

I am the gate for the sheep.
I am the good shepherd,
who is willing to die for the sheep.
I know my sheep and they know me.

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Cover Text: John 10:7,11, 14. .

The Rabbinic Background to the New Testament

In view of the long time span and our cultural separation from Biblical times, it is appropriate to make some study of Jewish and other writings contemporary with Biblical times. For the New Testament some attempt at this was usual in English society a few centuries ago. It has been said that any English household of the period could be expected to possess a minimum of three books: the Authorised Version of the Bible, the works of Josephus in William Whiston's translation (1737 and reprints) and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Whiston's Josephus still adorns many Christadelphian bookshelves, though it is not by modern standards a reliable translation. In any case Bible study is little served by Josephus. He lived c. 37-100 A.D. and wrote what survives in Greek under Roman patronage while living in Rome on a state pension. He used literary hacks to write good Greek and his works have passed down the centuries being copied by Christian copyists. His impartiality in giving a record of the 1st century A.D. wars of the Jews against the Romans, in which he took part, is doubted. His retelling the history of the Old Testament in his own (or his hacks') words uses many non-Biblical sources or no sure value. And his brief account of Jesus has certainly been modified by one or more Christian copyists. But he was a first century A.D. Jewish writer whose testimony has to be considered.

What else is there other than Josephus? Quite a number of apocryphal works exist which circulated in Jewish circles of the 1st century A.D., some of which indeed may have been composed in that period. The best known is the Book of Enoch, quoted in Jude 14, 15. What we have, in English translation from the Ethiopic, itself a translation from the Greek, which in turn was translated from the Aramaic, of which parts survive from the Dead Sea caves, is a combination of several originally separate works. Jude also quotes a Moses apocryphon in v. 9, but the work itself no longer survives. We do have part of a poor Latin translation of a Greek rendering from a presumably Aramaic original. While a perusal of such works can illuminate Jewish thought of the New Testament period, it is limited help only.

Jews of Jesus' time, as we learn from Josephus, could be divided into three sects: Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes. The last one is not mentioned in the New Testament, but it is often quoted in recent scholarship because the commune near the Dead Sea caves is often considered an Essene community. This is not completely certain, and in any case the various scrolls are not all

from one school of thought. Thus we shall not deal with them further here, but scribes and Pharisees with Sadducees are well known in the New Testament. Scribes were experts in the Jewish Law, and not inevitably members of one party.

The origins of both Sadducees and Pharisees are alike obscure and will not be dealt with here. In the time of Christ they were the main groupings of Jewry with their distinctive characters. The Sadducees were a kind of priestly aristocracy, controlling the temple and so involved in the security of the Jewish state. We have no books of Sadducean origin and when the temple was destroyed in AD 70 they soon disappeared from Jewish life. Their teaching involved rejection of the doctrine of resurrection (Luke 20:27; Acts 23:5), similar rejection of the immortality of the soul, and of the oral law, and accepted only the Law as canonical. Doctrinally they were very conservative, though they were often accused of adopting Greek manners and customs. They do not contribute much to our inquiry.

The Pharisees were a much greater power in Jewish life of the first century AD. They were sticklers for the letter of the Law, not only the written, canonical books, but also the so-called oral Law, allegedly given by God to Moses orally and passed orally down the centuries. The concept arose from purely practical problems of the Law, which can be illustrated from the written requirement of Sabbath observance. When service to God was seen as primarily a matter of observing the Law, the problem arose of knowing exactly what constituted work for this purpose. Leading Rabbis had developed a vast quantity of rulings which they taught to their students, and in time a body of oral material had grown up. To take one simple matter: Acts 1:12 mentions that the journey from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem was a 'sabbath day's journey'. Walking on the Sabbath was permissible up to a certain distance, but walking a greater distance was considered work and so was forbidden.

At first all these rulings were passed down orally, but in due course there were attempts to organize and codify them in writing. This process began at about the time of Jesus' mission and reached a certain climax about 800 AD, though further refinements continued to be made by some Rabbis later.

The fall of Jerusalem with the destruction of the temple did not eliminate the Pharisees as it did the Sadducees. Rather the Pharisees became the sole leaders of the Jewish community as their rivals disappeared. Indeed the threat to Judaism from the destruction of the temple seems to have spurred the Pharisaic leaders to press on with the codification of all their elaborations of the written Law to help in consolidating the now templeless Jewish community. There are no records of just when, how, and by whom this was done, but there is enough surviving Rabbinic material to give a rough outline of the process. Acts 5:54 names a Rabbi Gamaliel as urging the Jewish Council to be cautious in dealing with Peter and other Christian preachers. And Paul in Acts 22:3 declares himself to have been a student of this Gamaliel. The Rabbi was a Pharisee and belonged to one side of two often conflicting Pharisaic schools already existing before Jesus' mission began, those of Shammai and Hillel. Shammai was a stickler for meticulous regulation and observation of all the traditional rulings. Hillel was more liberal, so that Gamaliel's plea recorded in Acts confirms his belonging to the school of Hillel. But it was a second Gamaliel, active towards the end of the first century AD and into the second, who played a greater role in putting all the rulings in ordered written form. Other famous Rabbis involved were Aqiba (lived c. 50—135), Meir (active c. 140—165), and, above all Judah the Patriarch (born 135). The last-named produced what is called the Mishnah (a term covering both the process or teaching and what is taught), a work still surviving and available in reliable English translation by Herbert Danby (Oxford, 1933 and reprints). The work is divided into six main parts, and each part contains a number of separate Tractates, 63 in all. The translation covers 789 pages. While this work did much to settle disputes on many issues, it also commonly cites divergent views with the names of the Rabbis supporting them. Finality was thus not achieved, and further discussion took place, which resulted in more compendia. The earliest is the Tosephta ('Additions'). This is four times the length of the Mishnah and is altogether more uncertain as to authorship and date. Some think it in fact preceded the Mishnah, others that it followed. There is an English translation by J. Neusner (6 volumes, 1977-1986), but the whole is little studied and never had the authority of the Mishnah. TWO Talmuds followed: both being essentially the Mishnah section by section with often lengthy commentary. The earlier, and less authoritative, is the Palestinian (or Jerusalem) Talmud, the later and much more authoritative is the Babylonian Talmud. This, in its commentary sections, included a vast amount of material, anecdotes e.g., which is not strictly relevant to the legal matter being discussed. The Palestinian seems to have been compiled, or reached its final form c. 450 AD, and is not available in a complete English translation. The Babylonian was apparently compiled c. 450-800 AD, and there is a good English translation: I? Epstein (ed.), *The Babylonian Talmud*, 55 volumes, London 1935-1952 and reprints. The Mishnah is the most helpful for New Testament study, and as readily available in a single volume. Illustrations will follow in the next article.

W G Lambert

(Erratum E118, 4 lines up from bottom of page 7, '50' should read '30'.)

I Am

In my booklet *The Doctrine of The Trinity*, I suggest that the expression 'I am' (*ego eimi*) is part of the verb 'to be' rather than a reference to the Divine name in Exodus 3:14 but this supposition has attracted criticism.

The words 'I am' are highlighted in John chapter 18 where it is recorded that when the Temple guard came to arrest Jesus, they were stopped in their tracks. When the soldiers approached, he asked them 'Who is it you want?' to which they replied 'Jesus of Nazareth'. The Master then responded: 'I am he.' When he said that, the military men 'drew back and fell to the ground.' A footnote in the NIV Study Bible reads: 'It is the forceful I am (*ego eimi*) which refers to the personal name of God as it appeared in the Greek translation of the Old Testament.' Certainly, Jesus was identifying himself and voicing God's authority, but is there more to the words even than that?

Commentators seem to agree that there are seven absolute 'I am' sayings in John's gospel; the seventh repeated twice:

Then Jesus declared, 'I who speak to you am he' (4:26).

But he said the them, 'It is I; do not be afraid' (6:20).

'If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins' (8:24).

'Then you will know that I am the one I claim to be' (8:28).

'I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, 'Before Abraham was born, I am' (8:58).

'I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you may believe that I am he' (13:19).

'I am he, Jesus said (18:5).

When Jesus said 'I am he', they drew back and fell to the ground (18:6).

'I told you that I am he', Jesus answered (18:8).

Similarly, commentators identify seven absolute 'I am' (*ani hu*) sayings in the Old Testament, plus two with an emphatic

variation, namely 'I, even I, am he' (*anoki anoki hu*):

'See now that **I myself am he**' (Deuteronomy 32:39).

'I, the Lord - with the first of them and the last - **I am he**' (Isa 41:4).

'So that you may know and believe me and understand that **I am he**' (Isaiah 43:10).

'Yes, and from ancient days **I am he**' (Isaiah 43:13).

'Even to your old age and grey hairs **I am he**' (Isaiah 46:4).

'Listen to me, O Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: **I am he**' (Isaiah 48:12).

'Therefore in that day they will know that **it is I** who foretold it' (Isaiah 52:6).

'**I, even I, am he** who blots out your transgressions, for my sake' (Isaiah 43:25).

'**I, even I, am he** who comforts you' (Isaiah 51:12).

If there is a correlation between the two series of 'I am' occurrences in Deutero-Isaiah and John's gospel, then Jesus is identifying himself with the God of Israel.

Thus, when he was arrested by the Temple guard, it is not surprising that the Jewish soldiers were filled with awe, reeled back, and fell prostrate on their faces. In this amazing incident, the climax of Jesus' agony in Gethsemane, he apparently reflected the Shekinah glory - as similarly witnessed at his transfiguration.

To sum up, perhaps the 'I am' is both the verb 'to be' and the affirmation that the Lord Jesus bore and identified himself with the Divine name.

Bill Davison

The Bible in its Place

We Christadelphians have frequently called ourselves *The People of the Book* and, indeed, our devotion to the scriptures is, perhaps, second to none. Others, however, have pointed out that there is a danger in this devotion - that it is possible to put the Bible if not on the same level as God, certainly on the same level as Jesus, if not higher. We may dispute this, but maybe we can see how such ideas come about. Perhaps, therefore, we need to reassess exactly what the Bible is, what it is for, and what place it should have in our lives.

It may be said that the Bible has two main purposes: firstly to help bring people into a relationship with God and Jesus and secondly to enable them to grow in that relationship for the rest of their lives. So the Bible certainly has an essential place in God's purpose and in our lives; but we need to understand what that place is and ensure that we do not turn scripture into something it was never intended to be. Everything about Christianity is to do with relationships, but we can't have a living relationship with a book. The Bible is not an end in itself, but is a stepping stone designed to lead to right relationships with God, Jesus, each other and the world. It cannot replace those relationships.

What is the Bible

The Bible is a special and unique story - of God at work within his creation, specifically with mankind. It is the story of an almighty and yet loving creator putting right what man has got wrong. It tells a living story, the end of which is not yet written. What has happened so far has come to us, *apparently*, in the form of a book. But what kind of book? It is impossible to classify it in terms of any known kind of literary work. So instead we may say that the Bible is a unique book which reveals '**The Truth**'.

But one of the problems facing Bible students is that there are parts of the Bible that do not give the impression of being 'true'; that is they do not appear to be factually or historically accurate, or indeed, credulous. But if the book contains details which are not (or may not be) true then how can it reveal the 'Truth'? Perhaps we need to consider our definition of 'truth'. Does it help if we stop assuming that everything in the Bible must be true, in a factual sense, and say instead that it reveals the 'Truth' because it contains what God wants us to know - the truth about himself, about Jesus, about the divine purpose, about human nature - but it does so in ways which may not be true in the way we normally use the word? Spiritual 'Truth' is not merely a set of statements, doctrines or rules, it is all about a living relationship with the Father and his son.

Perhaps our mistake is to insist on thinking of the Bible merely as a book, holy one though it is. This can limit our understanding and appreciation of it. For a minute let's think about it as an instrument - one which can be used in a variety of ways. Like a piano, for instance! This can be a solo instrument, or used to accompany. It can be the lead-instrument or it can play in the background. It can be used to play jazz, pop music, classical music, hymns - and the same player can do all these things at different times. Sometimes he can do several of these things at the same time. To merely say it is a musical instrument is to fail to recognise its potential and its versatility. It tells us what it is, but it gives us no idea of the scope of its application.

The same applies to the Bible. It is more than just a book, it is an instrument which in the hands of God and through his Holy Spirit, can be used in many different ways. God uses it to impart principles which are there to guide his children through life lived in a relationship with him. So it is the principle which becomes important and the means by which it is revealed and established becomes of secondary importance. In other words it may not be so important that the record of an event or situation does not seem to be factually accurate, provided that we can establish the principle behind it. This is the very basis of the parables used by Jesus. Must parables be confined to the gospel record? Aren't they just as legitimate as a teaching method from Genesis through to Revelation?

This way of looking at things does not detract from the fact that the Bible is a divinely inspired book, although it may mean that we have to rethink our understanding of inspiration. In 2 Tim 3: 16-17 Paul reminds us that the purpose of inspired scripture is to enable us to be '*equipped for every good work*' - that is the crux of the matter. The Bible is there, inspired by God, to enable God's people to be God's people, and to live as God's people in his world. It is not there to enable God's people to sit back smugly and declare that they understand all of God's Truth!!!

Biblical Authority!

We often talk about '*Biblical authority*'. But what does that mean? The first thing that has to be said is that any authority that the Bible has is a derived authority, it is based on the authority of God himself. The Bible never focuses on its own authority but demands that we look beyond its pages to the authority of the one who inspired it. So, just as we adjusted our definition of truth,

so perhaps we need to adjust our definition of authority. Human authority often carries with it the idea of power, of control, of superiority, of domination – frequently for the benefit of the one who carries that authority. People often use authority to crush those beneath them, especially those who challenge them. And they use it to put people into little boxes and keep them there.

