

Neither do men light a candle,  
and put it under a bushel,  
but on a candlestick;  
and it giveth light  
unto all that are in the house.

# Endeavour

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### Jesus and 'the powers that be'

Luke gives us a lot of information about those in power in the Middle East at the time of Jesus. It was clearly important to him to make his readers aware of the circumstances surrounding the events leading up to the showdown between Jesus and those who sent him to the cross. In this respect, he is no different from the other gospel writers, who all make it clear that the significance of the cross is of central importance to the Christian gospel.

In writing his account for Theophilus, Luke first makes mention of Herod (the Great) as king of Judea in 1:5, when he refers to the beginning of the gospel story in the announcement of the forthcoming birth of John the Baptist. We know from Matthew that Herod was very zealous and was prepared to resort to wholesale murder to fend off a possible threat when he heard that some thought that a new king had been born. The same Herod had a reputation for having family members, who he perceived as threats, killed off. Here was a kingship, a kingdom, that was maintained by the constant threat of the sword.

In 2:1, Luke refers to Caesar Augustus, the figurehead of the Roman power at the time of the birth of Jesus. Augustus (previously known as Octavius, then Octavian, before taking the name Augustus in 27 BC) was the adopted son of Julius Caesar, something we should never forget, as August follows July in our calendar. (It was Julius who standardized a 365 day year with an extra day inserted on leap years.) He got involved in a bloody war of succession on the death of Julius. The last of the other claimants to be destroyed was Mark Antony who, when he was defeated at Actium in 31 BC, then committed suicide. This left the way clear for Augustus to take the reins of the Roman Republic. It was under Augustus that the Republic became an Empire. As with Herod, this was a power which maintained its dominance by the edge of the sword or by crucifixion.

Augustus went on to declare his adoptive father Julius to be divine. Not only so, but Augustus referred to himself as 'son of god' and others spoke of him as 'saviour' of the world, its king and lord. As time went by, in the eastern part of the empire, some began to worship him too as a god. He reigned from 28 BC to 14 AD, and Herod the Great, made king of Judea by the Romans, reigned from 37 BC to 3 BC.

Herod the Great was succeeded by his sons Herod Antipas, Philip and Archelaus. With the agreement of Augustus, the latter was given Judea, Samaria and Idumea, Antipas was given Galilee and Peraea, while Philip was given the north-eastern territories. Archelaus was promised kingship if he proved to be a worthy successor to his father but he lost favour with Rome, by his ineptitude, cruelty and injustice, and so he was banished and Judea was placed under direct Roman rule in AD 6. Augustus died in AD 14 and was replaced by Tiberius who made Valerius Gratus prefect of Judea. Gratus remained in office until AD 26 when he was replaced by Pontius Pilate.

In 3:1, Luke tells us that it was in the 15th year of the rule of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod [Antipas] was ruler of Galilee and his brother Philip ruler of the territory of Iturea and Trachonitis, that John, the son of Zechariah went throughout the whole territory of the Jordan river inviting Jews to turn from their sins and be baptized whereupon God would forgive them their sins. Luke also notes in verse 2 that Annas and Caiaphas were high priests and in so doing he has named nearly all those in power in the Middle East at the time of Jesus' ministry. The Romans, the Herodians and the Jewish factions were all jostling for positions in the politics of the time.

The Herodians supported the claims of Herod Antipas to be the true king of the Jews. Although the Pharisees did not have much respect for Herod they were prepared, when confronted by Jesus, to make common cause with the Herodians and seek to kill Jesus (Mk 3:6). Ironically, Luke records that some Pharisees warned Jesus that Herod wanted to kill him (13:31).

In contrast to all of this come John the Baptist and Jesus both challenging the current state of affairs. What was the major issue? There can be little doubt that it was kingship. Jews were expecting God to do something about their circumstances which would free them from the yoke of Rome and from Gentile oppression. They were looking for the kingdom of God and the promised Messiah who would put all things right. But the coming of John and Jesus were perceived by those in power as challenging the status quo and to be resisted at all costs.

Most, if not all the characters involved in the power struggles in Palestine at the time of the crucifixion are to be found in chapters 22 & 23 of Luke's Gospel. The chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, the elders, the High Priest, the Council. 'Are you the Messiah?' Jesus was asked (22:67) confirming that kingship was the issue at stake. Pontius Pilate and Herod get involved too, for obvious reasons, for any other claim to kingship was bound to concern them. Herod, although so far he had not met Jesus, had nevertheless previously shown his hand against him. Before Pilate, Jesus is openly accused of claiming to be Christ, a king - kingship is the issue - but also of misleading the people by telling them not to pay taxes to the Emperor. The latter charge was nothing less than a lie, but no doubt Jesus' accusers would have said that they had some grounds for saying so.

Much to Herod's delight, he gets the opportunity to meet Jesus face to face. Here we have the present king of the Jews, the representative of the political lord of the world, who would love to be openly and fully acknowledged as the promised Messiah, face to face with the real king of the Jews, the true Lord of the world. Jesus says and does nothing, but nevertheless thereby makes a statement. His royalty is there to be seen by those who have eyes to see it. Unlike Moses at the exodus, he performs no signs or wonders (no doubt to the disappointment of Herod) and does not engage in threats. His kingship is of a gentler kind. Luke has presented us with a sequence of scenes which he hopes will convince his readers of the truth of Jesus' kingship and the falsehood of all other forms of kingship. Previously enemies, Pilate, the Gentile ruler, and Herod, the Jewish king, suddenly, in the presence of Jesus, now become friends, perhaps a foretaste of the reconciliation that Jesus is to accomplish on the cross.

Barabbas and Simon of Cyrene have their parts to play in Luke's attempt to tell us what Jesus might mean to us. Jesus predicted that he would be reckoned with the lawless (22:37); he always seemed to mix with the wrong people (19:7). Now he is to die the death reserved for violent rebels and runaway slaves. He is to die and Barabbas to go free. Jesus in a sense comes to take our place, charged with sins that he has not committed but others have. He shares the sinner's fate and in a sense substitutes for it. Once we realize what Jesus has done for us, the call comes to us too to take up the cross and follow him. Simon of Cyrene then can become a model for the Christian life, although he was conscripted to carry the cross of Jesus. We are to tread behind Jesus on the road of humility, pain and death as an expression of our devotion to him.

On the way to the cross, Jesus was followed by a large crowd (23:27) including women who were weeping and wailing for him. Jesus has some enigmatic words for them. It has always been usual for women to count having children to be a blessing and many women have found it hard to live with the stigma of not bearing children. But in this case, Jesus has a beatitude for these women that turns all that upside down: 'Blessed', he says, 'are those who have not borne children!' He follows that up with warnings of catastrophe to come and again has an enigmatic saying for them: 'For if such things as these are done when the wood is green, what will it be like when it is dry!' What could Jesus have meant?

Well we all know that dry, dead wood is good for tinder, as it burns readily whereas young, fresh, green wood does not. Jesus is asking the women, and any others who will listen, to think carefully about what is happening before their eyes and to be warned that there is likely to be worse to come. He has been tried and, although Pilate and Herod could find nothing worthy of death against him, he has nevertheless been sent to the cross, while what we would call a terrorist has been released. So he tells the women not to wait for him but to prepare for the time when it may well be their own zealous sons, who have not listened to Jesus' warnings and words of peace, who are sent to the cross. Jesus is no doubt presenting himself as the green wood who came with a mission of peace and repentance and a message about God's reconciling kingdom bringing and offering new life, as green wood does. He is asking them to consider that if the Romans will crucify him, the Prince of Peace, although he is guiltless, what they will undoubtedly do to genuine terrorists when they take to arms to force the kingdom to come. The zealots are the dry wood, dead, with no prospect of new life in it. Jesus is suggesting that this is where the Jerusalem that he loves, and has tried to advise and save, is heading. In the event, Jerusalem was not only sacked but fired as well.

Jesus had warned Jerusalem and its inhabitants of woes to come if they refused to listen to his message from God (13:1-5). Now he is baring the sins of the many. He is intent on suffering Israel's fate on her behalf, trying to save Israel from herself. He was mocked in 23:11,12 by Herod and his soldiers, mocked as king of the Jews. (He has further mockery to endure in verses 35-39 from Jewish leaders and Pilate's soldiers, as well as from the two who were crucified with him.) Having held his peace through all of this, in verse 34, he breaks his silence to speak from the cross: 'Father forgive them! They don't know what they are doing.' These words are only recorded by Luke and make it clear that forgiveness is at the heart of Jesus' message, the heart of what the cross stands for. He had taught his disciples to pray for forgiveness and to forgive others as they had been forgiven. In Matthew's longer version of the Lord's prayer, reference to forgiveness is followed by 'and bring us not into temptation but deliver us from evil'. Forgiveness and deliverance from evil are closely connected.

It is easy to think that requesting deliverance from evil is asking God not to let bad things happen to us, not to let us suffer. But if the cross is a demonstration of God's love for us, it is showing that love involves suffering. The cross was not just Jesus suffering but God was involved too. To deliver someone, is to set them free from captivity, for example, or from oppression. Being delivered from evil is being freed from evil, that is not being at evil's beck and call, not using the methods of evil to achieve our own ends. In coming into Christ, we have to change allegiance from serving evil to serving our Lord, the Prince of Peace and Love. We have to learn not to be tempted to fall back into the service of the old master. When we experience evil in our lives, the way to be delivered from evil is forgiveness, of others and of ourselves. This does not mean

going soft on evil. Evil needs to be recognised for what it is, needs to be challenged and dealt with. The best teacher of all this is of course Jesus himself, who challenged evil throughout his life. When he shared the Last Supper with his disciples and offered them the cup Luke has: 'This cup is God's new covenant sealed with my blood, which is poured out for you' (22:20). Matthew has: 'This is my blood, which seals God's covenant, my blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (26:28). It is forgiveness of sins that should deliver us from evil. Let us seek to make that a reality in our lives. Will we serve Jesus in the kingdom of God that he inaugurated on the cross or follow the kingdoms of this world?

Jesus' final words to his disciples include the following:  
'This is what is written: the Messiah must suffer and must rise from death three days later, and in his name the message about repentance and the forgiveness of sins must be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And I myself will send you what my Father has promised. But you must wait until the power from above comes down upon you' (Luke 24:45-47).

Les Boddy

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#### **Writing and Books in the Purpose of God**

Christianity as a religion is now based on a book: the Bible. This aspect it inherited from Judaism, which, in the time of Christ, rested on books – in Hebrew with a little Aramaic – which were authoritative, the only then available source of God's revelation to man. Slowly the New Testament in Greek was written by a variety of authors and, after a few centuries, its constituent parts were acknowledged and became canonical, i.e. authoritative. Other religions are also religions of a book, Islam and the Quran in particular, but Judaism and Christianity were a power in the world out of which Islam arose and were certainly a factor in its content. To be significant to the spread of the Gospel, writing had to be within the grasp of ordinary people, not a learned profession, and to be useful, written matter had to be not too large and heavy.

