

**This image and this inscription,
who do they belong to?**

**Well then, you'd better give Caesar
what belongs to Caesar!
And – give God what belongs to God!**

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AD 49, 1 Thessalonians and Holiness.

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians is thought to have been written about AD 51 when the world around the Mediterranean was in religious and political turmoil. Claudius had become emperor in AD 41, when he appointed his Jewish friend Herod Agrippa I to rule Galilee. Herod died in AD 44, when direct Roman rule was restored in the area. Claudius reigned until AD 54 and it was during his reign that the Romans conquered Britain, showing how far afield Roman influence had spread.

AD 51 was about halfway between the crucifixion / resurrection and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Amongst the Jews, Messianism was rampant, both in Judea and the Diaspora, as they hoped for a restoration of a truly independent Jewish state. The situation was made worse by trouble between Jews and Jewish Christians as well as within the Christian community itself. In particular, AD 49 saw two significant events take place, one within the Church and the other in Rome.

At Jerusalem, there was an important Christian council concerning the influx of Gentiles into the church. Acts 15 records how this resulted in an agreement about what was deemed to be necessary for Gentiles to become Christians. It was agreed that circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic Law were not to be imposed on Gentile converts. However, the Jerusalem decree insisted that Gentiles be instructed to abstain from strangled animals, blood, eating of meat offered to idols and sexual immorality. This may look as though some Mosaic Rules were in fact being imposed on Gentiles. However, it needs to be noted that the one place where you were likely to find all four of the things mentioned in the Jerusalem decree was well known to be in a pagan temple (see 2 Macc 6:4-5). Prostitution and other sexual practices were rife in such places. Christians avoiding them would leave themselves open to ridicule, if not persecution, from friends and neighbours used to them frequenting pagan temples in the past. Neighbours would no doubt react with amazement at such sudden changes in lifestyle. The decree, then, was less of an imposition of some Mosaic requirements, but rather more of a request for them to abstain from attending pagan temples with their associated practices. Gentile Christians, then, should modify their behaviour by staying away from pagan temples, thus showing that they took morality seriously, which would be a helpful witness to Jews in the Diaspora synagogues, who might hopefully become their brothers and sisters.

In Rome, trouble broke out in Jewish communities concerning one called Chrestus, believed to be a reference to Jesus Christ. This led to Claudius banishing Jews from Rome and to general upheaval in the world Jewish community. The edict of Claudius is referred to in Acts 18:2. Of course, at that time, Christians were generally seen as a Jewish sect and so would also come under the ban. They all had to flee from Rome and find other places to live. The first major city east of Rome, on the Via Egnatia, the Egnatian Way, was Thessalonike and no doubt both Jews and Christians would have sought refuge there, taking their arguments with them.

Both these events would have tended to make Jewish communities in other towns, including the ones Paul visited, much more sensitive to criticism and novelties. Some synagogues would have been like tinderboxes, just ready to burst into flame if provoked in any way. The world was a melting pot, full of trouble and strife. All of this no doubt explains the violent reaction to Paul and others who came preaching a crucified Messiah and a new king, Jesus, as not just Jewish Messiah but also Lord of the world, a clear challenge to the current Roman Emperor, Claudius.

When Paul crossed from Turkey into Macedonia and Greece, that much nearer to Rome, you can easily imagine the atmosphere in and around any Jewish synagogue. Paul and Silas got themselves put in prison in Philippi and were eventually told to leave the city. At Thessalonica, after Paul and Silas had preached for three Sabbaths, their followers thought it best for them to leave, presumably before they caused any more trouble. And so, after a three-week campaign or mission, the young Thessalonian church was left to fend for itself in an atmosphere of antagonism likely to break out into persecution.

Paul went on to Berea, then Athens and Corinth, but could not forget the new church he had founded in Thessalonica with the troubles they were probably having to face. Would they stay faithful or give up? He sends Timothy to find out and gets good news back which prompts him to write this letter, 1 Thessalonians. He is obviously very pleased to hear that they haven't given up and congratulates them and encourages them to go on making progress in their Christian lives.

In chapter 1, verse 9, he refers to how they turned from idols to the living and true God, just as the Jerusalem council had agreed, which suggests that many of them were Gentile converts. In verses 4 to 6, he stresses the role of the Holy Spirit in their conversion and reminds them how he had called on each of them to live lives worthy of God who was calling them to share in His kingdom and glory. In 3:12,13, he prays for their love to grow, the means by which the Lord would strengthen them and make them perfect and holy before God when Jesus returns with all his saints or holy ones.

Paul appreciated how they were likely to be experiencing problems and would need help and encouragement. In chapter 4, he offers some thoughts and advice on three regular problem areas of life, namely sex, money and death, reminding them that they had already learnt how they should live to please God. Holiness is very much on his mind as he tells them in verse 3 that God wants them to be holy and completely free from sexual immorality. He reminds the men, in verse 4, that they should each live with their wife in a holy and honourable way, not with a lustful desire, like the heathen who do not know God. In verse 7, he stresses that God did not call them to live in immorality but in holiness. To do otherwise would be tantamount to rejecting God who, he reminds them, gives them his Holy Spirit.

He continues by reiterating his concern that they should love one another and do even more. They should live a quiet life, mind their own business and earn their own living. There would be a temptation to rely on the love of others but they should all, as far as possible, endeavour to pay their own way and not rely on the financial support of others. Unbelievers would learn from them the lesson that Christians were not spongers, although always ready to help those in need.

In the last section of the chapter, he addresses their concerns about fellow Christians who have died. He assures them that death will not have the last word; those who have died will not miss out on God's future. The resurrection of Jesus was God's commitment that believers in Jesus would share in his resurrection together with all other believers.

At the beginning of the letter, 1:3, Paul had commended them for the way they put their faith into practice, how their love made them work hard and how their hope in the Lord Jesus Christ was firm. He echoes these thoughts in chapter 5 when, in verse 8, he exhorts them to wear faith and love as a breastplate and their hope of salvation as a helmet. God, he insists in verse 9, did not choose them to suffer his anger, but to possess salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for them ...

With his mind still very much on holiness, he instructs them in verse 19 not to restrain the Holy Spirit but to put all things to the test, keeping what is good and avoiding every kind of evil. 'May the God who gives us peace,' he says, 'make you holy in every way and keep your whole being – spirit, soul and body – free from every fault at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you will do it, because he is faithful.'

AD 49, then, was a problem year within the Jewish community as it wrestled first with whether it could accept a crucified Jesus, not just as Messiah, but as Messiah and Lord of the world, and second with the extent to which Jewish Christians could accept Gentile converts as full members of God's new covenant people without them effectively having to become Jews via circumcision and full obedience to the Law. This often led to disturbances in Jewish synagogues across the empire and difficult circumstances therefore for believers from both Jewry and paganism. Paul's concern for his newly-formed churches was that they should be able to lead a quiet life but nevertheless one that clearly showed that holiness mattered to them because it mattered to God. There was to be no compromise with paganism or with Jewish exclusivism, but the holiness he enjoined on his converts was not stand-offish, rather it was holiness centred on faith, hope and love, i.e. loyalty to God and to Jesus and a life lived in the strength of the Holy Spirit which demonstrated love for each other and all mankind and which rejoiced in the hope of resurrection. 'He who calls you will do it,' he insisted.

Les Boddy

(I am indebted to Ben Witherington III's *New Testament History – A Narrative Account*, 2001, Paternoster Press.)

Theodicy

In the last issue, Stan Baylis asked readers for contributions discussing theodicy, which comes from the Greek *theos* 'god' and *dike* 'justice', and which refers to how we justify the ways of God in view of the existence of evil in the world. Two of our readers have responded to that request by sending the following two articles. Both recognise the difficulty of the task and would welcome comments on their contributions and further suggestions of how best to deal with this thorny problem.

Editor

Constructing a theodicy - an approach

The problem of evil is most succinctly expressed as the dilemma of Epicurus: God cannot be both all good and all powerful; if

God wishes to prevent evil, but cannot, he is impotent; if he can but will not, he is malevolent; if he has both the power and the will whence, then, is evil? In its acute form we are confronted by the horrors of war, of terrorism, hurricanes and earthquakes; how can a loving God permit suffering and death on such a scale? On a more personal level there is the agony of parents whose child dies of a long drawn-out painful and debilitating illness, or the young mother snatched away from her family by tragic accident.

Important ingredients in any Christian theodicy are first, our ability to exercise freewill, and secondly, the character-building potential of adversity. God could have eliminated both of these but the result would have been a very different world. God's will for the human race required that we should freely choose to serve him. As a consequence, inevitably, we can freely choose not to do so. Much of the evil in the world is a consequence of the exercise of this free choice. Similarly, God could have made our lives easy and stress-free by the absence of all adversity. Again, the world would then have been very different with no difficulties to try our patience or test our resolve.¹

A basic fact of biblical belief is that mankind is sinful, alienated from God, and subject to death and evil as a consequence (Gen 3:16-19; Rom 3:23; 5:12; 6:23). Genesis chs 2 & 3 tell of a man and woman freely choosing to reject God's law – a picture of all of us most of the time – a portrait of 'everyman'. Finding themselves in a situation that offered temptation, they 'fell'. Some consider that the allusions of our Lord and his apostles to Adam demand a literal understanding of the early chapters of Genesis (Mat 19:4-5; 1 Cor 15:22; 1 Tim 2:13-14; Jude 14). Others think that this may not necessarily be so, since Jesus' words do not demand a literal understanding of demon possession or of hellfire (Lk 11:24-26; 16:22-26). Thus, while the above passages are of profound importance for our understanding of salvation – of our need and God's provision – they perhaps may not demand acceptance of any particular view of the age of the earth or of the date of Adam and Eve – issues on which Bible-based Christians are unfortunately deeply divided.

Scripturally, one can distinguish different categories of suffering. There is persecution for one's faith; punishment for sin; criminal acts; and illness, accident and natural disaster. Human activity may increase the effects of natural disaster, as when coastal development exacerbates the effects of tsunamis, or when upland tree-felling increases run-off and lowland flooding. We are all subject to the law of cause and effect, and often reap what we sow – think of drug or alcohol abuse, or sexually transmitted diseases.

Prominent themes of the Old Testament are the blessings that come to the godly for their righteousness while the wicked suffer for their sins (Ps 34: 91). Adversity came upon Israel because of their unfaithfulness. If only they would repent and turn from their idolatry or ungodly living, then the army of the invader would go away and their crops would grow again (Lev 26:3-39; Isa 1:2-20). Sometimes, however, it was the righteous who suffered, due to persecution by the ungodly (Heb 11:35b-38). Affliction was to be welcomed for the spiritual gain it afforded (Dt 8:2-5; Job 5:17; Ps 119:67; Pr 3:11-12). There was also the concept of testing – to show to God and, more importantly, to bring home to themselves, of what stuff they were made (Gen 22:1; Dt 8:2; Jud 2:20-23). The idea that the righteous always prosper, while the wicked inevitably suffer is examined and rejected in the book of Job.

In the New Testament the same message is prominent. Beatings, imprisonment and death were the actual or expected lot of the believer (Mat 5:10-12; Php 1:29-30; 1 Th 3:2-4; 2 Tim 3:10-13; 1 Pet 4:1,12-19). Suffering as a Christian was to be welcomed; the benefits lay in strengthening of character (Rom 5:3; Jas 1:2-4,12; 1 Pet 1:7). The apostles endured the affliction that came upon them with resolute fortitude because they could see beyond it to kingdom glory (2 Cor 4:7-18) and urged the same upon their readers (Heb 12:3-11). Some familiar sayings of our Lord (e.g. 'the hairs of your head are all numbered') were in the context of persecution and martyrdom, and plainly have the future kingdom of God in view (Lk 12:4-7,22-31; 21:12-19). For them, the present life only had meaning having in view the promised rest (2 Cor 4:16-18).