Too often we find this concept of authority in the church where it is used to control people or situations, to make sure that everything is done ‘properly’ so that the church does not go off the rails doctrinally or ethically, and that correct ideas and practices are upheld and transmitted to the next generation. So the church tries to tidy people up, to keep them in order and under control. So the Bible becomes the place where we go to find out the correct answers to key questions about how to do this. But is this really all the Bible is for? Is it there simply to control the church, so that the church can control its members?

Surely not! That is the exercise of worldly authority. The Bible is not just a rule book, even though it contains rules. It is a guide book for all generations and all cultures. The whole Bible is culturally conditioned. It is written in the language of particular times, and represents the cultures in which it was written. That does not matter if we accept that God is not giving us an unchanging set of rules, but instead is establishing a timeless set of principles which can be applied in any age and any culture in ways that are relevant to that culture. Turn the Bible into an abstract set of truths and rules and we make it something it is not, and was never intended to be. To quote N T Wright (the current Bishop of Durham to whom I am grateful for influencing a lot of my thoughts on this subject) *‘The Bible is not meant to be simply information for the legalist. It is not a Paper Pope, even though we often treat it like one.’* God has invested his authority in scripture, so in order to ensure that the Bible occupies the right place in our lives we need to think about Divine Authority.

Divine Authority

‘In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.’ God spoke and it was done. God always speaks so that his will may be done. He exercised authority in the lives of men and in the great events of biblical history. We find God bringing his authority to bear not just by revealing a set of timeless truths, but by delegating his authority to obedient men through whose words he brought judgement and salvation to Israel and the world.

This principle goes on into the New Testament where we meet Jesus who says, in effect ‘all authority is given to me, so that you can go and get on with the job.’ So, in order that the church may be the church – the people of God for the world – he equipped men in the first Christian generation to write the material which is to inform God’s people across all generations. Authority originates with the Father, is delegated to the Son, and then, through the Holy Spirit, to us as well. We are to be the ones through whom God still works authoritatively. The Bible reveals that authority it does not replace or usurp it.

God is saving the world through Jesus and, in the power of the Spirit, through us. He is the loving, wise, creator, redeemer God. And his authority lies in his exercise of those qualities! What he does authoritatively he does with this intent – to rescue, to redeem. God does not stand outside the human process and merely comment on it. He is right there in the process, working in the best interests of his creation and his children. His authority works to his glory but for our benefit. It is an authority of grace, not of domination! God’s authority is designed to liberate human beings – to enable his children to be the people that he wants them to be. Scripture is the way by which he reveals that authority, but it is not the way by which he exercises it. That is through Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and men and women like us! Scripture leads us to understand and become involved in that.

How does God use Scripture to exercise his authority?

The majority of scripture is not directly authoritative – *these are the rules, ignore them at your peril!* Most of scripture is narrative, an ongoing story, which has not yet reached its ending. The authority which God has invested in this book is an authority that is exercised *through* his people telling *their* story – one of God involving himself with mankind. So how can such a story be authoritative? Well sometimes a story is told so that the actions of its characters may be imitated (direct example), or with a view to creating an ethos which may then be perpetuated in various ways (established principle). But how do we know which is which? Trying to decide (and everybody will have their own opinion) can be a recipe for disaster, and even division. It also means we can spend too much time looking for answers where there are no answers – at present. So can we resolve this dilemma? Wright offers a scenario which I have found helpful, which can be summarised as follows.

Imagine that you discover a novel, one chapter of which is missing. You have the first four chapters which tell the early story, and also chapter six which provides the ending, but chapter five, which connects the two sections together, is not there. So someone says ‘You write the missing chapter!’ How would you go about it – remembering that you have to honour the original author’s master plan, and that you have to end the story as the last chapter says it ends?

Well, the early chapters would certainly be the authority for the task. Whatever happens in our chapter would have to be consistent with what had happened in the earlier part of the novel. The early chapters would govern the shape of the missing chapter, but the new chapter would not just be parts of the first ones being repeated over again. It would be original but it would be consistent with, and draw together the threads of, what had gone before. It would not be written in isolation but neither would it be slavish repetition. And it would lead to the final chapter logically and clearly. So the final chapter, too, would be an authority for what comes immediately before it.

So let’s take that model and apply it to the Bible. We know how it all began for we have the first four chapters which describe the creation and the fall, the history of Israel, the life and teachings of Jesus and the establishment of the Christian Church. This takes us to the end of the Bible except for Revelation which is actually chapter 6 and which tells us how the story is going to end. But we cannot reach that ending until the missing chapter (chapter five) is in place. We have to produce that chapter, and in fact we are writing it as we live! We are the missing chapter!

The fifth chapter is the story of the church age – our age. For almost 2000 years those who form the church have been required to write and, indeed, live out this fifth chapter based on the authority of the earlier chapters and in a way which is consistent with them but not a repetition of them. We take the principles of scripture and seek to apply them, not take the events of scripture and try to repeat them. The story is ongoing and it is ongoing through us. Our lives and the outworking of the divine authority which God has invested in us are informed by what we have preserved for us in the Bible. But our chapter is an original chapter not a rehash of what has gone before!

Wright points out that like all analogies this one inevitably breaks down because, in the case of the novel, the writing of the missing chapter involves no input from the original author, but in our case the divine author is very much in evidence. By his Spirit he is guiding us through the process. We are not alone, but neither are we puppets. We live out the fifth chapter, informed by the first four and the sixth, but also with the free will which our Father has given us as a part of our partnership with him.

Jesus said *‘As the Father has sent me, I am sending you’* (John 20: 21). We are authorised by God to do his work, just as those we read about in scripture were authorised to work for God in their culture and in ways relevant to their times. We are *not* authorised to try and shoehorn those ways into a culture which is not appropriate for them. We are to take the principles and the examples but be ready to be led by God to apply them in the way that he wants in our time. The church’s authority is to speak and act for God, to proclaim Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and to lift him out of the pages of scripture and place him in the hearts of men. But we cannot do that unless we see him in the pages of scripture first. God wants us to be involved in his work; he does not want to bypass us. Today, as in all other centuries, the Bible is a key part of God’s plan. It is not merely a divinely given

commentary on the way salvation works; it is part of the *means by which* he puts his purposes of judgement and salvation to work.

Again we can summarise some thoughts of N T Wright ... *'And, as we are involved, so we ourselves are being remade. He doesn't give us the Holy Spirit in order to make us infallible – blind and dumb servants who merely sit there and let the stuff flow through us. Likewise, he doesn't simply give us a rule book so that we could just thumb through and look it up. He doesn't create a church where you become automatically sinless on entry. Because, as the goal and end of his work is redemption, so the means is redemptive also.... God does not put people into boxes and keep them safe and sound. It is, after all, possible to be so sound that you're sound asleep. Boxes in which you put people to keep them under control are called coffins.... We read scripture not in order to avoid life and growth – and God forgive us that we have done that in some of our traditions – nor do we read scripture in order to avoid thought and action, or to be crushed, or squeezed, or confined into a de-humanizing shape, but in order to die and rise again in our minds. Again and again, we find, as we submit to scripture, as we wrestle with the bits that don't make sense, and as we burst through to a new sense that we haven't thought of or seen before, God breathes into our nostrils his own breath – the breath of life. And we become living beings – recreated in his image, more fully human, thinking, alive beings.'*

That surely is why God has given us so much narrative in scripture. Throw a rule book at people's heads, or simply offer them a list of doctrines, and they can duck or avoid them, or simply disagree and go away. Or worse still use them as a weapon against those who have the temerity to come to different conclusions. A story, though, invites people to come into a different world; from the Christian context it invites them to share a "God-view" and see life from a different and better perspective. Stories determine how people see themselves, how they see the world, how they experience their fellow men, and especially how they experience God. Man has always successfully used stories to get messages across. If that happens at merely a human level, how much more so when it is the creator God himself breathing out his message

So we are here to tell the story. We have to tell it in the world so that people may have the opportunity to find God and Jesus and come into relationship with them. And we also have to tell it in the church so that we may retain and grow that relationship both individually and collectively. And as we tell it we have to live it, to be that new chapter in the world in which we live. We must allow scripture to teach us how to think from the divine perspective, not the human one. God wants us to be people, not puppets; to love him with all our mind, our soul and our strength. And it is scripture that enables us to do that, not by crushing us into an alien mould but by giving us the fully authoritative chapters which enable us to both write and live the new chapter and in doing so make us free to become the kind of people God wants us to be in our time.

So the Bible is a means to an end and not an end in itself. Its authority lies in God's use of it to exercise his divine authority. He uses the Bible to establish and perpetuate a set of principles which his people can apply in all cultures and all generations, *in ways which are relevant at the time*. If the Bible is to be the Bible that God intended it to be, it must allow the people of God to be the people he intends them to be, his special people, living under his authority, exhibiting that authority and bringing light to his world.

We finish where we started – we cannot have a relationship with a book, –special and unique as it is. But by putting the Bible in its place, and respecting the place it occupies, we *will* have a relationship with God and with Jesus Christ his son. That is *our* place and that is where scripture, as an instrument of God's purpose and as a vehicle of his authority when used in tandem with the Holy Spirit, will lead us.

Mike Newbold

NB (N T Wright quotes are from *Simply Christian*, published by SPCK 2006 and from *How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?* - *The Laing Lecture* 1989, and the *Griffith Thomas Lecture* 1989, originally published in *Vox Evangelica*, 1991)

Trials and Tribulations

In several of 'our' interpretations of Revelation, it is mentioned that, at the time of the end, there will be a persecution of believers. For example Revelation 6:9 under the fifth seal says: *I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God and for the testimony which they held*. It poses problems: if this particular incident is prior to the Second Coming, then when does it start? *Eureka* suggests that this was the persecution that commenced under Galerius in AD 303. Is it correct then to extend it and project it into the twenty-first century? What would be the starting point of such a period of tribulation?

It would seem that the Word teaches an ignorance of the 'day' of the Lord. Hence the repeated exhortation to WATCH, for that day and hour knoweth no man. I think we have contributed our fair share of dates for this momentous event, but we still wait, and it will occur at a time when we think not. Many 'church' writers have written of a 'tribulation' to last for seven years, some say before, some say during and some say after the 'Rapture', the removal of believers to heaven.

That there was to be persecution is undeniable, but at specific times, the most immediate being the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple and the scattering of God's people to the four corners of the earth. At that time thousands lost their lives. There was also the dreadful spectacle of Christians thrown to the lions. When the Lord wrote to the seven ecclesias, He told them of trials and persecutions but these were not to be general in occurrence. They would be at set times. *The devil shall some of you into prison, that ye may be tried, and ye shall have tribulation ten days* (Rev 2:10). This was a specific period, however long that might have been, and it was addressed to those at Smyrna.

In Rev 2:13 there is a message for Pergamos: *I know thy works and where thou dwellest, where Satan's seat is, thou holdest fast my Name and hast not denied my faith, even in the days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth*; again a specific time and place. It does not appear to have been a universal persecution.

To Thyatira (ch 2:22): *I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel ... I will cast her into a bed and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent ... and I will kill her children with death ... and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. But unto you I say and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine and which have not known the depth of Satan ... I will put upon you none other burden*.

The message to Philadelphia (ch 3:10) was this: *Because thou hast kept the Word of my patience, I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth*. Then, in ch 3:18, the Laodiceans were told: *I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire ... as many as I love I rebuke and chasten*. Is it not the Word that rebukes and chastens us in these days?

The Apostle Peter mentions specific trials that were to come upon the believers: *though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with the fire might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of the Jesus Christ* (1 Peter 1:6). We have already seen what those trials were and these things are not unexpected by the saints. (1 Peter 4:12) *beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings*. Is the disciple greater than his Master?

At that time, it resulted in the slaying of James, an individual. Peter too could have died, had he not been rescued by the angel, though he did eventually lose his life for Christ's sake, as did Paul and, seemingly, most of the apostles. Right down the ages, believers have lost their lives for Christ's sake, many burnt at the stake. We call them misbelievers, but who are we to judge?

There have been those who have chosen the path of suffering, despite the consequences. *Moses, by faith, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt* (Heb 11:25). Do you think that would have pleased Pharaoh? Can you imagine the scene? But Moses forsook all that, even though Pharaoh must have been exceedingly angry – how dare he! One can just imagine his wrath, but Moses feared not the wrath of the king. To have been offered such a high honour by the reigning monarch and refusing it. What would one expect?

Later, after the slaying of the Egyptian, when Pharaoh sought to slay Moses, he did fear and said *surely the thing is known*. But that 'thing' was his attempt to take Israel out of Egypt and Stephen says (Acts 7:25 ESV) *he supposed his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand*. Moses later returned to Egypt, absolutely fearlessly, being more than a match for Pharaoh.

Jeremiah also chose to go down into Egypt with his people, despite telling them of the consequences of disobeying God, even when he was offered 5-star accommodation in Babylon. Sometimes to compromise one's faith for fear of the consequences might avoid unpleasant treatment, but Daniel did not consider that for one moment although he knew full well what the result would be.

Daniel's three friends had no hesitation in stating where their loyalty lay and, despite what must have been a horrible experience, were justified in declaring their allegiance to the Lord. Lot might have seemed to be seeking the things of this life, but we are given an insight into the sort of person he really was; in God's estimation he was a righteous man. His sufferings were not because of his weakness but *being vexed with the filthy conversation (manner of life) of the wicked ... in seeing and hearing, vexed (tormented) his righteous soul from day to day*. Why didn't he leave Sodom? Have we any right to ask?