Thus writing and books have a prime importance in our faith and a brief inquiry into their origins can be illuminating. Israel as a nation came into being toward the end of the second millennium BC, when they settled in the Promised Land. There were at this time two long established writing systems in use in the ancient Near East: Egyptian hieroglyphs on stone and the simplified hieratic on papyrus and other media, and Babylonian cuneiform (signs made up of wedge shapes) on clay tablets, rarely on other media. The origins of the Hebrews had more association with Mesopotamia than with Egypt (the Tigris and Euphrates in the Garden of Eden, and the tower of Babel (Babylon)), and the present writer has expertise in cuneiform but not hieroglyphs, so a brief description of the cuneiform system will be given to make a point valid for both systems.

Cuneiform writing began some 3200 BC, in the lower part of the Tigris-Euphrates valley – ancient Sumer—with designs scratched on clay tablets. Some of the designs are clearly pictograms: a sketch of a fish means 'fish.', of a human head means 'head', of a particular animal's head means that animal, etc. Others are uncertain as to what the ancient scribes intended, though their meanings can often be made out from later uses.

Very rapidly some 700 different signs, apart from numerals, were created, and were used for administrative documents and for ordered lists of signs for the scribes' own use. By about 2500 BC the Sumerian writing system was fully developed and is now largely understood. The original linear pictograms were now reduced to groups of wedges for easy writing on clay. Signs were still used for the thing originally depicted or implied. For example, the original sketch of a human foot and its later groups of wedges meant 'go' or 'stand', but curiously not 'foot'. An important innovation by this time was use of signs not only for the thing or concept depicted, but also for the sound made when used in any part of the language. It is as if in English a drawing of a honey bee served also for the verb 'be' or the syllable 'be' in longer words. Many Sumerian words had one syllable only, so the signs for them could easily become a means of writing the whole language. Also some words consisted of one vowel only: a 'water' for example. Thus the Sumerians had signs for whole words, signs for syllables (ba, be, bi, bu, etc.) and signs for vowels (a, i, e, u), but no signs for consonants (b, d, g, etc.) because consonants cannot be pronounced by themselves. Tradition was strong among the scribes and this system remained a very mixed system to the end. And clay remained the normal writing material.

The Semites in Mesopotamia and Syria/Palestine took over the Sumerian writing system and modified it a little, but kept the complexity of signs for whole words, signs for syllables and signs for vowels. After c. 2000 BC Babylonian and Assyrian were the main dialects in Mesopotamia, and they are closely related to Biblical Hebrew.

In ancient Egypt an equally complex writing system arose, though they did in time devise a simple system for writing foreign names, but that never supplanted the traditional complexities for the Egyptian language.

The alphabet was an invention of genius, because the whole of human speech can be written down with 30 or less signs. It came about when some person perceived that consonants can be isolated in the human mind though in speech they cannot be pronounced by themselves. Serious students of singing know that they can practise singing vowels, but not consonants. The exact time and place of this momentous discovery, which happened only once in human history, is not known, and may never be, but it occurred at some time during the second millennium BC and in the Near East: from the east Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean. So far the earliest known examples are small, often incomplete, and obscure. They are written or scratched in simple linear form. However, the East Mediterranean coastlands had created an alphabet of 50 signs, all consonants except that the consonant aleph (') (not a sound to English speakers' ears) had three forms: 'a, 'i, 'u; the only cases where vowels are expressed. These signs were written on clay tablets in simple cuneiform signs created for the purpose, and like all cuneiform written from left to right. This writing is best known from the ancient town Ugarit, just north of the modern Latakia on the north Syrian coast, and dates to c. 1500 BC. The same town has produced evidence of a second alphabet of 29 letters, all consonants, which, in that order, became the pre-Islamic alphabet of Arabia, now surviving only in Ethiopic script in north-east Africa. But the common Ugaritic alphabet was an antecedent to the well known first millennium BC alphabet of 22 letters, all consonants, used by the Phoenicians, Hebrews, Ammonites, Moabites and others, written in simple linear signs on a variety of media: leather, papyrus, potsherds, etc., written from right to left. Some expression of vowels was achieved by using Y, W, ' , and M for mostly long vowels. This alphabet formed the basis of all other worldwide alphabets save for the pre-Islamic Arabic and Ethiopic syllabary.

Thus when Israel took over their promised land they were in a world which for the first time in human history had a simple writing system that any person of average intelligence could master at will. This possession of a simple writing system gave rise to what we call books: large quantities of written material meant for some length or time. Potsherds were convenient and cheap material for writing short- or even medium-length notes or letters, but not for long documents. Leather, Egyptian papyrus and parchment (a specially treated form of leather) were the usual materials for books, and in roll form they were easy to store. Thus the Old Testament books were originally written on leather in roll form, as clear from the Old Testament (e.g. Jer:36) and the New Testament (e.g. Luke 4:16-20). Synagogues still have scrolls of the law written on leather in accordance with Rabbinic tradition. However, in the early Christian church difficulties with scrolls became apparent. Disputes between converted and unconverted Jews often involved searching the Scriptures for proof texts, and scrolls can be awkward for that. If an Isaiah scroll were fully rolled up so that chapter 1 was on the first column, it would take a long time to check a passage in chapter 66, even when the beginning and end of the scroll were fixed to wooden rods to help in the rolling. And the total amount of writing that can be accommodated on one scroll is limited by convenience. The law was written in five separate scrolls, but the 12 short prophets were often written on a single scroll. And no one tried to write the whole of the Jewish scriptures on a single scroll, though it would have been technically possible.

The problems were resolved with the introduction of the modern book form, though currently termed a codex when referring to ancient manuscripts. Separate sheets of suitably sized papyrus, parchment or leather were folded down the middle, were sewn together down the fold in a group (a quire), and quires were sewn together to form as big a codex as was needed or was practical. Inscribe was more complicated if done before the sewing, but the ease with which any part of the text could be consulted amply justified any extra initial labour. Exactly when the codex was introduced is unknown, but some first century AD Roman authors had notebooks in this form: notes to which they needed access from time to time. Literary texts in codex form begin to appear in the second century AD but only slowly over several more centuries did they eventually oust the roll form. During this overlap Christian works, the New Testament especially of course, are more commonly found in codex form than pagan literary texts.

It appears that Christianity was a main force in the roll form becoming obsolete. The codex gave easy access to any part of the text and offered the possibility of much more text than was practical on a roll. In the 4th century AD the whole Greek Bible was put on a single codex, which allowed the defining of the canon of scripture more clearly than a small library of rolls ever could.

It has long been pointed out how the use of Greek throughout the East Mediterranean, thanks to Alexander the Great's conquests, and the existence of the Roman Empire policing the area during the first few centuries of the Christian era, allowed the evangelization of Paul and others which resulted in a Christian church separated from its Jewish roots. To a Christian, divine providence was at work. The same must surely be concluded about the spread of a simple writing system which flourished in Israel before, during and after the Exile. The scriptures which held Israel together and kept them separate from the surrounding nations would have been less effective if only professional scribes could read and write them. Synagogues, which first arose in the exile, were places where Scripture was read and studied by the congregation. Also the early church, was much helped in its evangelizing work by the codex form of the Scriptures. Surely the hand of God.

Wilfred Lambert

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**Read it to get the facts,  
study it to get the meaning,  
meditate on it to get the benefit.  
David Shepherd  
on the Bible.  
Reading the Bible as personal dialogue**

When we read any serious piece of literature, sacred or secular, we follow certain principles of interpretation:

- What are the writers actually saying?
- What does the text mean, leaving aside preconceptions we might have?
- What moved them to write? What was the context?
- Were they consistent? Were there variations of perspective or even of fact?
- What motivated them to write?
- What inner contradictions afflicted them? What inward debate was involved in their interpretation of their experiences?
- Did their understanding develop? (Being human we would expect that.)

Should these principles apply equally to Biblical literature? If we believe that every word of the library we call the Bible was precisely dictated by God the writers were just puppets. Even their expression of inmost feelings, as in many Psalms, would be a charade if they were responding to divine instructions: 'Now write "My heart is downcast within me."' They were writing down their inspired understanding of the will and activity of God. But they were still human – with all the human reactions, contradictions, misunderstandings, optimism and pessimism, common to humankind. Far from being automatons, they were people who were puzzled, burdened, encouraged, discouraged, as they sought, no doubt under inner pressure from God, to understand and contribute to their times.

If they believed that nations and individuals received their rewards and punishments in this life, this influenced their hearing of what they took to be the voice of God. At another time they might hear it differently, or another writer might have a different understanding. The most significant moments in the growth of 'scripture' were when they took the leap of faith and advanced beyond the current understanding towards a new vision. These variations in the understanding of one man are, for example, particularly notable in the work of the prophet Jeremiah. Readers will be able to recall for themselves many illustrations of opposite points of view in the Biblical writings, which must suggest caution before we apply the term 'without error' to them. They do not profess to provide us with a seamless robe of final thoughts. We are invited to engage in dialogue with the writers, who, themselves, were inquiring what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them (1 Peter 1:11).

#### **'Through faith in Christ Jesus'**

It is all profitable to us; whether we find it easy to agree with everything that is said or not; it is able to make us wise unto salvation, but, only 'through faith which is in Christ Jesus' (2 Tim 3:15). Jesus as portrayed in gospels and epistles is himself the criterion of the truth of what we read. But it is all profitable, as the next verse declares – 'for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.'

So especially as we engage in dialogue with Old Testament writers we have to bear in mind that their words are not final and have to be read in the light of the New Testament, which we have and they did not. God's secret purpose was hidden for long ages and through many generations, but is now disclosed to God's people – Christ in you the hope of glory (Col 1:26,27). The God who 'spoke in many and varied ways through the prophets has in this, the final age, spoken unto us by his Son' (Heb 1:1,2).

This raises the question whether when we read that God commanded genocide of the Canaanites, killing every man woman and child, we have to take this as the true will of God or a contemporary interpretation, which is countermanded when we come to Jesus. The 'God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' could never have willed such slaughter. The Cross on which Jesus suffered is the proof of that.

Unless we treat the New Testament as a story of a relationship between God and his people which is now non-operative, we have to believe that God still moves people by the Holy Spirit and this doesn't mean the working of what we would call miracles. God works even now through apparently normal means.

#### **Reflective dialogue**

Just as people were able to reject a prophet's message in Old Testament times, so we, too, can reject the voice of God. A prophet had no irresistible evidence that he spoke for God. People had to use their judgment, based on reflection on what, overall, they could perceive as the ways of God, as we do now. They had to link what a prophet said with the overall thrust of their knowledge of God, gained from a number of sources and still developing. For them and for us it would appear that God has not given us final certainty, immediately available, but rather we have to live with the ambiguity of learning step by step what the will of God is in a range of situations. Part of the dialogue with scripture is to link what we are learning from reflection on it with our own experiences.

The prophets' reflecting on what they were learning is described as listening to the voice of God. This is dialogue with God, even though it is going on in the mind and no divine voice is thundering down from heaven. This silent speaking or small still voice in the consciousness is the most real form of communication between God and humans. The prophets heard in their hearts. To this we can relate and the Bible is the great medium through which this can happen.