Freewill is a key element in human life. In the natural world, too, we can perceive freedom granted to natural processes. The apostle Paul perhaps hints at this in writing of a troubled creation, labouring as in the pains of childbirth – subject to frustration (vanity, futility) and in bondage to decay ('the tyranny of change and decay'²) (Rom 8:19-22). The movement of the continental plates leads to earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis, etc as the planet is continually moulded. God is continually at work as Creator and Sustainer:

This view of God is illustrated by the Bible's use of certain Hebrew participles used for God's creative work (eg. Job 9:8-9; Psa 104:2f; Isa 42:5; 44:24; 45:18). They are participles which indicate continual exercise of an activity. Thus God's creative activity is at every moment in the universe's history. When the Bible speaks of God as sole creator of the universe it does not view creation as one momentary act, but a moment by moment sustaining of the universe in existence.³

The same Hebrew words that describe miracles are also used of natural events – there was no distinction in the Hebrew mind between what we see as natural and what we view as miraculous – both were displays of divine power. In particular, *pala* (wonders, marvels, amazing things, miracles) is used of the plagues of Egypt and the crossing of the Jordan (Ex 3:20; Ps 106:7; Jos 3:5) as well as of rain, cloud formations, storms at sea and the wonder of childbirth (Job 5:9; 37:14; Ps 107:24; 139:14)⁴.

How does God relate to the universe in creation? Christianity does not see God relating to the world simply as a cause amongst causes, but as the foundation of all that goes on in the universe. He does not relate to the world just at the beginning but at every moment in the universe's history. Thus the biblical view of God as creator includes him continuously sustaining the world in being. The biblical imagery is not God reaching out his hand to light the blue touch paper, but holding the whole universe in the palm of his hand.³

... physical evil ... is the inevitable consequence of a world exploring and realising its own potentiality through the shifting operations of happenstance. That world must contain impermanence as the ground of change, death as the prerequisite of new life. Its blind alleys and malfunctions will produce what humans perceive as the physical evil of disease and disaster.

In that sense the universe is everywhere 'fallen' and has always been so.⁵

In human affairs God responds flexibly to people and their responses to him (Jer 18:7-10; Jonah 3:10). It is possible that while God has willed certain endpoints in human history (Is 46:10-11), he has not willed the means to those ends, but has allowed elasticity in the attainment of them. God, in his infinite wisdom, has been compared to a chess Grand Master, who is able effortlessly to outwit the freely made chess moves of any number of novices, integrating their games into one unified, consistent whole – the history of the human race. History is thus an unfolding process within which God is at work as an 'Improviser of unsurpassed ingenuity'.⁶

Various quotes from Hick¹ paint a picture that may be worth pondering:

In the light of modern anthropological knowledge some form of two-stage conception of the creation of man has become

an almost unavoidable Christian tenet. ... By an exercise of creative power God caused the physical universe to exist, and in the course of countless ages to bring forth within it organic life, and finally to produce out of organic life personal life; and when man had thus emerged ... a creature has been made who has the possibility of existing in conscious fellowship with God. But the second stage of the creative process is of a different kind altogether. ... personal life is essentially free and self-directing. It cannot be perfected by divine fiat, but only through the unimpelled responses and willing cooperation of human individuals in their actions and reaction in the world in which God has placed them.¹

Man, created as a personal being in the image of God, is only the raw material for a further and more difficult stage of God's creative work. This is the leading of men as relatively free and autonomous persons, through their own dealings with life in the world in which he has placed them, towards that quality of personal existence that is the finite likeness of God.¹

The picture with which we are working is thus developmental and teleological. Man is in process of becoming the perfected being whom God is seeking to create. However, this is not taking place – it is important to add – by a natural and inevitable evolution, but through a hazardous adventure in human freedom. Because this is a pilgrimage within the life of each individual, rather than a racial evolution, the progressive fulfilment of God's purpose does not entail any corresponding progressive improvement in the moral state of the world.¹

If we are right in supposing that God's purpose for man is to lead him from human *bios*, or the biological life of man, to that quality of *zoe*, or the personal life of eternal worth, which we see in Christ, then the question we have to ask is not ... 'Is the architecture of the world the most pleasant and convenient possible?' The question that we have to ask is rather, 'Is this the kind of world that God might make as an environment in which moral beings might be fashioned, through their own free insights and responses, into 'children of God'?'¹

For the Christian believer adversity is an inevitable accompaniment of discipleship, a means to strengthen character and enhance the prospect of future kingdom glory and peace. By no means, however, can we tell someone that their desperate loss or searing pain is given them to strengthen their character. Severe adversity can destroy faith, though if we can survive we may well be strengthened. Some can cope much better than others. Intense affliction will change us, perhaps profoundly, for better or worse. We are never the same afterwards as we were before.

One is reminded of Nietzsche's aphorism: 'That which does not kill me makes me stronger.'

Much misunderstood and misquoted, this is not a statement of fact but a resolution: 'I will try to ensure that every experience I go through, no matter how bad, will be turned to my advantage. If I make a mistake I will try to learn from it. If I survive an ordeal I will use the knowledge that I pulled through to strengthen me in times of future hardship.' It is no use simply quoting Nietzsche to someone having a hard time and expecting it to console them. There is no inevitability that they will emerge from their ordeal stronger than at the start. It takes willpower .. to turn adversity to advantage. To believe that hard times naturally empower us couldn't be getting Nietzsche more wrong, since his point is precisely that it is all down to us how we deal with difficulty. That which does not kill you may well make you weaker, if you let it.⁷

For the believer there is the motivation of the love of Christ, that he died for us, and we have the assurance that God is on our side and that, in the kingdom, all wrongs will be righted. Others can offer empathy, encouragement, support and comfort to those who are suffering (1 Sam 23:16; Acts 14:22).

The Christian response to suffering is not debate but action; in the words of von Hugel 'Christianity does not explain suffering, it shows us what to do with it.' Practical involvement in the world of suffering humanity is the responsibility of every believer (Mat 25:31-46). Those who have themselves suffered are thereby equipped to put their experiences to good use by helping others (2 Cor 1:3-7). Many charitable institutions have been founded to assist, or as memorials to, those who are, or have been, suffering.

God sent his Son into the world to share and suffer the world's evil. 'Touched with the feeling of our infirmities ... tempted in all points like us', fully conversant with our frailty and mortality – misunderstood, rejected, hated, tortured and cruelly done to death, totally one with those he came to save (Heb 2:9-18; Isa 53:4-12).

Born into the stream of human life running in (the) wrong channel Jesus nevertheless lived in perfect obedience to his Father's will. He thus represented a higher purpose which was in conflict with the prevailing dynamics of human society, and as a vulnerable human agent of that higher purpose he met a death which has decisively illumined both the horror of man's life apart from God and the depth of divine love which is so costingly at work to rescue us from that horror.¹

God's grand scheme of human creation will find its focus and ultimate fulfilment in the future kingdom of God on earth, the consummation of all God's promises – a healed world at rest – when the creation 'will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God' (Rom 8:21) – when tears will be wiped from all eyes and there will be no more death, mourning, crying or pain, for the former things will have passed away (Rev 21:4).

I am aware that, in the above, I have not addressed any of the specific questions posed by Stan Baylis. However, I hope that I may have helped to clarify some of the issues and lay a foundation on which others may build.

Bob Burr

References

- 1 John Hick: *Evil and the God of Love*. Collins 1979, Part IV.
- 2 JB Phillips: *The New Testament in Modern English*. Bles 1960.
- 3 David Wilkinson: *God, the Big Bang and Stephen Hawking*. Monarch, 1993 p 128.
- 4 H Wheeler Robinson: *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*. Oxford 1962 pp 34-39.
- 5 John Polkinghorne: *Reason and Reality*. SPCK 1991 p 99.
- 6 William James: *The Will to Believe and other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. Longmans 1897 pp 180-181.
- 7 Julian Baggini: *Wisdom's Folly* - Times or Guardian newspaper

Comments on:

Can we construct a theodicy? (Stan Baylis, E.116 p.40)

1. The Holocaust

I have great sympathy with Stan's observations and the problems he raises; these have given me similar difficulties. On the first

of his 'two very disturbing facts' – the example of the more than one million children who perished in the Holocaust – are we to understand that, sadly, this terrible happening was simply a necessity in God's overall purpose? At the moment I see no easy answer to such problems.

Since being prompted by Stan to give the matter more thought, I was pleased to receive a book – a fortuitously timed present from an old friend – in which a chapter entitled 'The World's Sorrow' deals with the very problems we are considering. The following thoughts are based on this same chapter and are given, not as a definitive answer but, hopefully, as input to assist further study of the problem. The author, John Austin Baker, looks firstly in some detail at the pros and cons of a number of the standard arguments used down the ages to justify the existence of pain and suffering. None of these appear to have resulted in a satisfactory theodicy. A few abbreviated examples of the arguments are given below:-

a) '*Everything happens for the best*':

Baker points out that this is an unprovable view; he sees it as more an expression of piety, than as an argument. 'In view of the sufferings some people have to undergo, it requires considerable ingenuity to imagine what could be worse.'

b) '*All suffering is retribution for sin*':

Many crimes and stupidities can have disastrous results for individuals and communities, but as often as not these results are felt by those who had no part in the actions which produced them. Good and evil fortunes, the author concludes, are 'morally random'. If the theory of *retribution* were true, then self-interest would be the *only* way of life open to us – it would be impossible to do good for its own sake, or because it was right.

c) '*Physical pain acts as a warning system – helping us to survive*':

When we touch something hot our reflex withdrawal system saves us from serious injury. But effectiveness of this system is very uneven: for example it is possible to reach the inoperable stage of cancer *before* feeling any significant discomfort.

d) '*If there were no pain, we could not experience pleasure*':

e.g. pangs of hunger increase the pleasure of food, or, 'the deprivations of the dark, interminable Northern winter make the return of the sun a silent ecstasy such as the Southerner can never know.' Pain can sometimes intensify pleasure, but as Baker points out: 'Such a view...says nothing about those pains which are never followed by any pleasure – unless the blessed relief of approaching death be so regarded.'

This last thought, of course, brings us back to problems like that of the Holocaust children – and we conclude that the classic arguments have not resolved our problem. We see many horrors occurring in this global village of ours which prompt the cry: 'Why, Oh Why are these things *allowed* to happen; why does God *not intervene*; why is it *possible* for all this suffering to take place?!' Our sense of justice is so outraged that we are tempted to hold the Creator responsible for all the suffering endured by innocent people. In effect, we are asking: 'Why was the natural order made such that all these sufferings and injustices are *possible*?' – (*implying that we would have made it very differently?*)

It is at this point that I find Baker most helpful. It is not that he instantly resolves our problem, as looked at from the viewpoint of our human sense of justice. It is rather that he indicates a *different perspective* by suggesting that perhaps we should be asking *different questions*. These are: 'What would necessarily be *lost* if the world were such that there could never be pain above an easily tolerable level, or where, whenever something was about to go seriously wrong, an interventionist God by a special act saved the day?'

In a world subject to this sort of intervention, he argues, 'There would necessarily be serious limitation on our ability to discover regularities in Nature; but the *major loss* would seem to be control of our own affairs and the *responsibility that goes with this*.' He points out that opting for an interventionist God would be to say that these losses do not matter; therefore Christians would do well to remember this when they ask for miraculous answers to their prayers. On a world without pain, Baker comments: 'If no word or act of mine, or of anybody else's, no accident of nature, no defect in themselves, can cause pain either to them or to me, *can I have any concern for them?* ... to our list of losses do we have to add – *love?*'"

Another topic that impinges on the matter of human qualities and values is that of happiness. I think that probably all of us, from our own experiences, can relate to Baker's comments on the subject when he states that we cannot seek happiness for its own sake – that it comes as a by-product of doing other things. 'All such activities involve a concern for something or someone other than the self, by which the self in self-forgetting is fulfilled. But concern and self-forgetting are attitudes *possible only in a world where pain is also possible*.'

Coming back to our original problem, it seems unlikely that we can obtain any simple answers – at least not in the same terms as we asked the questions. We can only observe the world as it is from where we stand. It is the world we live in that makes possible the different qualities and values, good and bad, around us. It is the basic terms of this existence that dictate our potentials and our possible development. Though at times we are tempted to wish that we could re-design things, where could we possibly start? We are hardly in a position to evaluate all the possible effects and ramifications which our imaginary new system would create, let alone ensure that all these would be for Mankind's good.

