in great flocks, they seemed to be taunting her and off she would go chasing them or she would watch land-clearing fires with burning embers blowing in the breeze and she would be sorely tempted and 'break faith', dashing off to be in the middle of the excitement. How like Lass we are! How often do we allow ourselves to be distracted from the Lord's work! How often do we dash off to the action! How often do we pray, 'Lead us not into temptation?' 'Keep an eye on yourselves', Paul says to us, 'so that you will not be tempted' (Gal 6:1).

O let me feel you near me, the world is ever near.
I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear.
The world is ever near me, around me and within.
O Jesus draw still nearer and shield my soul from sin.

Phillip naturally thought it was right to punish Lass when she was tempted and, as he put it, 'broke faith' and dashed off. He doesn't actually tell us how he punishes her but I've deduced that it was something short and sharp and all over and forgotten soon. Once she had been disciplined she would leap into his arms and he would caress her

head, rub her chest and whisper, 'It's all over, girl.' Her eyes would shine again and she would tremble with joy. There was total reconciliation and restoration as she then raced over the grass, returning to another warm embrace. The Lord corrects everyone he loves and punishes everyone he accepts as his child.

As Lass began to have less mad moments and learned how important the commands she was given were, she was delighted to carry them out. In other words she became very obedient. Phillip's orders to his dog were expressed in clear and concise terms. So, he said, were God's commands to him, in simple straightforward language. God has not left us without clear instructions. His desires for us have been voiced in unmistakable terms. His word is precise and to the point, sharper than a two-edged sword. There is no excuse. Anyone who truly desires to know and do God's will can find it stated clearly in his word. Jesus said: 'You are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you.' Paul said: 'Those who obey God's commands live in union with God and God lives in union with him.' Phillip was delighted that not only had he become the proud owner of a magnificent dog but he had now a friend and co-worker, just as Paul says to the Corinthians, 'We are partners, co-workers, labourers, working together for God.'

Contemplating his Christian life and his working life with this dog which had become his companion, friend and co-worker, Phillip felt he had to ask himself the following questions:

Is the devotion I receive from this beautiful dog any measure of the devotion I have for the Lord Jesus Christ?

Am I a partner, a co-worker with Christ as Lass is with me?

Am I willing to throw myself into any work anywhere with such enthusiasm as Lass does for me?

Do I trust the Lord Jesus so completely without question as Lass trusts me?

Will I walk where the Lord leads me, come when he calls me, obey when he commands me?

Are the Lord and I inseparable companions as Lass and I are?

Am I as conscious of my day to day life with my Saviour as I am with my sheepdog?

Do I find life with the Lord an adventure? And is his friendship everything to me?

'In utter and devastating truth,' writes Phillip, 'I had to admit my devotion fell short of hers and I could not even begin to approach her level of the trust she had in me.'

So, Lass, a loyal friend companion and co-worker, loving, trusting, obedient, devoted, joyful, ready for any challenge, full of the joys of life. What an example for us all!

Jesus calls us o'er the tumult
Of our lives wild restless sea.
Day by day his sweet voice soundeth,
Saying, 'Christian, follow me.'

Jesus calls us! By thy mercies,
Saviour may we hear thy call,
Give our hearts to thy obedience,
Serve and love thee best of all.

Mavis Boddy

*Remind me each morning of your constant love,
for I put my trust in you.
My prayers go up to you; show me the way I should go.
(Psalm 143:8 GNB)*

Heeding the Psalms

The Psalms are often seen as God's provision of a prayer and hymn book for Israel to use in their worship. Christians tend to see them as providing gentle comfort to troubled souls, kindly, uncontroversial and not particularly tough. It can come as a surprise to realise that many of the Psalms are abrasive, challenging, critical and full of vigorous opposition to the ways that humans conduct their lives. The use of the Psalms in 21st century worship is often selective, leaving out the less polite and more controversial elements. A bland presentation which supports an easygoing relationship with God is assumed.

The inspiration of the Psalms

The Psalms are widely recognised as inspired by God, along with the rest of Scripture, containing clear definitions of His doctrinal and behavioural requirements, totally without errors and issuing precise commandments from God about exactly what we should believe and how we should behave. The Bible does claim to be inspired in the sense that ‘holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21) – but they were still human and spoke as men (mainly), using human language, influenced by human culture, even though they were motivated by God to convey what was in His mind, as far as they understood it. In 2 Timothy 3:15-17 we read that the sacred writings (of which in those days only the Old Testament was written down) are able to make us wise and lead us to salvation, and note, ‘through faith in Christ Jesus’, i.e. they are to be interpreted in the light of Christ, through the lens that he provides in his life, death and resurrection.

Inspiration of scripture sets up a dialogue between humans and God about what matters in the relations between humans and God, not to give impeccable guidance on other natural matters of a scientific or cultural nature and not deleting all purely human ideas. The breadth and the limits of Biblical inspiration are particularly illustrated in the Psalms, which look at every aspect of life as lived by humans and as perceived by God. True ideas are brought face to face with untrue ones in the Psalms to create a dialogue in which the two sides – God’s and man’s – are represented, often in conflict with each other. Human beings, especially in Israel, were invited to ponder their thought and action and gain a divine perspective which would unveil the failures as well as the successes seen in human life. God didn’t dictate the Psalms. He did not ensure that they should express only his requirements, but rather stimulated people’s reflection on the meaning of life and encouraged them to speak appropriately to God. They were given illustrations of how they should approach Him, often with surprising frankness, though with respect in their intimacy and honesty. They were not rebuked for complaining at delays in God’s rescue plan: ‘Oh Lord, how long?’

Such illustrations came from human experience and could include pleas for help which were from their own lips and not from the voice of God. Thus when they communicated their needs to God, they were making their own pleas. It was not a case of God dictating to them the words in which to express their troubles and sense of fear that was befalling them. They cried out to God in anguish to be rescued from trials, such as the threats of enemies. They cried out because that is how they felt; the pleas were their own words and show the folly of thinking that we can treat the Psalms or any part of the Bible as an anthology of God’s words. Many of the words were from men and couldn’t be used to prove a point about God’s instruction to humans about what to believe and do. Psalmists cried out ‘Oh my soul why art thou cast down within me: oh Lord hear me!’, because they needed to express their feelings to God. They were the mouthpieces of men to God as well as being the mouthpieces of God to men, thus providing a dialogue which we could recognise and learn from.

Gems of thought about the Psalms

I have noted some wise things that various writers have said about the Psalms. I give below a few examples, each of which is capable of sparking off wide-ranging meditation. They are taken from the books listed at the end of this article. So:-

‘The book of Psalms is a literary sanctuary which affords a textual holy place where humans share their joys and struggles with brutal honesty in God’s presence.’