If the prophetic hearing were something foreign to our experience we would have a situation in which only a few dozen 'Bible' characters, living in 'Bible' times ever personally knew the presence of God. Much of the Bible's inspiring power would be lost if our lives were so different from those of these men and women. It would suggest that God had left us without a power that he had only very occasionally bestowed in the past. The Biblical writers would be an elite with whose experiences we could have little point of contact in our times, and there would indeed be a famine of the word of God. God's presence would be very limited in our lives.

The other side of this is that it is of the nature of dialogue that Spirit provided experiences can be misinterpreted. There will be failures of understanding as well as triumphs of vision. Reflection and dialogue with these writers and speakers of old includes seeking to sort out the Truth from the mistaken perceptions. When Jeremiah demands vengeance on his enemies, we might say in our dialogue with him: 'Ah Jeremiah, you didn't have the benefit of standing at the foot of the cross and hearing the Messiah ask forgiveness for his killers.' On the other hand we might marvel at Jeremiah's grasp of the New Covenant with its promise of sins forgiven and God's law written in the heart (Jer 31) and his sensitivity which made him wish he had more tears available to shed over his people's plight. (Jer 9:1)

#### **"Moved by the Holy Spirit"**

Being moved by the Spirit did not mean that the prophet was not still a man or woman with human perceptions and even faulty perceptions of God and his will – though, taking the Bible as a whole, there is a self-correcting force at work, centred on Jesus Christ and him crucified. This enables us to make some progress in taking into account the influence of models of thought contemporary with the prophets, their cultural environment and traditional background. Similarly we are conditioned by our environment, by our inbuilt prejudices, our religious habits. The work of the Holy Spirit in the first century did not preserve Apostles from making mistakes. It is interesting to note the phraseology in the book of Acts: 'It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.' The Holy Spirit did not make their own prayerful reflection superfluous.

Dialogue with God through his holy men, who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, may involve us in trying to puzzle out imperfections and ambiguities. We shall move forward and go backward, but there will be an ever present motivation and thrust to move onward toward the fullness to be found in Christ Jesus. Our understanding will often be inadequate, but we can be led in the direction that God intends, far more powerfully than if we had just a set of rules and laws, clear beyond all dispute.

As we share the ebb and flow of the writers, we join our own spirit with theirs, and learn to discern the mind of the Spirit. We ponder the ways of God with the prophets. We seek enlightenment – 'Come Holy Spirit open our eyes – clarify this message.' Reading the Bible is prayerful encounter. To see the variety of trends in scripture does not belittle the Bible. Rather it becomes a rich and personal possession.

#### **A living Word**

We dialogue with the prophet to discover what word of God there may be for us today. The Word of God, is of course more than the Bible: it stands within and behind the Bible; the Bible is the raw material through which we may hear that voice. As the letter to the Hebrews declares 'the Word of God is living and active, piercing to the division of the soul and spirit, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart.' This is harder work, less obviously secure, more seemingly ambiguous, than passively receiving ready made edicts from heaven. You are never quite sure that you've got everything right. This year's perception is modified next year – but the soul is fed by the process; the mind is kept spiritually alert and growth takes place. The Fundamentalist view of the inspiration of scripture is an easy way out, largely abdicating from the need for searching and reflection as we dialogue with men and women of former ages and the God whom they sought to obey.

#### **Lighting a Candle is a Prayer**

Crescens

When we have gone, it stays alight,  
kindling in the hearts and minds  
of others the prayers we have  
already offered for them  
and for others; for the sad,  
for the sick, and for the suffering;  
and prayers of thankfulness too.  
Lighting a candle is a parable:  
burning itself out,  
it gives light to others.  
Christ gave himself for others,  
He calls us to give ourselves.

Rosalind Lomas discovered this short poem hanging on the wall of a chapel at Offa House, the Coventry Church of England Diocesan House near Leamington Spa. It is used at Salisbury Cathedral. Rosalind sees it as an example of 'thinking outside the box'.

What is the difference between Christian thinking and other attempts to make sense of the world? Most empires maintain their imperial nature by the threat of death. Jesus' all-embracing message is based on love and so he will not intimidate people into belief and discipleship. He looks for a loving response to his loving overtures, a response that is invited but not imposed. The principle of God's kingdom or empire, as revealed by Jesus, would seem to be that life is obtained by giving up one's life, that attempting to save oneself results in losing one's true life, perhaps because saving oneself will mostly involve being violent to others. To own Jesus as Lord is to renounce vengeance and to embrace suffering by giving up oneself.

I first penned these words as a reaction to reading parts of a book entitled *Colossians re:mixed Subverting the Empire*, written by Bryan Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat, and the candle poem made me think of it again.

Editor

#### A note on John 1:1-14

The essence of the understanding of this passage lies in the recognition of the meaning of the word 'word'. A word is the expression of the mind, thought, intention of the Speaker, conveyed outside himself by breath/spirit. It is the essence, the fundamental character of the person, operating outside himself.

John 1:1-14 shows how this very creative power of God (for breath is also an influence to move, create and change) operated from the beginning in creation and through the people of Israel (compare Hebrews 1:1) until it was manifested and consummated in Jesus, who is the embodiment of this same spirit-infused essence of God. Therefore in a sense Jesus has been there from the beginning, as his essential being is the spirit-breathed utterance of God, as John's Gospel is designed to show.

The basic mistake of the doctrine of the Trinity lies in a misunderstanding of the nature of God, which was derived originally from Greek philosophy. This led to a belief in God as perfect, unchangeable, omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent and in man as wholly alien to Him, as sinful, corrupt and imperfect. (Augustine)

But the Bible shows God as a dynamic power, a consuming fire, an active, creative force in creation, history and man as His creation. Our God is a moving force, infusing His creation with His own spirit, totally revealed in Jesus and manifested in His people. 'Christ in you, the hope of glory' is the true dynamic of faith.

The fault of the doctrine of the Trinity is the futile attempt to define the indefinable, to put the living, creative power of God's spirit into the limits of credal statements and doctrinal belief.

Sheila Harris

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Christ is our hope of glory

and the glory of our hope.

Anon

Building a library: Non-Christadelphian Writers

Like Alfred Ward, I have had many commendations of books that others have found helpful. As a student in Auckland some 45 years ago, I was fortunate to have many conversations with Bruce Smithson, the librarian of the Auckland Christadelphian ecclesia. He was the Chief Engineer for the Auckland Regional Authority, and during his very demanding and very active working life he was also an avid reader, purchasing for the library such books as the works of E. J. Young, and F. F. Bruce. As a result of his love for books, I began to build my own library. I hereby pay tribute to him and trust that we also will encourage our young people to read wisely and carefully, not only works by Christadelphian authors but also those who are not members of our community.

We live in an age which craves instant gratification – the 'now generation' – and which seems to also demand instant knowledge. One of my work colleagues who is studying accountancy often asks me to proof-read her essays, because although our computers may have spell-checkers, they cannot put together a coherent and reasoned piece of writing. Like many of the readers of this magazine, I was educated in an age when there were no computers or photocopiers. Much study was, and still is, a weariness of the flesh.

As a student, I was issued with reading lists – books (required and recommended) which my lecturers used in their lectures, and which helped one to pass examinations. Of course our Bible (from Greek *biblia*) is a library of books. However, the sacred writings are given to us not merely to gain a pass-mark at the final judgement, being able to instruct us for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, but also, more importantly, to teach us, reprove us, and train us in righteousness. With this in mind, I apologise if what follows is a survey of technical rather than devotional books. Christian bookshops in New Zealand now focus on the latter rather than the former. Perhaps that shows the changing reading tastes of their customers.

#### The works of Edwin M. Yamauchi

Dr Yamauchi is Professor of History at Miami University. At a recent count, I have noted that he has written four books and many journal articles, including the Archaeological Background of Daniel, of Esther, of Ezra and, of Nehemiah. I first came across his name when I was looking for books on *Rosh* in a theological library. Lo and behold, I found a small paperback: *Foes from the Northern Frontier (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1982)*

In his foreword, Alan Millard notes that 'what Yamauchi has done . . . is make clearer some obscure parts of the Old Testament.' Since the time that Dr John Thomas wrote, probably most Christadelphians believe that references to obscure and distant peoples can be applied literally to nations in the 21st century world; in particular that Rosh is Russia, Meshech is Moscow and Tubal is Tobolsk. For example, in 1959, Percy Bilton published 20,000 copies of his *Russia, Israel, Christ and You* in which he stated that 'one of the urgent purposes of this book is to try to convince the people that the invasion of Israel by Russia is inevitable.'

But as Yamauchi writes, 'Even if one were to transliterate the Hebrew *rosh* as a proper name (as do the Jerusalem Bible, the New English Bible, and the New American Standard Bible) rather than translate it as 'chief' (as do the King James, Revised Standard, New American Bible, and New International Version), it can have nothing to do with modern 'Russia'. This would be a gross anachronism, for the modern name is based upon the name *Rus*, which was brought into the region of Kiev, north of the Black Sea, by the Vikings only in the Middle Ages (p. 20). 'If we are to dispense with Rosh as Russia and place Meshech and Tubal in Turkey, we may still ask: 'But are there no biblical references to territories in what is today the modern country of Russia?' Yes there are. The ancient region of Biblical Ararat (Urartu) is today in southern Russia (i.e. in Soviet Armenia), south-eastern Turkey, and north-western Iran' (p. 29). Perhaps this is one area of our preaching which needs to take notice of recent scholarship.

#### The works of C. Ryder Smith

Formerly Professor of Theology in the University of London, his books were published by Epworth Press, London, and brought to my attention by my lecturer in Classical Hebrew; the Rev Hames MA (Principal of Trinity Methodist Theological College) who had the ability to engender his love of this language to me and seven other students.

It was not until many years later that I actually purchased Smith's series on Biblical doctrines: of Man (1951), of Sin (1953), of the Hereafter (1958). My library is definitely incomplete, for I have yet to purchase *The Doctrine of Grace*. As a retired minister, now a Christadelphian, is wont to emphasize, we can never stress enough the grace of God.

Each book follows a standard format: helpful indices of Scriptural references and of Hebrew, Greek, and English terms. As Ryder Smith states, 'I have gone straight to the Bible itself for the evidence. Regarding the Greek terms, as the LXX (Septuagint) was the Bible of the first Christians, it is the best key to the meaning that they attached to words.' When a particular word is discussed, Smith usually notes in brackets the number of times that it occurs. Each book is divided into three parts, namely the Old Testament, from Hebrew to Greek, and the New Testament. Hebrew and Greek words are transliterated into English to help the reader who cannot read Hebrew or Greek script. The whole series shows how words may change their meaning over time, and why an understanding of idiom is needed if one is to fully appreciate foreign languages.

#### The works of G. A. F. Knight

The author of more than thirty books on Jewish studies, biblical theology, and Old Testament commentaries, he was Professor of Old Testament at Otago University, N. Z., based at Knox Theological College. After teaching at St Andrews University, he retired to Dunedin, where he recently died.