I give some of Baker's conclusions at the end of his stimulating chapter on 'The World's Sorrow':-

'Unless we have faced the radical question which, ... the fact of suffering puts to us, and have already made the naked choice *to hold love, sacrifice, concern, and the rest, of greater value than exemption from pain*, we cannot rationally believe in a God of goodness at all.' But, once that choice is made, he declares that it is possible to '... take up all the agonised and convoluted arguments by which religious thinkers down the ages have sought "to justify the ways of God to men", and pitch them into the depths of the sea.' The chapter ends with Baker's belief that '*the nature of moral good and evil is not an open question. The system has been "rigged" so that we are not free to start from scratch in deciding what is right and wrong. In a rather strange and oblique way love has been required by law.*'

Can it be that, after all the arguments are debated and agonised over, our problems and their answers are all really summed up in the full title of John Baker's book: *THE FOOLISHNESS OF GOD* – (plus, of course, the other half of the quotation)?

2. God's own words

How do we explain why a God of '*infinite compassion*' was prepared to kill child and suckling when punishing his people? I don't know! The deliberate killing of innocent babies – and there are a number of such examples – seems impossible to reconcile with the idea of a just and loving God. Neither does it agree with a principle expressed in other scriptures, e.g. Deut 24:16, 2 Kings 14:6; Ezek 18:20. These tell us that a son shall not bear the iniquity of a father, and vice versa, but that a person is to be put to death only for a crime he himself has committed. Here we can recognise a more obvious justice in the principle – but it simply does not agree with the command of 1 Sam 15.

On this problem of contradictory scriptures, may I make a tentative suggestion: 'Did God really decree that innocent babies must be slaughtered, or was it rather that the Israelites *thought* that this must be God's will? Was it the justification for their action?' This idea, of course, has implications for how we look at inspiration. Perhaps it is time to reappraise the Christadelphian dogma on biblical inspiration, for it seems to me that we cannot use scripture as though it gives definitive answers to all questions. Les, in his study *The Agenda of Genesis 1*, – in the same issue of Endeavour as Stan's item – assumed the writer of Genesis to have been 'an Israelite inspired by God', but pointed out that he was 'nevertheless a human being with limited vision and understanding.' In other words his humanity was not overridden by divine control to ensure absolute freedom from human error. Does this not apply to any scripture?

Like Stan and Bob, I also would welcome further comments.

Cyril Marsters

Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

**'Men will faint from terror...'
It will be even worse than you thought.**

'Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world,
for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'
(Luke 21:26, NIV)

This familiar saying of Jesus, in his Mount Olivet prophecy, is often linked with another in the same discourse: 'If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.' (Mark 13:20, NIV)

In the context of the gospel records of this prophetic discourse of Jesus, nearly all of it seems to refer to the horrors of the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, though there is wide acceptance of the suggestion that parts of it will have an application still future to us – around the time of the second coming of Jesus. If I am right in seeing references to troubles still ahead, we (inhabitants of earth) are in for a grim time, and we should be preparing for it. The terrors ahead may be particularly stressful for disciples of Jesus.

I think that never yet, in the whole history of mankind, has the prophecy about: 'men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world' been even partially fulfilled. There have been episodes where very many have lived in dread, but a **worldwide** 'terror'? I think not!

In the last decade or so, however, it has become increasingly evident that both verses cited above are about to become true. Horribly and desperately true. I would like to introduce two witnesses to this effect:

1. *NewScientist*, 10 February 2007; editorial on p3 and article on p7.
2. Sir Martin Rees (now Lord Rees), Astronomer Royal and President of the Royal Society; his book, *Our Final Century*, or, as the US publisher has made it, *Our Final Hour*.

Taking *NewScientist* first (yes, it *is* written like that!) we find, in issue after issue, articles and other contributions adding to the picture of, for example, impending climate changes and their consequences. In the issue cited above the two relevant items are headed: 'Consensus is not enough; the IPCC (International Panel on Climate Change) report is welcome, but what happens next will matter more' (editorial). One memorable statement is picked out in large red letters: 'it's a fair bet that much of what we do not yet know for sure will turn out to be scarier than most of us would like to imagine.'

The article is headed: 'But here's what they didn't tell us; If the official verdict on climate change seems bad enough, the real story looks much worse'. A section of the article (by Fred Pearce, an experienced and respected science writer) is headed: 'The predictions go from bad to worse'.

Lord Rees's book takes a sober look at where humankind is taking us, with particular reference, of course, to science and technology, and what they now permit us to do. As a leading science practitioner for about half a century, Sir Martin reviews what he considers to be the possibly lethal self-inflicted burdens which threaten our race. He is quite serious in his warning that we humans are 'bringing about one of the greatest, severest, 'extinctions' the earth has ever experienced – far worse than the one which took away the dinosaurs – and that we will be among the species to be labelled 'Extinct'.

So, what have we to fear?

I will try to summarise the scenario arising from these specified two witnesses, plus points from a substantial number of other creditable writers, so that readers can judge for themselves whether or not the verses at the head of this article are really beginning their fulfilment in our day.

I'll begin with climate change, now convincingly shown to be a result of human activity. As the earth warms, the water in all the seas expands; this has resulted in a steady rise in sea level already. As the world's ice begins to melt, far more rapidly and over far more territory than many had forecast, the seas will rise commensurately. Just think of the consequences of loss of all ice from Arctic (on land, that is; ice on water does not alter the level when it melts) and much of the Antarctic regions. This is quite likely well before the century is out, and in the view of many 'on site' workers, much sooner than that. This, says Pearce in *NewScientist*, will result in 'a 30% drop in rainfall in subtropical regions'. With failure of delivery of snow and ice to mountain ranges such as the Himalayas, the great rivers which water much of the earth, in this example, of course, the north of the Indian subcontinent, will fail. There are already fears of 'water wars', even under present conditions...

If the sea level rises by only one metre, national territories such as those of Bangladesh, Mozambique, and Holland will disappear. What will happen when *tens of millions of refugees try crossing other nations' borders?*

We in the UK have become used to a climate which is dependent on the Gulf Stream; the news that between 1957 and 2004 the Stream's flow fell by 30% should fill us with alarm – had you even heard of this?

There is another unstoppable factor adding to the fear of what's coming: carbon dioxide is by no means the only 'greenhouse' gas stoking the global temperature rise. Methane is even more effective and there are huge deposits of it (complexed with water as clathrates) on the floors of oceans and in the permafrost wastes of Siberia and Canada. They are already beginning to release the gas, and this release is expected to increase with every degree rise in temperature...

As the load of ice on land, particularly on Antarctica, Northern Canada, Alaska, Northern Siberia and Greenland, is relieved by melting, the earth's crust thus freed begins to float upwards like a ship having its cargo unloaded. This is a painful process, with severe earthquakes releasing the energy in the margins of affected regions. Fracturing of crustal layers, as plates of it rise relative to the rest, opens the way to devastating energetic volcanic eruptions such as have, in the past, sterilised vast tracts of earth.

To all this one must add the real threat of international terrorism and the probability that powerful groups will acquire chemical, biological or nuclear (even if only as 'dirty bombs') weapons and use them. Small aggressive nations may be tempted to use such weapons in 'water wars' or even in the struggle to secure places on the steadily decreasing surface of a drowning earth.

All this is against a background of pandemic HIV infection, influenza (possibly mutated 'bird flu') and probably starvation as well. Jesus used very moderate language to describe the horrors of the time of the end.

Shall we leave it at that – there is much more, and it's easy to find. But this will suffice to illustrate how literally the Mount Olivet prophecy is coming to pass. The mood of the world's populations is likely to become progressively more of: 'Every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost', than of 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Worse, the aggressively anti-Christian stance of militant Islamic groups may be an important factor – their influence is already growing in Western countries,

However dreadful the sacking of Jerusalem was in AD 70, or the Holocaust of AD 1940-1945, surely what is yet to come more than justifies a belief in a still future fulfilment?

What are we doing to prepare ourselves, or, more probably, our children and grandchildren, for the dreadful times ahead. Politicians don't like mention of such matters; there are no votes in troubles to come! Christians could find their best approach to be an informed acceptance of what will be, a support for any in need if the means are to hand, and prayer that the Lord may indeed shorten these days of earth's turmoil, remembering that 'soon' there will be the 'new heavens and new earth' where righteousness will live.

Paul Launchbury

The Quest of Truth

... Truth, it is said, is shaped like a tree, and not like a straight line. It has more than one side and it has many branches. We cannot grasp the mysteries of life or grapple with the sum of all truth. Whatever we do, contradictions and riddles will continue to baffle us.

Unless we approach the quest of truth with some guiding principles we will soon become hopelessly lost.

The first of these – a very vital one – is that we should realise our own limitations. 'To know what we know, and to know what we do not know – that is wisdom,' says an old Eastern proverb. There are many things which we will not understand at all, until the day when we understand perfectly (1 Cor. 13:12). We must therefore try to distinguish what are the limits of our understanding.

... Something apparently new may seem to threaten our mental security and therefore we reject it. Sheer mental laziness can thus overcome the quest of truth. Nothing is easier than to live within a small circle of ideas, never learning, with the conviction that all things have, within that narrow compass of conformity, been revealed to us. We can very easily begin to assume that we are thinking when we are merely 'rearranging our prejudices'...

(Extracts from an article written by James White, a founder member of the Endeavour Committee, published in E23, Spring 1967.)

The Name that is above all other names. (Phil 2).

God's 'mighty strength was seen at work when he raised Christ from the dead, and enthroned him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all government and authority, all power and dominion, and any title of sovereignty that commands allegiance, not only in this age but also in the age to come. He put all things in subjection beneath his feet, and gave him as head over all things to the church which is his body, the fullness of him who is filling the universe in all its parts.' (Eph 1:20-22)

This mind-blowing description of our Lord Jesus and his position in the universe now, is a complement to the poem (or is it a hymn?) quoted by Paul in his letter to Philippi: 'Therefore God raised him to the heights and bestowed on him the name above all names' (2:9). But before I launch into my main argument about that verse, I should like to say something about v.10 'At the name of Jesus' – please bear with me!

Greek prepositions are a minefield for the unwary, and I don't pretend to be a Greek expert, but I am baffled by the translation 'at' for the preposition 'en'. To me it shouts to be translated 'in' – 'in the name of Jesus every knee should bow to the glory of God' shows how Is 45:23 (where God himself uses the phrase 'every knee should bow to me') is accomplished, and it harmonises with the position of the child of God baptised 'in Jesus' name'. But it may be that one can just pluck a meaning for a preposition out of the air, so to speak, and that I am thinking 'through my hat'!

So, to the name above all others, which, it seems to me, must confirm Jesus' highly exalted status. It cannot be 'Jesus' (God saves) since it does not particularly exalt Jesus himself, and is a common Hebrew/Greek name. Nor can it be 'Immanuel' (God with us), for both his names had already been given at his birth. 'YHWH' has also been suggested by some, and indeed, in Revelation, Jesus does describe himself as the Alpha and Omega, who was, and is, and is the Coming One.

I would however like to make another suggestion. To illustrate my meaning, I will quote from Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (vol.2, ch.4). Two of the hobbits meet the guardian of the forests, who appears to be a tree himself. He asks for their names, which they quickly give. He replies '... I am not going to tell you my name, not yet at any rate. For one thing it would take a long while, and my name is growing all the time, and I've lived a very long, long time, so my name is like a story. Real names tell you the story of the things they belong to....'

I put forward the suggestion that Jesus' name, which is above every name, is an 'experiential' one telling of all that he has done in his humanity and up to his glorification – saviour, the bringer of friendship between God and man, the healer, the man of sorrows, son of man, son of God, the betrayed, the despised, the crucified. And, now that he is raised to become the all-glorious Lord, that name will include all that he continues to do as shepherd and guardian, as the progenitor of the new creation, until all things are gathered into the unity of God himself.

'My new name' Jesus himself calls it in the letter to Philadelphia (Rev 3) – a name which will be written on the faithful, together with the name of God the Father himself, and the name of the city where they can both dwell. Citizenship and family belonging are thus conferred. And there is more.

In Jesus' letter to Pergamum (Rev 2), he promises 'to anyone who is victorious I will also give a white stone, and on it will be written a new name, known only to him who receives it.' And why is it known only to that person? Because it describes the life of the victorious one, all the vicissitudes, all the struggles, the tears and the joys; and no one else can really know that name, for no one else will have had those experiences! It will be a name based on the development of the child of God in us. We are making it now!

Margery McGregor

(With thanks to Paul Launchbury for pulling this together.)

Upon the Swallow

This pretty bird, oh, how she flies and sings!
But could she do so if she had not wings?
Her wings bespeak my faith, her songs my peace;
When I believe and sing, my doubtings cease.

