

# The Endeavour Magazine

## *For Christian Thought and Action*

ISSN 1474-404X

[www.endeavourmagazine.org](http://www.endeavourmagazine.org)

June 2009

No. 121

### CONTENTS

Theories and Truth	Les Boddy
Alcoholics Anonymous	Averil McHaffie
He's Behind You!	Cedric Twelves
Jesus Christ: the Hidden Years	Roy Boyd
How are the Dead Raised?	Alan Fowler
Looking for His Coming	Mark Robertson
It's not what you know	David Allsopp
Paul at the Areopagus	Sheila Harris
Inspired by Scripture	Alfred Ward
A Critique of <i>The anniversary of Darwin's birth</i>	Cyril Marsters
Review: <i>The Bible and Science</i>	Charles Crawford
Review: <i>Big Questions for Little People</i>	David McHaffie
Review: <i>Reading and Writing in The Time of Jesus</i>	John Stephenson
Review: <i>Misquoting Jesus</i>	Sheila Harris
Review: <i>Approaching Apocalypse.</i>	Sheila Harris
The Elect, Salvation, and the Righteousness of God	Tony Cox

---

**Well, religion does make a person very rich, if he is  
satisfied with what he has.  
For the love of money  
is a source of all kinds of evil.**

1 Timothy 6:6,10 (GNB)

## Theories and Truth

Both scientists and theologians are engaged in the search for truth. Lesser mortals, like myself, may have dabbled in both, but often have difficulty following the details of arguments put forward in both arenas. However, we all engage in our own search for truth, at a lower level perhaps, and certainly don't want to feel that we are being taken for a ride by experts. We either have to make judgements in the light of what we feel we do know and understand or else we need to learn to withhold judgement while we seek and wait for greater enlightenment. This requires a good dose of humility. Scriptures such as Job 38:1-12; Isa 40:13,14; 55:8,9 and Rom 11:33-36 all emphasise our limitations and difficulties. Nevertheless, we all have God-given curiosity and a need to seek understandings and explanations for what we observe and experience in this wonderful world. But scientists and theologians also have need of humility, for the world is full of surprises at all levels.

Everyday observation would suggest that the earth is flat and stationary – except when it shudders frighteningly in an earthquake! The sun, moon and stars appear to rotate round the earth. The stars appear largely to be in fixed constellations, except for what were known as the seven planets (wanderers): Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, forever immortalised in our seven-day week. For all normal purposes this view of things will serve us well but such phenomenalism, as it is called, cannot be the basis of all our knowledge. Looking more deeply into such matters may well require that we adjust our thinking and understanding accordingly. For example, observation of the sunlight streaking out from behind clouds and of shadows on the earth, both suggest that light travels in straight lines and so it does, for all practical purposes, except for some special circumstances that physicists and astronomers know about.

Observations provoke questions and curiosity seeks explanations which result in hypotheses, theories and laws. Many theories have had to bite the dust. I understand that it was once thought that light travelled from the eye (a bit like a torch) and in some way 'felt round' the objects that we see and somehow reported back to the brain. More recently, there was a theory of combustion that proposed that when something burned, something called Phlogiston (from Gk *phlox* - flame) escaped from the burning substance, as the flames and smoke tended to suggest. This theory held up the progress of chemistry for about 100 years until it was demonstrated that burning substances take something (oxygen) from the air instead of giving phlogiston to the air. Appearances are often deceptive.

Our word theory comes via Latin from the Greek *theoria*, via *theoros* 'spectator' from *theoreo* 'look at' (COD). The verb *theoreo* occurs fairly often in the NT and is translated in the AV by words like 'see, behold, perceive and consider'. *Theoria* occurs only once, in Luke 23:48, where it is used to refer to the crucifixion of Jesus and *theoreo* is in the same sentence, only a word separating them in the Greek.

**AV** And all the people that came together to that **sight**, **beholding** the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.

**GNB** When the people who had gathered there to watch **the spectacle** **saw** what had happened, they all went back home, beating their breasts in sorrow.

The verb *theoreo* is translated 'beholding' or 'saw' and the noun *theoria* is translated 'sight' or 'spectacle'.

Could we not say that there is both observing and theorizing going on here? The crowds see and behold and then think about what they see, i.e. theorize, which leads them to conclude that beating breasts (*stethos*, from which we get stethoscope) is the proper response. The only two references to breast beating in the NT are both in Luke, here in 23:48 and in 18:13 where the Publican beats his breast exclaiming 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' The GNB says that those at the crucifixion beat their breasts 'in sorrow'. It was a sign of anguish, severe mental or physical suffering. No doubt they would be sorry to see yet another Jew dealt with by the Romans but might equally have wondered what might well happen to themselves if an innocent preacher like Jesus had to be crucified. Otherwise, they may have thought sadly that here was

another failed Messiah biting the dust. Certainly Jesus' disciples did at first think that with Jesus dead, that was the end of the hopes they had in him and they would just have to learn to live with it.