#### A Christian Theology of the Old Testament (SCM, London, 1959)

Unfortunately after his exit from Otago University the courses in Old Testament concentrated on the writings of German theologians. It was only 20 years ago that I read this book and for me, this is his most helpful book. In his opening words he stresses that 'The theology of the Old Testament will never be written. Each generation sees new vistas within the Scriptures of which earlier generations were unaware.' In some sections of our community there is an emphasis on Bible-marking according to a prescribed scheme. Although this provides students with an incentive to study and the recording of findings very accessibly in their Bible, there is a danger that the student believes that the final word has been written and no consideration need be given to further information or interpretation.

#### Christ the Centre (Hansel Press, Edinburgh, 1999)

This is one of Knight's books written during his retirement. The methodology of the book may summed up in his note that 'there are some Hebrew language terms that cannot be understood unless they are seen to possess in themselves a dual meaning' (p. 7). He gives a number of examples such as *tab* which is one small word, but like a

coin, it has two sides, each of which interprets the other. He then refers to the coin (Mark 12:14-17) shown on the cover of *The Endeavour Magazine* no.117, June 2007, 17. 'Literally, the denarius would have on one side the face of the current Emperor of the Roman Empire (probably Augustus who died 14AD or Tiberius who died 37AD). But on the other side it would have an indication of its value: and when cast into the offering box at the door of the temple it served to forward God's saving plan for the redemption of the world. . . . Its value raised deeper questions – about the ultimate purpose of life, money, taxes' (p 6).

#### **The works of Bryan Wilson**

Dr Wilson, the doyen of Sociologists of Religion, first came to Christadelphian attention with the publication of *Sects and Society* in which our community was one of three groups subjected to sociological study. Published in 1961, this book is rather dated but a number of his observations made more than 45 years ago are still relevant today.

(1) Sunday schools 'are entirely geared to the inculcation of that knowledge which is seen as necessary for salvation' (p 272). In New Zealand, there has been a massive decline in the number of Sunday Schools in the mainstream denominations, and also with there being no Religious Education in the State school system, school leavers are Biblically illiterate. Perhaps this search for knowledge on the part of adults accounts for one reason why 'learn to read the Bible effectively' seminars are a more successful means of preaching than the 'old-time' lecture.

(2) 'Today the scriptural rule of female silence is less rigidly applied' (p 272). I personally know of sisters who not only help their husbands with Bible class papers, exhortations, and lectures, but also fully compose them for delivery by a male. It was only during my visit to the United Kingdom that I fully appreciated the great contribution that sisters can make when they are given the opportunity to verbally present their thoughts to male as well as to only female audiences.

(3) 'Today Christadelphians generally have a much more relaxed attitude towards education . . . The education which is favoured tends to be scientific rather than liberal. Distrust of liberal education, with its frequent destruction of religious values, continues among Christadelphians' (p 290). When I was a student, the Christadelphian University graduates I personally knew – New Zealand has a small population – were either scientists, engineers, or teachers, all of whom held high positions in their chosen field. I remember asking a very prominent visiting Christadelphian who was a University Chemistry lecturer why he had not become a linguist as he had exhibited such talent for languages. His response was that he thought he could be of more benefit to our community by using his scientific background. Unfortunately, in some sections of our community, there is still a distrust of higher education in the 'non-technical' tertiary sector.

In this present century there are many more young Christadelphians – both male and female – who have successfully completed tertiary education, but there is still a preponderance of those who have graduated in science, information technology, accountancy, and education. These are the fields which attract most young people, not only Christadelphians. A few young Christadelphians have taken papers in Religious Studies. I well remember the comment of a lecturer. 'John, I can always tell when there are Christadelphians in the class. They usually not only finish a biblical quote but often give chapter and verse.' So, presumably there is not much wrong with our Sunday School system.

John Stephenson (NZ)

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#### **The Holy Spirit**

##### **Conclusion to an article in E26, Winter 1967, by George McHaffie**

The Christian possessed only of a written book has, in fact, regressed in God's purpose to the position of those under the old covenant. The Jews had an inspired book able to make 'wise unto salvation' (1 Tim. 3:15). Paul, however, points the difference between the two covenants in his second epistle to the Corinthians chap. 3:3, 'Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone but in the fleshy tables of the heart.' The first covenant was 'written with ink' or after the earlier fashion (and in allusion to Ezek. 36:26) 'in tables of stone' (inspired writings nevertheless). This is all the old covenant gave. But the new covenant is 'with the spirit of the living God' and it is His activity in 'the heart.'

The texts quoted to support the contrary opinion are examined below.

#### **1 Corinthians 13**

This is a well-known passage, and there is no need to quote it. It is contended that Paul is here arguing that love is superior to Spirit gifts, that the gifts would fail and only faith, hope and love would continue: that the 'perfect' which would come refers to the books of the New Testament: knowledge, which while the gifts were in being was only 'in part', i.e. held only by certain members as gifts of knowledge and prophecy, would cease as unnecessary when all had complete and perfect knowledge in the possession of the books of the New Testament.

Paul is certainly teaching the superiority of love to the other gifts, but the failing of the gifts may be no more than a manner of speaking, such as Jesus used when He said 'Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall not pass away.' The gifts were a sharing in the 'powers of the world to come' (Heb. 6:5), which suggests that they will still be very much in evidence in the kingdom itself, though we can well see, for example, that, when there is ultimately no more disease, gifts of healing will vanish away. Paul is mainly concerned to show that love must be at the root of the true manifestation of the Spirit gifts. Love is the supreme gift of the Spirit. 'The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts through the holy spirit which is given unto us' (Rom. 5:5). Even, therefore, if all other gifts are lost, the possession of the Holy Spirit would still be required to produce love.

Unless it is contended that the gift of prophecy was for the sole purpose of completing New Testament knowledge of the purpose of God, the gift is not one which we can consider obsolete. The gift as seen in, for example, the Acts of the Apostles, was of value in the particular circumstances of the time, as of famine (Acts 28:11) or the circumstances of Paul's life (Acts 21:11). Such prophecy is equally necessary today in addition to the knowledge of the purpose of God.

#### **Ephesians chap. 4**

The point made here is similar to that of 1 Cor. 13. The expression 'perfect man' of verse 13 is considered to be the completion of the New Testament. Once the purpose of the Holy Spirit in cleansing the heart and purifying the life of the believer is understood, we can see that the gifts of the Spirit in the church were for the moral perfecting of the saints till they all and individually grew to be perfect men (compare 'the spirits of just men made perfect' Heb. 12:23) and attained unto the measure of the (moral) stature and fulness of Christ.

This Spirit operation in the church was according to Paul 'that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine. . . .' The possession of a Bible carries no guarantee against being carried about with every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14) as again it might be said that the number of different opinions all 'based on the Bible' give witness. We need something to guide in these matters and the spirit was promised to those ministering the new covenant to lead us to 'the new man (compare 'perfect man') which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness' (Eph. 4:24).

George McHaffie

#### **Befriending Foreign Students**

**'Half an hour's quality time is better than no time at all.'**

Professor Jim Farquhar, chairman of the Victoria League in Scotland, came to visit the school I taught in. He spoke to the senior pupils to encourage their parents to take part in the scheme organised by the Victoria League. This scheme matched British people to foreign students by befriending the students and entertaining them in their homes, showing them what life in Britain is like.

The Victoria League was started in 1901 by a Mrs Mary Davis and Miss Balfour, the sister of the Prime Minister of that time. Mrs Davis had felt frustration 'at the bitterness of war' and decided to start a Society of Friendship. They called together a group of ladies to form a non-political organisation to promote a closer union between the different parts of what was then known as the British Empire. The aim was to encourage interchange of information and to offer hospitality. The name was chosen to

commemorate Queen Victoria who had died earlier that year.

At first the work included care of war graves in South Africa, sending educational materials and offering hospitality in the League's club at Whitehall. There have been many changes over the years in the different applications of the aims of the League. Whereas, at first, it worked mainly within the British Empire and later the Commonwealth, it has now opened up to offer hospitality to students from many parts of the world.

I first came into contact with the League when I was asked to entertain Professor Farquhar to coffee after his talk to our pupils. I remarked that as a busy teacher I would find it difficult to add more to my work load by entertaining foreign students. I thought that the scheme would involve far more commitment than it does. Professor Farquhar made the point that many of the students felt strange and lonely when coming to a country so far removed in many ways from their own. To get to really know people here helped them to settle and feel more at home. We discussed becoming involved and decided to give it a try, if only for the one year. As followers of Jesus we believed this to be putting into practice, in a more pluralistic society of today, the principle of 'loving our neighbour'. We hoped that if our family were in a strange country there would be people ready to support them as we were aiming to do – the Golden Rule. We have now taken part in this scheme for fifteen years and we believe we have gained far more than we have given.

The introductory letter informed us that they would give us two students. The idea being that the students would not feel too strange going into new surroundings if there were two of them. We were advised about the differences to expect in customs and in understandings of politeness. We were given two names and encouraged to contact them and arrange a first meeting.

One was a German girl and the other a male student from Malaysia, or so we thought. The Malaysian lived fairly near and so we decided to make a visit and invite him for a meal. To our surprise the door was opened by a mother and little girl. The student, a school inspector in Malaysia, was here with his wife and their five children.

They were a delightful family and we learned much from them. We had invited them for a meal and decided that we would be tactful and not mention religion. It was a Friday and they said that they would not be able to come until after their family prayers which take place early on a Friday evening. When they arrived they all had patches of ash on their foreheads. Although the majority religion in Malaysia is Islam our student family were Hindus. They wore ash as a reminder that we all die and we are to make the most of our life here, not in a material way, but spiritually and practically in helping others. Much of our discussion that evening did involve religious issues.

Some of our former prejudices were expelled by our contact with this family. We tend to think of Hinduism as being a religion of many gods but our friends said that that was not a correct interpretation: they understood Hindu gods as ways of representing the different aspects of the one god. The father was leader in his Hindu temple and was pleased for his family to learn about Christianity. He believed that Hinduism is the oldest of the major religions but each has something to offer. So at their prayers on Friday evenings they included reference to Jesus too. The children came to Sunday School for the year that they were in Edinburgh and the adults occasionally came to a service. It was interesting to see the children's art work, mountains in Old Testament stories looking like a rain forest! The father gave us a talk on Hinduism and he started by saying that because he was a Hindu he believed in only one God! He ended by saying that because he was a Hindu he considered the most important principle is to love your neighbour as yourself. The whole family enthusiastically helped with the work of packing goods to send in aid convoys to Bosnia. When they returned home we kept up contact for a few years and still send a calendar at Christmas time.

At the same time as the Malaysian family we met the young German girl. She had come to Scotland in the year before starting university – a gap year in which she was a volunteer in a Cheshire Home. We became a little like a second set of parents for her. She came to us with some of her worries and concerns. A strong friendship has grown over the years with her and her parents. She knows that when she comes to Edinburgh there is always a bed available for her in our home, whether we are here or not. We have visited her and her parents and they us. She is now a lawyer in Cologne and recently visited us with her boyfriend. She had been brought up in former East Germany. Discussions on what life was like then with both her and her parents have been enlightening and have made us count our blessings. She was brought up in a secular state which was militantly hostile to religion. She recently told us that she had become a Christian and had been baptised.