John Bunyan
1628-1688

Ever Learning

(An exhortation given last November 5th)

Remember, remember the 5th of November: gunpowder, treason and plot...' As the nation around us (and maybe even our family as well) stands by the bonfires tonight, those famous words may well come to mind.

When I was a lad – I was, once long ago; really! – penny bangers were still called penny bangers, and had already been so for as long as I could 'remember, remember', but the really traditional firework names like Roman Candles and Catherine Wheels had already begun to disappear into the past. With those centuries old names there also passed from common use the memory of the terrible deaths, in the name of Christ, which had been inflicted on Christians by Catholics on Protestants and by Protestants on Catholics back in the dark ages, and by the Roman Empire on **all** Christians in the 1st Century AD.

One of the tortures favoured in those days was called 'Breaking on the Wheel'. The hapless victim was tied to the rim and spokes of a large iron wheel mounted on a spindle like a 6ft wide turntable. It was driven round by a team of burly men, battering the victim to death with heavy clubs by slowly breaking every bone in his or her body.

One of the noblest and highest-born victims of this brutality was a woman named Catherine, hence the name Catherine Wheel for the device which now is loosely fastened by a pin or nail to a vertical post and rotates at high speed. The optical effect can be quite beautiful, but the original physical effect on the victim was truly horrendous.

Likewise, the Roman Candle, which emits brilliant red and green flames & sparks from its top, with frequent explosions sending red and green fireballs high into the sky. The original Roman Candles were nothing so attractive, however. They were people. Real, live people actually but not alive for long. For whatever crime they had committed, they were liberally soaked in some kind of highly inflammable oil or spirit, bound to or impaled on a hardwood stake and set alight. Dozens of them were set in the ground lining the entrance to an emperor's or other Roman high-ranking nobleman's palace or mansion. So cheap was life in those days, especially the life of a non-Roman miscreant, that he could end his days as the wick in a literal Roman Candle.

So 'REMEMBER, **REMEMBER**, this 5th of November, what blessings through Jesus we've got', who was executed so brutally in those days when life was so cheap that 'Penny for the Guy' was literally its value in Roman eyes. But the one whom we 'remember, remember' today died a death more brutal and more long-drawn-out even than these. Not for anything he had done – even one of those executed with him confessed that he and his companion deserved to die but Jesus had done nothing wrong.

Looking back over my life, when I was a teenager, the worst persecution I suffered for Jesus was daily hard work which did me no harm whatever, and the odd fisticuffs from some of those living with me in a War Agricultural labour hostel in Dunchurch, near Rugby. Curiously enough, the bailiff of the farm where I worked for several years lived in a cottage there – the very cottage in which Guy Fawkes and the conspirators planned their attack on Parliament.

Think back over your life. Have you ever wanted to thank God in your prayers that the one called upon to suffer **more** than all mankind **for** all mankind was Christ, and not you? I have, many times. I do whenever we sing hymn 221: 'Was it for me thy flesh was wounded sore?' In fact I often wonder whether I could face the thought of enduring even the corporal punishment that Pilate caused him without a thought – on a mere whim. 'I know,' he said, 'I'll have him scourged: will that keep them quiet?' Well, it didn't; '**Crucify him; crucify him!**' they chanted.

The inevitable result of scourging was a back and shoulders losing half their flesh, onto which the brutes down below stairs dropped a heavy hardwood crossbeam. No wonder a certain Simon of Cyrene had to carry that beam to Golgotha!

Because of the terribly slow, long-drawn-out death that Jesus suffered, he did have the opportunity – if he had the inclination, which few victims possessed – to speak, albeit only occasionally, briefly and with agonising difficulty. Now if the words of someone who has lived the Christ life and is now dying on a brutal torture stake have one special attribute, it is – **it must be** – that

they are so important as to be 'remembered, remembered' by all who hear them. Here, not necessarily in the right order but I suspect not vastly wrong, is what he said.

First, so typically, to his Father: *'Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing...'*
Thus he freed the Roman execution squad from all culpability for his death, and thus, too, he bound that culpability onto all who, deliberately, 'crucify the Son of God afresh'. *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.* (Heb 6:4-6)

I believe there are two distinct ways in which people do this:

1. Perpetrating evil in the name of Christianity, as the Inquisition **and** the Crusaders did, from opposite dogma but with the same end in view, and
2. Falsely claiming that the bread and wine which we look forward to taking into ourselves as we 'remember, remember' the Lord's redeeming sacrifice, miraculously change into the literal – **mortal** – body and blood of Christ, while still retaining all the smell, taste, texture, etc., of bread and wine.

As the risen Jesus later said, after his body was tenderly laid in Joseph's tomb and virtually all the blood he had ever had was soaked into the sand of Calvary; it was not flesh and **blood** he had when he was risen, but flesh and **bones**. There is no doubt of that. Besides, the risen Jesus couldn't have ascended to his Father's realm as flesh and **blood!**

I tell you from the heart that, when I meditate on the fact that the people for whom Jesus was pleading forgiveness were, **while he was pleading**, hammering rough, rusty cut nails through his wrists and feet, my mind goes into sheer wonder at his *agape* love for us and his deep regard for them. And on top of all this, he of all people was aware that, so far from NOT knowing, those **men** knew perfectly **WELL what they were doing!** What they didn't know was to whom they were doing it. Their ignorance in that respect was total. However, knowing how his Father had punished Korah and his rebels, and Pharaoh and Egypt's firstborn, and how He had instructed Joshua – that's Jesus in Hebrew, of course – that he was to leave alive in Canaan **'nothing that breathes'**, he sought to preserve those who were killing him. His reason? That they did not seek, and had not sought, his death.

That had been the deliberate intention of those who later were to do the same to Stephen.

The next words from the cross have been the subject of far too much speculation over the centuries. One of the thieves crucified with the Lord turned on him, demanding that **IF** he were really the Christ, he should save himself, 'AND' he added, 'us as well, while you're about it!' In all our erudite arguments about the Greek term *semeron hoti* (today that) always meaning 'I tell you **today that** you'll be with me', and never 'I tell you **that today**, you will be with me', we mustn't forget two essential thoughts:

First, that by saying it's *'I tell you that today you'll be with me'*, not only are we making Jesus into a liar (HE was in Joseph's tomb that day – the thief was cast onto a bonfire heap in the Jerusalem rubbish tip), we are **getting our thieves the wrong way round!** It was the **evil** thief who wanted Jesus to do something for them **that day**; the penitent one knew perfectly well that there was nothing Jesus **was** going to do, for himself or for either of them that day; there was only ever one way off a Roman cross – straight to the tomb, or in their case the ever-burning rubbish heaps of the valley of Hinnom. Consequently he didn't ask Jesus for what he knew was impossible. Instead he asked for what he believed WAS possible, even for him. *Lord, Remember – there's that word again! – Remember me when you come in your kingdom! And happen what may, the Lord will! Jesus doesn't break promises like that one!*

And now, try this for a second thought: There is one way – just one – that the penitent thief can indeed be with Jesus 'that day'. Imagine: It's resurrection morning, and the penitent thief is re-created, suddenly, in a moment, in the time it takes to blink (1 Cor 15). **And for just a millisecond, locked in his memory, it is still that terrible afternoon, with the heat, the thirst, the flies and oh, the searing agony and here comes the soldier with the heavy iron sword, to break his legs and force his body into the asphyxiation position...!** And then full consciousness takes over and he realises, with a joy I can't imagine, that he **IS** with Jesus – he **DIDN'T FORGET** – Jesus too has remembered, remembered!

Now I'm not certain, but I think it's highly likely that the next words from that central cross were dragged from the Lord's heart. He certainly shouted them: **'Eloi! Eloi! Lama sabachthani!'**, which, the Spirit itself confirms, is 'My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?'

My mind immediately goes now to David, who so loved God's Law that he meditated on it all day and many a sleepless night too, if I'm any judge! He wasn't afraid to share his emotions with God, and neither was great David's greater Son. We all know where the words come from – Psalm 22.

Prophecy:

All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.

Now, after demonstrating his mercy to the ignorant, his promise to the repentant and his affinity with another 'King of the Jews' who also was a man after God's own heart, Jesus fulfils David's prophecy almost to the letter. Let's compare a sentence or two with the gospel record:

Fulfilment:

And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: (Matt 27:39-40)

Prophecy:

the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet (Ps 22:16)

Fulfilment:

The other disciples therefore said unto Thomas, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. (John 20:25)

Prophecy:

They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. (Ps 22: 18)

Fulfilment:

Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did. (John 19:23-24)

'Therefore' – ? These were Roman Army veterans with 100 yrs time served between them! More dead bodies than – well, you

know the rest. Just to ensure fulfilment of an ancient Jewish manuscript? No **way!** Putting a wager on to win some perfect homespun fleece knitted with deep love by Mary? **You bet!!!**

Prophecy:
'I thirst.'

Does anyone think that John's record means that Jesus counted up the prophecies in Psalm 22, came to the bit that said:
My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws;
and conveniently said those two words? Remember, remember, had God **not** thoughtfully veiled the sun for three searing hours, that cry would have been wrung from the Lord's cracked lips much, much earlier!

Prophecy:

*They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that **HE HATH DONE THIS!*** (Ps 22:31)

Fulfilment:

he said, "IT IS FINISHED!" and he bowed his head, and gave up the Spirit
(John 19:30)

I am reliably informed that 'It is finished' could well be an alternative rendering of the Aramaic for 'He hath done this!'. Now I'm not claiming that Jesus was reciting the Psalm on the cross; he may have been but I don't know. However, I can't think of a more appropriate part of scripture on which he could have been meditating, can you?

Next we consider the mind of such a man as this, who in the extremity of his agony still thought and planned for the future well-being of his mother.

When Jesus therefore saw his mother and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. (John 19:26-27)

And what perfect care he had arranged for Mary, by putting her in the hands of a disciple he loved as much as John! This was the disciple who, when Peter in the upper room mouthed to him over the Passover meal, 'Ask him who is the betrayer!', had whispered the question, had obtained the Lord's almost silent reply **and then never breathed a word of it – especially not to Peter!** Remember, remember; there were two swords in that upper room, and one of them was Peter's! Dear, beloved John: 'The Lord knows who it is, and he's not doing anything' he reasoned, 'so who am I to interfere? He knows what he's doing!'

Now, in contrast to the cry of triumph and relief at the imminent end of his agony, comes the quiet surrender:
And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit': and having said thus, he gave up the Spirit. (Luke 23:46)

Unfortunately, Psalm 22 and other OT prophecies were fulfilled in such detail at Calvary that this has been wrongly attributed to Jesus purposely saying and doing things so that prophecies **could** conveniently be fulfilled. However, it seems obvious to me that at the agonising climax of his pain, when even the tiny amount of possible analgesia from the gall in the vinegar had faded away, as the record in John 19:30 says: *'and he bowed his head and gave up the Spirit.'*

I have thought long and hard about that bowing of his head. And the more I thought, the stronger was the conviction that this was not an act of triumph, or of submission – although we sing 'he yielded to his Father's will' – but it was an action on his part to show that his mortal life's work was finished. You remember that the execution squad returned just before sunset to break the legs of any victim still alive? Forget any idea that the reason was to inflict a sudden further shock to their systems, or shed more blood, and thus hasten their death.

It was the bones of the **lower** legs – the Tibia and Fibula – that were broken by the heavy swords. The immediate result was **total loss of power** in the knees and calves. It had been possible, up until then, (if you can imagine the additional excruciating pain it would have caused) for the victim to lift himself relative to the cross by actually standing on the nail through his feet. Yes, well, now you know why 'ex-cruciating' means 'the agony of the crucified'!

But what happens when, pain or no pain, you simply physically **CAN'T** support yourself that way any more and your whole weight suddenly hangs on your arms? I'll tell you! Mercifully rapid asphyxia, and in a few seconds, the release of death. If that is what happened, I believe Jesus did it, **NOT** so that his body wouldn't remain on the cross long enough to defile the Jews, but to say, in action, as he had done not many hours previously in words to Malchus in Gethsemane, *'Suffer thou thus far...'* (Luke 22:51)

And no farther. By giving up his **breath** after his mission was accomplished, yet before the soldiers came, Jesus fell asleep in God **and not a bone of him was broken**. This fulfilled Exodus 12, Numbers 9 and Psalm 34 to perfection, and the rest was, is and will be all gladness and unspeakable JOY!