Athanasius called the Psalms ‘an epitome of the whole of scripture’,

Basil described the Psalms as ‘a compendium of all theology’, and

Luther as ‘a little Bible and summary of the Old Testament’.

‘In the Psalms God reveals himself through the prayers of his ancient people.’

‘We learn to pray from the Psalms. They make it possible for us to say things to God that we might otherwise think were unsayable.’

‘The Psalms speak from God by showing us how to speak to God.’

‘As we read the Psalms, they read us.’

‘Theologically the Psalms are the densest material in the entire Old Testament. There is a greater concentration of statements about God here than anywhere else.’

And finally: ‘As creator, God is the God of everyday life and of the everyday experience and needs of individuals.’

The Psalms and Enemies

Early Christadelphians used to sing from a musical/metrical version of the Psalms and a number of churches use a version of the Psalms to chant or speak them together. One of the difficulties of this is that Psalms written by or for a King of Israel or for the whole community, spoke mainly of military enemies or people who were seeking to engineer a political revolution. This use of Psalms can seem rather irrelevant to people worshipping in the 21st century, at least in a Western context.

Where the Psalm is calling upon God to act as a warrior or to wreak vengeance on the king's enemies, we have to place the Psalms by the side of the teaching of Jesus to love enemies and eschew violence. While Jesus as Judge may say to some, 'Depart from me; I never knew you', love and compassion are his ruling approach and the vengeful elements of the Old Testament have to be seen as superseded by the teaching of Jesus, and the hope which he stressed of a day when he should make wars to cease to the ends of the earth.

'Breaking the teeth of the wicked' is not the language of the Lord Jesus, and even in the Old Testament, God is portrayed as a God of compassion, at the same time as caring about justice and equity. He will not let the wicked prevail. Even though some of his servants spoke in terms of a God of violence against those who ignored or opposed him, some of the language reflected the global culture of the times, rather than the divine plan to smooth the way of the poor and vulnerable. He would let the oppressors fall into a pit of their own making. We must never forget that there is a human as well as a divine element in the dialogue of the Psalms. Those who saw God as motivated by the spirit of vengeance can be corrected by 'faith in the Lord Jesus', even though some of their early utterances, such as in Psalm 137, were far from this.

Balancing the goodness and severity of God

Nevertheless, faithful Israelites would recognise that there was such a thing as perfect hatred – a phrase used in Psalm 139. As we read the Psalms we have to balance the goodness and severity of God, and see everything we read in the light of the God whom John tells us is LOVE. His love includes the overthrow of evil, the triumph of good and a world which will declare the glory of God. Some 30 Psalms place great emphasis on the bad end of the enemies. A similar number place the emphasis on the righteous putting their trust in the unseen, but ever present, God. The many Psalms with accent on humans trusting God will help us to find a balanced path with the Father and the Son.

God's anger with the wicked is expressed in Psalms 5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 17, 18, 21, 22, 28, 35, 36, 37, 41, 49, 50, 53, 55, 64, 73, 76, 83, 109, 129, 137 and others. We may find that these descriptions don't seem to fit our adversaries; we may even feel we haven't any enemies in the sense the Psalmists describe. Some of them are pictured in very antagonistic terms and the Psalmist asks God to make an end of them with his sword. 'Thrust them out of this world from among the living.' The Psalmists do not seem to make a plea that the wicked should be brought to repentance and receive forgiveness. These same Psalms do promise a better outcome for the righteous, those who put their trust in God.

Hope in the Psalms

Hope exceeds despondency in the Psalms. Particularly this is seen in frequent reference to a change in the attitudes of what are called 'the nations'. In some dozen Psalms, pictures are given of a day when nations shall praise the Lord, when 'the whole world shall bow low in his presence.' 'Bless our God, you nations; let the sound of his praise be heard'. Psalm 67 is rich in this emphasis, with God's 'saving power among all nations. Let all peoples praise you.' See also Psalms 66, 67, 87, 98, 99, 113, 115, 117 for more hope for the nations in a totally changed world. This little word 'all' looks forward to more than a minute minority receiving the compassion of God, when they respond to his appeals which are implicit side by side with many of the most severe accusations.

The hope passages in the Psalms are frequently linked with Zion or Jerusalem, where God's earthly house was physically the temple, which role became that of Jesus, as the permanent replacement of the building and the dwelling place of God. The end of the exile, whether the Babylonian exile or the wider exile of Israel from God, was described as the return of God to Zion. The focus of hope was Zion restored; thoughtful, faithful Israelites saw Jerusalem as the centre of their hopes and the place where their fellowship with God was symbolised and enjoyed most fully. It provided a tangible focus for their faith. Psalm 102 speaks of this with special vividness: 'So shall the Lord's name be declared in Zion and his praise told in Jerusalem when peoples are assembled together, and kingdoms to serve the Lord.' Other examples of the Zion connection are to be found in Psalms 48, 53, 72, 84, 87, 89, 122, 125, 126 and 132.

Trust in the Psalms

Interwoven in the passages in the Psalms on the enemies of faithful Israelites, and of Israel as a whole, is an emphasis on personal trust in the God of Abraham, to whom it was promised that all nations should be blessed in his seed. Both in tribulation and triumph the faithful were using the words of some of the Psalms to declare what God had done for them and how their lives were transformed by the trust they could place in him to give them deliverance from enemies, the continuance of their commonwealth and a sense that wherever they went, whatever sad experiences they would have, He was always present, never absent, from the experiences of their lives. His ever open ear was always able to listen to their cries and to respond in ways that gave them confidence and the ability to feel that they always had divine company on the journey to the ultimate Zion. 'Lord my God, to you I lift my heart. In you do I trust: do not let me be put to shame, do not let my enemies exult over me. No one whose hope is in you is put to shame...Make

your paths known to me, LORD; teach me your ways...In you I put my hope all day long...All the paths of the Lord are loving and sure' (Psalm 25).

Whatever elements in the Psalms may seem sub-Christian, and however much they needed the Lord Jesus to give them the fullness of meaning, words such as those give the heart of the Psalms and they stand. Whatever crudities and partial truths we may find in the Psalms, it is from passages like this that we know that the Psalms, with their exploration of the meaning of life and their seeking the face of God, do provide a powerful contribution to human growth in the way of the Lord. They are always able to bring us close to the God with whom we dialogue in the Psalms and who uses them to dialogue with us.