Over the years we have befriended students from many different countries – Jammu and Kashmir, Bangladesh, China, Taiwan, USA, Tenerife, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, France, Belgium, as well as Germany and Malaysia. We usually invite the student for a meal and perhaps invite other friends to meet them or invite them to bring friends with them. We aim to take them out to show them the countryside around Edinburgh and if it is appropriate to take them to some school performance, music or drama. The League has now updated itself and is called VL Friendship. They run outings and have a ceilidh (a traditional Scottish Dance) regularly in Edinburgh. We do not attend these because we are too busy, but some of our students do.

When we started with this scheme we thought it would be a way for foreign students to learn about Britain but it is as much a way for us to learn about life in other countries – all a valuable part of learning about other people in our world, and helping to cultivate the right sort of attitudes towards each other. Discussions range around different customs, the words we use, our families, our countries, religion and sometimes politics.

We had a couple from China a few years after the Tiananmen Square massacre. This came into our conversation and they told us that they were there, but not at the time of the shooting; they had gone home at that point because the students took it in turn to demonstrate. It was interesting to hear some of the background to what happened. They were not demonstrating against communism but against government corruption. When we discussed other issues it was also interesting to hear claims on Tibet from the Chinese point of view. We invited them to join us for a Christmas meal. They knew nothing about the Bible and asked to borrow books on the Bible.

The League encourages the students, if they are able, to invite their hosts for a meal. These have been very interesting and sometimes unusual occasions for us. One such occasion was when we were invited by a student from Bangladesh to a meal in his hall of residence. We were given our food and encouraged to eat; he did not eat with us but sat and talked. We found he had his meal later in the kitchen of the residences with other students: giving us our meal first was a mark of respect. At Chinese New Year two girls, one from China and one from Taiwan made a special meal in our home. We realised that they were not getting on as well as usual, the reason being that coming from different regions they disagreed as to the amount of spices to put in the food. We were surprised, when invited to the home of the couple who had been in Tiananmen Square, that they gave us soup at the end of our meal. Having foreign friends means we have to be open to new ideas and to new ways and to be ready to change. This I think is good for us.

One of the students came from Taiwan. She was a mature student and a primary teacher. She stayed in halls of residence here but the other students were not a multicultural mix as we had expected but were all Chinese. She therefore did not meet many British people other than her lecturers and us. Because she was older than the other students and a Christian she found it difficult to mix and felt very lonely. We were able to give her some support and for a short time she came to our Bible Class.

A couple from Jammu and Kashmir were here with their two daughters. They invited us for an Indian meal. I was cautious because I do not like spicy food but the meal was delicious and not at all 'hot'. They also were Hindus and very devout ones. There is a danger for us, as committed Christians, to not really appreciate the commitment of those of other religions. Meeting people face to face, in their homes, and being able to discuss helps towards a greater understanding of what motivates them and we hope helps them to realize our commitment and what motivates us.

Subjects studied by our students have been education, computer intelligence, employment law, nursing, world health, tourism, English language, veterinary science. Some of the students have been quite high powered in their own country. One came top in nursing exams in the whole of Bangladesh. She gained a bursary but had had to leave a small baby at home to be looked after by her sister so that she could take the opportunities that training here gave her. She did not see that child for more than 18 months.

There are many more stories that could be told. We have obviously given far more than 'half an hour of quality time'. All our experiences with the various students have been quality time for us. We have learned about ourselves and our own prejudices, we have been able to teach foreign students a little about this country and to give support where it has been needed and we hope put into practice Christian principles of caring and hospitality.

Averil McHaffie

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### Harmony Through Headship

What happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object? Explosion and disintegration. So in any partnership involving two people it is highly desirable to have an agreement that one of the partners is senior or 'head'. And in institutions where there are more than two decision makers it is desirable to have a committee with odd numbers or else appoint one member to have a casting vote.

The principle of headship is particularly important in the marriage partnership because the continuous and intimate relationship between husband and wife is highly likely to generate disagreements. In many instances these disagreements can be resolved by compromise. But in some instances, such as conflict over the choice of school for a child, compromise is not possible and headship is required. It is abundantly clear from Scripture that headship belongs to the husband. This principle was established from the beginning, in Genesis, when Eve was told that she would be subject to her husband:

*Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in sorrow you shall bring forth children; and your desire shall be to your husband, and he shall rule over you.* (Gen. 3:16)

Although this is clearly spoken to Eve, we understand from Paul that Adam and Eve represent humanity in general. We are all 'in Adam' and our sins prevent us from enjoying the luxury of living in God's paradise garden. Similarly all women can be considered to be 'in Eve' and enduring the burden of bearing children and submitting themselves to the headship of their husbands.

We need not, however, regard God's words to Adam and Eve as punishments: they are the inevitable consequences of sin. Sinners cannot be allowed to live for ever in

paradise. Our basic human selfishness means that it is almost inevitable that, at some time in our marriage, there will be irreconcilable disagreements. So we can see that the headship of husbands is a divinely established principle for maintaining a stable society. It is therefore not surprising that the abandonment of the headship of husbands in our modern Western society has coincided with an epidemic of marital and partnership breakdown and inevitable social disintegration.

The causes of marital breakdown are complex and interlocking and it is difficult to distinguish cause from effect: infidelity, for example, may be a result, rather than a cause of breakdown. But although we lack official statistics on the causes of marital breakdown, there are many studies by sociologists and divorce lawyers, one of the largest and most recent being *A National Survey on Marriage in America*<sup>1</sup>. In this survey the top reasons for divorce given by ex-husbands and ex-wives were: (1) 'lack of commitment' (2) 'too much conflict and arguing' and (3) 'infidelity'. (*Fatherhood Today*, Vol.10, No.3, 2005 p.4-5).

But some may ask, why should husbands be heads? Because it is in harmony with the Creator's design in the natural world. The headship of husbands in humans is typical of the class of animals to which we belong. Male mammals are physically stronger than females and the male sex hormones generate dominant and often aggressive behaviour as shown in the difference between a bull and a cow or ox. As humans, however, we are uniquely endowed with the ability to control our animal instincts, and Scripture makes it clear that husbands must control their aggressive instincts. There should therefore be a balance in the relationship between husbands and wives: wives must yield to husbands but husbands must be loving and gentle towards their wives. This balance is beautifully expressed by Paul in Eph. 4:22-25, 28:

*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the church.*

Looking at these principles in the context of the Old Testament we find that husband headship is embedded in the Mosaic law, (Num. 30). Peter reminds us that Sarah called Abraham lord (1 Pet 2:6) and we have no evidence that Sarah was reluctant to cooperate in Abraham's dangerous deception in claiming that she was not his wife. However we find that on the occasion, when Abraham was unwilling to discipline his taunting slave wife, God commanded Abraham to obey his wife. Here is a good example of how circumstances alter cases and a sound principle needs to be applied with discretion.

Similarly, the headship principle would not apply if a husband were afflicted with mental impairment from injury, disease or addiction. It is significant that alcohol was involved in the only two instances in Scripture when wives wisely rebelled against their husbands. Nabal was a bad tempered heavy drinker (1 Sam 25:36) and Ahasuerus was drunk when Vashti refused to display herself to his guests (Esther 1:10-12).

In the New Testament the doctrine of husband headship is beautifully expressed in Eph. 4 quoted above. In this passage there is no doubt that Paul is dealing with husband/wife relationship. But in other passages it is not so obvious. This is because the Greek word *anēr* means either man or husband, and the Greek word *gynē* means either woman or wife. So the translator has to decide which English word is appropriate. The translator's decision will depend on the immediate context, on other similar passages where the meaning is clear and on the wider context of Scripture.

With these principles in mind we shall look at three other relevant passages on headship. In each case a truly literal translation is given with both meanings of the Greek words *anēr* and *gynē*. This is followed by a suggestion as to the most likely interpretation based on the context.

(1) *Let the woman/wife learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman/wife to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man/husband, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve.* (1 Tim. 2:11-12)

Here Paul is using the Genesis record of creation to teach headship. Since Adam and Eve were husband and wife, then we may infer that the headship is between husbands and wives. Eve was a wife from her beginning. Paul is using the fact that Adam was created first as a confirmation of Adam's headship over his wife.

(2) *Let your women/wives keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are to be under obedience as also says the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their men/husbands at home: for it is a shame for women/wives to speak in the church.* (1 Cor. 14:34-35)

In this passage we need to decide who were the males at home whom the females in the ecclesia should obey and from whom they should learn. Paul is saying that this female submission is based on the 'law'. The law refers to the five books of Moses (John 1:17) and there we find that the only command in relation to submission of women, is in Gen 3:16 when Eve was told that she would be subject to her husband. We are therefore on safe ground when we assume that in this passage Paul is referring to the husband and wife relationship. In this passage Paul was dealing with the situation in Corinth where the gift of tongues was being abused and it is possible that married sisters were causing 'confusion' by using their possession of Holy Spirit gifts as a reason for challenging their husband's authority.

(3) *But I would have you know, that the head of every man/husband is Christ; and the head of the woman/wife is the man/husband; and the head of Christ is God. Every man/husband praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonours his head, but every woman/wife that prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head: for that is as if she were shaven. For if the woman/wife be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman/wife to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man/husband indeed ought not to cover his head, because he is the image and glory of God: but the woman/wife is the glory of the man/husband. For the man/husband is not of the woman/wife; but the woman/wife of the man/husband. Neither was the man/husband created for the woman/wife: but the woman/wife for the man/husband.* (1 Cor. 11:2-8)

Here again we lack details and we cannot be dogmatic. Looking at the three hierarchies at the beginning of the passage, all are agreed that, in the first hierarchy, *anēr* is being used in a common NT sense, meaning 'all mankind'. It is in the translation of the second hierarchy that fundamental differences arise. Is Paul writing about relationships between husbands and wives or between men and women in general? Once again, because of ambiguity of the Greek, the language alone does not provide a definite answer. We must therefore search for meaning in the context.

In searching the context for an answer we find that all Paul's comments that follow, relate to ecclesial matters, in particular the communion meal. In such a context it seems more likely that, as in the previous two passages, Paul is dealing with personal relationships between husbands and wives. This interpretation is supported by the allusion in the last paragraph to the creation of Eve as a wife for Adam. In six of twenty English translations (RSV, NRSV, ESV, Weymouth, GNB and Young) the translator implies that Paul is dealing with husbands and wives.

Paul is uncompromising in teaching the headship of husbands. But, as usual, he is careful to preserve a balance of thought. So later in this discourse he writes, *Nevertheless, in the Lord woman/wife is not independent of man/husband nor man/husband of woman/wife; for as woman/wife was made from man/husband, so man/husband is now born of woman/wife. And all things are from God.*

Once again Paul alludes to the creation of Eve, so we suggest that Paul is saying, 'Wives, do not be discouraged by your lower status; husbands and wives need each other. Although Eve depended on Adam for her existence, men now depend on women!'