A brother once confessed to trying to hide his light under a bushel when he went to college and bitterly regretted doing so. The Second World War caused him to be sent on the land but afterwards, when he resumed his interrupted studies, he determined that, come what may, he was going to declare his allegiance to the Lord Jesus and found that things could not have been easier.

There are times when we should seek to avoid persecution. On sending his disciples out to preach the Word, the Lord said *when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next*. Paul also did that. After he had preached at Ephesus for three months, some, who were hardened and disobedient, spoke evil of The Way before the multitude. Paul departed from them, and separated the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. There is a time to keep silence and a time to speak.

It is interesting to know that the altar of Revelation 6:9 must have been the altar of burnt offering. It was a freewill offering, offered by the man of his own free will. He chose to do that; everything was consumed. When we give ourselves to the Lord it must be totally. Ananias and Sapphira learned this the hard way. Nothing held back. Giving one's self shows a love for the Lord with ALL the heart, ALL the soul, ALL the strength and ALL the mind. This was the path many chose, as we have seen in the other examples.

Just how do we regard trials and sufferings? They are obviously needed, for *whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth and scourgeth every son and daughter whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof ALL are partakers then are ye bastards and not sons* (Heb 12:6-8). So to be chastised by the Lord is not to be punished by him – sometimes yes but it is the measure of God's love for us – as the Psalmist said *before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word*. So the man whom the Lord chasteneth is blessed indeed.

Life inevitably brings trials, setbacks and tests. If, by a million to one chance, it doesn't then God makes up the deficit, unless we are truly *of the flesh*. Then we are without God, dead in trespasses and sins. If we think we seem to be having more of our fair share, then it is useful to remember the words of Paul: *no temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man. God is faithful and will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it*. It fosters trust and dependence and patience. If we are *his workmanship* then the finished product will not be sub-standard but capable, by GRACE, of being able to share his GLORY *in bringing many sons (and daughters) into glory to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering*. If that was necessary for the Lord, how much more for us? Paul says: *I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ*. (Phil 1:6 ESV)

He that loseth his life (loseth – to destroy, to put out of the way entirely, abolish, put an end to, literally or figuratively) for my sake, shall gain it: constant giving of oneself, going to the back of the queue, suffering oneself to be defrauded, seeking not our own, cultivating the new man by putting the old man to death. In many ways we can lose self, take up our cross, crucify the flesh with its appetite and lusts, as Paul said *I die daily, I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me*. Don't we remind ourselves each week by partaking of the bread and wine, symbols of a body given, of blood poured out? The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation, a sharing, of the blood of Christ, the bread we break is it not a participation of a common union in the body of Christ? Do we not wash our robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb? Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees.

The conqueror I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father in his throne. (Rev 3:21 DIA)

Basil Allsopp

A Ransom for Many

We can, with a bit of imagination, picture a slave market in the ancient world, filled with young and old, male and female, black and white. Some had been snatched from their homes and families and brought to a strange country. Some had been placed there because their fathers could not pay a debt. All were sold in the market like cattle. Once purchased, they became the property of their master and, because there were few laws to regulate their welfare, he could treat them any way he pleased. That was the position of slaves in the ancient world. Many of the people to whom Paul wrote either were or had been slaves.

And we can understand why, against the background of a society largely run by slaves, the words 'ransom' and 'redemption'

figure so largely in the New Testament, and that in passages which deal with the implications of Christ's atoning death: 'But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive adoption as sons' (Gal 4:5, ESV). We do not need to go so far back in history to appreciate the force of the metaphor. We have only to open a newspaper to read of criminals, terrorists or self-styled 'freedom fighters' who try to achieve their ends by kidnapping some hapless victim and then holding him prisoner until a third party agrees to buy him back.

The words 'ransom' and 'redemption' are also used in the Old Testament to describe God's deliverance of His people from Egyptian bondage: 'Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed' (Exodus 15:13). The image is invoked again to describe Israel's deliverance from another captivity; the Babylonian Exile: 'I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine' (Isaiah 43:1).

It was therefore appropriate that Jesus himself should use the same language when, on the evening of his arrest, he told his disciples that the Son of Man had come to 'give his life as a ransom for many' (Mk 10:45). We miss the point however, when we ask, to whom was the ransom paid? As in the Old Testament use of the word, we can press the metaphor only so far. The answer has sometimes been given that Jesus paid the ransom to God. But this creates the impression that God is a slave master or a tyrant who has got us in His grasp until Christ sets us free. This is not the Scriptural view of God and His relationship toward us. What Christ achieved was not a bribe to his Father to release us, as though we were His captives; rather, it enabled Him to receive us as His children. For the truth is that the ransom was not paid to anyone. The point of the metaphor is the cost to Christ, and the resulting freedom for his people. He paid the price of our redemption when he trod the path of obedience to its utmost limit, putting aside all thought of personal ambition and self-preservation, knowing what would finally happen to him at the hands of men who were blinded by hatred and sin.

Whenever the New Testament writers refer to this ransom price, they always make mention also of its implications for Christ's disciples. The Apostle Peter thus exhorts his readers:

'... conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot' (1 Pet 1:17,18).

From what did Christ redeem us? There are three tyrants or slave masters mentioned by Paul: sin, the law and death. Sin is defection from God, the Law condemns sinners and death is the wages of sin. From the point of view of those who are slaves to sin, their condition does not always feel like bondage. Sin is attractive to human nature because it promises freedom; independence from God. We can dispense with His laws and live life to the full. We can do just what we want. That is the illusion which prevents sinners from recognizing their true condition. That was the illusion that motivated the Prodigal Son to go out into a far country, his pocket full of money, his head full of plans, convinced that freedom from parental restraint was the key to happiness. Then he found that such freedom did not and could not bring happiness. It brought poverty, misery and bondage.

It is clear from the letter addressed to them that the Corinthians struggled to understand the difference between freedom and license. They knew all about Christian liberty, but had convinced themselves that it meant liberty to do exactly as they wanted, when they wanted and with whom they wanted. It was a caricature of the Gospel which Paul had preached. In effect they were saying, 'Let us sin that grace may abound'. The whole letter is a catalogue of the abuses into which the Corinthians had fallen, sexual license, drunkenness, immorality. But Paul reminds them that: 'you are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body' (1 Cor 6: 19,20). He thus reminds them that there are moral implications for those who have been purchased by Christ.

Unlike the slaves of a wealthy Roman however, we do not find that we are restricted and circumscribed in our freedom and pushed around by our new Master. In fact, we are not his slaves at all; he has bought us so that we can be set free; not free to go our own way, but free from the enslavement which sin imposes and therefore free to love, to serve our Lord and each other, to live as Christ lived.

On a human level, this sometimes happened. It is recorded that wealthy Jews sometimes went into the slave markets of Rome and bought fellow Jews in order to set them free. Such benevolence deserved gratitude. What could a slave give to his benefactor? He was poor; he could not pay him back in money. But he could show gratitude, loyalty and service. And we have been set free by Christ. Whatever our circumstances there is always scope to exercise our Christian freedom by living as he lived, showing to others the same love, patience and kindness which he demonstrated and thus growing like him in every way. And that is how we can demonstrate to him that the sacrifice he made on our behalf has born fruit; it has done something for us enabling us to serve him instead of the selfish impulses which would otherwise have dominated our lives. And if we thus exercise our freedom in his service, doing so willingly and spontaneously, then we are living as our heavenly Father intended that His children should live: 'He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins' (Colossians 1:13,14).

Mark Robertson

Beannacht ('Blessing')

On the day when
the weight deadens
on your shoulders
and you stumble,
may the clay dance
to balance you.

And when your eyes
freeze behind
the grey window
and the ghost of loss
gets in to you,
may a flock of colours,
indigo, red, green,
and azure blue
come to awaken in you
a meadow of delight.

When the canvas frays
in the currach of thought
and a stain of ocean
blackens beneath you,
may there come across the waters
a path of yellow moonlight
to bring you safely home.

May the nourishment of the earth be yours,
may the clarity of light be yours,
may the fluency of the ocean be yours,
may the protection of the ancestors be yours.
And so may a slow
wind work these words
of love around you,
an invisible cloak
to mind your life.

John O'Donohue

(Contributed by Rosalind Lomas)

'The horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.'

So sang Miriam in praise of what she called 'the glorious triumph of the Lord' in destroying the armies of the king of Egypt.

The story itself and the songs of triumph which celebrated it, raise a number of moral difficulties for thinking Christians. There are also other problems which many people raise. They find it difficult to believe in the disruption of the ordinary course of nature by a series of plagues at the right moment to bring Egypt to its knees, culminating in the selective killing of one member in each family of a nation, of seas opening up to allow a whole people to pass through unscathed, while a pursuing army gets decimated in the waves.

However these problems can be answered by recognising that the God of creation must have the power to intervene and produce surprising results. But it is less easy to dismiss the moral problem of what God is said to have accomplished by these interventions and whether the record presents the character of God in harmony with the one whom we know as the 'God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ'. The whole issue of how to interpret the relationship of the Old Testament to the New is involved.

The spirit of Jesus

A misunderstanding of these issues by many American right-wing evangelicals is the basis of their justification of a militaristic approach to world affairs. It is clear from 2 Timothy 3:15 that the sacred scriptures, which we call the Old Testament, are able to make us wise unto salvation only if we read them in the light of faith in Christ Jesus – and this means re-interpreting the Old in the light of the New. The cross is the centrepiece of this reinterpretation. Jesus does not meet violence with violence, rather he meets human strength with the divine weakness, as 1 Corinthians (chapters one and two) explains. This is the way God triumphs over human sin and oppression.

So it was that Jesus told his followers to 'love their enemies', to 'do good to those who spitefully use them', to 'turn the other cheek'. He told his followers who wanted to call down fire from heaven on his opponents, that they didn't understand the spirit they were supposed to exhibit. On the cross his words were 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do' – very different from the gloating words of the Song that Moses and the Israelites sang as recorded in Exodus 15.

His apostles continued the same message. Paul in Romans 12 forbids the spirit of vengeance and gives emphasis to an Old Testament text which bids us: 'If your enemy is hungry feed him' and to 'overcome evil with good'. Peter likewise points to the Lord as an example 'who when he was abused did not retaliate, when he suffered he offered no threats.'

The Celebration in Exodus 15

The contrast of the spirit of the words of Jesus and his apostles with the Songs in Exodus 15 is stark indeed. 'Pharaoh's chariots and his army he has cast into the sea; the flower of his officers are engulfed in the Red Sea. The watery abyss has covered them. They sank to the depths like a stone.' And this terrible end is then the subject of rejoicing in a God, who is 'majestic in holiness, worthy of awe and praise, worker of wonders.'

There is no sparing a thought for the human tragedies arising from Pharaoh's stubbornness, of the mothers bereaved of their sons, already having lost their firstborn, of the wives left to mourn as widows – the Songs are just full of delight that Israel have been delivered; the cost to others is of no consequence.

The use of Exodus 15 in Christian worship

But these chapters in Exodus are read all over the Christian world as part of the post-Easter liturgy. By implication, they are being used to describe the freeing of the slaves to sin and death from the captivity in which they have been held. They are being used to affirm the deliverance that the Easter morning proclaimed, though many may not realise the connection that is being made.

At the Transfiguration we are told that Jesus discussed with Moses and Elijah his 'departure', which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem, his 'going out' or 'exodus'. The escape of the Hebrew slaves from Egyptian captivity was the 'first exodus' and freed them to begin their national history, in which they were expected to show forth trust in God and rebuke the ways of the nations. (And a minority did, and for all their limitations of understanding they displayed a lively faith in the God of Abraham). Israel as a nation failed to represent God as he had required, but through the protests and hopes of their prophets, and the trust of the 'remnant', we were given a rich literature which in every fibre awaited the coming of the Messiah.

The Old Testament Library of Anticipation

For the Christian, the Old Testament was re-evaluated as the library of anticipation. The details in the volumes in this library were often fulfilled in unexpected ways, though there were psalms and prophetic songs which spoke of the sufferings of Messiah and the God whom he showed forth. There was a secret or mystery in the Hebrew Scriptures which was unveiled or revealed in the

life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, as expansively described in Ephesians 1.

So military victories in the Old Testament and national glory, are repainted in the gospels and the epistles in more beautiful hues to glorify the one who fulfilled in himself the destiny that was Israel's. Israel, God's national firstborn son, pointed to Jesus, God's only begotten son.

And it is from that vantage point that we go back and read passages which in their original form contain much that is unchristian, but we read them as people who know the end of the story. As we read the Old Testament we 'edit' what we read and bring every thought into the obedience of Christ. We may even marvel at how the very sins and mistakes of Israel provided in the Old Testament the framework for a lively hope in the one who was to come, who did come, and who accomplished *his* exodus at Jerusalem.

Alfred Ward

Life in Six Words

The BBC Radio 4 has set before its listeners
an exercise in summarizing one's own life in six words.
Could there be a more perfect summary than that of Jesus:

'Life given, life received. life shared.'?

Sheila Harris

Sectarian Religion in Contemporary Britain

Nigel Scotland
Paternoster Press 2000 ISBN 0-85364-917-0

When I was visiting The Christadelphian office, this 314 page paperback caught my eye and returned home to New Zealand with me after I had paid the sum of £14.99. The work has a select bibliography of 5 pages (in which there are 7 Christadelphian books noted¹), a single page scripture index and a subject index of 5 pages. The author is Field Chair at the School of Theology and Religious Studies at Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education. After discussing the nature of sectarian religion and the variety of sectarian movements, he devotes 255 pages describing 9 sects, among which are the Christadelphians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Exclusive Brethren and the Latter-day Saints.