Alfred Ward

For further reading:

Psalms (3 volumes); John Goldingay (2009) Baker Academic, Michigan
Long ago God Spoke; William L. Holladay (1995) Fortress Press: Minneapolis
How God Acts; Dennis Edwards (2001) Fortress Press; Minneapolis
Laying down the Sword; Philip Jenkins (2001) Harper One, New York
The Psalms; Artur Weiser (1962) SCM Press, London UK
The Message of the Psalms; Walter Brueggemann (1984) Augsburg, Minneapolis

A Bicentenary

The power struggle between Catholics and Protestants during the Tudor era is well documented. Disagreements continued into the Stuart era but became more complicated with the growth of new Protestant churches such as Baptists, Independents, Presbyterians and Quakers. Although these Nonconformist, or Dissident, churches were becoming an accepted part of life, their followers were still required by law to worship in the church in the parish where they lived. In theory at least, there were fines for non-attendance. Nonconformists were also forbidden to study at the universities or to take up political office.

However, old enmities were softening and toleration was becoming acceptable. This more friendly attitude culminated in the passing of *The Toleration Act* (or the *Act of Toleration*) in 1689 which allowed freedom of worship, with certain conditions, to Nonconformists who were loyal to the monarch and who supported the monarch's claim to be recognized as Supreme Governor of the Church of England. Interestingly though, from our point of view, freedom of worship was not extended to Atheists, Catholics or anyone who did not believe in the Trinity.

Nontrinitarians were targeted just a few years later by *The Blasphemy Act* (1697) that made it an offence for any person to deny the Holy Trinity. Again there were set punishments although it is likely that they were seldom imposed. One person who could not accept belief in a Trinity was, of course, Sir Isaac Newton.

It was not until 1813 that these restrictions were removed with the passing of the *Doctrine of the Trinity Act*. The *Blasphemy Act* was repealed in 1967. It is somewhat sobering to realize that it is only two hundred years since we were given this freedom and for this we have to be very thankful.

Lydia

Editorials from E42&43, Spring & Summer 1974

It is unfortunate that an editor who wishes to sow seeds of peace should conclude his last editorial with a provocative statement, namely: 'All those who believe that Christ is their God and Master and want to lead a life of love and harmony should have much in common.' It was this view that caused such strife in the Christian Church in the early centuries. It was intended to state that, 'All those who believe that Christ is their Lord and Master...should have much in common.' So much for bad writing!

What, however, was said in error, might well be a starting point for examining differences. Stated simply, among followers of Christ today are many who are Trinitarians, some who believe that Christ was the Son of God born of the Virgin Mary, some two thousand years ago and begotten by the Holy Spirit, whilst a few believe that he was the son of Joseph and Mary and the spiritual Son of God.

An editorial is not the place for a detailed discussion of this complex issue and we wish only to plead for a tolerant attitude between those that hold apparently different views, realizing that they hold them sincerely. It is easily argued that this is so fundamental an issue that no compromise is possible. Can there be a more important issue than

the question of a definition of the God that a religious body worships? The argument might be strong if we could define the Christian God, but we cannot. It is when man tries to define his God by creeds and dogma that he loses him. He is looking in the wrong direction. 'God is love' is the most fundamental definition revealed from the depths of John's soul. To explain this John tells us we have to live in love and then he says we live in God; so God, according to John, cannot be seen or touched by mortal man; still less described in words, but He is met in life, if the quality of that life is love. If we have not experienced that life we can see it as we read of Jesus's encounters with the men and women of his day – simple folk, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, the High Priest, Pilate – and this will help us to seek God and Jesus in our encounters with the men and women of our day. If we really believe this then every encounter in our lives is important and should be so treated.

In our search for progress towards harmony among Christians, we very soon come up against the question of creeds. The Christian Church from quite an early date felt it necessary to have some compendium of beliefs. It would seem too that these statements were associated with baptism. This however was not from the beginning. 'The Apostle's Creed' despite the tradition that each phrase was uttered by each of the apostles in turn starting with Peter - 'I believe in God the Father Almighty...' was certainly not apostolic. It developed over a long period of time. There is no creed as such in the New Testament. A baptismal formula is of course present – 'Go forth therefore and make all nations my disciples; baptise men everywhere in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you.' (Matt 28:19-20 NEB).

The Orthodox Church, which became the Roman Catholic Church, felt itself obliged to add to this simple formula and narrowed the path to exclude heretics. Were they wise?

The first simple Roman Creed became enlarged to the Nicene Creed and finally to the so called Creed of St. Athanasius with its awful condemnation:- 'which faith except everyone do keep, whole and undefiled without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.' Arius rejected the co-equality of Father and Son, and in the conflict that followed in the church thousands perished but we hope, in the mercy of God, not everlastingly.

The 'creed' of the Old Testament was the ten commandments: of these it is very significant that three are about God, one about a day of rest, and the remaining six about social behaviour. It is surely a poor reflection on the Christian Church that even its simplest creed should be entirely obsessed with doctrine, biblical though its contents may be. Christ replaced the ten commandments with one – 'A new commandment I give unto you – That you love one another.' 'New' in the sense that the quality of love desired was the same as that with which Jesus loved humanity (John 13:34). This cannot be a commandment in the sense of the ten commandments because, as was pointed out in the last issue, in the article entitled 'A command to love?' 'Love', by its very nature cannot be commanded. It can however be 'believed', 'With him whose last best creed is Love', to use the words of the familiar hymn. John's gospel is a theological gospel in which Greek and Jewish thought intermingle to present Christ in all his glory, a glory far above that which Jesus himself encouraged. Perhaps John looked back to the awe-inspiring epiphany at Sinai – in the words of the Old Covenant through Moses – 'The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb...Thou shalt have none other God before me.' Does John see in his Master's proclamation at the Last Supper just before Calvary an even greater epiphany? – 'Love one another as I love you.' Is this the Word which, amidst spiritual thunder and lightning and with a voice of the trumpet waxing louder and louder, echoes through the fragments of the shattered cross cementing it together so that it can *show* to the world the still small voice – the Peace of God which passeth all understanding.

John Weaving

Spirituality

Within Christianity a multitude of separate moral communities have formed, and, though using the same scriptural texts, they are sometimes totally at odds with each other. This should alarm us, as we are all reading, and many are venerating, the same texts. This diversity has to some extent been brought about by a strong tendency to overcome problems in the text by saying, in effect: 'Now the text says x , but of course it couldn't really mean that, so we must see the underlying principle to which it points, which is y .' This subjective practice has invariably led to manifold ways of deriving meaning from scripture.

For example, in Eden when an external tempter beguiled Eve we, in our community, are asked to read this literally (x equals x). However, in the account of the temptations of Jesus we are asked to read in a non-literal way (where x

actually means y). Similarly, teaching about eternal life is taken seriously yet apocryphal elements in the Gospels outlining eternal punishment or torment are dismissed. Also, the demand to renounce all our possessions is ignored but the biblical insistence on female subjection is accepted (at least in the ecclesia). So are we the experts on what the Bible really teaches?