Now, as we prepare to remember, remember his final great offering, let us wonder at his great love **and** his massive courage, BEFORE he died. Can it be, I wonder, that as Jesus spent agonising hours suffering so much for you and me, he was inspired by remembering (there's that word again, for the penultimate time!) the thoughts of one who had gone before, another man after God's own heart? If so, then our question right here and now and maybe round the bonfire tonight with the children – is – (And this IS the last time) **'Just what am I REALLY remembering...?'**

'Greater love has no-one than this...'
Greater NEED has no-one than I...!!

Brian Morgan

Extract from a letter in E23, Spring 1967.

What of the much-repeated argument that those of 'simple faith' need protecting by disfellowshipping those who it is alleged threaten their simplicity? If such were the case, Christianity itself would never have been founded for that too was a threat to the simple faith of Jewish believers. To those who use their susceptibility to offence as an instrument of blackmail, not I, but the Lord says, 'Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up' (Matt. 15:13). And again scripture says, 'Great peace have they which love thy law; and nothing shall offend them' (Ps.119:165).

Perhaps there is still a deeper reason for our hostility towards innovators. We have lived in yearly expectation of the Second Coming to the exclusion of almost all else for more than a century. History suggests that a hundred years is about as long as a community can endure such unfulfilled expectation and survive. There are welcome signs that we are at last beginning to believe our Lord when He said, 'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons . . . but ye shall be witnesses unto me . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth' (Acts 1:7-8). Our witnessing can take many forms – preaching at home and overseas; the care of others; social and educational work in under-developed countries; and honestly facing up to modern problems. Our growth will be stunted and our witness frustrated if fear is allowed to prevail and we continually draw back. We demean our witness by resorting to the psychological equivalent of stoning in disfe]lloshipping

those whose services and insights we need to sustain and guide us.

Gordon Hunnings,

Christian Fellowship

Some years ago, Ron Coleman put together a booklet on the Atonement, a topic which was described as 'the most important doctrine of all'. I would like to suggest that Bible teaching on fellowship is right up there among the crucial doctrines in the Bible – it has such far-reaching implications and consequences. In this article, I want to explore just what the Bible *does* teach about Christian fellowship, by looking at the two key words – 'Christian' and 'fellowship'! I want to try to define both these words from the Bible, so that any artificial barriers to Christian fellowship might be removed. I do not think the phrase '*Christian* fellowship' occurs in the Bible, at least not in the English versions that I am familiar with, but perhaps that was not necessary in the 1st century. However, modern usage of 'fellowship' seems to need qualification now – and I hope we can get at the meaning of the phrase, with Bible in hand, by looking at each word separately.

I grew up with some oddly inconsistent views of fellowship. On the one hand, it seemed to be about – almost totally defined by – attendance at the 'breaking of bread' and, on the other hand, mainly about a sort of social fellowship – but perhaps these did not actually in practice conflict?

I want to get some of the negative aspects out of the way first, since I do feel confident – with the Bible in hand – about what 'fellowship' is not! I also grew up with a frequent reminder of fellowship; the word was often used, basically in four ways or contexts: i.e. (a) the Dawn Fellowship/Central Fellowship, (b) receiving into fellowship/giving the right hand of fellowship, (c) withdrawal of fellowship/dis-fellowshipping, and (d) re-fellowshipping.

Most of the above contexts (perhaps all of them) are defining 'fellowship' as a club, in two senses:
(i) a social grouping, i.e. joining a group of like-minded people who meet together in that tight group regularly and
(ii) a club or cudgel with which to beat one, or a kind of sword of Damocles, something to bestow, but with an implied warning – the threat of its withdrawal if the club rules were infringed is always hanging there!

The first sense is the reason why the terms Dawn *group*/Central *group* might be more appropriate, and more accurate. 'Group' describes more closely the concept I was brought up with, and conforms to my dictionary's definition of fellowship: 'companionship, friendship, participation, sharing, community of interest, a body of associates, a brotherhood or fraternity.' There is of course nothing wrong with this purely social/common interest definition among Christians, unless it is used to justify exclusion, or with Christians choosing to worship with particular groups, but *Christian* fellowship is much *more*.

So, let us go to the Bible, where of course we find both the words 'fellowship' and 'Christian', but not actually the two words together. However, I use them together to distinguish from the purely dictionary definition or social context of the ordinary word *fellowship*. We go first to the key verses in I John 1: 'We write to you about the Word of life...When this life became visible, we saw it; so we speak of it and tell you about the eternal life which was with the Father and was made known to us. What we have seen and heard we announce to you also, so that you will join with us in the fellowship that we have with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We write this in order that our joy may be complete.' Here is the positive picture – fellowship is a reason for joy: 'None have such reason to be glad as reconciled to God'!

So what is this verse telling us about fellowship? Surely, that our *Christian* fellowship is *only* through God – the Father and His Son. We are all familiar with what we might call the fellowship wheel: the *hub* at the centre representing God, and the *spokes* out from that hub linking each individual Christian to God. However, perhaps we are also familiar with this 'wheel' having a rim, linking individuals to each other – and here seems to lie the problem.

In the Bible, *Christian* fellowship is *only* through God, and *through* Him with each other. Thus we can only break our fellowship with other Christians if we break it with God. We cannot, as it were, reach across the hub and sever another's spoke – only he or she (or God) can do that! We have neither the right nor the power to bestow or withdraw Christian fellowship. The 'rim' thus creates problems unnecessarily – and is only really about 'social fellowship'. Also, the rimless wheel shows us that we are in fact in Christian fellowship, through God, with all those who are also in that bond – not a concept with which all are comfortable, but unavoidable nevertheless! In passing, this Biblical concept of fellowship gets in the way of the idea of 'withdrawal of *fellowship*' – which is a phrase which does not seem to be in the Bible. 'Withdrawal' is there, certainly, although not in more recent versions of one of the well-known verses (I Timothy 6:5). In the other most frequently quoted verses in this context, II Thess 3:6ff, we are exhorted to treat the one from whom we have withdrawn as a brother. Thus, of course, we can choose to bestow or withdraw social fellowship (if we put in the *rim* of the fellowship wheel, we can sever and reconnect the section of that rim between individuals), but not *Christian* fellowship.

Incidentally, the teaching in I John 1 on fellowship is confirmed in the imagery of the vine in John 15. I understand that all the branches of the vine grow out directly from the main stem, and thus we, the branches, are only linked to each other through Christ – the main stem of the vine; we cannot lop off some one else's branch!

I have referred to the odd inconsistency in the way I was brought up to view fellowship – in one sense, as a social grouping but, in another, a concept which centred (almost?) entirely on frequency of attendance at the 'breaking of bread' service, essentially with a narrowly-defined, and exclusive, group – a sort of 'test', the main test of being 'in fellowship' – or not! I know I am not alone in being puzzled by this particular view of fellowship. So let us now get a feel for wider Bible teaching on fellowship (I will use this word now as shorthand for *Christian* fellowship). Another key verse in scripture concerning fellowship is in Acts 2:41,42 'Many of them (to whom Peter preached) *believed* his message and were *baptised*, and about 3000 people were added to the group that day. (Yes, the GNB uses the word 'group'!) They spent their time in *learning from the apostles, taking part in the fellowship, and sharing in the fellowship meals and the prayers.*' So, some key words here: belief, baptism – yes – and sharing/meeting together, but note that fellowship includes learning (and therefore teaching), praying together, as well as the communion service – not *just* the latter. Surely now we are truly talking about *Christian* fellowship.

I want now to have a journey through the New Testament, and put together a rounded picture of fellowship – mainly from Paul's writings – in the first century Christian church, and to see what we can learn from that.

Actually, I am going to start in the Old Testament, in Micah 6:8 'The Lord has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with God.' So, when does fellowship start? Romans 6:4,10,11, in the familiar context of baptism: 'By our baptism, we were buried with him, and shared his death ...so also we might live a new life....and now he lives his life in fellowship with God. In the same way, you are...living in fellowship with God through Christ Jesus.' Similar sentiments are expressed elsewhere, e.g. in Philippians 3:10, where Paul writes 'All I want (!) is to know Christ...and the fellowship of (GNB 'to share in') his sufferings.' In I Cor 1:9,10, fellowship is sharply contrasted with divisions: 'God is to be trusted, the God who called you to have fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord...I appeal to all of you...to agree...so that there will be no divisions among you. Be completely united...' Have Christians (I use that word in

the Biblical sense, see later) responded to that appeal? Have Christadelphians, even in a sectarian sense, responded? In that emotional last chapter of Romans, where again Paul warns against divisions among Christians, he lists many of his friends, and describes them as 'friends in the fellowship of the Lord'. This contrast between fellowship and divisions is surely not accidental – and in fact is very, very challenging!

Another contrast compares fellowship/non-fellowship with light/darkness. I John 1:5-7: 'God is light, and there is no darkness at all in him. If we say that we have fellowship with him, yet at the same time live in darkness, we are lying... But if we live in the light – just as he is in the light – then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus purifies us from every sin.' Phil 5:11 makes a similar reference to light and darkness. And, later in John's 1st letter (2:19), it is clear that it is the *enemies of Christ* who do not belong to our fellowship, not other Christians! Yet more contrasts are in II Cor 6:14ff, where believers/unbelievers, right/wrong and again light/darkness are set against each other in the context of fellowship or partnership. The point being made is surely that we can so easily, and so wrongly, draw the fellowship line in the wrong place – between sects or even parts of sects, rather than between true believers and non-believers!! Incidentally, having been brought up on the AV, I tend to recall verses from the AV. The version I use (GNB) often does not use "fellowship" but, eg, sharing, partnership, communion, unity, help/support – all helpful synonyms in understanding fellowship, but always through God.

Another, lovely thought comes from Paul in II Corinthians 13:13, where he signs off by referring (in what is commonly called 'the grace') to the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (how glad we should be that the Holy Spirit was not withdrawn at the end of the 1st century!). In Philippians 2:1ff, Paul moves us on to the effects of fellowship: 'You have fellowship with the spirit' and the effects – strength, love, kindness, compassion and by 'having the same thoughts, sharing the same love, and being one in soul and mind...', a good, inspired, description of fellowship in action. Another wonderful reference in this context is in Philemon (v6): 'My prayer is that our fellowship with you as believers will bring about a deeper understanding of every blessing which we have in our life in union with Christ.'

And then of course there is the famous verse in Galatians (2:9) – one of the familiar contexts (so commonly used *out of* context and leading to interesting discussions about whether we are in fellowship between baptism and the 'receiving in', to which I referred at the beginning of this article), where the 'right hand of fellowship' is exchanged between James, Peter, John, Paul and Barnabas (simply 'shook hands' in GNB) 'as a sign that we were all partners' – nothing to do with welcoming new converts, but a sign of support and blessing on the next work in Christ's service.

So, we have explored 'fellowship' – perhaps almost defined it? We need now to think about the other key word 'Christian'. Many of us have met with Christians other than Christadelphians, and have been uplifted by that experience, feeling true fellowship with them. So we need to address the questions (again?) 'what is a Christian?' and 'what is a Christadelphian?' Let us try some definitions.

Christian: I grew up not thinking of myself as a Christian (the word was not encouraged since it was too inclusive) but as a Christadelphian. I was however familiar with hearing the phrase 'so-called Christian' – a phrase which I thoroughly dislike, particularly in the way it can be used, but I do understand the reasons for the phrase, if applied carefully. I also recently heard the phrase 'Biblical Christian', but surely that is tautological – what other kind of Christian can there be? I did however feel the need, in an article I wrote on 'Unity in Christ' in the Dec 2004 Endeavour, E112, to a largely Christadelphian audience, to define my use of the word 'Christian'. The word is sometimes, and sadly, used loosely. My dictionary defines the word beautifully, and I believe entirely in line with scripture: 'Of Christ's teaching or religion, believing in or following the religion of Jesus Christ, showing the qualities associated with Christ's teaching, a person who has received Christian baptism, an adherent of Christ's teaching, person exhibiting Christian qualities.' The dictionary should at least have added, however, 'having a positive relationship with God.'