In his preface (p v), Nigel Scotland, says that 'we are living at a time when, generally speaking, the mainstream historic and denominational churches are in decline.'² The further comment is made that some of 'the newer, smaller and more intensive religious groups which are generally categorised as 'sects' have demonstrated a capacity to retain a greater hold over their membership. In fact a few of them have even expanded numerically.'³ This is certainly the case in New Zealand, the only country for which I have statistics.

Dr Jim Veitch, the Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Victoria University Wellington, when commenting on the New Zealand 2006 census figures believed that they reflect the huge defection of white people from the main denominations. He believes that that the Roman Catholic growth (less than the 7.8% population rise) would be immigration from countries where Catholicism flourished. The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church noted that there are increasing numbers of Pacific Island and Asian congregations. This factor would hide the drift of 'white' New Zealanders from the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Many reasons could be found for the overall decline in formal religious worship, but as this review is concerned with sectarian religion, its focus is on sects rather than denominations. However, it may be noted that modern attempts to solve the problem of categorising religious groups are usually dated from the work of Ernst Troeltsch.⁴ He made the distinction between the church which is the Kingdom of God in the world and the sect which emphasises Jesus as Lord working through individuals as they pass through a pilgrimage. The church dominated the world and hence was dominated by the world. It was both hierarchical and dogmatic with its membership based upon birth. But, because it was a 'state church' it was continually adjusting to, and compromising with, the values and institutions of society in order that social cohesion and order could be maintained.

Sects are subscribed to on a voluntary basis with the 'new birth' rather than the 'natural birth' which determines membership. While there is such a close inter-dependence between church and state, the needs to which sects are directed vary greatly. This may be seen when sects are analysed as to their main emphasis in doctrine (teaching).

J. Milton Yinger⁵ believed that Troeltsch failed to adequately discuss the conditions in which various types of religious organisation are likely to occur. Hence, Yinger distinguished 6 groups:

- (1) The Universal Church (such as the 13th century Roman Catholic Church) which is relatively successful in supporting the integration of church and society.
- (2) The Ecclesia (such as European national churches) which seeks universality and obtains formal allegiance by all levels of society.
- (3) The Denomination (such as the Baptists) may be limited by class, racial or social boundaries. It may have begun as a sect.
- (4) The Established Sect (such as the Society of Friends) which has accommodated itself to the cultural milieu over a period of time, but less so than a Denomination.
- (5) The Sect (such as the Jehovah's Witnesses) which is a small voluntary group protesting the inability of church and society to meet its needs.
- (6) The Cult (such as the Black Muslims) being similar to the Sect, but makes a sharp break religiously from the dominant religious tradition of the society in which it finds itself.

When writing about sects, Nigel Scotland notes that his intention is to 'let each movement speak for itself and where possible in its own words.' He succeeds in providing accuracy and a high degree of objectivity. For this reason, I have not critiqued his 9 chapters which describe each sect. For those who want to know more about them, read, or even purchase the book.

When considered in their variety, Scotland notes that 'Sects are not all of a piece.'⁶ In attempting to classify them, he follows the analysis of Bryan Wilson.⁷

- (1) **Conversionist** who place a high value on evangelism as they seek to change people's hearts (Jehovah's Witnesses and the Latter-day Saints)
- (2) **Adventist** emphasising the imminent return of Christ (Seventh Day Adventists and Christadelphians)
- (3) **Introversionist** who stress withdrawal from the world and its culture (the Exclusive Brethren)
- (4) **Utopian** who often build their own colonies (the Jesus Fellowship)
- (5) **Manipulationist**, manipulating aspects of the outside world (Theosophy, Christian Science and Scientologists)
- (6) **Reformist** with an emphasis on social reform (the Society of Friends (Quakers) in their later development and the Salvation Army even though it possibly should not be classified as a 'sect'.
- (7) **Thaumaturgical** [derived from a Greek word meaning 'wonder-worker'] (various spiritist groups).

In 1980, in an attempt to give students an insight into the variety of religious beliefs and practices in New Zealand, the Religious Studies Department of Massey University published a directory, the contents of which were the results of questionnaires sent to representatives of religious groups. No attempt was made at classification, with the groups listed in alphabetical order. A reading of the directory leads one to ask why so many sects developed. For those who are interested, Bryan Wilson in his book, *Religious Sects* p 98, provides a map of North America showing the birth of modern sects.

Max Weber⁶ believed that it was the 'charismatic' leader who was the important element in sect development. Charisma (a certain quality of an individual personality by which s/he is set apart) is seen in the the Seventh Day Adventists [Ellen G. White] and in Christian Science [Mary Baker Eddy]. Why is institutionalised religion challenged? It is challenged, not only by those who claim a new or better revelation, but also by social causes.

Sociologists Werner Stark and Michael Hill believe that the discontent phenomena is primary, while the one who exploits this plays a secondary role. Interestingly, in his analysis of sect development, Wilson notes that if a sect emerges around a charismatic leader, then its subsequent history depends not only upon his or her teachings but also upon how the organisation develops. Wilson also notes that the principal tension is to be found between the demand for separateness and the acknowledgement of the command to go forth into the world to preach the Gospel. The manner in which the sect copes with this tension will play a large part in its development, as will, of course, the power struggles within it.

In his final chapter Scotland addresses the issue of the appeal of sectarian religion. He discusses 7 reasons:

Certainty: 'Growing numbers of people are reaching a point where they find it hard to distribute the load of uncertainties which press in on them in the course of their daily existence. Inevitably, therefore, they will be attracted to any movements that offer definite answers to ultimate questions or even clear solutions to social and political issues.'⁹ Sects appeal to those who want black-and-white answers. Scotland notes that the Anglican Church is characterised by a wide divergence of views on theological issues. This factor, as well as the increasing secularisation of society, seems to be an important factor for its declining membership.

Morality: As noted above, churches and denominations which become churches are more ready to change their moral codes in response to the culture in which they exist. It may be noted that the Roman Catholic Church is less liable to do this, and seem to be more successful in keeping their flock. Scotland states that high standards of personal behaviour characterise the Latter-Day Saints and 'Christadelphians' and Jehovah's Witnesses are also among those movements which preserve a strict morality and encourage family values.¹⁰ The further point is made that 'sectarian leaders adopt straightforward, face-value and sometimes literal interpretations of the biblical literature.'¹¹ Some sects make excessive use of the writings of their founder together with only the AV bible (e.g. the Latter-day Saints, the Jehovah's Witnesses and Christian Science) and seem to be unaware of the textual criticism which has enabled the production of more accurate scriptures.

Identity: Sects are not only essentially smaller than churches and denominations - as shown by the census data - but they tend to be 'more vibrant and intensive.'¹² With reference to their development in the 19th century, 'within the Ecclesia, the Kingdom Hall or the local ward church, members were able to create their own subculture based on their particular values and standards.'¹³

Community: 'Members develop a strong bond with each other. They share a common core of beliefs and subscribe to a corporate vision.'¹⁴

Immediacy: 'Salvation in the historic churches is for the most part a matter of reason and operating one's life on the basis of trust in certain doctrinal propositions.'¹⁵ 'A number of sectarian movements appeal because they are able to offer a package which is not only immediate but also emotionally satisfying.'¹⁶ This is particularly true of Pentecostal and Spiritist groups.

Authority: 'At the local level sects often continue to be led by charismatic individuals who are possessed with energy and enthusiasm.'¹⁷ This is particularly so in Pentecostal sects in which members often transfer from one group to another.

Mission: 'The majority of sectarian movements, although not all, have a strong missionary impetus.'¹⁸ This factor does not seem to apply to Christian Science which is a declining sect with aging adherents. The sense of mission does not appear strong among the Exclusive Brethren which maintains its numbers by marriage within the group.

It is very difficult to fit religious groups into 'little boxes.' However, comparisons may be made between any combination of sects. I have not attempted to do this. Perhaps, in light of the statistics, we should ask why, from a numerical point of view, the Christadelphians have not performed very well.

John Stephenson (NZ)

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The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse.

Recognising and Escaping Spiritual Manipulation
and False Spiritual Authority Within the Church.

By: **David Johnson & Jeff VanVonderen.**

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Jeff VanVonderen is the author of *Tired of Trying to Measure Up, Good News for the Chemically Dependent*, and *Families Where Grace is in Place*. A nationally known speaker on issues of church and family wellness, he is Pastor of Counselling at the Church of the Open Door in Crystal, Minnesota. He is also Director of Damascus, Inc., a family focused recovery ministry, and an

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This invaluable book is dedicated to the weary and heavy laden, deeply loved by God, but who find that the Good News has somehow become the bad news because of spiritual abuse. It comes in three parts.

Part I Spiritual Abuse and its Victims
Part II Abusive Leaders and Why They are Trapped
Part III Post-Abuse Recovery

‘Help Me...’

The first chapter deals with a woman called Jeri who explained that she felt she was going crazy. ‘Either that, or I’m on the verge of a major breakthrough in my spiritual growth. My pastor tells me that the root problem is *me*; my pastor tells me I’m in rebellion against God.’

What unfolded was an unfortunate, and all too common, case history. Jeri’s church teaches that Scripture is God’s Word, the standard by which we must live. But they use it as a measure by which we gain acceptance with God rather than as a guide for living. Therefore, when she asked her pastor for help with her depression, she was given a ‘prescription’ of praise Scriptures to memorise and repeat over and over. This, she was told, would get her mind off herself and onto God. The depression would lift when she got over her sinful self-centredness.

Naturally her depression didn’t lift. She noted that there was a history of depression among the women in her family, and moreover, she confided that she was struggling in her relationship with her husband because he shrugged off responsibilities with their two teenagers who were beginning to get into trouble. The pastor then told her that all her problems were the result of her inability to submit fully to God and His Word. She told him that she felt condemned, that she felt she needed some other kind of help. But he used the ‘R’ word against her: he said she needed to repent of her Rebellion against God.

Finally she became suicidal, hearing her pastor’s voice in the night, hearing the word ‘rebellion’, a sin we all have to deal with. If only she could praise enough or submit enough, but she just couldn’t stand it any longer, she felt exhausted and as though she was losing her mind. ‘I can’t carry this weight any more,’ she ended, ‘help me...’

Jeri’s dilemma is similar to countless cases encountered by our authors, representing a widespread and serious problem among Christians. The problem, as they have come to know it is spiritual abuse. No doubt the term itself will disturb, if not shock, many people, though that is not the intention. Therefore it’s important to define what is meant by spiritual abuse and also to make clear from the start that any one of us could be a victim, and sometimes even a perpetrator, without realizing what we are doing.

Anatomy of Spiritual Abuse

The authors go on to examine the dynamics at work in Jeri’s story. Jeri’s pastor ignored the physical, emotional and relational dimensions of her problem and took a more narrow ‘spiritualised’ approach. With little investigation he assumed he knew Jeri’s ‘root problem,’ that there was a root problem. But there are more subtle factors at work, and that is what gives abusers their power to wreak great damage.

Firstly, the authors examine the power dynamic at work in this case. Jeri had voluntarily made herself vulnerable by sharing a problem. This assumed that the pastor could help. Add to that the pastor’s position of spiritual authority, and it’s easy to see how his words would have double weight in her thinking.

And then, sadly, help was not what Jeri was offered. This is where a second dynamic comes in; the focus of the issue was subtly changed. The pastor addressed the problem as being Jeri herself. Depression was no longer the problem, Jeri herself was ‘the problem,’ labelled a rebel who needed to live up to a standard. She never noticed that she was not receiving help, instead her spiritual position before God was being questioned and, it would appear, judged.

At the bottom of this sad, painful encounter lies perhaps the subtlest dynamic: Jeri questioned an authority who considered himself above questioning, perhaps even above error. This pastor evidently interpreted his position of authority to mean that his thoughts and opinions were supreme. Second, it was assumed that her questions were coming from a wrong spirit, not simply from an honest attempt to have a give-and-take dialogue, the worst was assumed of her and not the best.

More troublesome than that was the power play that went on. She was manipulated. No doubt the pastor thought he was being honest and direct, but manipulation came into the picture when she asked an honest question and he ‘pulled rank.’ The unspoken attitude she met might best be stated in words like this, ‘I’m the authority, and because I’m the authority my words are not to be questioned.’ This attitude perhaps reveals insecurity, buried frustration and anger. It also reveals that the pastor was not, in this instance, functioning in a caring manner for Jeri’s benefit, although she needed him. Upholding his position of authority was what mattered most.

What then is spiritual abuse?

The authors say that it ‘is the mistreatment of a person who is in need of help, support or greater spiritual empowerment, with the result of weakening, undermining or decreasing that person’s spiritual empowerment.’ They go on to give several other examples:

- 1: A man who was told that his family’s problems were his fault because he should be praying more.
- 2: Someone who wanted to know more about the church finances. He was told to stop trying to create a faction in the church.
- 3: A man who was told to lose weight because being overweight was a ‘poor witness’.
- 4: Women who had been made to wear head-coverings to show that they were in submission. They were also forbidden to wear make-up.

The chapter goes on to discuss parental behaviour, physical and sexual abuse of children, and the ways in which this can be unacknowledged.