It is important to appreciate that, although there is no doubt about the headship of husbands over wives, none of us can be certain whether Paul taught that headship should be broadened to include headship of men over women. However, if we insist that Paul is teaching that all men are superior in status to all women, this raises two problems. Firstly this is not taught anywhere else in Scripture and secondly it creates a serious dilemma because such a proposition takes no account of age. As a general rule, husbands and wives are about the same age, but the concept of male headship, means that a young inexperienced brother has to be regarded as head of a wise old sister. Such a belief is not only bizarre, it is contrary to the respect that Scripture accords to the aged (Lev. 19:32). In 1 Tim. 5:2 Paul writes, *treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers*. Surely a young man should not be considered as head of his mother!

It is one of the tragedies of the human condition that throughout the ages men have sought to dominate or exclude women. This is seen, not only in domineering behaviour in the home but also in society, in the professions, in politics, in governments and in religion. Religious domination has been especially cruel, such as the refusal to relieve the pains of childbirth on the false and unjust notion that Gen 3:16 prescribes painful childbirth for all women, in spite of the fact that the word pain does not occur in the Hebrew of this verse, as shown in the KJV.

It is a sad fact that the doctrine of male headship has 'caused the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme'. For example, Richard Dawkins in his book *The God Delusion* takes pleasure in quoting the outrageous Orthodox Jewish prayer: *'Blessed are You for not making me a Gentile. Blessed are You for not making me a woman. Blessed are You for not making me a slave.'*

In first century Judea, our Lord Jesus Christ was living in just such a male dominated society. We may ask why did he not appoint women among his apostles. To do so would be to make himself a politician. He practised a quieter and better way of liberating women; by accepting their hospitality and sharing spiritual truths with them in their homes. And he granted Mary Magdalene the privilege of being the first to witness the greatest event of all time.

The doctrine of headship of husbands might seem to legitimise the free reign of the natural, testosterone-driven, male aggression. But, as we have seen in Paul's beautifully balanced words to the Ephesians, the headship of the husband is only one side of the coin. Husbands must love their wives 'as their own bodies'. This quality of love will guarantee that husbands will be driven by a spirit of 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control' (Gal. 5:22).

No two humans are identical. We recognise that some wives may be naturally submissive and unaware that they are following a divine precept. On the other hand, there may be some husbands who are always happy to yield to their wives, even if they disagree. But these are exceptions, and the principle of headship of husbands is a wise and logical provision which we ignore at our peril.

Alan W Fowler

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**It is with men as with wheat;  
the light heads are erect even in the presence of Omnipotence,**

**but the full heads bow in reverence before him.**  
**(Joseph Cook)**  
**Beholding The Glory**  
**Some thoughts on John's Gospel**

**Provenance and Atmosphere**

This wonderful book, which is designed to show the relationship between Jesus, his Father and ourselves, has from antiquity been associated with Ephesus. It was here, according to tradition, that John brought Mary, Jesus' mother, to care for her after Jesus' death and where John, Jesus' beloved disciple, died at an advanced age and was buried. Clear evidence from the scrap of papyrus in the John Rylands Library in Manchester proves that it was written about the end of the first century, well within the living memory of eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry. Ephesus was an important centre of Greek culture and this book reflects that influence. The language, although simple, is pregnant with meaning. Words such as eternal, knowledge, truth, light, way, etc. convey ideas rather than facts. Platonic philosophy, the dominant influence at that time, taught that true reality does not lie in the outward appearance but in the inner meaning. Moreover much of the book consists of discussion, debate, questions and answers, the dialectic method to discover truth through enquiry. So is this book essentially Greek?

**The Prologue**

The prologue sets the scene. Unfortunately most translations do not help as they are dominated by a belief in a pre-existent Christ. But the subject of the first 13 verses is the word, as endorsed by Tyndale – the word through which all things were created. And immediately we are taken back to Genesis 1, where God's creative word – *dabar* in Hebrew – means both word and work. His thought breathed out through spirit stirred the elements to produce our world. But not only so, this living dynamic word inspired patriarchs, prophets, psalmists, priests and kings – Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, etc. God's word was the life force of Israel, moulding, shaping, guiding, judging, enlightening and illuminating. It was the light and the life through which they became God's people. But it was only a glimmer in the darkness, until the true light shone in Jesus (1:14) bringing grace and truth. So however Greek the format, the substance lies in the Old Testament.

**The 'I Am's**

Many times does Jesus declare this: 'Before Abraham was, I am'. In Gethsemane he faced those who came to arrest him with the same declaration. Whether we read into these his identity with the name of God, there are still seven declarations of his claims, which have been thought to present Jesus as the ultimate revelation of the abstract concepts of light and truth. A closer look proves that they are all deeply rooted in the Old Testament, in the history of Israel and God's involvement in it. He is the light which illuminated their path through the desert, the Good Shepherd who led the way, the door through which alone they could gain access to God, the bread which sustained them, the way and the truth which guided and instructed and, supremely, the true vine, the channel through which the spirit would flow to produce fruit to God as He had purposed through Israel (Psalm 80).

All that God had been and purposed in Israel was now consummated in Jesus, as Dr. Thomas showed in his last pictorial illustration of *Deity Manifested in the Flesh*. But it does not stop there!

**The Signs**

The fact that the so-called miracles of John's Gospel are called signs, proves that these seven incidents are carefully selected; as John tells us (20:30), they are to illustrate some fundamental truths. Whatever their factual origin (and John assures us that his account of Jesus' life is rooted in historical detail, hence his emphasis upon witnesses), this book is not intended to be a literal historical document, but a spiritual insight into the person, work and meaning of Jesus' life and death. There is no reason to question the authorship as that of Jesus' own disciple, as the book claims. But it is an inspired reflection upon Jesus' life and death and, no doubt, John's own personal experience of it. So the seven signs are designed to illustrate the Lord's power to change, to heal, to bring life, light, sight and renewal. The turning of water into wine is the transformation of the natural into the spiritual; the healing of the nobleman's son shows the healing touch unlimited by space. The cripple at Bethesda is cured by response to the Master's command. The provision of bread and the walking on the water, both recall the work of God in the past and the dynamic of creation. The man born blind receives new sight and Lazarus new life. But all of these demand response, for not even God can work unless we draw out, go to meet Him, rise up, receive Him, obey, offer our small contribution and come forth in answer to the Master's call.

**Symbols**

John gives us many clues to interpret the book. In chapter 1 he cites seven witnesses to attest to the claim of Jesus to seven titles. He enumerates the first two signs and he dates the events by feasts and by days. He begins the first sign with the phrase 'on the third day'. We later have several mentions of 'after 2 days', 38 years and finally 4 days, the first day, and the 8<sup>th</sup> day. Jesus himself had so often taught his disciples that on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day he would rise. We recall Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22). It is the day of resurrection. The ministry of Jesus was a foretaste of the power of the risen Lord to bring new life, new sight, healing, restoration and spiritual vitality into those who will come, receive and obey. The 8<sup>th</sup> miracle, his resurrection was the initiation into the new age, the 8<sup>th</sup> day, beyond the third and seventh of the Jewish order. In chapters 14-16 he tells his disciples of his indwelling power which through the spirit will flow through them to bring forth fruit, as they become branches of the true vine receiving from him the life force of his own abiding presence – the true ladder betwixt earth and heaven – the eagle which swoops down to catch its young and bear them on its wings (Deuteronomy 32:11).

In Jesus we see God's supreme involvement with man to draw us up to Him (12:32). This book is the post-resurrectional experience of the living presence and empowering spirit of the Lord.

Sheila Harris

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*At the Cross*  
by Richard Baukham and Trevor Hart,  
Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1999.

This is a book which shows that some theological academics can write in ways which appeal to the heart and feed the mind with deep spiritual understanding. They are both professors at St Andrews University in Scotland, Baukham of New Testament Studies and Hart of Divinity.

The book invites us to think imaginatively through the eyes of eleven characters whose lives were, in one way or another, touched by Jesus in his last earthly hours. Mary of Bethany, Judas Iscariot, Simon Peter, Caiaphas, Pontius Pilate, Barabbas, Simon of Cyrene, Mary Magdalene, the unnamed Centurion, Nicodemus and the beloved disciple – all appear on the stage of the most important drama in history, told in the longest description of crucifixion in the whole of ancient records.

As the authors reflect and add extracts from other writings, prayers and poems on the reactions of these men and women, the significance of the cross comes across with power and simplicity. There are no great theories of atonement; we stand in the presence of Jesus on the cross and feel the mighty transforming power. We are invited to keep on looking until we see!

**Mary of Bethany**

For some time Jesus had been teaching his disciples that 'the path that God required him to travel would lead to suffering, rejection and death'. After the raising of Lazarus he was walking straight into mortal danger. The Bethany household were harbouring a wanted man. They prepare a meal in gratitude for the raising of their brother, yet the joy of fellowship is clouded by a feeling of foreboding.

Washing the feet of guests was the task of servants, but here Mary undertakes it – and in the most extravagant and uncalculating manner, which astonished everyone. She observes the social conventions of a woman's place, but her actions speak louder than any words could have done. She seems to have known that he was going to die and that there was no avoiding it. This is her last opportunity to do something for him. She would not have known why Jesus was walking open-eyed into certain death, but she anoints his body for the burial. Alone among the disciples, she recognises unquestioningly that the cross is Jesus' necessary God-given destiny.

This is the heart of the gospel. We may not understand why, but we need to begin by accepting it – that Jesus accepted the injustice of his death as the way his obedience to the Father must lead him and which he endured for us. Mary's love embraces both the joy and the sorrow of the situation and the fragrance of her gift filled the house. It might have been given to the poor, but the way of the cross which Mary accepts, is the way that leads Jesus himself into his deepest solidarity with the poor and the wretched. As the chapter ends 'in loving Jesus and in accepting Jesus' death, we shall find ourselves drawn ever deeper into God's own loving identification with the poor and the needy and the suffering. The poor are always with us, Jesus also is with us, and it is as the brother of the poor that Jesus is with us.'

**Judas Iscariot – the Betrayer**

The handing over of Jesus, which Judas arranged, illustrates that his suffering was not the physical pain alone. The bitterness of betrayal, denial and desertion by his friends was the precursor to his plumbing the depths of the human experience of god-forsakenness. "In the dark hour of Golgotha the human Son of God feels separated from his Father, a pain the intensity of which we must suppose to be in direct proportion to the closeness of the relationship between them." In the very moment when his closeness to his Father reached its zenith, he feels delivered up, handed over and abandoned, and submits to the treachery of Judas and what followed – for our sake. And so close was the unity of the Father and the Son that God would have felt the pain of the treachery too.

Judas represents the whole of humankind in its propensity to reject the Son of God when he draws near and to hand him over to be crucified. Judas was not alone in

deserting Jesus – all forsook him and fled and one followed afar off. The treachery of Judas cannot be downplayed, but if he had not assumed his plight so desperate that he ended it all, what would Jesus have said to him on the beach where Peter was rehabilitated? Our authors suggest that ‘the least we can say is that the forgiveness offered freely to Peter and to all who will receive it, must also be available to Judas.’ His awful crime was not so great as to place him outside the scope of God’s love.