The problem of strict reliance on a set of beliefs

Religion is perceived by some to be a worrying area of human activity 'where it is considered noble to pretend to be certain about things no human could possibly be certain about.'¹ Within religion we may be obliged to accept the teachings, rules and limitations of a particular faith in order to find group acceptance. This breeds separation from other Christians with an exclusive mantra such as 'we have the Truth and you don't,' or effectively, 'we're going to be saved, you're not.'

Religious belief, may invite a warped worldview containing contradictory spiritual values. Considering all the religious wars and the number of heretics who were burnt at the stake or merely persecuted, Christian history teaches us the harsh lesson that 'We see through a glass darkly...' and that our understanding of truth is incomplete. Religious conviction may be just one step removed from opinion. The Bible is far too ambiguous to provide an unequivocal message on everything. Even within scripture, laws are abrogated by later insights and there is a clear evolution of morality to be discerned. There are deeper spiritual principles that underlie moral rules that can be mined from the text and applied in new and imaginative ways, if we choose to.

Experience shows that many Christians, including Christadelphians, who are doctrinally steadfast, display impressive symptoms of spirituality. Unfortunately, all too often, the drive to spirituality is slowed down, if not brought to a halt, by the trammels of belief. Contemplate all the pain and frustration engendered by the rigid belief in the prohibition on divorce and remarriage. Many teach their children the truth of Genesis chapter one and the errors of scientific endeavour. There is also the unfortunate belief that we live in a righteous community and out there, in the world, it's Sodom and Gomorrah (and this is announced publically on a regular basis). Surely, one doesn't even need to be religious to accept that sincerity is preferable to dishonesty, generosity to selfishness, gentleness and compassion to violence and cruelty, or love to hate.

We tend consistently to emphasise our distinctive doctrines, thus confining ourselves to the exclusivity of a denomination where any activity, with the aim of achieving Christian cooperation on matters of mutual concern, is out of the question.²

The Book of Joshua, which our community asserts is to be taken literally, is an account of the faith of Joshua and of the 12 tribes who conquer Canaan with strong military victories. The invasion involved injustice, genocide, violence and cruelty. I'm sure no Christadelphian currently promotes violent behaviour but it is apparent that many affirm the righteousness of the despicable activity described in the book. It is said that it was all justified because it was 'God's will'. Once again we find a perfect demonstration of the unfortunate dissonance between belief and spirituality. Under the Law there was actually crucial emphasis on justice and mercy, on concern for widows, the old, the poor, the oppressed and resident aliens. Jesus taught us to 'love our enemies'.³

Within our traditional belief system the patriarchal and hierarchical theological language of the Old and New Testament is accepted, but in reality much of it is inappropriate for our age and we should try to find new 'imaginative pictures' of God's relationship with the world.

Spirituality and the big picture

Spirituality is a loaded word which may be defined in different ways. Meditation, prayer and contemplation may be used to develop an inner path or to discover deeper values of existence. All religious people should be spiritual as it demands a moral character capable of displaying vital qualities such as love, compassion, generosity, patience, tolerance, wisdom and forgiveness to the detriment of purely selfish materialism. It doesn't need to be bound to a particular religious tradition, indeed in a recent poll in the US 25% of those asked, identified themselves as spiritual but not religious.

Jesus tells us the message of love which sums up the Law. The big picture involves love not doctrinal purity or the keeping of rules. 'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.' Here we're given another 'big picture' which emphasizes the overriding importance of love, sympathy, understanding, and developing a quality and depth in our interpersonal relationships. Jesus proved to be critical of the Pharisees' religious practices, such as excessive enthusiasm to make new converts or scrupulous tithing of their spices, and noted their neglect of the more spiritual 'weightier matters' of the Law – justice and mercy and

faithfulness. Ultimately he wished to subordinate the Law's specific commandments to its deeper (spiritual) intent.

In the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats Jesus explains the criteria by which he will judge his servants. There is nothing about assenting to the correct creed. What he emphasises are various humanitarian activities performed (in his name) without expecting a reward. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul compares and assesses the merits of faith, hope and love. He concluded that love was of paramount importance. Love is more important than faith ('a firm conviction producing a full acknowledgement of God's revelation or truth' – Vine). We all have a tendency to pick and choose which passages or themes we want to highlight but highlighting those which conform to the 'big picture' or to the 'weightier matters' is surely beyond criticism.

Traditional faith rules that divorce or marrying an outsider to the faith is bad. Why enforce rules which deny love and compassion? Spirituality should be more relaxed with a liberal openness, requiring no set rules. It can't be governed by the traditional acceptance that all scripture is wholly inspired and infallible (there are far too many contradictions and ambiguities for that). Spirituality is the ultimate quest, by whatever means, to find a clearer, fuller vision of goodness. We may gain help in this enterprise from scripture, experience, reason or other religious philosophies in order to bring that vision to reality.

The inclusive nature of spirituality

In February 2012 a couple of Christadelphians from Nottingham revealed on Facebook that they had taken part in the 'Mansfield Big Snore.' This was an appeal by St. Mark's Church, Mansfield, to step-up the fight against rough sleeping in their town. 17 'Delphs' joined 45 'Christians' to sleep rough for a night in order to raise the profile of this appeal. This struck me as a wonderful inclusive act of thoughtful cooperation where doctrinal difference was not evident. This event highlights what I'm advocating, more inclusive spirituality unimpeded by the constraints of creeds.

Think about the festival of Christmas. There is the belief that this is the time when the Son of God was born of a virgin miraculously. He is our Saviour; therefore we are sinners and need to be saved. However, the vast majority of folk enjoy and participate in the festivities without believing all of these doctrinal or religious elements. They will though readily practise the spiritual elements which require love, joy and peace and good will to all men (and women). It appears to be a good model to illustrate a radical message with which some Christadelphians will find great difficulty. Faith when it results in spirituality is fine. Misguided faith which inhibits spirituality is bad. Will those of us who wish to read the Bible in a spiritual way (without necessarily conforming to a strict orthodox set of beliefs) find acceptance? I guess many would say: 'Well I'm sorry but Christadelphianism is about having faith, so if you can't accept all our beliefs then join another church.' Disagreement among friends can be healthy, joyful and stimulating; condescension and contempt cannot.

Spirituality is not about promoting controversy, quite the reverse. Working within the faith environment it has a great deal to offer. It is capable of promoting love and hospitality within the ecclesial community, and participation in building up a spiritual house, a house where we care for and look out for each other and with the inclusive ethos (which I saw outside a pub in Spain) – 'There are no strangers in here, just friends you have yet to meet.' Within this vision of spirituality an emphasis on doctrinal orthodoxy is relaxed as we become tolerant of theological diversity. 'Love is patient and kind...It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. Love...endures all things.'