What is your theory of the cross? What was going on there and what was achieved and how? What should our response to it be? There have been many theories of atonement which have caused much dissension in our own community and in Christendom at large.

Of course, the word 'theory' has become topical this year with the anniversaries of Darwin's birth and the publication of his *On the Origin of Species*. Not so very long ago a brother used to argue that there were a number of different theories of evolution which contradicted each other and went on to conclude that that was sufficient evidence to discount altogether any theory of evolution. It never seemed to occur to him that, if that were a good way of reasoning then we couldn't really expect anyone to take seriously any form of Christianity because different Christian groups espouse different views of atonement and other matters.

It seems that some people think of theories as having virtually no factual basis whatever, being pure speculation. We certainly can't afford to ignore the Law/Theory of Gravitation and the student of Music can't afford to neglect the theory of Music. No doubt theories always leave room for improvement and innovation, because God and His world never fail to keep on surprising us. But are we open to being surprised?

When trying to understand and describe nature we tend to ask of any suggested explanation 'Is it reasonable?' This assumes that we are already equipped to judge reasonableness, that we know in advance what is reasonable in the case under consideration. But this implies that the reasonableness of an explanation is being judged against our pre-existing reasoning habits. Such a procedure will tend to close down the possibility of novelty and does not look for or expect surprises. The criterion of truth becomes nothing more than our current understanding.

The well-known scientist and theologian John Polkinghorne suggests that a more fruitful question to ask is 'What makes you think that might be the case?' This is a more open question as it does not prescribe in advance the form that an acceptable answer has to take. To persuade someone that some unexpected possibility is true requires the production of evidence in support of the claim. The same applies whether we are talking of science or religion and this should make us hesitate to dismiss too quickly what we consider to be unreasonable. Whether something appears to us to be unreasonable depends on where we are coming from and how open we are to novelty. We often can't see the truth for looking, which sometimes gets in the way, for we look from our current perspective, wanting to justify our current perspective without having to rethink it all. What we consider to be truth, and often hang on to for dear life, can block the way to deeper understanding of reality. The NT is full of examples of this, particularly in Jesus' dealings with his disciples.

One of the problems with evolution is that the word comes to modern ears with so much baggage. Nearly all talk of it in the media presents it as something which is totally opposed to creation, so much so that it is implied that we all have to choose between the two, either creation or evolution. This no doubt suits the atheistic evolutionist but it has been well said that the biological theory of evolution, accepted by the vast majority of biologists, including Christians, has nothing whatever to say about atheism or theism. That being the case, it is open for us to choose whether we see God involved with the process of evolution or not. However, so-called theistic evolution (TE) hardly gets a hearing in the media because they focus on the battle between the either/or extremists. Battles are more interesting than peaceful coexistence it seems and so the myth of the battle between science and religion is hyped up.

Because of this feature of the word evolution, some TE authors are trying to avoid it and choose to speak of evolutionary creationism or biologos. Here is one possible version of TE put forward as an example by Francis Collins in his book *The Language of God*:  
The universe came into being out of nothingness, approximately 14 billion years ago.

Despite massive improbabilities, the properties of the universe appear to have been precisely tuned for life.

While the precise mechanism of the origin of life on earth remains unknown, once life arose, the process of evolution and natural selection permitted the development of biological diversity and complexity over very long periods of time.

Once evolution got under way, no special supernatural intervention was required.

Humans are part of this process, sharing a common ancestor with the great apes.

But humans are also unique in ways that defy evolutionary explanation and point to our spiritual nature. This includes the existence of the Moral Law (the knowledge of right and wrong) and the search for God that characterizes all human cultures throughout history.

Is there anything here which demeans God or makes it impossible to see Him as involved at all stages of this process? What we consider to be truth is no less an approximation to the Truth than are the theories (some more well-founded than others) of the scientists. God will never cease to surprise us on all fronts with what to us may well be contrary to our intuition.

**Les Boddy**

(I am indebted to John Polkinghorne, Credo, The Times, 11-14-09,  
and to Francis Collins, *The Language of God*.)

---

### **Alcoholics Anonymous**

Recently we had a visiting speaker from Alcoholics Anonymous to tell us about their work. The premises they had been using in our district were no longer available and our ecclesia was asked if they could use one of our rooms. It was agreed that they could and they now use it three times a week. Some of us had only a vague idea about the organisation and so we invited a speaker. It was a fascinating talk and discussion which seemed to us to have a number of lessons which could be applied to the Christian life too.

Alcoholics Anonymous is a worldwide fellowship of men and women who share a desire to stop drinking alcohol. The speaker started by telling us his name and saying, 'I am an alcoholic.' He saw alcoholism as an illness from which he could not be cured but with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous he could control. He said that one of the first things to learn is to remain sober for a day at a time. He went on to tell us of his own experience, a little of the history of the organisation and about its work.