#### **Peter – the failure**

Unlike Mary, Peter could not accept that Jesus must die. He wants Jesus to be a success and to achieve the deliverance of Israel and he is prepared to die himself if it would ensure the success of Jesus. He has got Jesus and discipleship all wrong and wants Jesus to be the kind of Messiah he envisages. He cannot accept the cross. The idea that Jesus would win by losing, succeed by failing, live through dying, was beyond Peter. ‘The cross creates all these paradoxes. In Jesus’ failure, condemnation and death, God meets us in all our failure, our condemnation and our death’, in order to create for us a new beginning.

Peter may not have denied Jesus just out of cowardice, but because he could not acknowledge association with such a failure. But he had to start on a wholly new basis, understanding a God whose grace is especially available for failures. The cross had to shatter all his illusions. Everything he believed about himself had to come apart. He had to learn that Jesus does not conform to this world’s aspirations. He contradicts our definitions of success and in one sense Peter had to learn that being a failure is a qualification for being a follower of Jesus. ‘Our failure is God’s opportunity, the point where God’s grace always proves to be greater.’ ‘Our confidence in our own abilities has to be dispelled’, though not in favour of a path of self-denigration. Peter had to learn to surrender to God’s grace in Jesus everything that he was, his abilities as well as inabilities, for God to remake him, to heal, restore and renew. And Peter did learn – on the far side of the cross, when the devotion to Jesus he never lost, now purified, prepared him for the role of feeding the Lord’s sheep.

#### **Caiaphas – the man who couldn’t live with Jesus**

Caiaphas saw his task as keeping the peace, so that the Romans could find no excuse to take away what little freedom remained to Israel. Jesus was a threat to this. Jesus was saying and doing things that set him in conflict with those who wanted to preserve, the status quo in Jewish life. He interpreted the law in ways which seemed to the conservatives to be breaking it. He was openly critical of the establishment and the people warmed to this and felt his innate authority. He was someone who was worth hearing and worth being near. And he was especially near to the poor and the unfortunate and even ate with those who were rejected by Jewish society.

His popularity with the masses made him a potential source of trouble and even revolt. It was necessary, in the political scheming of Caiaphas, that this one man should die rather than that the little power left to their nation should be lost. National security and the good of the people required no less. Caiaphas had not sought this dilemma. He would have been happier if Jesus could have just gone off to the wilderness and tempered his words and behaviour. So he saw no alternative. Jesus came to people on his own terms. Political expediency was not one of his concerns. He challenged the norms of human behaviour; following him meant the disappearance of one’s comfort zone. And Caiaphas wasn’t going to let his comfort zone go.

The authors make a comparison between us and Caiaphas. Jesus faces us with alternatives differing radically from our normal compromises with the world. ‘Instead of welcoming Jesus gladly, granting him a triumphal entry into our lives, we do as Caiaphas and his henchmen did. We wait until the opportunity, the dark moment, arises and then we seek to put him to death for the sake of a quiet and peaceful existence.’ Strong words from our authors!

#### **Pontius Pilate – the man who couldn’t make up his mind**

On the face of things Pilate was a powerful man, but perhaps the weakest of all the characters considered in this book. Caiaphas was able to manipulate him easily because Pilate couldn’t afford another mistake after a rebuke from the Emperor for riding roughshod over Jewish susceptibilities. Caiaphas floored him: ‘if you release this man you are no friend of the emperor.’

With all the armed might of Rome behind him Pilate’s hands are tied. He knows Jesus is no real threat to the Emperor, so he tries to negotiate fair treatment for him. ‘But integrity does not come cheap, and Pilate can’t afford it.’ He has some conscience and tries literally to wash his hands of the affair, publicly proclaiming his neutrality, in a vain attempt ‘to seek absolution for a sin he cannot bring himself to own.’ His complicity in this political murder is daily brought to memory in the creed: ‘was crucified under Pontius Pilate.’ Not the epitaph he would have wished. He felt the force of Jesus’ personality but the cost of standing for him was too high. And so he adopted this morally noncommittal, if uncomfortable, neutrality. There are times for us too, when confronted with the weakness and humility of Jesus, sensing the true meaning of kingship, we find it difficult to take our stand with him.

#### **Barabbas – a close scrape with death**

We are told little of him in the gospels. He seems to have been a rebel and bandit who had committed murder in pursuit of the cause. Whatever his original motives, we can’t whitewash him as less than a violent criminal. Yet he obviously had some kind of rough charm which appealed to the crowd who shouted for his release. And so the man who could have been a threat to the emperor went free, while he whose kingdom was not of this world was crucified.

It was not in the interests of the Jewish establishment to let such an insurrectionist go free – the activities of men like him could have rapidly brought about the suppression of the Jewish commonwealth. But so real was their fear of Jesus that they preferred the release of the real criminal.

Baukham and Hart draw an imaginative word picture of the possible emotions of Barabbas as he is set free at the moment he expected to be called to the gibbet. He probably didn’t ask too many questions about the rights and wrongs of the exchange of his life for that of Jesus, as he passed the hill and looked up thinking ‘that might have been me.’ Perhaps he thought that if Jesus had played his cards better, grovelling a bit to Pilate, it would have been Barabbas there. Instead, thanks to Jesus, he had a fresh start in life. What was he going to do with it? We don’t often wonder about Barabbas.

#### **Simon of Cyrene – carrying the cross**

Jesus proved physically unable to carry the cross beam on which he was to be nailed. Simon from Libya, was fortuitously dragged into the drama to carry it, perhaps knowing nothing of what was going on. Yet this accidental encounter made him a disciple of Jesus, according to Romans chapter 16.

He would have been moved by the horror of the situation, coming so close to a mode of death, normally only for those who to Romans were scum and to Jews accursed, neither of whom could see a saviour in such a death. The other victims have been forgotten, but this victim and his solidarity with all of them, has been remembered by multitudes ever since. Perhaps Simon began that day to see something in Jesus which distinguished him from all other victims of this awful penalty. Did he stay long enough to witness the agony and abandonment of the cross? Did it write itself indelibly on his mind and later come to have meaning?

As Jesus showed concern for others and his love of them in his last suffering hours, did Simon see and hear and marvel at it all, later leading to his own transformation? ‘Suffering is often the price some people pay for the self-interest, the greed, the neglect of others. This man, Jesus, who suffered out of love and loved in his suffering, is the loving solidarity of God with all who suffer.’

‘To remember these victims we must take the way of the cross, with Jesus, into the brutal reality of this world. This is a costly and difficult task, but like Simon of Cyrene we shall be drawn closer to Jesus.’ We will be ‘deeply concerned about the unjust structures of our world, the tyranny of the powerful over the weak, the exploitation of the poor by the affluent, the domination of greed and the destruction of the earth? . . . And we recognise you Lord Jesus . . . as one who chose the fate of the victimised. In the brutality of your death we see the love that will heal the world. Help us to see the world from your place among the victims. Enable us with Simon to take our share in carrying our cross.’

#### **Mary Magdalene – enduring the darkness**

We know the names of seven women who travelled with Jesus and ministered unto him. . . . All were present with him at the cross. Notable among them was Mary from Magdala, not a prostitute, but whom Jesus cured of severe mental affliction, earning her fierce devotion. ‘Jesus led her out into the light of a wholly unexpected dawn in which all was unbelievably new and God’s grace and goodness were everywhere to be seen.’ She saw darkness in retreat wherever he went and believed that its defeat would be complete.

Then she stands by the cross. She has lost the one she had lived for and all her hopes are dashed. Darkness is resuming its role of enveloping creation and he who had defeated evil in her life was now defeated by it. The light of the world goes out, but she remains to the end a faithful disciple of Jesus. She stays with him in the three hours of darkness, though hope is extinguished. In this she was so close to the experience of Jesus as he passed beyond consolation into the terrible sense of abandonment by God. ‘She endured with Jesus the very blackest hours of world history, and conversely he, dying and desolate, endured them with her.’ ‘Only by entering the darkness himself could Jesus bring light and liberation to all.’

He didn’t abolish it with a word, but by entering it. ‘He died the death of the most abandoned, so that the most abandoned might share his resurrection,’ though Mary did not know this at the time, as she simply endured the darkness, faithful to Jesus even in the desolation.

In varying degree we experience some or much of this darkness. When we do, the picture of Mary Magdalene by the cross can help us to sense Jesus with us in our darkness. In our desolation we may find the comfort of his presence, who shared our darkness in the darkness of Golgotha.

Sometimes we may be so hemmed in by the darkness that we can find no comfort; we are simply in the darkness with Jesus. ‘Like Mary, all we can do is stay in the darkness, waiting, not knowing there is anything to wait for. Mary’s love and faithfulness are all that keep her there. Because of her love and faithfulness she has nowhere else to go. Out of such experiences, for us as for Mary, come fresh experiences of God. At the time there may be only the faithful staying with him, ‘until, with the surprise of Mary in the garden by the empty tomb, we hear behind us . . . the voice of the risen Christ calling us by name.’

#### **The Centurion at the foot of the Cross**

‘Surely this man was the Son of God.’ What evoked this confession from a battle-hardened soldier who had seen all imaginable evil in his career? He has seen prisoners

herded like cattle to their fate; he had seen death in its most horrible guises. Yet, as he saw this man in his dying hours, these words were wrung out of him. After all he has seen of the sense of abandonment that Jesus expressed, 'My God, My God why hast thou forsaken me!' yet this soldier still believes that the Sonship persists, and that God cares for this Son.

The life of Jesus had been 'one long conversation with God' and this made the sense of being forsaken as he approached death such a terrible tragedy. The joy of his Father's presence being withdrawn – separated for the first time from the Father he loved. Was it the poignancy of the cry of dereliction that broke through the hard shell of the centurion's nonchalance in the presence of death? 'On this cross was a man who loved God, for only one who genuinely loves much can be hurt this much by separation.'

'The centurion's judgment, that this pathetic, exhausted, bedraggled, abused, sad-looking victim of the ultimate human injustice, was and is God's own Son may not be a likely conclusion, but it is the conclusion that Christian faith is driven to in spite of all appearances.' It changes our picture of God. We learn that God is a God who suffers, who feels grief and pain, and shares in the tragedy that befalls his Son. 'Golgotha itself, in all its terrible darkness' tells us more of the love of God than anything else could. 'God is revealed most fully in the pain and vulnerability of Jesus' death.'

The authors conclude, before reproducing a very powerful poem by Studdert Kennedy, that in spite of the many books written in attempting to explain what happened on the cross 'in a sense the impact of the story lies in its telling, rather than in analysing and explaining'. So the centurion saw, and perhaps understood, more than many a learned theologian.

#### **Nicodemus – seeing the Kingdom of God**

Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish Council, a wealthy aristocrat who moved in the highest Jewish circles, had gone to Jesus by night and received, though at the time hardly understood, a new perspective on the kingdom or rule of God, requiring a new birth, not based on human genealogy, which could come from God alone, and which involved leaving behind the political vision of an Israel based on military triumph.

It was the way in which Jesus was condemned to die and submitted to this fate that finally convinced Nicodemus that Jesus really did represent God's rule. Defeat and failure it may have seemed but, whereas for Pilate and Caiaphas it refuted his claim to be king, for Nicodemus it had the marks of true kingship, based on totally different values. He throws in his lot with Jesus, the dead king!