The emblems at the Memorial Feast remain very meaningful, reminding us at least of the path of transformation. This path involves the 'putting off' of the works of the flesh and cultivating the fruit of the spirit – a list of characteristics or virtues that we are all invited to display. Spirituality involves the renewal of our minds as we are invited, by testing (Rom 12:2), to discern 'what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.' Such insights, when experienced, have proved sacred to the individual, but may well lead to radically different views as to what that will is.

'Religion that God accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world' (James 1:27), a definition of religion that we can all agree on. Let our lives stand as a pattern of good works (Titus 2:7), another principle that we can all agree on, and some may hold the ambition of performing a 'good work' every day (time and health permitting).

Spirituality then is a desirable, worthy and positive reflection of the life of Christ with no downside. Within the 'big picture,' in an age of enlightened tolerance towards religious or spiritual diversity, there is no reason to penalise (or be segregated from) those who display (various degrees of) indifference, but not hostility, towards a rigid set of

beliefs. There remains plenty of wholesome, spiritual practice that we can all be joyfully engaged in.

Keith Lowe

Notes

1 *Letter to a Christian Nation*, Sam Harris, (2006), ISBN 0-307-26577-3, p. 67.

2 Paul exhorts believers to unity and rules out division. All Christians should live in unity but in order to achieve that there must be incredible doctrinal flexibility.

3 Unsurprisingly, archaeology has cast convincing doubt on the historicity of Joshua's recorded invasion. We don't need to believe that this was an historical account of the formation of the nation of Israel, indeed spirituality demands that we don't accept it.

The Serpent in the Garden of Eden

When I accepted a correspondence course student from Nigeria, through the *This Is Your Bible* website, little did I realise what I was taking on. That student was a member of an evangelical church who told his friends about the course. Some years and sixty more argumentative evangelical students later have given me a better understanding of evangelical church teaching.

There were the obvious sources of disagreement such as the trinity, heaven-going and the devil, but I was not prepared for the strength of their teaching about the Garden of Eden. They believe that the Garden of Eden was perfection, but that the devil, Satan, masquerading as the serpent, destroyed God's perfect plans. The devil, using the disguise of the serpent, spoke words which tempted Adam and Eve with the intention of subverting God's wishes. The devil did this successfully, and thus disrupted God's purpose in creating the perfection of Adam and Eve in the perfect Garden. This malign destruction meant that God needed to develop an alternative plan to overcome the machinations of the devil. The whole of God's energies since that time have been spent restoring the Garden of Eden and mankind.

Thus this view of the events means that:

- The serpent is portrayed not as an animal with speech and brain capacity to a limited extent in order to fulfil the role that God designed, but as an embodiment of the devil, Satan.
- God is portrayed as being at the mercy of the devil, in the sense that the devil has great power to the extent that he can overcome God's purpose with Adam and Eve.
- In compromising God's purpose with Adam and Eve, the devil compromised creation. God has spent the ages since that time in compensating for the mischief wrought by the devil/serpent.

Surely this interpretation of the events in Eden cannot be right? God is in charge of everything. He created all things. God made the whole of the universe with the earth and the Garden of Eden. Is it reasonable to suppose that at the start of His purpose with the world that it could be immediately frustrated? Note the following:

Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; (Isaiah 46:10 quotations from NASB) and

The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil. (Pro 16:4)

The serpent was part of God's creation and the whole of the creation is described as good or very good. The serpent was therefore good, very good. While the text does not say that the serpent was a four-footed animal, the curse on it in Genesis 3:16 to crawl along the ground suggests that it initially had four legs like the other beasts. Animals are able to speak if God wills it: a donkey rebukes Balaam (Numbers 22:28). In the same manner, a serpent can also speak words when God wishes it.

The evangelicals assert that the serpent spoke words against God's wishes. Surely this cannot be right! God had a specific reason for equipping the serpent with the power of speech. He used the serpent to teach Adam and Eve an essential lesson. They had not experienced temptation. In order for Adam and Eve to learn that they (and all their descendants) needed to develop the capacity to choose to serve God or not, the human couple were placed in the position of making such a choice. God deliberately made and used the serpent to give this choice of obedience or disobedience to Adam and Eve.

This test set up a precedent for the whole of mankind. The fact that Adam and Eve failed the test opened the way for the whole of mankind to experience the same lesson. The choice of whether to serve God or to follow the ways of those who misrepresent God's word is a fundamental process which has come down to all of us. It is part of everyone's spiritual education. God used the serpent to teach this foundation element of spiritual life.

It was the basis for the work of Jesus, who showed us how to choose when confronted with temptation. Without this lesson for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the whole process of salvation would be meaningless.

The tempting voice leading people away from God comes to us all in different ways and at different times. God uses the example of the serpent in scripture as a continuing symbol of those who do not speak the truth:

But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. (2 Co 11:3)

And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (Rev 12:9)

God had everything planned from the start of his creation. He knew that the only way to develop a spiritual creation could come through the natural creation as a first stage. He knew that the only way for a spiritual creation to be developed was for men and women to learn the meaning of choice and the results of disobedience. The events in the Garden of Eden were the foundation for the teaching of these principles and were an essential preparation for His spiritual creation. Thus the natural creation was a passing, but essential, phase and prepared the way for the work of Christ who would inaugurate the new creation which is eternal, not temporal. The work of Christ in living as part of that first, natural creation was a necessary prelude to the cross, resurrection and the second, spiritual creation:

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. (Hebrews 2:10)

Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, (Hebrews 5:8-9)

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. (1Peter 5:10)

God's purpose is never disrupted: it is always sure and steadfast. By misrepresenting the serpent, the evangelicals are in danger of undermining the whole relationship between God and men and women. God used His spirit, His power, to create the world, the Garden of Eden and to mastermind the events there. Perhaps there is an analogy with the experience of Jesus, His son. When Jesus was accused of using the power of demons to cast out demons, his response was unequivocal:

When the Pharisees heard this (that is Jesus was casting out demons), they said, 'This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.' (Matthew 12:24)

'But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.' (Matthew 12:28)

'Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.' (Matthew 12:32).

Perhaps the events in the Garden of Eden, where the serpent is acting under God's influence and power, but which the Evangelicals attribute to the devil/ Satan inhabiting the serpent, is similar to the Pharisees attributing the power of the spirit to Beelzebul?

Perfection in the Garden of Eden?

The early chapters of Genesis describe God's creation. From the third day onwards, the work is described as 'good' until the sixth day when everything is 'very good'. Perfection was never planned for the Garden of Eden – it comes later with the Lord Jesus Christ at the time God planned for it.

The evangelicals interpret the opening chapters of Genesis in an exceptionally literal way. The approach made here is an attempt to meet them on their own terms, leaving aside any other way of understanding God's teaching: *'Answer a fool as his folly deserves, That he not be wise in his own eyes.'* (Pro 26:5)

Roy Boyd

God's Name

Much has been written and debated about this subject, and brethren and sisters have even fallen out over it. I have to ask, is it really that complicated or am I missing something? I have no knowledge of biblical Hebrew or Greek.