The co-authors claim that their book is not a witch-hunt. They quote Paul: ‘It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery (Gal 5:1 NIV).’ And also, ‘You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men (1Cor 7:23, NIV).’ There are more biblical quotations in the same vein. The chapter ends by saying ‘The Christian life begins with freedom from dead works, from religious systems and from all human attempts to ‘please God.’ It’s time for many of us to shake off the religious systems and expectations we’ve created, and return to that joyful freedom in Christ.’

The Wizard of Oz

(- a striking extended quote from the book taken from chapter 9, ‘Because I’m the Pastor, that’s why!’)

‘Many will easily recall the story of The Wizard of Oz. Curiously, we can gain some spiritual insights about spiritual authority from this popular tale. Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion go to the Wizard because they believe he has

the power to give them what they need. Dorothy needs to go home; the scarecrow needs a brain; the Tin Man needs a heart; and the Lion needs courage. The Wizard sends them out on a quest to get the broomstick of the Wicked Witch of the West. If they bring back the broomstick, he will give them what they need. They accomplish their mission, they then return to the Wizard. But, in fact he is not expecting them to return, and is quite put out at being held accountable to keep his promise.

Our heroes enter the huge chamber where the Wizard of Oz conducts his business. They are met face to face by the Wizard himself, a big, scary head – not a real person, just a serious face, surrounded by billowing smoke and fire, making a lot of noise. With a thunderous roar, the Wizard demands to know how these four dare to challenge him. Here is the point: it's at this moment that Dorothy's dog runs over to a small room and pulls back a curtain, and what is revealed to us is a simple, flesh-and-blood man who has long been hiding behind a mask of power. He operates behind a curtain, pulling levers, making smoke, fire and noise. The result looks impressive, but is only a façade. Even when exposed he roars, 'Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain!'

The 'Wizard' is in fact a power abuser. He controls a whole city with a façade that postures power and punishes people for noticing. In a kingdom where the problem was that the Wizard couldn't deliver, Dorothy and her crew became the problem for noticing that there was a problem.

It is sad to think how often churches control their spiritual kingdoms with power facades. They rain Bible verses on people about authority, submission, judgement, prosperity, or the End Times. They penalise people for noticing that 'the man behind the curtain' is just human, without authenticity or authority at all.

In too many Christian families and churches, Christians are told to jump through spiritual-performance hoops to earn God's approval – something they already have for free because of Jesus' death on the cross.'

The book ends with a 'Message to Perpetrators of Spiritual Abuse'. The authors cite the Pharisees as the biggest spiritual abusers of all; which is why Jesus was/is so scornful and dismissive of them.

This book deserves to be read by all Christians.

Rosalind Lomas
(With permission from the authors)

Why argue?

There is a movement sponsored by the Pope to heal the rift between the Catholics and the Orthodox Church. The crux of the division lay in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The Roman Church says that it proceeds from 'the Father and the Son', whereas the Orthodox Church claims that it originates from 'the Father alone'.

There was disagreement also about the identity of Jesus with the Father, whether 'of the same substance' or 'of like substance' – a difference in Greek of one letter 'i', one iota.

In each case the dispute lay between the emphasis upon the distinction between Jesus and God, as human to divine, and the contention that Jesus was one with God in essence and character – he was in fact a manifestation of His Father.

The Roman mind endorses the distinction. The Greek mind emphasises the identity. Is there not room for both?

Sheila Harris

The following appeared on p255 of *Logos* Vol 74, Number 6, March 2008:

An Endeavour to Ridicule Logos

We have received the following from a reader in UK: *In the December 2007 issue of the Endeavour magazine, there is a review by John Stephenson from New Zealand of a book entitled The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies. One of the articles is concerning The Language and Translation of the Old Testament by a person called John Elwolde. Commenting on this the reviewer says: '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 writer ignores the scriptural basis of our comments. Refer to Zeph. 3:9. The 'pure language' indicates a common tongue with a unified worship. No other language is able to express scriptural principles as much as Hebrew, the language selected to express the divine character and purpose. It was the language spoken by the Master, found in the epistles (e.g., Rom. 9:29; Jas. 5:4), and appropriate for the needs of the millennium, when all shall call upon Yahweh with one consent. The *Endeavour* writer gives no example of our 'misinterpreting verses', nor any alternative to the 'pure lip' of Zeph. 3:9. — *Editor*.

John's Response

The Editor, Logos Magazine
Dear Bro Mansfield,

With regard to your short article *An Endeavour to Ridicule Logos* (p 255 Logos March 2008) John Elwolde, whom I quoted, is translation consultant to the United Bible Societies.

I reply to your response to my review of *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies* as follows:

(1) My critical note in the *Endeavour* magazine (December 2007) formed a very small portion of a book review. It was given from the standpoint of one who has had academic training in Classical Hebrew for a number of years. It was written not as an attempt to ridicule, but to note that I believe your theory that 'the Hebrew of the Bible is a pure language. It will form the basis of the language of the kingdom age' cannot be sustained by the biblical verses that you use in proposing such an hypothesis.

(2) You do not fully explain what you mean by the word 'pure', other than to state that the 'pure language' of Zeph 3:9 indicates a common tongue with a unified worship. Linguistically speaking, the Classical Hebrew of our Bible had a limited vocabulary, was characterised by its simplicity of sentence structure, and increasing use of loan words from other languages. Languages are not static, but dynamic. Even though the text of the Old Testament Hebrew, as we have it, was the result of the

work of the Massorettes, it should be noted that the language of the poetical books differs from that of later books such as Ezra and Nehemiah. Importantly, the Hebrew of the Bible differs from that of Modern Hebrew.

(3) Regarding Zephaniah 3:9, ('I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord'), admittedly, there is a hope of true and universal worship indicated by the phrase 'call on the name of the Lord.' [Compare Gen 4:26 for the first indication of worship.] I would suggest that there is more to Zeph 3:9 than meets the eye, for the 'pure speech' is literally 'a pure lip.' The lament of Isaiah (6:5) that he was 'a man of unclean lips' dwelling in the midst of a people of unclean lips, seems to refer to the words that come forth from the mouth – those which are dishonouring to God – false worship in particular. I believe that Zephaniah looked forward to a time of true worship, both in word and deed. If so, here the emphasis lies in the type of worship, rather than in the actual language to be used.

(4) You make the assertion that no other language is able to express scriptural principles as much as Hebrew, the language selected to express the divine character and purpose. The New Testament is replete with scriptural principles, being written in Common (Koine) Greek which developed from Classical Greek, and that from Homeric Greek. Today, we express our thoughts in our own language, notably English, even though a good knowledge of ancient languages may enable us to better increase our understanding of how God's word was originally received and comprehended. Are we not able to adequately express scriptural principles in our own language?

(5) You cite two New Testament passages – Rom 9:29 'If the Lord of hosts had not left us a seed' and Jas 5:4 'the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts' – to 'prove' that Hebrew was the language spoken by the Master, found in the epistles. The former is in verbal agreement with the Greek translation (LXX) of Isa 1:9 while the latter also uses an Old Testament title of God, the Lord of Hosts. Many quotations from the Old Testament are from this version, although they may not always be exact. This is not surprising when we remember the Septuagint was widely used, and that the use of foreign language terms were carried over into Greek.

(6) In Jo 5:2 (RSV) we find the phrase 'a pool, in Hebrew called Bethzatha' This name is the Aramaic equivalent of Bethesda (the house of the sheep). This name occurs in various forms in the ancient manuscripts. In Jo 19:13 we read of 'a place called The Pavement and in Hebrew, Gabbatha'. Also in Jo 19: 17 there is mention of a 'place called in Hebrew Golgotha.' This possibly is an unusual formation from an Aramaic word equivalent to the Hebrew *gulgoth*, a skull. In Acts 21:40 the words 'he spoke to them in the Hebrew language (literally dialect)' are used. It is very probable that these phrases are used to designate both Hebrew and the locally spoken Aramaic. It needs to be remembered that Hebrew and Aramaic are separate languages, with Aramaic steadily spreading after the exile as the Palestinian vernacular at the expense of Hebrew.

(7) It is interesting to note that the cry of Jesus from the cross (Mark 15:34) – *Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani?* – a quotation from Psa 32:1 is spoken in Aramaic, not Hebrew. It was highly probable that Jesus was multilingual, knowing Aramaic and Greek, and possibly Hebrew.

I fail to see why worship in 'the Age to Come' should be in the Hebrew language.

John Stephenson

A reply by email

Dear Brother Stephenson,

I have received your letter regarding the use of Hebrew, but observe that you give only critical comment, and nothing positive as to what you might believe to be the religious and worship language of the Kingdom Age. What do you feel is the 'pure language' spoken of by Zephaniah? Whether or not Hebrew is the selected language is a matter of personal belief, but I see no other language in history as appropriate as that selected by the Deity to bring the knowledge of His wisdom to mankind in the original scriptures. The concern I have is that you made reference in the Endeavour criticising Logos before approaching us beforehand. I make the following comments to your letter:

[1] If you discount the use of Hebrew as a divine language, what do you suggest will form the basis of the language of the Kingdom? How do you sustain from the scriptures such a view?

[2] I do not find that biblical Hebrew has a limited vocabulary, except as you might argue that modern technology does not find expression in Hebrew. I hope that modern technology has no place when things are "as they were in the days of old." David seemed to have no problem in understanding the Law of Yahweh in his day; and I am sure it can be the same again.

[3] I understand the use of "pure lip," and agree that this speaks of a unified worship, and such a worship is only possible with a unified language by which that is expressed. Thus the benefit of Israelis being required to understand Hebrew in order to have succeeded in the War of Liberation. Words honouring to Yahweh must be words expressed in an understandable language, and certainly English does not qualify. I agree with you that Zephaniah looked for a time of true worship in word and deed, but that, hopefully, will not be in an "unknown tongue" that brought confusion in the apostolic times.

[4] I disagree that those in the first century had to speak in Koine Greek or any other Greek for that matter. Clearly, the apostle spoke to Jews in Hebrew, and I believe that the Lord Jesus would have also. I have spoken to Jews who have told me that Hebrew (including the divine Name) was expressed in the tabernacle at Yom Kipporim, and have no reason to disbelieve this tradition. But what language do you suggest will provide the basis for the "pure lip"?

[5] I disagree that it is the Septuagint translation that is being used by the apostle (none have ever said so in the scriptural record), and similarly in expressions prove nothing. Why did not they use the Hebrew text, used in the temple, and since it was known by the Hebrews then as otherwise? I disagree that the Septuagint was "widely used," and have seen no evidence to this effect. It was, after all, a Greek translation of the Hebrew, and hardly used by such as Gamaliel and his fellows.

[6] I see no reason why such words as "Bethesda" are Aramaic and not an English translation of the word original spoken, and recorded in a text (not the original) in traditional Greek. You mention that "Golgotha" is "possibly an unusual formation of the Aramaic word, when the scriptures state it is "called in the Hebrew Golgotha." It seems simpler to just accept the statement of the Scripture. Your explanations of the historical use of Hebrew and Aramaic as the latter "steadily spreading" is opposed by other writers on the language of the times, but I do not believe either of us can prove anything, as we were not there!

[7] Why should the Lord speak Aramaic, when he was very much a Jew, and knew the original Hebrew very clearly. I believe the Lord would have honoured the language of the Psalm from which he quoted. There is no proof that the language of the stake was Aramaic at all, and it would be the subject of criticism if he used some conflicting language to quote the clarity of the Psalm, with which he was clearly very familiar.

For these and other reasons, Bro. Stephenson, I see no reason why Hebrew should not be the language of worship in the Age to Come. If we cannot agree, we must agree to disagree on this matter. Time will tell.

Graham Mansfield,
Editor, Logos.

Dear Bro Mansfield
26 March 2008
In response to your email of 12 March 2008

(3) If English does not qualify as a language in which God may be worshipped, why not?

(4) As previously noted to you; I have no opinion as to what language will be spoken in the 'Age to Come.' I would be interested to know where the idea originated that it will be Hebrew.

(5) The Septuagint was originally a translation, commencing c 285 BC, of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek for Greek-speaking Jews.

(6) I refer you to the highly respected Dr F. F. Bruce who was Emeritus Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis, University of Manchester *The Books and the Parchments*, Pickering and Inglis, 1984 p 44 where he writes that 'from the time of the exile onwards, Aramaic steadily spread as the Palestinian vernacular at the expense of Hebrew.'

Regarding the origin of the Gospels as we know them, written in our New Testament I refer also to Stephen Neil in *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961*, O. U. P. London 1964 p 236:

'No scholar doubted that before anything at all came to be written down, there had been an earlier period of oral tradition during which the stories of the words and works of Jesus circulated among the believers in Aramaic.'

In the primitive Christian communities, oral testimony was highly valued, and there was the hope of the imminent return of Christ, but as eyewitnesses died, the need for written records grew. For example, we read 'Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you....' (Lk 1:1-4)

The relationship between the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark and Luke forms part of what is termed the 'Synoptic Problem.' It is not possible to date the four gospels with absolute accuracy, but the majority consensus is that Mark was written c 65-70AD, Luke c 80-85AD, Matthew c 85-90 AD and John c 90-100AD; i.e. that priority is given to Mark.

Regarding the relationship between the Synoptic Gospels, F. F. Bruce writes in *The New Testament Documents*, InterVarsity Press, Leicester, 1979 (p 37) 'The form in which the oral preaching underlies Matthew and Luke is the form given to it by Mark, who not only acted as Peter's interpreter (presumably translating Galilean Aramaic into Greek), but incorporated in his Gospel the substance of the preaching as he heard it from Peter's lips. There is no lack of evidence in his [Mark's] Gospel that much of the material originally existed in Aramaic; his Greek in places preserves the Aramaic idiom quite unmistakably.'