This was done publicly when Nicodemus ensured for him a burial fit for a King. He came with half a hundredweight of most expensive spices. It was an enormous expense and a vast quantity. Whereas earlier he had come by night to see Jesus, now there was no question of sneaking in with a few spices, without anyone noticing. He would have needed a whole procession of servants to carry the precious material to the tomb which Joseph of Arimathea had provided and where he had laid Jesus. It was an act of honouring in a very conspicuous fashion a man who had been executed for treason against the rule of Rome.

Courageously and dangerously he was asserting that the inscription above the cross was true. He recognised a radical alternative to the worldly, self-serving politics to which his station in life had hitherto exposed him and he did so openly. He saw in Jesus true kingship exemplified, even in the humiliated and suffering Jesus. He saw the way of worldly rule repudiated and all human ideas of power and status reversed. Nicodemus saw Jesus crucified and recognised him as the true king who ruled for God. Then it may be said he was truly born again or from above. And this even before the resurrection.

#### **The disciple Jesus loved: the witness to the truth**

This is the story of the disciple, whose closeness to Jesus enabled him to gain a perceptiveness, beyond that of the other disciples, of what the death of Jesus really meant. The authors refer to him as 'the beloved disciple'. He was the disciple who stood by the cross, to whom Jesus gave the care of his mother. He is the loyal friend who sticks by Jesus to the end, when all seemed hopeless. He had used his acquaintance with the High Priest to get close to the action on the fateful night. He is set apart from all the other disciples who had forsaken Jesus and fled. And he writes anonymously because he wants the emphasis to be on his witness to Jesus (John 19:35).

The death of one man, an apparently minor event in history, has life-changing, history-changing, world-changing, cosmic meaning – an event 'upon which God's whole purpose for his whole creation hinges.'

The beloved disciple in his gospel breathes the experience of that day by the cross; throughout his gospel he sees Jesus as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. The crucifixion was the point at which God broke the power of evil in the world and opened the gate of freedom for all. The blood of Christ cleanses us from sin; the water that also flowed from his side springs up inexhaustibly as a fountain of life. Read the whole gospel from the perspective of the beloved disciple's sojourn by the cross throughout the ordeal. As with Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany and Nicodemus, his was a loyalty which even before the resurrection can be seen as tested and true. What amazing faith in the midst of the darkness.

#### **The new beginning**

Of course without the resurrection it really would have been a failure, yet Jesus Christ and him crucified is the source of transforming power as we accompany him every time we read the gospels and whenever we eat the bread and drink the wine in remembrance of him.

With its many facets, this book, as nothing else I have read, has made the cross come alive for me. All my attempts to come up with a theory of atonement seem futile by comparison with the faith of those loyal friends who stood firm to the end, even when it really seemed the end. It was as if they were coming to know God for the first time as the one whom, in his Son, suffered in solidarity with the race he had created for his ultimate fellowship and joy.

#### **Finally, a selection from the prayers and poems which end each chapter in the book:**

In the plight of a world that lacks your love  
And in the tragedy of a world that refuses your presence,  
Help us to see Jesus crucified as your presence in the world  
And find in him your unfailing love for that world.

Lord, we recognise you as the ruler of all  
Not in spite of your cross, but because of it.  
We see your power in weakness  
Your glory in your humiliation,  
Your sovereignty in your self giving service,  
Your victory in your death.

And on the far side of the shame and pain of crucifixion  
May we discover your enduring and redeeming love,  
Restoring and raising us up  
To a new and fullness of life,  
Lived in your Son and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Alfred Ward

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**Your theology is what you are  
when the talking stops and the action starts.**  
Colin Morris

**The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies**  
Ed. J. W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu  
Oxford University Press Oxford 2006

This is a large hardback volume of 896 pages, designed for many hours of reading. Among the contributors are authors who are well known to many Christadelphians, and who write as specialists in their own particular fields:

W. G. Lambert (Ancient Near Eastern Studies: Mesopotamia),  
Kenneth Kitchen (Ancient Near Eastern Studies: Egypt),  
Gordon Wenham (Law in the Old Testament),  
Alan Millard (Authors, Books, Readers in the Ancient World), and  
James Dunn (New Testament Theology).

The work is divided into 7 parts:  
On the Discipline  
Languages, Translation, and Textual Transmission of the Bible,  
Historical and Social Study of the Bible,  
The Composition of the Bible,

Methods in Biblical Scholarship,  
The Interpretation of the Bible,  
The Authority of the Bible.

Each article is accompanied by a bibliography, while the whole work has an index of subjects and names, and an index of biblical references.

Undoubtedly, it is a very scholarly production in which we are given the benefit of the expertise of its 45 contributors. Among the five shades of meaning given by my Oxford English Dictionary, a scholar may be defined as a distinguished him/herself in some branch of knowledge. Thus, it is with some trepidation that I write this article, not as a scholar, but as a student. However, I believe that this recent publication should be brought to the attention of the readers of *The Endeavour Magazine*. What follows is a sample of some insights that I have gained by reading this book, especially in the areas which are of particular interest to me.

#### **The Language and Translation of the Old Testament**

John Elwolde, in his article, notes that 'the alphabet familiar to us as Hebrew is in fact the Aramaic script, used for writing Hebrew after the exile' (p 136). For the development of writing see *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, IVP, 1994, pp 1160-1.

'Aramaic and Hebrew are not mutually intelligible dialects, but separate languages, each with a wealth of literary and spoken traditions' (p 137). In Neh 8:8 we are told that the Levites read from the book, from the law of God, clearly - or perhaps paragraph by paragraph - and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. This seems to imply that the meaning of the text was expounded. However, if the date of Nehemiah can be fixed during the reign of Artaxerxes I 464-424 BC, and the suggestion of F. F. Bruce, in *The Books and the Parchments*, Pickering & Inglis, 1984, that some of the exiles on their return from Babylon 'found themselves no longer able to speak the Hebrew tongue of their forefathers' (p 43) is taken into account, then translation was also involved in the exposition. Bruce makes the further point that 'from the time of the exile onwards, Aramaic steadily spread as the Palestinian vernacular at the expense of Hebrew, until the situation became the reverse of what had obtained in Hezekiah's time' (p 44).

Regarding figurative language, Elwolde makes the important point that 'what was immediately recognised as figurative to those who produced the text may not be so apprehended by those who have access to the text only through non-mother-tongue knowledge of its language or through translation' (p 150). An example of such misunderstanding is found in an article in the Logos magazine where it was stated that 'the Hebrew of the Bible is a pure language (Pro 30:5). It will form the basis of the language of the kingdom Age.' Most of us are in the situation whereby the biblical languages are not our mother-tongue, but this does not give us the excuse for misinterpreting verses in order to fit our own preconceived ideas. The need for us to use modern translations is that they 'will often clarify, or decode, a figurative usage, if it is felt that readers will not readily comprehend [a passage]' (p 152). However, 'It is often difficult to see where linguistic assistance ends and interpretative imposition begins' (p 152).

One of the well-known verses of scripture is Isa 7:14 where the AV has 'a virgin' while the RSV uses 'a young woman.' This appears to be a more faithful translation for, while 'almah' may bear the meaning 'virgin', generally it means a young woman of marriageable age. Thus, in this example there is no interpretative imposition. A more complicated question is; What is meant by the phrase 'knowledge of good and evil' in Gen 2:17? Is the focus on moral issues, or does it mean 'complete' knowledge, or even that which is advantageous or disadvantageous? Most translations leave it up to the reader to decide, but hopefully not to be dogmatic.

Elwolde hardly touches on the topic of syntax; the grammatical arrangement of words in speech or writing. As a former teacher, I cringe when I hear or read the word 'only' misplaced in a sentence. My work colleagues think I am being pedantic when I correct them. In Biblical Hebrew word order is particularly important. For example, when we read Gen 2:17, in the RSV, the sentence 'for on the day that you eat of it [the tree], you shall die' there is no need for convoluted explanations which take 'in the day' as a literal 24 hour period and death as a continuing process. Hidden behind our translation is a particular Hebrew word order - 'dying you shall die' - which expresses certainty.

Some Hebrew words can be easily misunderstood. For example, with our modern understanding of anthropology, we know that our brain performs our thinking process and our heart acts as a pump to enable the blood to circulate through our body. However, Biblical Hebrew has no word for 'brain.' In contradistinction with modern usage the heart is not the centre of the emotions; rather it acts as the thinking organ whereas the term bowels is related to the emotions.

#### **The language and translation of the New Testament**

Stanley E Porter, in his section on the *Use of Greek in the early Church and even by Jesus*, suggests that 'the question becomes whether Jesus himself and his disciples may have spoken Greek' (p 187). 'Although there are some who deny that Jesus spoke any language other than Aramaic, there is a growing number of scholars who recognise that Jesus certainly spoke Aramaic but probably also spoke Greek on occasion' (p188). Porter concludes that 'it was highly probable that Jesus was multilingual, knowing Aramaic and Greek, and possibly Hebrew, (p 189).

At a cost of NZ\$300, this book is rather expensive, and with its size does not make for bedtime reading. For those who have access to a university or theological library, this book is well worth consulting.

John Stephenson (NZ)

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*If you know Hebrew, Greek and Latin,  
do not put them where Pilate did,  
at the head of Christ; put them at his feet.*

#### **Correspondence**

Dear Les,

Constructing a theodicy is proving to be a difficult task, which is hardly surprising. When trying to deal with the mind of the Almighty, we are inevitably going to tie ourselves up in knots, and, in the end, still have unanswered questions. Our puny minds cannot possibly understand all His ways. It is dangerous to speculate too much, or we may find we are trying to justify His actions in the same way as we might those of another human being. We can, however, go a little way down the road as Bob and Cyril have already shown. Our minds *can* comprehend that a suffering world has its advantages in trying to bring us back to God.

A choice made in Eden brought sin, suffering and finally death into our world, but that does not make God other than good. We know that '*God cannot be tempted by evil*' (James 1:13). He is uncontaminated by evil, and only allows it until He intervenes and sends Jesus to earth again. We live in a world of cause and effect, where a high proportion of death and suffering is directly due to man's actions. God may not yet intervene on a grand scale, but He can and does in some individual cases. We all know of those whom God has saved from accident or cured of serious illnesses, but we cannot know why God helps some, but not others. All we can be certain of is that, whatever happens in our lives, we must all die of something, unless Jesus returns first.

But, what about the thorny problem of all the innocent children who have been killed, along with adults, in both biblical and non-biblical contexts? Why does God allow it? It might help us to consider what would have become of those children had they not been killed. Who would there have been to care for vast numbers of orphans, all suffering the mental trauma of suddenly losing their parents and other adult relatives? Without such care they would have been in dire straits, probably dying anyway from disease or starvation. Even with some sort of care, it is highly likely they would have been psychologically scarred for life by their terrible experiences. Maybe God in His mercy saved them from all of that.

Sincerely yours in Jesus,

Pauline Clementson

by  
Sheila Harris

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