Maybe a look at Exodus 3 with non-technical eyes, asking the sort of questions the Jews and Moses might have asked, gives a clue. The Jews had been ill-treated in Egypt for over 300 years, and so the question might have been asked, 'Where is God?' I believe the Jews asked this in the holocaust. There could have been silence from God from Joseph's death till Moses' return from Jethro. Moses might have been asking himself: 'The Jews are being badly treated, God has disappeared for 300 years and here am I going to proclaim God who has done no good (it seems) to

this folk and not shown himself any way: surely they will ask who this God is.’

Moses didn’t seem to need an answer for himself, he simply believed in the God who was talking to him. Why does Moses not need His name? I think that in the natural order of things the greater names the lesser, and never the other way round. So Adam named the animals but not the other way round. Father and mother name children but not the other way round. Furthermore, father and mother call their child by name but rarely does the child call their father and mother by name; and if the child does call their father and mother by name it is thought to be rude. But of course Moses knew the Lord, but the Jews might have wondered: ‘If this God exists and, if he was there, then why had he abandoned them?’

There is no reason then why the Supreme Being should have a name; only a title, or a polite form of address (such as Sir) is needed. The AV got it right, in my thinking, by simply using ‘LORD’, a polite form of address from a lesser being to the greatest being of all. God identifies himself with a history that some, if not all, Jews will know: he is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – their God. And their God, who made all, sustains all, and has promised and has done great things through the Jews’ founder-fathers, doesn’t need a name.

What is your name? ‘I am that I am’ (*I don’t need a name*). I, who doesn’t need a name, have sent you, Moses, to my folk. This is who I am, the God of your fathers, and I have looked on what the Egyptians have done to you and have come back to send you somewhere better. The Lord of course confirmed this with signs and wonders following.

So my view is that ‘I am that I am’, as said by the First Cause, means just that: ‘I have no name, but you know who I am because of your first fathers.’

When I do my analysis of scripture, including Exodus 3, I try to start with a blank piece of paper: that is, take no account of what anyone has taught me, and simply see where scripture leads me. This generally has a positive effect on readers and hearers of my ideas: they naturally look at their existing position, and either it is modified, or it strengthens their own arguments, which then they impart to me, which thus can modify or round my own opinion, or occasionally make me strengthen my own arguments.

I am mindful that God’s name is mentioned so many times in scriptures that it is hard to ignore, whether it be YAHWEH or JEHOVAH, and it is even in the Lord’s prayer ‘Hallowed be thy name’. All brethren and sisters who set great store by God’s name or names do this with the utmost reverence. I appreciate that to suggest that God doesn’t have a name could be unsettling. Clearly I don’t want to unsettle anyone, and I hope readers can understand at least why Exodus 3 leads me where it does, even if they don’t agree with me.

I would really welcome readers’ thoughts, to see where it leads me. I am open to any constructive ideas.

Tony Norris

*Spirituality begins to have real meaning in our lives
as we begin to exhibit simultaneously
the holiness of God and the love of God.*

(Francis Schaeffer)

Some Thoughts Inspired by Alfred Ward.

Whether you find reading the Bible simple or not, often depends upon what kind of person you are. Most people don’t learn about the Bible by themselves, but learn about it within some form of denominational context. Bible-reading then tends to become effectively an exercise in the confirmation of formerly adopted doctrinal presuppositions.

It is also a fact that some people have a very great need for religious certainty, coupled with a very low threshold for uncertainty. So if, for example, there are four legitimate, possible ways to explain certain Biblical data, some people will not be able to emotionally, or cognitively, cope with this, and will feel the need to invest in one of the possible viewpoints with absolute certainty, and dismiss all the others, as being erroneous.

However, the reality is that there is much in the Bible that we do not understand with absolute, one hundred percent certainty – and we have to accept that. It appears that there is much about ultimate spiritual realities that we do not know (2 Cor.12:3-4), that we are probably not meant to know (Phil. 4:7) and which we are probably incapable of knowing (Rom 11:33-36). It is also likely that the Fall of Adam has probably affected the constitution of humankind

in every department of their being – including their intellect. As the *Translator's New Testament* renders Rom.3:23: 'All have missed the mark and have fallen short of God's glorious intention for them.' In short, we are naturally not what we should be.

We therefore often have a rather paradoxical situation, that, whereas many Bible readers may be happy to confess their many moral weaknesses, these same people may nevertheless very angrily resist any notion that there is anything wrong whatsoever with their mental perception of what constitutes 'the Truth.' On the basis of this assumption, many Bible readers have been led to make simplistic, arrogant claims to possessing 'absolute doctrinal truth.' For those denominations that claim to be inspired, or 'semi-inspired', these claims have a kind of logicity about them, but for groups like the Christadelphians, who do not claim direct inspiration, simplistic claims to the possession of absolute, perfect, doctrinal truth, are somewhat illogical.

Similarly, although theology is supposed to be the study or science of God, many theologians have proceeded in their theologizing, in a very unscientific way. When new evidence comes to light in a criminal court case, there can be a retrial. In the physical sciences, when new evidence arises, there can be a change in scientific theories. But when new evidence concerning the Biblical languages, and ancient Judaism, come to light, most religious denominations cannot, and will not change their beliefs. For most religious organisations, with their various 'Statements of Faith', the old is best (Luke 5:23), because it essentially represents 'the traditions of the elders' (Mark 7:3), and therefore, is effectively 'a Law of the Medes and Persians.' (Dan. 6:8,12).

But apart from these socio-psychological factors, there are also various textual problems involved in reading the Bible. It becomes obvious, when you compare Old Testament quotations made in the New Testament with the Old Testament itself, that the New Testament writers (and presumably the earliest Christians generally), appear to have been using a different Bible! Most Bibles largely use for their Old Testament, what is known as the 'Masoretic' Hebrew text. In the first century CE however, the Masoretic text was only one of several different Old Testament texts that were in Jewish usage. Other Old Testament texts of the first century CE, included a Greek translation called the Septuagint and, allied with this, a Hebrew type text upon which the Septuagint was originally based. There was also, in the first century CE, a Samaritan translation of the Hebrew text. Biblical manuscript evidence from Qumran, the Dead Sea Scrolls, also make it clear that there were several other different Hebrew, Old Testament text-types, that cannot be aligned with the Septuagint, Samaritan or Masoretic texts. For certain Biblical books, there were also expanded paraphrases in Aramaic, known as Targums. Our earliest known Targums were found at Qumran, and included parts of Job and Leviticus.