I also direct your attention to Dr Donald Guthrie *New Testament Introduction Vol I The Gospels and Acts*, Tyndale, London 1966 where such questions are treated in some depth. He makes the interesting comment (p 77): 'Most scholars are agreed that Mark's Greek has Semitic flavouring, but the extent of it and the inferences to be drawn from it are the subject of wide divergences of opinion. The more thoroughgoing hypothesis that Mark's Greek is a direct translation from the Aramaic has not found complete acceptance in spite of having some able advocates. The more generally held opinion is that Mark's Greek is 'translation Greek' because he reproduces an Aramaic catechesis (teaching).'

I will not go into technical details regarding differences between Hebrew and Aramaic, especially regarding the names Bethesda and Golgotha.

(7) With reference to Mark 15:34 these words were certainly spoken in Aramaic – see any reputable Bible commentary.

John Stephenson

The Editor of Logos has indicated that he will respond to the above items more particularly in Logos magazine, God willing, and indicates that copies will be made available to all wishing to follow the matter. Logos, Box 188, West Beach, South Australia 5024

An English professor wrote the words,
'woman without her man is nothing'
on the blackboard and directed the students to punctuate it correctly.
The men wrote: 'Woman, without her man, is nothing.'
The women wrote: 'Woman! Without her, man is nothing.'

Responses to *Harmony Through Headship*

Dear Les
Greetings in Jesus' name

Please may I comment on Bro. Alan Fowler's very nice article on *Harmony Through Headship*. The first few chapters of Genesis are a very brief picture covering a number of great events. As it is an inspired account I feel there is more in it than appears at first glance.

Genesis 3:16

'I will greatly increase your pains in child bearing; with pain you will give birth to children, your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.' This NIV version differs from the AV which says: 'I will greatly multiply your sorrows and your conception.' Conception should be a time of joy not sorrow, especially if the woman has desire for her husband. Some women do experience severe pain and problems in childbirth; however the real pain in giving life to children is in the future. Eve had one son who was a murderer and another son who was murdered. Samson's career was not as expected, when the angel appeared to his mother. John the Baptist was a righteous man, but was beheaded. Mary saw her most precious son crucified.

There are many reasons for an increase in divorce. Divorce has been made much easier. There were many women in the past who submitted to their husbands, but would gladly have divorced had it been possible. I have known Christadelphian couples whose marriage was detrimental to their spiritual health. Lack of communication is definitely a major cause of divorce, as is lack of belief in God and the sacredness of marriage.

1 Timothy 2:11-12 'Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.

I suffer not a woman to teach,' etc. I don't know quite what Paul had in mind here, or the circumstances of the problems he was addressing. This advice was given 2000 years ago and education of women has improved and we are now able to own and read our own Bibles. Women are intelligent human beings with a depth of spiritual understanding. In this day and age some women may well be able to contribute to their husbands understanding of spiritual matters. It is very sad that these words of Timothy have been taken as a hard rule for spiritual life today. We are not living under Mosaic Law but under the law of Christ. If we look at examples from Jesus life, we see Jesus went out of his way to encourage women to enter into dialogue with him. He didn't command them to be silent. Jesus had to explain to Martha that her spiritual development was more important than her entertaining duties. Martha was as entitled to sit at the feet of Jesus as his other disciples. This is something which brethren still have not grasped today.

There are some small ecclesias who believe their numbers are too small to hold a Bible Class. Any ecclesia is large enough to hold a Bible Class provided they don't silence over half the members. However, Bible Classes can be held in people's homes and those unable to transport themselves can be fetched. If members are frail and elderly the class can be held during the day – Saturday morning, if some are at work during the week. You only need 3 or 4 people to hold a Bible Class.

God gave us intelligence because law-obeying robots could not reflect his glory. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for putting law before doing good and being merciful. Should we put rules before the spiritual well-being of our community and its members?

Yours in Jesus,
Cynthia Lunn

The head of every man is Christ...

(being a section taken from the booklet on 1 Corinthians 11)

... the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11:3)

... between the sexes, the male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the male ruler and the female subject. (Aristotle, *Politics* 1254b)

Of all the creatures that have life and reason,
We women are the most unhappy kind:
First we must throw our money to the wind
To buy a husband; and what's worse, we have to
Accept him as the master of our body.
Then comes the question that decides our lives:
Is the master good or bad?
(Medea's address to the Chorus of Corinthian Women,
Euripides, *Medea*, lines 230-235)

When Jesus and Paul preached, they spoke in a fallen society to which they brought the message of salvation, a message which transformed all human relationships.

They worked in a world where women were 'second-class citizens', with fewer rights than men (religious or civil), and the results of their teaching and attitudes were to raise women to a standard never before equalled, and rarely since.

The same applied to other measures of discrimination. Slaves were not second-class citizens; they were not citizens at all. Gentiles, from a Jewish perspective, were of no account to God. But the New Covenant included and embraced all three disadvantaged sections, so that Paul could write to the Galatians: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' (Gal 3:28)

This sounds fine as an ideal. But how is it applied in practice?

When Paul wrote to the churches, he had to interact with the society that already existed. Slavery was an established system; the economy was based on it. Paul acted in the only way possible for his time: he accepted it but modified it, not only diminishing the harshness that could exist but asking, in effect, that masters should accept an equality before God: they too had a master in heaven. '...knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with him.' (Eph 6:9)

Paul's teaching on marriage in 1 Corinthians

Paul did the same as regards marriage. Men were in charge of women. Under Roman law (extended throughout the Empire in Paul's time), women had certain rights, but basically were ruled by male guardians: fathers when young, then husbands. The man was head of the wife. This could lead to abuse: 'Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely.' So, what did Paul do? He did the same with marriage as with slavery. He modified the prevailing attitude so as to bring Christlike behaviour into the picture.

In 1 Corinthians 11 he starts with the husband, and reminds him that he does not have absolute control. As a believer, he looks to Christ, and so takes the Messiah's standards as his. Having put the husband under the constraints imposed on him by the love of Christ, he reminds the wife that she is under the control of her husband. But it is a husband who now has a new, Christlike

outlook. And if husband and wife both don't like the idea of being under the authority of another, Paul reminds them that Jesus is also under authority, that of God.

In the ecclesia in Corinth both the wife and the husband are able to take an active part in the meetings of the ecclesia. The wife can prophesy and pray, just as can her husband. This is the practical working out of their new freedom in Christ, but from a worldly point of view this might be seen as insubordination on the wife's part. Paul reminds them that they each, in the way they behave, need to be seen to be showing respect. She has to take care in her demeanour, as does he, in relation to customs of dress and propriety. Though describing the head of the wife as the husband, Paul is keen not to encourage the husband to rule over his wife. Hence he modifies the concept when he says: 'Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.' (1 Cor 11:11-12)

The important phrase 'in the Lord' is going back to God's original intention in creation, as seen in Genesis, where the woman is to be a helper suitable for the man – a partner, not someone to rule over him, nor to be ruled over.

Paul's teaching on marriage in Ephesians

In Ephesians we can see Paul using the same procedure we have outlined above. The husband is head of the wife, and Paul modifies it in two ways.

The section starts with mutual submission: 'Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ' (Eph 5:21).

He then teaches that wives are to be submissive to husbands, using the term 'head' again. If this were all Paul said, we might conclude that he endorses the common view (as that of Aristotle) that men rule their wives and the wives have to do as they are told. That's what a boss, a chief, the head of an organisation does. 'Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife ...' But when we read on, we find that Paul has again turned the position round by qualifying what he means by head: 'For the husband is head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands' (Eph 5:22-24). The husband is head 'as Christ is the head of the church'. Christ's way shows the kind of head he should be, and Paul specifies this in the next few verses. He is a servant-leader, who gives himself for others. Christ nourishes and cherishes the church and that is how a husband is to love his wife.

This means that the husband must serve his wife in every way possible, from helping in the house, to encouraging high spiritual standards in the family. He will encourage his wife and children to understand the Gospel and to put it into practice.

No one disagrees with this. It is clearly expressed. But people frequently draw a further conclusion that in marriage the husband must always take the lead. He should make all the decisions (well, all the decisions that matter), and his wife submits to his leadership. 'As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands' (Eph 5:24).

Implications of Paul's Teaching

The Internet abounds with evangelical sites which assert that God's plan for marriage and society and the church is this: the husband rules (in a positive, spiritual manner); the wife plays a secondary place, helps him, and submits to his leadership. This is an easy deduction to draw from Ephesians 5:21-33, especially as Jesus, as head of the church, is leader not only as a servant but guide and moral teacher. 'Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies' (Eph 5:25-28).

But is it correct to make such a deduction? Other considerations lead us to think that there is much more to be said. And these do not arise out of humanism or modern ideas of equality but from the Bible teaching itself.

Does the Bible teach that men should always lead in society, in marriage, in the church? We suggest not.

'Be subject to one another'

Consider Ephesians where Paul describes Christian behaviour. His instructions refer to all brothers and sisters. Jesus is an example and pattern to us all, not just to husbands. We are all called to develop and promote spiritual understanding: 'And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God' (Eph 5:2). '... walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord' (Eph 5:8-10). 'Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ' (Eph 5:17-21)

This is written to both brothers and sisters ('saints' Eph 1:1). There is mutual spiritual encouragement, 'addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs', and mutual submission within the ecclesia, 'Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ'. This does not suggest that it is a one-way process: men teach and lead, women listen and learn.

Nor is it the case with marriage: 'For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control' (1 Cor 7:4-5). Although this clearly refers to sex, it also refers to prayer, and, importantly, to 'agreement'. The couple discuss their plans together: it is not a matter of either telling the other what to do.

Paul also discusses the position of believers married to unbelievers.

'... the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband? Husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife?' (1 Cor 7:14, 16)

Submissive behaviour and active participation

Peter does the same as Paul, calling on everybody to be submissive:

'Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution' (1 Pet 2:13).

He then moves on to slaves, then to wives, then to husbands.

'Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behaviour of their wives, when they see your reverent and chaste behaviour'

(1 Pet 3:1-2). 'Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honour on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint-heirs of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered' (1 Pet 3:7-8). In 1 Peter 3:1-2 the aim is to win the unbelieving husband and to do this by being a submissive wife. Submissiveness does not mean doing what one is told and never having any personal input – though this could be concluded by looking at these passages in isolation. It means putting the interests of another before one's own. The wife hopes to win over her husband by her behaviour, so that he will become a believer. The same hope exists in 1 Corinthians 7. She will be the prime contact, and not only will he (hopefully) see

what a considerate wife he has now that she has become a believer, but he will learn what Christianity is about by what she says to him. This is only common sense. To suggest that she says nothing about her faith because she is submissive would not be a sensible conclusion. Nor would it be sensible to assume that she can encourage him to follow Christ until he submits to Christ in baptism and thereafter she is allowed no more spiritual input into the marriage. By submitting to her husband, the wife seeks his highest good, spiritually as well as materially. Especially spiritually, so this requires positive input in Christian understanding and activity too. The more spiritual understanding she can develop in herself and encourage in her husband, the better the marriage will be. Both husband and wife should put the maximum possible spiritual input into their marriage and family: again, '... whatever you do, do all to the glory of God' (1 Cor 10:31).

Paul refers to 'one flesh' in Ephesians 5:31. If we go back to Genesis, it is partnership that is planned by God. Both are put in charge, and the point about Eve being created from man's side is that she is a human being like himself. She was created for partnership because 'it is not good that the man should be alone' (Gen 2:18). The man and woman are to complement each other. No domination of one over the other is taught or implied, despite the ingenuity with which this is sometimes inserted into the account.

Genesis 3:16 ('... he shall rule over you') is often quoted as the grounds for a husband to rule his wife, and is misapplied as though it were an instruction, along with deductions that Eve's mistake was to rule over Adam. But it is a deduction, not the direct teaching of the text, and one that is not made elsewhere in the Bible. To justify dominating behaviour on the basis of things going wrong is like saying that the sinful consequences of disobedience to God are what God desires! We should do as Jesus did and consider what God wanted 'from the beginning' (Matthew 19:4), and take our practice from that.

It is the failure to treat women according to this fashion which has led to men dominating women and husbands dominating wives. Paul spoke to a culture with this attitude. Let us not seek to use Paul's improvement of the situation to try to clamp down on the women whom Paul and Jesus set free. It is easy to misuse the Bible to make it say things not intended for us – like slave owners did to justify slavery until recently, like Augustine and many church leaders over the centuries have done to restrict the position of women, like white racists have done towards people of different skin colour. Such interpretations tell us more about the people who make them than anything to do with Bible teaching.

In the modern world, boys and girls receive the same education – or are supposed to, according to good educational practice. Discrimination against girls was often widespread in the past, if unofficial, but this has largely been corrected. Girls are encouraged to use their minds, skills and voices, as are boys. This is the reality of the situation in modern culture, and sensible and sensitive applications of the principle of mutual submission, mutual service in Christ, is the key to happy relationships.

Practical Issues

Let us consider practical issues in two areas: Marriage, and the Ecclesia.

(1) Marriage

Which is a better way to proceed? By partnership, or by male leadership?

It is sometimes suggested that the latter is better, because someone is needed to make decisions, or at least, a final decision. Perhaps some couples feel happy with this. The idea could be drawn from Numbers 30 where husbands can overrule a wife's vow, but there is no suggestion of this in the New Testament. It is not what Paul means when he talks about the head of the wife is the husband. Husbands are never encouraged to rule their wives; they are instructed to love and serve them. Therefore mutual agreement is needed whether on minor or major issues. In some areas the husband may have more experience or a greater understanding; the wife may have in others. There needs to be discussion and prayer over matters on which they disagree. If a husband takes any decision against the wishes of his wife, he is not being head according to the New Testament descriptions. He also thereby fails to recognise Christ as his head, for Christ's teaching is to be applied: '... in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you' (Mat 7:12).