In the context of the few uses of 'Christian' in the Bible, we can also distil definitions: e.g. Acts 11:23ff 'When (Barnabas) arrived and saw how God had blessed the people, he was glad and urged them all to be faithful and true to the Lord with all their hearts... It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians.' And what teaching of Paul preceded Agrippa's 'almost you persuade me to be a Christian' in Acts 26? '...Open their eyes and turn them from darkness to the light and from the power of Satan to God, so that through their faith in me they will have their sins forgiven and receive their place among God's chosen people.' In the context of the teaching in Peter's first letter, i.e. suffering for Christ's sake, 'Happy are you if you... are Christ's followers... If you suffer because you are a Christian...thank God that you bear Christ's name' (I Pet 4:12ff). Some pretty good definitions of 'Christian' here, which seem to me to apply to many Christians I know! Just read again the italicised words in this paragraph, and we have both a Biblical 'definition' of *Christian*, and a very challenging set of characteristics to live up to!

Now, Christadelphian, of course, means 'brother (and sister) of Christ', but that applies to all Christians – it is not a unique label.

Dictionary definitions focus on doctrines, most commonly: 'rejects doctrine of Trinity, expects second coming of Christ and believes in the millennium', but these are not very helpful. Many other Christians believe in the second of these, some in the third (although why we seem to assume that the 1000 years is literal when most else in Revelation is symbolic has puzzled me for a long time – and especially in 200Z) and we have to understand what we mean by 'The Trinity' before we can accept or reject it. I believe that the only honest definition of a Christadelphian is 'one who accepts and fully supports the Statement of Faith and has no communion with other Christians' – since that is the official set of Christadelphian doctrines and the official Christadelphian position. However, this definition poses problems: eg, Which statement of faith? And how many Christadelphians would be left? In practice, the definition appears to be 'those who belong to Christadelphian meetings', in spite of the very large range of views held across the body of members, by individuals and meetings, on both doctrine and practice. I have addressed this apparent diversion from the Biblical definition of Christians because it seems to help us to resolve who those are who are in fellowship with God, and therefore those with whom, as Christians, we could meet, worship, pray, study, share the Lord's table, socialise ... confidently and happily.

So what is the basis and continuing 'cement' of and for Christian fellowship? Is it doctrinal (ie based on the acceptance of a *particular* set of, or interpretations of, doctrines and first principles)? Is it 'knowledge-based'? That is what I was brought up to believe (and I am sure I am not alone in that), and was tested on before baptism, but then I read II Peter 1:5: 'add goodness to your faith; to your goodness add knowledge; to your knowledge add self-control; to your self-control add endurance; to your endurance add godliness; to your godliness add brotherly affection; and to your brotherly affection add love' – a progression in which knowledge is *not* the first, a progression which describes our Christian journey and our growing as Christians, and all centred on Jesus – as Peter makes clear in this chapter. I also read again Hebrews 6:1ff: 'Let us go forward then to mature teaching and leave behind us the first lessons of the Christian message. We should not lay again the foundation of turning away from useless works and believing in God; of the teaching about baptisms and the laying on of hands (!); of the resurrection of the dead and the eternal judgement' – what a short, and interesting, list – 'Let us go forward...He will not forget the work you did or the love you showed...' The context of these verses is that milk is the basic truths and doctrines, and strong meat is the fruit of the spirit!

These thoughts seem to me to be totally supported by scriptural teaching elsewhere. The Sermon on the Mount was all about Christian living (of course as a response to God) – a big shift from what the Jews had been used to, and presumably the reason for Matt 7:28 ‘When Jesus finished saying these things, the crowd was amazed at the way he taught. He wasn’t like the teachers of the Law...’ Why not? Because he taught the meaning (the spirit?) of the law ‘Do for others what you want them to do for you: this is the meaning of the Law...’ (Matt 7:12). So what does Paul write to Timothy? ‘You have followed my teaching, my conduct, and my purpose in life; you have observed my faith, my patience, my love, my endurance... Continue in the truths that you were taught and firmly believe’ (II Tim 3:10ff), and similarly to Titus, where actions and character are the way forward – but always centred on Christ, and a response to God’s love.

So, surely the basis of our Christian fellowship is our faith and trust in God the Father and Jesus – our relationship with them, and the unifying factor is all the Christian qualities, but centred on God’s word and around Jesus, as in II John v. 9: ‘Anyone who does not stay with the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God. Whoever does stay with the teaching has both the Father and the Son.’ – and the gospels (i.e. the teaching of Christ) are much more about Christian living than a set of doctrines. I bring to mind the parable of the sheep and goats in Matt 25, and think about the criteria on which the right and left hand sides are determined! Romans 6:17 puts very clearly the position when we move into Christian fellowship: ‘But thanks be to God! For though at one time you were slaves to sin, you have obeyed with all your heart the truths found in the teaching you received.’ One cannot obey doctrinal detail, but Christ’s commands...! I hope the general drift of what I am trying to write is clear – we must all have met many Christians who seem to meet the criteria for being in fellowship with God, and therefore with us – what a joy, how encouraging, how uplifting, how liberating..., and what a relief!! We can relax in the social and spiritual company of all those Christians who put their trust in God, who genuinely have the Bible as their basis of faith, and respond in their lives to Christ’s teaching. Christian fellowship is a wonderful, positive, inclusive concept – not inclusive in the woolly, ‘anything goes’ sense, which some would want to promote in the context of ecumenicalism, but inclusive for all those who are clearly – on Biblical criteria – ‘in Christ’. I hope we can all see that as a positive end to my thoughts!

I would like to draw my article to a close with some challenging questions:

- * Are we willing to look again, with no pre-conceived notions, at Bible teaching on Christian fellowship?
- * Are we prepared to submit and respond to this teaching?
- * What are the implications, particularly for our young and our lonely people, of the Christadelphian stance on fellowship – for finding Christian friends and partners?
- * Why do we seem to promote, or at least condone, divisions between Christian believers, when this is so roundly condemned by Christ and Paul?
- * What are the implications of Biblical teaching on fellowship for our individual and group practices as Christians?
- * Do we suppress our own Biblically-based views on fellowship for fear of upsetting some – and do we confuse ‘upsetting’ with Biblical teaching on ‘giving offence’?

I have a dream (to use Martin Luther King out of context!), and a constant prayer – it is that all Bible-based, God-centred Christians (i.e. all Christians) might put divisions and exclusions behind them, and recognise that they can worship together, pray together, mix together, share the Lord’s table together. Perhaps the power of prayer, and accepting the guidance of the Holy Spirit, can move us in that direction?

Nigel Warwick

‘How readest thou?: A Question of Interpretation

We cannot read anything in the Bible, without bringing to our reading some existing perceptions. In many cases there are several possible interpretations of the text. We choose one, and having given our reasons, we then assume that we have found the truth of the matter. We may even say ‘I read it in a straightforward manner’; ‘I take things literally’, though even then we may add, ‘unless they are obvious metaphors.’

If we are careful students we may look at options and take a two-handed approach: ‘on the one hand’ but ‘on the other hand’. Those who seek certainty are uneasy with this approach. They want definite answers and they say that God has given such answers in Scripture and that salvation depends on accepting them: those who do not subscribe to these definite answers are presented as facing the danger of being outside the way of salvation.

Thus, for those who hanker after certainty, salvation tends to be by the correct (i.e. their) interpretation of the text of the Bible. So ‘incorrect interpretations’ (on matters such as whether there is an intermediate death state before the resurrection; whether there is some sense in which Jesus partakes of divinity; whether there is one definitive theology of the cross and, if so, which one; whether there is a supra-natural power of evil; in what nature we emerge at the resurrection; whether the kingdom of God is present as well as future;) on these and many other issues are made tests of fellowship, with the implication that if you get the interpretation wrong your salvation is at least in doubt.

We have to face the fact that most people have little skill in interpretation and in comparing alternative possibilities in any field; the volatility with which people vote at elections or interpret the news illustrates this. And even Christians who may eschew politics are no more skilled in weighing up evidence and so tend to accept ready-made interpretations. They may view other Christians with different interpretations as having excluded themselves from salvation and the forgiveness of God.

To support this intolerance, books have been prepared on wrested scriptures, in which quite reasonable interpretations are rubbished and a case made for one, and only one, correct interpretation. Many Christians in such denominations have a lot of heartache as they wrestle with such scriptures and worry whether they will be eternally lost if they doubt the one and only interpretation. Many a Christadelphian has been worried after they have felt that they have had the worst of an argument with an evangelical on whether Scripture teaches some kind of a personal devil.

The other tendency in fundamentalist Bible interpretation is to depend on selected verses or proof texts to offer a final verdict on ‘the Truth’, and to disregard the fact that there are texts which suggest a different answer or to fail to take into account the context. So a verse from Ecclesiastes is tossed out to prove that the dead know not anything, ignoring the fact that it goes on to say that ‘neither do they have any reward and all memory of them is forgotten, never again do they have any part in what is done under the sun.’ Similarly, John 3:13 is quoted to show that you don’t go to heaven when you die, though the plain meaning of the second part of the verse is re-interpreted, when it says ‘except the son of man who came down from heaven.’ This bandying about of texts amounts to salvation by textual tight-rope walking.

The fundamentalist use of Scripture tends to treat it as all on the same level and equally quotable, except where the New Testament specifically abrogates something in the Old. But it cannot be regarded as all on the same level. There are fundamentally different interpretations of events within the Old Testament itself. There is a considerable amount of Old Testament support for the view that disasters are the actions of a punishing God; the wicked are punished, but the righteous are not; but the other view is also presented that both the righteous and the wicked may suffer alike or even prosper. Both views sit side by side, apparently contradicting each other, or at least presenting us with a paradox. A God who repents is presented side

by side with an unchanging God. A God who suffers and grieves over his children, full of compassion and ready to forgive, is also presented as a God who is consumed with wrath and will destroy whole nations.

We need to recognise these apparent anomalies and, as we try to make sense of them, to acknowledge in humility that our attempts at harmonisation are interpretations and not final truths. And this may well seem ambiguous, uncertain and confusing, if we always expect clarity and finality in our search for truth in theory and in action.

This sense of unease is particularly evident in the way in which the Old Testament seems to say that God not only permitted genocide of Canaanites, Amalekites and others, but commanded it. Think of Israelite soldiers murdering all the screaming women and little children in Jericho, because they thought that this was what God required. Think of the story of the firstborn, in many cases totally innocent, being killed by the avenging angel and the screams of the inhabitants of the earth at the time of the flood as they tried to hang on to the highest points and were finally drowned, in the great tsunami. Visualise Moses crucifying (impaling) rebellious leaders of Israel (Numbers 25), Samuel hewing Agag in pieces, David making the Moabites lie down and killing two out of every three lines of soldiers, David killing seven members of the family of Saul, to appease the Gibeonites and to end a divinely caused famine, and other similar activities, apparently divinely approved. As far as such events are concerned, we need to ask in what sense could they be the intention of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is at such points that we have to take into account the teaching of the overall picture in the New Testament of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. While we must read the Old Testament on its own terms and in its own context, in order to identify the situations in which its perspectives appeared, we must in the end acknowledge that the foundation of all Truth lies in Christ. In 2 Timothy 3:15, we are plainly told that the Scriptures (i.e. the Old Testament) are able to make us wise unto salvation, but only through 'faith which is in Christ Jesus'. In other words, the sole basis of interpretation of the Old Testament lies in what Jesus stood for. And this is focused in the cross and resurrection; we should be determined, like Paul, to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

So the gospel is not a matter of knowing clear answers on everything in the Bible, of having the right theories (or doctrines, as the word is often used, although it actually means any teaching). Our standing with God depends on a relationship with God through faith in the Lord Jesus. Faith rightly seeks understanding, but does not depend on it; salvation is not by intellectual accuracy. To say otherwise is to add to the gospel just as much as the Judaisers did in the days of Paul. To add to the gospel is to detract from its power.

So we bring our problems of interpretation to the foot of the cross, in the light of which the Old Testament is re-interpreted as Jesus focuses in himself all that Israel should have been as the light of the world. And we are nearest to a relationship with Jesus when we do not look at the cross as a matter of getting the right theory of atonement, but we just behold the event in all its horror and splendour. We there see Jesus drawing upon himself the consequences of everything that has been and is evil in the world. Sin does its worst; it is exposed for what it is; it is battered to death against the love of God in Christ. God's strength is made perfect in weakness; the foolishness of the cross shows up all the violence, hatred, greed, scheming, antagonism of the human race and, in submitting to its worst actions against the only fully righteous man, the Son of God gained the victory over the 'works of the devil'. And, importantly, he gained this victory over sin, by persuasive and non-coercive means.