In short, during the time of Christ and the Apostles, there was no stable Old Testament text – the Old Testament textual situation was fluid. Somewhere between 70 CE and 135 CE the emerging anti-Christian 'Rabbinic' movement 'standardised' the Old Testament text, by adopting the Masoretic text, and excluding all other text-types. This text was then copied very accurately from around about this time onwards. However, this Masoretic text is known, even by Jewish scholars, to have been corrupted by very early Jewish editors, who were working to a theological agenda.

The Bible for the first Christians was the Jewish Bible, either in its Greek translation, the Septuagint, or else as the Hebrew text from which the Septuagint was translated. It has been estimated that about eighty percent of the Old Testament quotations cited by the New Testament writers, come from a Septuagint translation of the Bible. Indeed some very important Old Testament quotations such as Isa. 7:14 (Math. 1:23); Amos 9:11-12 (Acts 15:17); and Psalm 40: 6-8 (Heb. 10:5) can only be understood by reference to the Septuagint. (The fact that the King James version has 'virgin' at Isa. 7:14, is only because they have deviated from Masoretic text usage, and lifted the word 'virgin' from the Septuagint. This thereby means the King James version uses an eclectic Old Testament text !)

The Holman Bible states that the Apostle Paul himself makes ninety-three quotations from the Old Testament. Of these, fifty-one are absolutely identical, or virtually identical, to the Septuagint translation. Only four come from the Masoretic text, while thirty eight, diverge from all known Greek or Hebrew texts. One of Paul's Old Testament quotes, from Psalm 68:18 (see Eph 4:7), is actually based on an Aramaic (Targum) translation, which differs significantly from the Masoretic text. Jesus Himself, in Matt 12:3, may also have been quoting from an Aramaic translation that was very popular at the time. Jesus states that David and his companions were hungry, and ate consecrated bread, but according to the Masoretic text, at 1 Sam 21:6, there were no companions with David. David, apparently mentioned his companions merely as part of a protective 'cover story'. Mark 2:26, also has Jesus apparently quoting from Scripture to the effect that the 'David and his men' incident, took place during the time when Abiathar was high priest. This contradicts the Masoretic text at 1 Sam 21:1, but Jesus may well have been quoting a very popular Aramaic translation, which followed a different historical tradition, in which Abiathar was actually Ahimelech's father.

A popular Aramaic paraphrase may also be the source of the curious incident cited in Jude 9. This incident is typical of what is known as a piece of Jewish ‘Haggadah’ – a kind of parable, or sermon illustration (probably originally based upon Zech. 3:1-3), that was meant to bring out present-day moral lessons for synagogue worshippers. The Aramaic paraphrases are noted for the inclusion of such curious parables. Another example of this would be 1 Cor 10:4, where Paul states that a water-bearing rock that followed the Israelites around in the desert, was a type of Christ. This idea is based upon a Rabbinic belief, legend, parable (and which was probably originally part of an Aramaic translation) that the rock mentioned in Numbers 20:8 actually followed the Israelites around in the desert. Whether some Jews, perhaps even the majority of synagogue Jews, actually believed these stories/legends/parables/illustrations, as literally true, is difficult to say. The main point, perhaps, is that these tales were well-known, from probable Aramaic translations of the Old Testament, and could be appealed to by Jesus and the New Testament writers. All of this very probably means that the early Christians may well have been using material that qualified in their eyes as ‘Scripture’ but which we today, using a different text-type (the Masoretic text), do not now recognise as ‘Scripture’.

Another classic example of this, occurs in Hebrews 1:6 : ‘Let all of God’s angels worship Him.’ This is actually a quotation from Deut. 32:43 – but you won’t find it in the Masoretic text, nor in the King James version. The relevant lines in Deut. 32:43, according to the Septuagint read:

‘Rejoice, O Heavens, with Him! Let all of the Angels of God worship Him.’

A manuscript from Qumran, renders the same line, similarly :

Praise, O heavens, His people, Worship him, all you gods

where the ‘gods’ are considered to be divine beings or angels.

The equivalent Scripture in the Masoretic text however, is :

O nations, acclaim His people

with the second sentence completely deleted. For the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Septuagint version of the Old Testament was Scripture – all of his numerous citations from the Old Testament come exclusively from this version, and indeed, sometimes only make sense by use of this version.

According to *The Jewish Study Bible*, the Masoretic text at Deut. 32:43, is corrupt. The whole verse there, with the omission of the second line, now lacks the expected Hebrew poetic parallelism, and the whole forty-third verse thereby becomes incoherent. It is illogical that the very nations judged guilty of spilling Israel’s blood, should suddenly join in a chorus of those praising Israel in the moment before their destruction! This *Jewish Study Bible* believes that the original two lines of verse 43 must have read :

Rejoice, O heavens with Him! Worship Him, O every god!

This is very similar to the Septuagint rendering, and it points to the image of God being surrounded by a heavenly angelic court, which in later Jewish tradition (in Jerusalem 1 Targum, Genesis 11) represented the guardian angels of the nations (cf. Job 1:6, 2:1, Psalm 29:1, 82:1, 89:6, 103:20-21, 1 Kings 22:19; Isa. 6:1-3). This is further supported by the distinctive Septuagint rendering of Deut. 32:8, which reads :

When the Most High apportioned the nations, when He divided humankind, He fixed the boundaries of the peoples, according to the number of the Angels of God.

A Qumran manuscript of Deut. 32:8 reads similarly, except that, once again, it prefers the rendering ‘gods’ where the Septuagint has ‘Angels of God’. The corrupt Masoretic text reads: ‘According to the number of the children of Israel’, which is a rather strange statement.

Deut. 32 in the Septuagint provides the basis for the notion that every nation has an Angelic ruler, or guardian angel, except Israel, who is directly governed by God alone (Deut. 7:6; 32:9). These Angels, were in the Hebrew, sometimes called ‘elohim’ (Psalm 8:6, 97:7, 138:1, etc), and ‘elohim’ can mean ‘angels’, ‘divine beings’ and ‘gods.’ At some point in time, however, editors of the Masoretic text tampered with Deut. 32:8, and Deut. 32:43, because they felt that any mention of ‘gods’ would compromise ‘pure monotheism.’ However, the earliest Biblical strata do see God presiding over a council of lesser divine beings, angels or ‘gods.’

The notion of National Patron Angels, would also cast light upon Daniel 10:13, and 10:21, where ‘the Prince of the kingdom of Persia’ and ‘the Prince of Greece’, are almost certainly (as it states in the *Jewish Study Bible*) the Patron, guardian Angels of those nations. The idea then developed within Jewish theology that the Patron Angels of evil nations, would have to bear some responsibility for the conduct of their charges. This idea, very probably underlies Paul’s meaning in 1 Cor. 6:3, concerning the saints judging angels. It also illustrates the principle that even God’s ‘servants’ (even Nebuchadnezzar in Jer. 25:9-14, and the King of Assyria in Isa. 10:5-12) still have a judgement to face.