The husband is head of the wife only in the sense that Christ is towards the church. He is not head in any dominating, worldly sense.

(2) The Ecclesia

It is very notable that in 1 Corinthians 11 the husband is to honour his head, Christ, and the wife to take care not to dishonour her head, her husband. As far as ecclesial activity is concerned, both husband and wife pray and prophesy. No restriction is placed on these activities either for male or female.

We observe the same in 1 Corinthians 14. Paul addresses the brothers and sisters, and encourages them all to take an active, speaking part in the meetings: 'What then, brethren (adelphoi = brothers and sisters)? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification' (1 Cor 14:26).

The activities need to be done in an orderly manner, which means speaking in intelligible language, and speaking one at a time. The restrictive verses in 34-35 can be explained in several ways, but need to be seen in the context of the rest of 1 Corinthians 14, where both brothers and sisters speak acceptably. Where speaking is unhelpful (speaking in a 'tongue' with no one to interpret, v. 28), disruptive (as when several prophets speak at the same time, v. 30) or women chattering or interrupting with questions (by one interpretation of vv. 34-35) they are told to keep silent. In this, they need to 'be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ' (Eph 5:21). It is disruptive behaviour which is disallowed. Both men and women are encouraged by Paul to speak to edify the brothers and sisters: '... you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged' (1 Cor 14:31).

Paul's aim, in the ecclesia as in marriage, is partnership. Attempts to silence sisters in the ecclesia on the basis that only brothers should rule or speak or make decisions are based on a selective reading of the Bible. They fail to read the ancient context adequately and substitute standards of the secular world instead of biblical ones. The New Testament several times lists ecclesial activities, as in 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and Romans 12. These activities are not defined in terms of male or female. We are 'the body of Christ and individually members of it', and 'if one member is honoured, all rejoice together' (1 Cor 12:27, 26).

Being head is a position of service, and service is submission to others. As Jesus' example shows, there is nothing passive about submission:

'... let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. ... I am among you as one who serves' (Luke 22:26-27). Submission, acting as a servant, is personally chosen as part of following Christ. It comes from the heart; it is not something that can be imposed on anyone by others.

May we follow Christ's example in all our relationships.

Ian & Averil McHaffie

Alan's response to Cynthia, Ian and Averil is to be found on the next page.

Dear Bro. Les,

Thank you for letting me see the responses to *Harmony through Headship*. Both your correspondents endorse my thesis that although headship of husbands is both beneficial and Scriptural, there is no NT Scriptural imperative to regard men as heads of

women or brothers as heads of sisters.

I agree with Sis Lunn that 'conception' in Gen 3:16 cannot be a correct translation because in Bible times conception was almost always an occasion for rejoicing. The Heb. word *heron*, translated 'conception,' is a 'oncer' – it does not occur elsewhere in Scripture – so a concordance will not help. But as we point out, in *Exploring Bible Language*, we are helped by the Septuagint which translates *heron* by *stenagmos* which means groaning or sighing..

As pointed out by Sis Lunn, the 'sorrow and sighing' refers to what happens after birth and to the fact that, especially in Bible times, mothers were burdened with most of the work of child-rearing and coping with sickness and mortality..

Bro.Ian and Sis Averil McHaffie correctly insist that the husband should be head of the wife only in the way that Christ is head of the Church. This is a helpful analogy because although Christ has absolute authority, he invites us to take his yoke and work with him. So in the ideal marriage the husband does not have to impose his headship; rather the wife will yield gracefully.

But, as I hope I made it clear, the burden of my article was to show the wisdom of headship in acting as a safety-valve and preventing an explosion when agreement between husband and wife cannot be resolved by mutual consent.

Yours fraternally, Alan

If an offence come out of the truth,
better is it that the offence come
than that the truth be concealed.

Jerome

Dear Brother Les,
Greetings in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The time periods of early Genesis continue to generate discussion. Readers may be interested in two suggestions, one about time and relativity¹, and the other by Brother Ron Storer².

Schroeder's book draws attention to time and relativity. To illustrate his main point, science fiction can help. It is a common science fiction plot for people to travel long distances from the earth and, after travelling to planets far away, to return to the earth some years later. They are then amazed to find that, although only a few years have passed in their own lifetimes, many years have passed on the earth – their own generation is long dead and their grandchildren are adults.

Relativity has now been confirmed as actuality, not a theory. Time differences at different distances in space have been measured. We tend to think of time as progressing at a steady pace, in linear fashion – day after day, and year after year – but this is only so when we consider the situation on earth. If God were viewing the earth from a long distance away, and there are exceedingly long distances in the universe, then the days recorded in Genesis chapter 1 from His viewpoint would be the equivalent of, say, billions of years on earth. This is Shroeder's thesis. His book is rather inflated as he expands on this one essential point.

Concerning the 6,000 years which some say is the age of the earth, Bro Ron Storer drew attention to these scriptures:

For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. Psalm 90:4.

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 2 Peter 3:8.

When a year has 365 days, using a thousand years for a day, the 6,000 years become 219,000,000 years for the age of the earth. Further, a 'watch in the night' was three hours, or one eighth of a day. Applying this criterion, the age of the earth would be extended a further eight times, to 17,520,000,000 years.

Of course, there is no actual need to adopt any such suggestions when we read the Bible. Genesis 1 is not a scientific account of creation. It was written to be comprehensible to all people in all cultures at all times, and we limit God if we insist it must be interpreted either literally as six earth days or by our own scientific culture in our own era. The message of Genesis 1 is that God created everything and any interpretation should reinforce that teaching, not undermine it.

With love as a brother,
Roy Boyd

¹Shroeder, Gerald L. *Genesis and the Big Bang*. 1990. Bantam Books.

²Storer, Ronald. *Creation and the Character of God*. 1985. Arthur H. Stockwell Ltd.

The Lignum Project

Jamaica is a country still struggling to establish an economy which can offer employment and a reasonable standard of living to its citizens. Theoretically education is free, but travel to school and materials for learning are more than many families can afford. Training for employment is virtually non-existent and jobs for many young people impossible to obtain. As a result, young people with no possibility of earning their living honestly can slip easily into the culture of drugs and crime.

The Lignum Project has been running for about eight years. Roy Marshall and David Jones, both skilled craftsmen, have a well-established routine, travelling to Jamaica each year in order to run intensive training courses in woodwork skills for young people associated with our churches. Students who started with Lignum as schoolboys are now young men equipped with the tools and skills to find themselves a place in the workforce.

Each year the cost of the Lignum Project has been covered by generous donations from ecclesias, individuals and the Meal-a-Day Fund. Members of the ecclesias in Jamaica have been able to provide accommodation for Roy and Dave while they have been working in the country. We give thanks for this generosity and for the love and prayers which these gifts represent.

Lignum costs about £2500 a year to run. By far the greater part of our money is spent on ever-increasing air fares. The cost of some materials, tools and welfare work are also included and we spend all our income on the task we have set ourselves. We will have no funds in reserve after the summer visit this year.

As the project is expanding and developing, it would help us to have an element of assured income for the project, in order to offer – under the guidance and care of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ – a more certain package of assistance and encouragement to our young people in Jamaica. It would enable us, for example, to offer to pay for transport and accommodation for students travelling from another village, to consider the possible recruitment of a third instructor, and to purchase hand tools of a higher standard than those available in Jamaica.

If about fifty of our readers were in a position to commit themselves to giving perhaps £5 per month, the project would, by God's grace, be assured. If you are able to help us in this practical expression of care for God's children, would you please photocopy and complete the form below and send it to:

The Lignum Project, Maureen Marshall, Home Cottage Farm,
Penhill Road, Great Ellingham, Attleborough, NR17 1LS.
(Telephone 01953 483734. Email maureenhcf@waitrose.com)

You will be sent the bank details of The Lignum Project to enable you to set up a standing order. If you are a UK tax payer a gift aid form will also be sent to you. When this is returned, The Lignum Project will be able to reclaim the tax element on your gift.

Name: -----

Address:

Email address:

Telephone:

I wish to give £..... a month to The Lignum Project by standing order.

I am/am not a UK tax payer (please delete as appropriate).

Come and see
by Thomas Gaston

In 2006, Thomas published a booklet entitled *The Continuous Historic Interpretation Examined*. In it, he set out to show that the continuous historical approach favoured by many Christadelphian authors was incorrect. By his own admission, the booklet was rather negative. In this book, he sets out to be more positive and to present the reader with his own view.

A great deal of work has obviously gone into the production of this book. It is a 430 page long 'exposition', not a verse-by-verse commentary, and as such it fits into a tradition amongst Christadelphian writers who write about Revelation. If you require a commentary, the book is not for you. It is clearly intended primarily for a Christadelphian audience and sets out to present his own interpretation.

It is difficult to give a synopsis of such a large work and so, in this review, I will comment on three aspects:

- § his principle of using scripture to interpret the book;
- § his 'working hypothesis' that the 3½ year periods in Revelation take their meaning from the drought period at the time of Elijah; and
- § the identification of Babylon with the Roman Catholic Church.

Scripture as interpreter

Thomas starts from the premise that Revelation is an inspired book written by John, son of Zebedee. He does not tell us what he means by 'inspired', but it becomes plain when reading his book that he believes it is a message from God containing prophecies about the future which will be fulfilled.

The use of scripture as interpreter will appeal to many. Yet, it is not without its problems and those issues are not discussed. For example, if it was John's intention that we should always go to scripture to interpret the symbols, why does he include symbols that have no parallel in scripture? Thomas notes on the question of the sixth trumpet:¹ 'Given the lack of direct scriptural match for these symbols there are numerous suggestions for the interpretation of the sixth trumpet.' Further, difficulties arise in actually understanding the scripture. Take the question of the 'one like a son of man' in Daniel 7¹³.² This was developed in 1 Enoch so that the son of man denoted a Messianic figure. This is picked up by the New Testament writers and it is used by them as such. Yet, in Daniel it simply means a human-like figure, and Daniel himself tells us the meaning of the phrase just 5 verses later (v18):

'But the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever – for ever and ever.'

There is no doubt that Revelation is full of scriptural language, but whether John is looking for us to always look back to those scriptures for meaning is a question that requires a great deal of investigation.

The 'working hypothesis'

At the beginning of the book³, Thomas introduces us to what he terms his 'working hypothesis'. There are various passages in Revelation (and Daniel) that refer to the same period of time:

- § 1260 days (11³; 12⁶; cf Daniel 12¹¹)
- § 42 months (11²; 13⁵; 14¹)
- § a time, and times, and half a time, ie 3½ years (12¹⁴; cf Daniel 12⁷).

In biblical times, the year was reckoned as 360 days. Thus, if taken literally, a period of exactly 3½ years is indicated, and he takes it as such. He then casts around in scripture for another 3½-year period and he finds it in James 5¹⁷ and Luke 4²⁵, each of which refers to a 3½-year drought at the time of Elijah. This leads to a slight anomaly. The time period is to be taken literally as 3½ years to begin with, but becomes 'figurative' once another similar time period is found in scripture. He then sees what happened in this period of Elijah's life and sees it as pertinent to the pattern of Revelation:

§ Elijah was fed in the wilderness (1 Kings 17³⁻⁶; see Revelation 12⁶ & 14);

§ Elijah preached aided by miracles (1 Kings 18²⁰⁻¹⁴; see Revelation 11³⁻⁶)

§ God preserves a faithful remnant (1 Kings 18⁴; 19¹⁸; see Revelation 7¹⁻⁸; 12⁶, 14)

This is a new way of looking at things to me and it is possible that some will find it helpful. However, there is a difficulty with the texts in James and Luke. The event to which they refer is found in 1 Kings. However, 1 Kings 17¹ refers to 'these years' and 18¹ says 'in the third year of the drought'. This has troubled conservative Christians⁴ but not the more mainstream commentators who see Luke and the authors of Revelation and James as following an oral tradition current in New Testament times. Unfortunately, Thomas does not consider the issue and this seems to me to be an omission.

Babylon and the Roman Catholic Church

True to his principle of letting scripture interpret Revelation, Thomas goes back to Daniel for the identification of Babylon as the Roman Catholic Church⁵. However, again, there is no discussion of the visions in Daniel, just an acceptance of the Christadelphian tradition. Thus the little horn in Daniel is identified as the Pope, despite the fact that most commentators, and even the notes in the conservative NIV Study Bible, identify it as Antiochus IV Epiphanes⁶.

He similarly identifies the beast of the land as the papacy, arguing that the Pope is⁷:

§ 'religious in appearance, yet corrupt and blasphemous ('he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon' 13¹¹)

§ has the authority of the Roman Empire (beast of the sea) ('he exercises authority over the first beast...' 13¹²)

§ contemporary with the Eastern Roman Empire (beast of the sea) ('...in his presence' 13¹²)

§ performs (false) miracles ('he performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men' 13¹³)

§ restricts trade for non-Catholics ('...that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast' 13¹⁷).

Many Christadelphians will agree with Thomas for identifying the Roman Catholic Church as Babylon. Others, will take a different view on these symbols and find it deeply disturbing even though Thomas states⁸:
'Most of all, we must be careful not to lay against individual Catholics the crimes of the institution – the Church's adherents are often ignorant of its corruptions.'