A new platform was provided upon which the house of God could be erected, beginning from the death and resurrection of Jesus and continuing till God shall be all in all. We don't need a theory about how this was accomplished. It just was, and its influence reaches out to grasp us and will ultimately grasp the whole of humanity. It is the cross which will do this, not a military victory by a vengeance-wreaking Jesus and his saints. Just how this victory will be gained is not clear in detail, but that this final consummation will be based on the cross is beyond doubt. There are many facets to behold in the cross, but it sheds its light by absorbing us into its power. It has inaugurated and will consummate all that believers have lived by. The cross gives God's verdict on sin and releases the remedy and the forgiveness which is its channel.

And it was God who was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. We miss much if we do not see the unity of the Father and the Son, by the Holy Spirit, in the sufferings of the Son. God suffered too; God was in the remedy for the evil that had marred his creation. So deep was the identity of the Father and the Son that what the one suffered, the other suffered too. To adapt a human saying 'two hearts beat as one'. A deep truth lies in 'I and my Father are one'. God is not isolated from his creation. He is not getting Jesus to do a work in which he is not involved. Some interpretations of scripture which might be labelled Trinitarian may be trying to say just that. If we follow a theory of atonement which separates the Father and the Son we are missing some of the power of the cross. We can hardly grasp such unity, but it is the key to knowing God in Jesus.

And from that standpoint we have to read all scripture and accept the New Testament re-evaluation of the Old. 2 Tim 3:16 still stands; all scripture is given by inspiration of God to be profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be equipped for good work of every kind. It is not inspired by God to give an unerring statement about every subject in the realm of knowledge. The profitability referred to lies in engagement with the text, in recognising human perspectives, such as attributing genocide to the will of God, as well as the truths, such as the omnipotent God who yet suffers. We are invited to enter into dialogue with this library of writings, composed by humans with all the inevitable room for misunderstanding in human words. We are led to reflect and to bring everything to the cross of our Lord Jesus as the basis of understanding what is to be received as direct guidance and to turn from any understanding which is out of harmony with the cross. Thus God works through all scripture – its human ambiguities as well as the brilliance of the divine glory.

Beneath the picture in Scripture, shining beyond possibility of misunderstanding, there is the undeniable underlying truth that God has made a covenant with the human race, focused in Israel, who failed, and then focused in his Son. When allowance has been made for any failings in human understanding, the covenant remains firm and ultimately triumphant through the blood of the Lamb.

The details of the covenant are often transformed in the light of Christ. The hopes of military conquest, the Israelite nationalism of the Old Testament and the restoration of animal sacrifices are transfigured in the New, as the many re-applications of Old Testament texts in the New reveal. We cannot take these Old Testament Kingdom passages and assume that Jesus was essentially reiterating them in his teaching about the Kingdom of God. We should then be left with an Old Covenant gospel, but it has been fulfilled in unexpected ways in Christ. The cross is the centre point of the Kingdom of God. On it all our hopes and deeds should be founded. We search the scriptures; we enter into dialogue with the various threads, some of which may seem ambiguous to us, and as we do so we shall grow up to maturity in Christ Jesus.

Crescens

Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully

as when they do it from religious conviction.

Blaise Pascal Genesis 1- 11

Les Boddy's article *The Agenda of Genesis 1* (E116 pp 35-39) reminded me of the writings of the late G.A.F. Knight (Professor of Old Testament at Otago University, N.Z.). He was a prolific writer and Les has called attention to his small paperback book *Theology in Pictures – A commentary on Genesis 1-11*.¹ A few copies are still available at Pendleburys Bookshop in London. The commentary has neither index of Biblical passages nor index of Hebrew words, but this proves to be of no major handicap for the 123 page commentary follows the chapters and verses of our English Bible.

It is replete with thoughts which bring fresh insights into the meaning of the early chapters of Genesis. In particular, his exposition of the creation accounts shows how unnecessary have been the disputes among Christians in general and within Christadelphianism in particular. For example, I believe it is wrong to see in the Bible the seven days of 'creation' as a reference to the seven ages of man as expounded in some Christadelphian writings, with often an attempt to show that Jesus will return approximately 6000 years after the creation of man, 4004 BC according to Usher's chronology.

Many Christadelphians are 'fascinated' by numbers; especially those of us who have studied and taught mathematics. Thus, in our literature, the assumption is often made that man was created some 6,000 years ago. However, Knight says that 'we are not even to compromise with science by quoting the words of the Psalmist: "For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past" for the Psalm too is speaking in poetic figures.'² With this in mind, there seems to be no need for expounding the so-called 'gap theory' which seeks to harmonise the geological ages with the Genesis narrative.

In a short review, there is insufficient space to say in depth all that could be said. In sum 'Genesis 1-11 is a tract for the times, challenging ancient assumptions about the nature of God, the world of mankind.'³ It was relevant at the time when it was written, and it is just as applicable as revelation in this century, but only when it is read with an understanding of its historical and cultural background.

Unlike the surrounding nations, 'the God of Israel has no mythology'⁴. What, then, is meant by the term 'mythology'? This word is often misunderstood. 'Few terms in contemporary theological discourse are as open to misunderstanding. One reason for this is that in most of the ordinary uses 'myth' continues to mean something purely fictitious or imaginary.'⁵ The term 'myth' has endured a confused perception in recent years. For a study of mythology in the Ancient Near East see a recent book by Nick Wyatt.⁶ When considering mythology in its Ancient Near Eastern context, Wilfred Lambert wrote that 'it may be defined as primitive man's attempt to come to grips with the natural forces around him. ... Thus myth embraces primitive man's science, religion and philosophy. It is his attempt to understand the world of nature.'⁷

In his introduction Professor Knight notes that Israel, like the other nations of the Ancient Near East, 'wondered about the origin of the earth, the meaning of human life, the reality that man is subject to frustration and death. ... However, Israel was the only people of the ancient world that ever successfully de-mythed the myth.'⁸ Knight believes that in the early chapters of Genesis *ultimate reality was expressed in pictures*. He sees therein no attempt to report scientific fact. Moreover 'it is thus still a great hindrance to the spread of the Gospel when earnest men and women insist that "the first chapter of Genesis conforms with science".' The further comment is made that 'Jesus makes no criticism, however, of the early chapters of Genesis. It is evident that he regarded them as nothing less than Revelation. So we in our turn give thanks to God that this revelation is given to us in picture language.'¹⁰

With this methodology of revelation in pictures, which Knight uses in his commentary, let us select some of his exegesis which I have found, and hopefully others will find, helpful but not contentious.

'When God began to create the heavens and the earth' [RSV footnote] ... 'offers a translation that is both more accurate and theologically sound' [than that of the AV].¹¹ Wilfred gives further details why this is so in his booklet *Creation*, pages 3 and 4. Knight also notes that the idea of creation out of nothing (ex nihilo) does not appear anywhere in the canonical books of the Old Testament.¹² It is out of 'waste' not out of 'nothing' that with His spirit (rather than by a mighty wind) God creates order out of chaos.

The words of Genesis 1:26 in the AV are well known to us: 'And God said let us make **man** (*adam*) in our image, after our likeness...' However, the NRSV translates this Hebrew word *adam* as 'humankind.' Why should this be so? Man is not merely an individual. *Ad(h)am* is both singular and plural at the same time. As Knight states; 'Each of the two sexes merely represents Man, one malely, one femalely.'¹³ Adam is both singular and plural at the same time. In his discussion of the creation of man, Wilfred Lambert notes that 'when the first man was created in Genesis 2 he was given no name. He is referred to throughout the narrative with the definite article: *ha adam*, the man.'¹⁴ Wilfred continues to show how the AV is inconsistent in its translation using 'Adam' and 'the man' interchangeably.

I believe that it is not necessary to take the 'fall' as an historical account of the disobedience of the first individual man and woman. With this interpretation, there is no need for arguments whether 'man' was created mortal or immortal. The major lesson for us is 'Man is flesh (formed from the ground *adamah*) with all the possibilities of desire, of knowledge, of failure, of error, to which human flesh is heir.'¹⁵

A consideration of Christadelphian history reveals that a cause of major dispute has been the doctrine of 'sin in the flesh.' But sin is not an element which exists in our bodies. It is something we do because of our human, or fleshly, nature. In his section concerning man's rebellion against God, George Knight writes; 'Quite rightly the secularist rejects the notion that this chapter (Genesis 3) deals with the birth of human sin. The word 'sin' does not occur here at all... Sin is not a 'thing' that can be described by a noun. Sin is always an activity. Sin is something that man *does*.'¹⁶ Reference to the usage of this word shows various ideas such as (a) deviating from the right way or missing the mark, and (b) rebelling against a superior or unfaithfulness to an agreement. As we are told in Romans 2:23 'All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.'

There has been much discussion by Biblical scholars, and by Christadelphians, about the meaning of the terms 'image and likeness'. It is often said by some in our community that we are made in the image of the angels. This does not really answer the

question, but merely shifts the question back a further stage.

Some believe that the image consists of physical resemblance as in the way that Seth was found to be in the image of Adam. We use the phrase ‘spitting image’ today to show a close physical likeness between members of a family. Those who believe that man in some way has a physical resemblance to God fail to understand that God uses human language as the means of revelation; the description of God in human terms is technically known as anthropomorphism and anthropopathism.

Others interpret these words as having distinct meanings, depicting different parts of our ‘make-up’, with the image being applicable to our natural qualities (such as intelligence and the ability to reason) that make us resemble God, while the likeness is applied to ethical or moral aspects of our being.

Knight sees ‘image and likeness’ giving a double emphasis in the same way that ‘without form and void’ do. ‘It does not appear that ‘image’ means that man is made to look like God. Rather man is made *to do what God does*.¹⁷ We may also find the image applicable to those mental and spiritual qualities that we share with God; reason, self-will and intelligence, or of seeing how the image makes man God’s representative on earth. Certainly, the image gives man – unlike the animals – the capacity to relate to God, to enter into communion with Him.

Much more could be said about the early chapters of Genesis. How sad it is that they have been the cause of much discord and division within our community, causing so many to leave either forcibly or voluntarily.

Perhaps there can be no more fitting conclusion to this article than to quote Wilfred Lambert when he says that the truths which emerge from the early chapters of the book of Genesis are:

‘The universe, the earth and the human race did not arise by chance or accident, but by the express will and purpose of God.

Man is the cream of God’s creation on earth, alone able to interact with God on a spiritual level.

Moral evil exists because God created man with free will, which allows a choice between moral good and bad, and bad was chosen.’¹⁸

John Stephenson

References

1 *Theology in Pictures* George A.F. Knight, Handsel Press, 1981.

2 *Ibid* p 10.

3 *Word Biblical Commentary Genesis 1-15* Gordon J Wenham, Word Books, 1987, p xlv.

4 *The Old Testament Against its Environment* G. Ernest Wright, SCM Press, 1954, p 26.

5 Schubert M. Ogden in *A New Christian Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson & John Bowden, SCM Press, 1983, p 389.

6 *The Mythic Mind* Nick Wyatt, Equinox, 2005, pp 150-188.

7 *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* 40, 1988, pp 124-125.

8 Knight p xii

9 *Ibid* p x

10 *Ibid* p xiii

11 *Ibid* p 1

12 *Ibid* p 2.

13 *Ibid* p 17.

14 *Creation* 1998 pp 7-8.

15 Knight p 23.

16 *Ibid* p 35.

17 *Ibid* p 16.

18 *Creation* p 12.

The simplest sights he met,
The sower flinging seed on loam and rock;
The darnel in the wheat; the mustard tree
That hath its seed so little, and its boughs
Wide-spreading; and the wandering sheep; the nets
Shot in the wimpled waters – drawing forth
Great fish and small – these, and a hundred such
Seen by us daily, yet never seen aright,
Were pictures for Him from the book of Life,
Teaching by parable.

Author Unknown.

Building a library: Non-Christadelphian writers

This is the heading of an article in the Christadelphian for April 2007. The first sentence could be considered rather patronising as it declares: ‘A lot of useful work has been done by Bible students who have understood some aspects of the purpose of God, without having had a full perception of everything we are privileged to understand.’ Does this exemplify the humility expressed in words such as ‘now we see through a glass darkly’ and ‘who hath known the mind of the Lord’?