CONCLUSIONS

It may well be that the Bible is difficult to read **providentially**, in order to safeguard us from bibliolatry, which is loving the letter of the Word of God above God Himself. Jesus Himself points out this very danger in John 5:39-40. There is always a danger of Christians trying to save themselves through legalistic self-effort – by having self-acquired Bible knowledge or trying to mentally attain ‘doctrinal perfection’. We need more than mere Bible knowledge to be saved – we need the very life of Christ in us, and we need to let that life find expression (Romans 8: 11-17).

Tony Cox

There is more to Christian growth than knowing what the Bible says; nobody is ever nourished by memorizing menus.
(John Blanchard)

WE DON'T DO GOD – The marginalization of public faith

By George Carey and Andrew Carey (2012)

(Paperback, 174 pages, £7.99, Monarch Books, Oxford, UK,
& Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. ISBN 978 0 85721 030 2)

Hardly a week goes by without a story appearing in the newspapers about Christians falling foul of the law for demonstrating their faith too openly. A registrar is dismissed for refusing to officiate at gay civil union ceremonies. A nurse is suspended for offering to pray for a patient. A fireman is suspended for refusing to take part in a ‘Gay Pride’ march. Catholic adoption agencies have to close down after refusing to hand children over to gay couples. These are just a few examples of ordinary people who find themselves sacked or prosecuted for ‘hate crime’ when they try to practice their faith.

In *We don't do God – the marginalization of public faith* George Carey, a former archbishop of Canterbury and his journalist son Andrew, explore the disturbing changes that have come over the political and cultural landscape of the United Kingdom in the last few years and the ambivalence of its government towards the Christian faith. On the one hand, we are, officially, a Christian country; at the same time the state itself is waging cultural war against the official religion of the state. The title of the book is a quotation from Alistair Campbell, Tony Blair's former communications secretary, who, in 2003, interrupted an interview with the Prime Minister when he was asked about his personal faith. ‘We don't do God’, he told the interviewer.

What has brought about this change of climate? Dr. Carey identifies several factors. Much of it, he believes, is ignorance on the part of legislators and judges as to the historical legacy of the Christian faith and its place in the constitution. Traditions are, in ‘progressive’ circles, regarded as boring; the past is seen as bad, our national history a matter of shame. The ruling classes of Britain seem embarrassed by their own Christian heritage. Political leaders, media, public institutions and educationalists are united in this eradication of our national heritage. Ministers therefore act as though the present constitutional arrangements simply do not exist. ‘Britain is a secular democracy’ as one former government minister repeatedly claimed. Technically this is simply untrue. The Queen is both head of state and head of the Church of England.

Waves of new legislation have been added to the statute books, much of it emanating from the EU and which the British government has no alternative but to accept. The Human Rights Act in 1998 started the process. The Civil Partnerships Act appeared in 2004 followed by the Sexual Orientation Regulations (SORS) in 2007. The Equality Act in 2010 was intended to embrace all previous legislation on the subject, but actually widened the scope of equality legislation whilst narrowing religious exemptions. Another stick for beating Christianity is multiculturalism, the doctrine that no religion should have priority over any other. This has led some councils to ban references to Christmas and Easter and Nativity plays in schools and to threaten street preachers with prosecution for ‘hate crime’, or because these activities might offend minorities.

Carey blames many of the present problems on badly drafted legislation which takes no account of its unintended consequences. For example, article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights guarantees religious freedom, but also bans discrimination against homosexuals. But what happens when Christians exercise their freedom by barring a homosexual couple from hiring a double bed in their hotel? The anomaly should have been anticipated when the legislation was drafted. Instead, it is brought before the courts, which almost invariably come down on the side of homosexuals.

How should Christians respond to this pressure? Should we simply conform and keep our faith to ourselves? That would not be the way of a true disciple, for whom faith pervades every area of life, including the workplace. Dr. Carey offers no simple answers. He anticipates a time when employment in the public sector may be impossible for those who live by Christian standards. He suggests that Christians must be ready to challenge unfairness in any form and stick up vigorously and strongly for their faith. Like the Apostle Paul in the prison in Philippi who demanded his rights as a Roman citizen, they should avail themselves of whatever rights the law does grant them: 'If we behave like a doormat we should not be surprised if we are treated as one'. At the same time he sensibly warns against going too far in this. The role of Christians in society, he reminds us, 'is to be a witness to the love of Christ, not an advocate for a shrill and selfish culture of victimhood'. We can all agree with his conclusion that 'We cannot and must not engage with people as enemies, but as friends whom we seek to persuade by the quality of our arguments and our general witness of love'. This is a timely book to be read by all who are concerned about the growing spirit of intolerance that is pervading the society around us and may well get much worse before our Lord returns.

Paul Wasson

The Creation Text

Dear Brother Les,

As the subject of the evolution/creation debate is still being discussed among your readers I would like to make one more comment if I may. I would like to recommend David Levin's book *The Creation Text – Studies in Early Genesis*. This book raises the level of discussion about the early chapters of Genesis far above the sterile debate about the age of the earth and what is literal in the account.

Brother David uses his knowledge of Hebrew and much in-depth research to bring to light the hidden structure of the text and the light which it can shed on our understanding. I found it wonderfully spiritually uplifting and reassuring. No mere human account, passed down verbally over centuries, could possibly have produced this text.

Readers will not necessarily agree with all his suggestions, but his reasons are clearly argued and there are some stimulating and challenging ideas. I am particularly impressed with his explanation of why Adam and Eve did not receive the punishment of death on the day they ate; I found myself saying 'Of course! Why didn't I think of that – it fits exactly with what we know of God!'

Jean Field

The Creation Text: Studies in Early Genesis

David P. Levin

Published: 2011 — 364 pages, 49 studies. (Soft Cover)

Description: This book offers fresh insights into Genesis 1 to 5 by examining the text and structure. It addresses a wide range of questions, including: Are Genesis 1 and 2 two different creation accounts? Was the serpent given the power of speech to tempt Eve? Why was Cain's offering rejected? It also explores how early Genesis echoes throughout the Bible. For example: How the layout of the garden models the tabernacle. How Abel and Cain foreshadow Jesus and the Pharisees. How Jesus' prayer in John 17 relates to Adam and Eve.

It is published by *The Christadelphian Tidings Publishing Company* (ISBN 10-0-9776077-5-5 ISBN 13-987-9776077-5-4) and is available in the UK from Mrs Mary Whittaker, 14 Laidon Avenue, Crewe, Cheshire, CW2 6RR. mrywhttkr@yahoo.co.uk. 01270 569879.

Price £10.50 plus postage.