Conclusion

It is probable that more study has been devoted to Revelation in Christadelphian and other conservative protestant circles than any other book in the Bible. This means that there are many diverse views. We should read views that differ from our own in order to grow in understanding. If you are fundamentalist (conservative evangelical) in your approach to scripture and have an interest in Revelation, you may find this book useful. It is easy to read given the subject matter and there is not too much reference to the Greek.⁹ Furthermore, Thomas succeeds in his quest to be more positive than he was in his previous booklet and does set down his own ideas, but is refreshingly undogmatic. The fact that he has a 'working hypothesis' indicates that this is project in process and that he testing theories.

As with all interpretations that identify the symbols in Revelation as referring to events and institutions that occur between the beginning of the second century AD and a time that is still future to us, one wonders what relevance the book had to its first readers. However, if you are theologically liberal, you may find it difficult to connect with the principles that Thomas uses in interpreting the book and find that some of what I would consider as crucial principles are assumed or simply stated rather than presented as an argument. You may find this frustrating.

Michael Green

Notes

1 See p214

2 See p86

3 See pp19-25

4 For example, see Neville Smart or Harry Whittaker on James.

5 See excursus F, pp247ff

6 He similarly identifies the beast from the sea (Revelation 13¹) with the Orthodox Eastern Roman Empire. In his argument, he states: 'It is commonly accepted that the ten horns of Daniel's fourth beast represent the kingdoms into which the Roman empire divided upon its collapse (p263).' This begs the question, 'commonly accepted' by whom? Mainstream theology does not make such a connection.

7 See pp272-276.

8 See p273

9 Most of the Greek is in Latin script, but for some reason, the section on the number of the beast (pp268-270) is in unpointed Greek and errors suggest that the author is not very familiar with the language. For example, he states 'the absence of the indefinite article in verse 16' when referring to the number of a man (p270). There is no indefinite article in Greek and sometimes, when translating from Greek to English, we omit the definite article. Also in the footnote to this, he says that 'if "mankind" was intended then the plural form of *anthropos* would have been used'. Yet in Genesis 1²⁶ (LXX), the singular is used, yet it must mean mankind because the verse continues 'and let them...'

Copies of *Come and See* can be obtained from

Brother Thomas Gaston at:

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Price £10. Please make cheques payable to Thomas Gaston.

Thomas' reply

I would like to thank Michael for his review. I am an unashamed 'fundamentalist' (by his definition) and have no problem frustrating 'liberals'! This being said, I try to give all viewpoints a fair hearing and, though I do not give much space in the book to liberal or critical views, I did try to give them due consideration. I was fortunate enough to view Michael's PowerPoint presentation on *Revelation* while writing *Come and See* and noted that his own views on Revelation follow more closely the consensus of critical scholars.

I freely admit to the weaknesses that Mike identifies. I do presuppose many things without expansive discussion. As he also notes, my command of the Greek language is far from flawless (I am but a learner).¹ To this I would add that the exposition is quite uneven in terms of the level of detail given to different sections and there are an unfortunate number of typos in the text. I hope that these faults are pardonable and that the meaning still comes across adequately.

As far as Michael's three issues are concerned, I accept that I do not fully discuss his concerns regarding the use of scripture as interpreter. Yet even though there are difficulties with the application, the numerous allusions in Revelation to the OT (more than any NT book) would seem to require this approach. Perhaps the greatest difficulty with the 'scriptural' approach is that it makes one's interpretation of Revelation dependent on one's interpretation of many other passages of scripture. I am sorry if my discussion of OT passages, such as Daniel, was insufficient but I had to keep my word-count down somehow! I do adopt the 'Roman' view of the Four Kingdoms² and the 'messianic' view of the one like a son of man³ without much elaboration, though I hope it will not be presumed that I do so uncritically.

I welcome Michael's response to my 'working hypothesis'; if I have provided him a new way of looking at these time-periods then I am glad. He writes that I 'cast around' for a scriptural parallel to the 3½ years, which would seem to imply that my choice was arbitrary. In fact, it is (to the best of my knowledge) the only 3½-year period in scripture outside Daniel and Revelation; if it is a scripturally motivated symbol then really only Elijah's drought fits the bill. I did overlook the disparity between the records of the length of the drought, yet whatever the resolution of that disparity may be the period may still provide the basis for the symbolism.

I quite accept that many will find my identification of Babylon as the Roman Catholic Church 'disturbing', but I hope I may be believed when I say that I did not reach this conclusion lightly. I still struggle with the idea that the Roman Church will be a principal player in Armageddon and I distrust those efforts that are sometimes made to demonstrate that the Pope is still 'behind the thrones' of Europe. However, if the book of Revelation is focused on the path of Christianity (rather than the history of Western Europe) then it is fitting that the corrupt state of the Church should be symbolized. Whatever our views about the present state of Catholicism, the corruptions of the Roman Church of centuries past is historical fact.

In concluding Michael sets the challenge that if Revelation is truly eschatological – if it truly predicts future events – then it would have had limited relevance to its first readers. I fully acknowledge the problem. Yet it is not really a problem with my interpretation but a problem with the entire concept of delayed or progressive revelation; Adam probably could not have understood John's Gospel, let alone the book of Revelation. I have yet to see any compelling reason to deny that God had our generation – and all generations – in mind when He inspired men to write the Scriptures.

Thomas Gaston

Notes

1 In reference to his note above: 1) I used unpointed Greek since the font I used was not sophisticated enough for pointing; 2) the phrase in question should read "the absence of the **definite** article ..."; 3) 'mankind' would be more naturally expressed by the plural form of *anthropos*, though clearly there are exceptions that I haven't noted.

2 Michael argues that the little horn is to be identified as Antiochus Epiphanes, following consensus of critical scholarship, though he doesn't specify which little horn! The little horn of Daniel 8 is likely to be Antiochus Epiphanes but, given the disparity between Daniel 7 and Daniel 8, it is difficult to reconcile the idea that both little horns represent the same thing.

3 Michael argues that 'the one like a son of man' is identified as 'the holy ones', following scholars such as Casey (*Son of Man: The Interpretation and Influence of Daniel 7*, London: SPCK, 1979). However, many critical scholars reject this identification, supposing the man-like figure to represent a heavenly-being (some identify him as the angel Michael); see J. J. Collins, *Daniel*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, p305f. I deal further with the Son of Man question in an article in *Christadelphian E-Journal of Biblical Interpretation*, October 2007, pp130-145.

The Endeavour Magazine

	1976	1976	1986	1986	1996	1996	2006	2006
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Anglican	#908,415	29.3	791,901	24.718	631,764	18.613	554,925	13.8
Presbyterian	735,475	18.2	673,496	4.821	442,473	3.616	350,508	9.6
R Catholic	71,816	15.3	53,249	0.401	21,650	0.401	21,806	12.6
Methodist	49,059	5.5	67,932		53,613		56,175	3.0
Baptist	35,958	1.6	37,143		41,166		43,536	1.4
3 Ibid	13,338		16,377		19,527		17,910	
L-D Saints	11,877	1.2	12,048		14,691		13,815	1.1
Witnesses	3,335	0.4	2,700		1,743		2,316	0.4
D	1,662	0.4	1,785		1,156		1,785	0.3
Adventists	1,056	0.1	1,206		294		1,149	0.1
Brethren	564	0.1	369	204			234	0.1
Christadelphians								
of Friends								
Christians								
Science								
Theosophists								

4 *Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*. New York, MacMillan, 1931

5 *The Scientific Study of Religion*, New York, MacMillan, 1970

6 Scotland p.5.

7 *Religious Sects* London, World University Library, 1970

8 *The Sociology of Religion*, Boston, The Beacon Press, 1963

9 Scotland pp.292-3

10 Ibid p.295 11 Ibid p.295 12 Ibid p.296 13 Ibid p.296

14 Ibid p.298 15 Ibid p.299 16 Ibid p.300 17 Ibid p.301

18 Ibid p.302

Called, Chosen & Faithful

When people seek for a partner in marriage they exercise the choice of whom they might consider to be suitable. One of the main factors involved is likely to be whether there is someone amongst your acquaintances who you feel attracted to and you could imagine yourself being able to live with for the rest of your life. Making your feelings known to the person may come as a bewildering total surprise to him or her or may be met with great enthusiasm. The person concerned may wonder why on earth you would want to spend the rest of your life with them and may reject your proposal outright. Alternatively, they may express their joy at finding that you feel the same about them as they do about you, and are grateful that you have chosen them.

Christians are encouraged in scripture to see themselves as God's chosen people, individually and collectively. Peter's first epistle particularly stresses this. But how are we to understand the matter for it raises the question of why this one is chosen and not that one?

I want to suggest that being chosen is being the recipient of undeserved expressions of love which, in my turn, I can choose to respond to or not. By responding positively, I begin to announce to the would-be lover, and to the world, that I recognise my state of chosenness and wish to deepen the relationship it is trying to foster. By not responding, or by responding negatively, I fail to recognise, or choose to ignore or reject, the bid that has been made for my love.

As far as God is concerned, his love is his call to each of us, all of us, every one of us, to enter freely, at our choice, into a loving relationship with him. By the very nature of things, he obviously makes the first move, for he made each one of us and brought us to life in a world of his own making full of signs of his love. By these, he calls all of us, for he 'wants everyone to be saved and to come to know the truth' (1 Tim 2:3). It is clear that some of God's moves to show us his love for us were made before we were born. Paul could say that 'when we were still helpless, Christ died for the wicked at the time that God chose' and 'it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us!' (Rom 5:6,8) We can say that before we were born Christ died for us and so 2000 years ago God was already making a bid for our love, calling and choosing each of us, without partiality, as objects of his love.

Called, Chosen & Faithful

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The first epistle of John tells us that: 'This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven. . . . We love because God first loved us.' (1 John 4:10,19) In John's Gospel we read that 'God loved the world so much that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.' (John 3:16) Clearly what is true of us is true of all others, God's love goes out to all humankind.

New converts invariably believe that they have made a choice to follow Christ, and so they have, but the more mature Christian knows himself to be chosen by the Father and by the Son, while maturing with the help of the Spirit. However, we need to exercise some care about how we express the fact that we are chosen, for we can easily give the impression not only that we are chosen and others are not, but that God has decided it all in advance anyway. Some may well conclude that their fate is already sealed and that there is therefore little point in doing anything at all about the matter. We may well give the impression that our God is a tyrant who decides our fate in advance and only gives us the semblance of a choice. This would hardly encourage anyone to try to follow Christ.

Christians are not fatalists and their God is not a tyrant. The option he gives us, to respond or not to his love, is real. But we need to remember that being chosen does not of itself guarantee remaining that way. 2 Peter 1:10 encourages us to try even harder to make God's call and his choice of us a permanent experience and concludes that if we do so, we will never abandon our faith. God's chosen OT people largely lost the way to the point where they did not recognise the son of their own God when he appeared in their midst. And yet they persisted in saying that they were the chosen ones. We can so easily let pride lead us astray by saying that we are God's people, God's chosen ones, and God will of course bless us with privileges which are not for others. It is certainly a privilege to be a member of Christ's redeemed community but it is not for privileges that we are part of it.

As Peter says, in 1 Pet 2:9,10, we are a chosen race, but chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God who called us out of darkness into his own marvellous light. We are chosen to help others to know their chosenness, for God loves them too. Together we can learn how to live as Christ lived, being prepared not just to receive love, perhaps in the form of privileges, but to give and show love of the self-sacrificial variety that Jesus showed on the cross. This is underlined in Rev 14:17 where the powers of evil are defeated by the Lamb, Lord of lords and King of kings, together with his called, chosen, and faithful followers.

Les Boddy

A sense of wonder at why God would want to live with me for eternity.
Humility - his 'choice' of me, his arranging for a world in which I would appear and experience his loving arrangements for myself. His choice does not permit me to conclude that I am any better than others that don't appear to me to be children of God. They can choose not to be chosen by choosing not to respond to God's overtures, to the signs of his love.
God's choosing becomes effective in the offer of mercy which when it is accepted becomes the basis of life.
God unchooses those who despise his mercy.
He chooses those who respond to him but will not force himself on anyone who chooses not to respond.
God often chooses what men cast aside. He works with and for the weak, poor, down-trodden.
Chosen to manifest his glory, character, mercy and forgiveness.
John 15:16 You did not choose me, I chose you.
Mat 22:14 many are called but few are chosen.
While Christ's death was sufficient for all men, and is effective in the case of the elect, yet men are treated as responsible beings, capable of the will and power to choose.
Are some chosen because they are in the right place at the right time? And God gives the opportunity to act in favour of his purpose.
Call 1 Pet 1:15, 2:21, 3:9, 5:10

Chosen to declare the mighty deeds of God Is 43:20f 1 Pet 2:9

Snaith

God not fickle, partial, capricious,
arbitrary - unless it means that God chooses in a way or for a reason that we cannot understand
In a sense all love is arbitrary.
God's thoughts are not our thoughts
Rom 11:23 how unsearchable are his judgements and his ways past finding out. This is the mystery of divine love.
There is an exclusiveness in God's love.
Why this one chosen but not that one?
Calvin predestination. Luther said Calvin went wrong because he tried to climb up into the majesty of God
Why this one? Because God loved him. God rejects persistent, unrepentant wickedness.
Distinction between called and chosen made in gospels not the epistles Col 3:12

Editorial

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I Am

The Bible in its Place

Trials and Tribulations

A Ransom for Many

'The horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.'

Sectarian Religion in Contemporary Britain

The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse.

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Correspondence

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