However, the writer of the article recognises that these authors might be helpful, perhaps by their style or their digging out of ‘interesting details and facts’, rather than for their discussion of fundamental issues of faith and practice. Just two authors are mentioned, William Barclay and F. F. Bruce, but none who stimulate thought at a more profound level. Even these commendations are followed by a health warning ‘to read with discrimination’, as, of course, we should with any author, whether

outside or within the brotherhood.

Over the years, I have had many commendations of books that brothers and sisters have found helpful and some have been reviewed in the pages of Endeavour. Also when we meet one another we often share the benefit we have gained from certain books. I thought it might be useful to comment on a few that have been recommended to me. A list that I have gathered follows with a note on each, based on comments from those who have recommended them. Then perhaps other readers would like to write in about books that have helped them in their walk in Christ.

***The Language and Imagery of the Bible* by G B Caird**

Duckworth, London, 2nd impression 1988

G B Caird was Dean Ireland's Professor of Exegesis of Holy Scripture in Oxford University for many years and was widely influential on the way many scholars approach scripture.

He shows how the Bible is written in words and how to understand the use made of those words. He gives five uses we make of words: to talk about people, things and ideas; to think (talk to ourselves); to get things done; to show attitudes and feelings; to develop communal cohesion. These are examined with examples from scripture of each.

He spends time showing how words can have related meaning, but a different slant, which can explain what the writer is seeking to say; also how words can change their meaning. How ambiguity arises, how translation affects meaning and how idioms are used, all receive illuminating treatment. Metaphor comes in for frequent treatment and, with it, how to determine which statements are literal and which are not. These considerations help us to interpret the plentiful poetry in the Bible. This book has for many been a significant guide to the reading and interpretation of scripture. The scribe who really studies the book will be able 'to bring out of his treasures' many 'things new and old'.

***The Christlike God* by John V Taylor**

SCM Press, London, 1992

J V Taylor was Bishop of Winchester. The book takes its title from a profound remark by Archbishop Michael Ramsey: 'God is Christlike and in him is no un-Christlikeness at all'. Bishop Taylor's main theme is that Jesus is the reflection in a human life of the being of God. He traces this Christlike God through the Bible and brings out the cost and the riches of worshipping and following him. Creation, providence, love, power and prayer are among the themes discussed, in the process answering many difficulties we may experience about prayer and how God answers it. J V Taylor says himself: 'to call him the Christlike God is the supremest truth we can learn about his nature and it certainly does not reduce him to our human scale or fit him into the small grasp of our finite apprehension.'

Tom Wright's works

Mainly published by the SPCK, London

I have to use this heading, because it is a job to pick one book; they are all so good. For Christadelphians there are many points of contact with this author, now Bishop of Durham, who writes his more professional books and articles as N T Wright. His series on *The New Testament for Everyone* (2003-2006) is for the general reader, yet make profound issues seem simple. In each volume of this series he provides a glossary which corrects many traditional misperceptions. For example "Entering the kingdom of heaven" does not mean "going to heaven after death", but belonging in the present to the people who steer their earthly course by the standards and purposes of heaven and who are assured of membership in the age to come.' He defines heaven as 'God's dimension of the created order'. On Resurrection here, and in his large tome on the subject (2003), he sees it as the real hope of the faithful, not going to heaven at death: 'In most biblical thought, human bodies matter and are not merely prisons for the soul...the early Christians believed that they themselves would be raised to a new, transformed bodily life at the time of the Lord's return.'

In one of his other longer books: *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996) he powerfully sets Jesus in the context of what Dr Thomas called 'the last days of Judah's commonwealth'. Christadelphians will be pleased with His treatment of the covenants of promise, hell, the Satan, to name but a few. But his positive expositions of the Righteousness of God in *What Saint Paul really said* are for some the high point of his writing. His treatment of Romans in the New Interpreter's Bible is masterly (2002). (Incidentally some think this 12 volume commentary on the whole of the Bible is one of the best, with each part of the exposition accompanied by a spiritual reflection on the text, which is required to be written by the commentator. This prevents them from coming across as just academic theologians. The series was published in the 1990's and on into the 21st century.)

Nearly all Tom Wright's books pay special attention to the way in which the Old Testament expectations were re-interpreted by Jesus and the Apostles.

***The Human Face of God* by John A T Robinson**

SCM Press, London, 1973

Dr Robinson was Bishop of Woolwich and later Dean of Chapel at Trinity College, Cambridge, and famous for stirring things up with his book *Honest to God*, but who wrote many thoughtful Biblical expositions such as *The Body*.

We do not read a book like *The Human Face of God* merely to be confirmed in our present beliefs about God, whether we are believers in some form of the Trinity, Unitarians or Christadelphian believers in 'God Manifestation'. We read to be challenged and to think through the basis of our beliefs and be strengthened thereby in a better understanding of what we believe.

Some Trinitarian believers would find some views in the book make them uncomfortable, as when he expresses the view that Jesus of Nazareth had no conscious pre-existence before he was born and that he was truly human, and subject to development of understanding. He defines the LOGOS as the 'self expressive activity of God' and says that this in Jesus would not interfere with his real humanity. He rejects the idea that Jesus was a divine person who assumed human nature without assuming human personality.

As one reads one becomes aware of the variety of interpretations of God given by different perspectives on the Trinity. His own view is that the way in which God comes down in Jesus is not spatial or biological, but spiritual and in action. There will be much to agree with and much to dispute in this book, but read, with Bible in hand and a prayerful willingness to understand, one cannot but benefit from the spiritual search.

***Past event and present salvation* by Paul S Fiddes**

Darton, Longman and Todd London 1989, 1993.

At the time of writing this book, Paul Fiddes was Principal of Regent's Park College, Oxford and a minister in the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

It is sometimes said that the cross is to be viewed as if it were in the centre of a circular building and we went round looking at

the crucified Christ through differently positioned and diversely coloured windows and seeing a different aspect through each. There is no one coherent theory of atonement presented in the New Testament, but a number of emphases which meet our needs at different stages of our pilgrimage.

Paul Fiddes examines a number of such perspectives on the atonement, showing how they harmonise and sometimes conflict, yet even in the latter case showing what even those he sees as inadequate interpretations were seeking to express. The aim of any doctrine of the atonement is seeking to understand how the relationship between God and human beings can be restored. So the author examines the simple substitution view, the more complex penal substitution view, the representation view, which would be nearer the Christadelphian traditional view, the exemplary view, the transformational view (Abelard) and the Victory (Christus Victor) view. He shows which of them most emphasise the love of God in the sacrifice of Christ for forgiveness of sins. One finds that there are aspects of some of them that can be combined in one's own thought with a deepening of closeness to God in Christ. Above all, the book has the effect of moving atonement from a theory to a living active force in one's life.

***Forgiveness and Reconciliation* by CFD Moule
SPCK, London 1998**

Charlie Moule, as he is affectionately called by many Biblical scholars whom he has mentored, is the grand old man of fairly conservative Bible study, for many years Lady Margaret Professor of New Testament Studies in Cambridge University. When an informant checked recently he was still busy, in his nineties, writing letters and encouraging others.

This book is a collection of essays he has written over the years on the central Christian theme of forgiveness and reconciliation and other related themes. There emerges on every page a spirit of devout humility which weaves a spell over the reader. Forgiveness is costly and 'is only possible for one who is sensitive enough to feel pain at being wronged'. 'Equally, if one is genuinely to repent, one must begin to suffer in sympathy with the person one has wronged.' Viewpoints on Calvary are discussed, speaking of 'the obedience Jesus injected into the total organism of mankind'.

He rejects as an immoral story, the idea of 'an angry God accepting by way of propitiation the sacrifice of an innocent victim in lieu of the guilty.' In language unusually strong for him, he calls this a 'pernicious travesty of the gospel'. The reader may be led to modify the way in which the meaning of the death of Christ is sometimes presented within our own community. Jesus 'absorbed the wrong' done against him and the Father, 'instead of retaliating'. 'Grace is God's expenditure of generous forgiveness and faith is that costly response which is repentance.'

It is seen as incompatible with the sacrifice of Christ to believe that the fullness of the kingdom of God will come by coercion. Challenging interpretations are offered of the blood bath of Rev 14:20 as possibly referring to the blood of the lamb, not of the opponents. 'Love wins not by winning a victory over the other, but winning the other over!!' The preference for restorative justice over retributive justice is seen as the only realistic way to treat offenders.

There is only room for this sample of Moule's writing, but there is much more of the same quality in this book which will deepen one's appreciation of how 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself' and direct one's behaviour into the mode of reconciliation in all one's relationships.

***The Moral Vision of the New Testament* by Richard B Hays
T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1997**

This is probably the most comprehensive existing exposition of scripture teaching on how we should behave in our lives, individually and collectively. Although recognising that there are diverse points of view in scripture and diverse approaches to interpreting scripture, Hays believes we cannot stay neutral just because there are loose ends that need tying up.

Part one of his book is an exhilarating excursion through the whole of the New Testament, in which he attempts to do justice to the variety of emphases that different inspired writers provide. Jesus is seen as 'the Messiah who by the power of the Spirit will create a restored Israel in which justice and compassion for the poor will prevail.' His section on the book of Revelation is especially challenging in view of its apparent violence which is difficult to harmonise with the cross. He points out that in Rev 19:13, the rider's robe is dipped in blood before the battle – he sees this as a reference to the shedding of Christ's blood as the basis of a transformed world.

In part Two he discusses exegetical methods and in part three the interpretative (hermeneutic) strategies of five writers on ethics: Reinhold Niebuhr, Karl Barth, John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas and Elizabeth Fiorenza. Yoder, Hauerwas and Hays himself are all committed pacifists, yet the book is widely acclaimed by scholars and teachers of various perspectives.

Part Four tackles five specific ethical issues in some detail and with refreshing directness, accompanied by compassion: violence in defence of justice, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, anti-Judaism and ethnic conflict, abortion. In all cases he gives both sides of the matter as he works his way to a definite but sympathetic conclusion. It will be hard to find a more comprehensive assessment of New Testament teaching on how we should behave and how we should discuss such concerns, with determination to seek and do the will of God, while recognising the problems involved.

Other books

I certainly would be interested to read comments on books that have helped other readers in their Christian journey. We should not fear to read well-reasoned views that might challenge our own; and it is apparent that we are not alone in the capacity for offering biblically based thoughts on Christian faith and practice. It was the Roman Catholic Church which for centuries had an index of books the faithful should not read, lest they be contaminated. At a time when even they have moved from that position we should not get stuck in it.

Alfred Ward

What is Offence?

Whoever shall offend one of these little ones that believes in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. Jesus.

Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend. Paul.

The gravity of the crime of 'offence' needs no underlining after these quotations. But the nature of the fault is often missed, and especially by those who only read the Authorised Version and make no study of the meanings of words. . . . 'Offence' is particularly liable to misunderstanding because in the Bible it has two quite distinct senses, of which only one is in ordinary use at the present time. The tendency is to understand all passages in the modern sense, an error of tremendous implications as it is the now obsolete sense against which Jesus and Paul spoke.

'Offend' today is to provoke to anger, to irritate profoundly, to shock. A biblical example of this occurs in John 6:61. Jesus

had told His hearers that His flesh was meat and His blood drink, and that to attain life they must partake of these elements. Being Jews they were horrified at the suggestion of drinking blood especially, so Jesus asked, 'Doth this offend you?...'. They were shocked. . . .

It is easy to transfer this both biblical and modern sense of 'offend' as 'shock' or 'anger' to I Corinthians 8, from which the second passage at the head of this article is quoted. Paul is discussing the question of eating food which had first been dedicated in a nominal way to a pagan god, but was then sold through the market like any other food. Some, he says, are so sure that pagan gods are nothing that they can eat food of this kind without any moral harm. Others have more tender consciences and prefer to avoid it because of its associations. The danger, Paul continues, is that the strong may by their own example put social pressure on the weak to eat this dedicated food, and the weak will do so, but still feel that it is wrong. The point is not that the weak brother is shocked to observe the strong brother eat, but that he himself is encouraged to do what inwardly he feels to be wrong, and thereby condemns himself and commits sin. Paul does not say, 'lest I offend (i.e. shock) my brother,' but 'lest I make my brother to offend,' i.e. make him sin.

This other scriptural sense therefore of 'offend,' which is not current today, is 'make to sin,' either by encouraging the doing of wrong, or by driving away from faith in Christ. . . .

Wilfred Lambert

Extracts from an article in E24, Summer 1967.

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