Alcoholics Anonymous started in America in the 1930s. It started with an alcoholic called Bill Wilson who had ruined a promising Wall Street career because of his constant drunkenness. He was introduced to the idea of a spiritual cure by an old drinking friend, Ebby Thacher, who had become a member of a 'first century Christian movement' called the Oxford Group. Wilson was treated at Charles B. Towns hospital by Dr. William Silkworth, who promoted a disease concept of alcoholism. While in the hospital, Wilson underwent what he believed to be a spiritual experience and, convinced of the existence of God, he was able to stop drinking.

On a 1935 business trip Wilson felt the urge to drink again and in an effort to stay sober, he looked for another alcoholic to help. Wilson was introduced to Dr. Bob Smith. Wilson and Smith co-founded AA with a programme to help alcoholics. Nothing was written down at this point. Smith's last drink was taken on June 10, 1935, which is considered by members to be the founding date of AA. By 1937, Wilson and Smith determined that they had helped 40 alcoholics get sober, and two years later, with about 100 members, Wilson expanded the programme by writing a book entitled *Alcoholics Anonymous* which the organization also adopted as its name. The book, informally referred to by members as 'The Big Book', described a twelve-step programme which can be summarized by the following:

- admitting that one cannot control one's addiction or compulsion;

- recognising a greater power that can give strength;
- examining past errors with the help of a sponsor (experienced member);
- making amends for these errors;
- learning to live a new life with a new code of behaviour;
- helping others that suffer from the same addictions or compulsions.

Our speaker told us that it took a long time for him to accept that he was an alcoholic and that he needed help, but accepting this was a vital part in being able to overcome the desire to drink. He said that not everyone who goes to the meetings is able to remain sober. In his experience about one third of those who go to AA will remain sober. The others will revert to alcohol and, for some, the end result of that will be an early death.

Regular attendance at the meetings was at the beginning and still is very important to him. It helped him to hear the stories of other alcoholics. Those who had been successful gave him encouragement about what he could achieve. Hearing of problems cautioned him of what he could go back to if he did not remain sober. He has now been sober for the past seventeen years. He runs a business and is married with a family. But he still feels the need to go to regular meetings each week. When he goes on holiday he looks up the website for the nearest meeting and attends that.

Each meeting opens with a prayer, meditation and/or a period of silence. AA is not a Christian organization but the majority of members will accept the need to pray to or think about a 'higher power'. Introductions are made. Personal information given in the meetings is confidential. This is important as there may be stories of violence and physical and sexual abuse. AA does not claim to be expert in these areas and so contacts are given for agencies helping with these problems. Frequently, a section from the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* is read aloud, usually the beginning of Chapter Five, entitled 'How It Works'. Announcements from the chairperson and group members follow. Many groups celebrate newcomers, visitors, and sobriety anniversaries with rounds of applause. Following announcements, donations are collected, usually by passing a basket around the room. There is no requirement to make a donation. Most members contribute a small amount, often just some loose change. The making of large donations is actively discouraged in AA.

Meetings may take the form of a talk by a speaker relating their personal experience with alcoholism and AA or a discussion session with topics chosen by the chairperson, the speaker, or the attendees. Responding to another member's comments is discouraged. In many meetings, in order to encourage identification, members confine their comments to their alcoholic drinking and recovery, following the guidelines of, 'What we were like, what happened and what we are like now'. This format is intended to avoid distracting the group from its primary purpose. Sometimes there are talks giving medical information about alcoholism. After the discussion period, the meeting is typically ended with a prayer.

There are 'open meetings' which can be attended by anyone whereas the 'closed meetings' are only for those who have drinking problems. The meetings held in our hall are 'open meetings' but the one on Saturday evening tends to be a younger group than those attending on the other days. There are within the organization groups for the deaf, groups just for women, or just for men or groups for those who speak another language. There are also support groups for families of alcoholics.

Apart from the meetings, alcoholics are encouraged to choose one of the more mature members to be their sponsor. Our speaker had benefited from support from his sponsor and was, at the time of his talk, a sponsor for three people. This means that he is 'on call' to help them day and night. Even though he is a busy businessman, he responds as fast as he can to calls from those he is supporting because he knows how important it is to be there and help when help is needed.

Part of the 'twelve steps' is to acknowledge wrongs done and to apologise and make amends. Drink can cause people to behave very badly and it is important to accept the damage one has done and try and do something about it. It may take time to do this, even years. It may require the person to travel a distance to find out those that they have wronged but they are encouraged to do this. Another one of the twelve steps is to try to live a new life with a new code of behaviour. Our speaker, although he would not necessarily speak of this 'higher power' as God, said that at times when he knows he is not behaving as well as he would like, he prays to the 'higher power' for help to cope with the problems. He also prays at the end of each day to give thanks for being able to cope with that day without drink.

We were impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment the speaker had for AA. The groups had helped him to change his life and he wanted to help others to change their lives. AA had been a lifeline for him and he wanted to support it as much as he could.

It was interesting to note the parallels one could make with Christianity and the ecclesia and some of the ideas of AA. As followers of Jesus we need to accept that we do wrong and that we need help to overcome the problems we have. We need times for self-reflection. We are helped by regular meetings with other Christians. We are there to support and be supported by the group, the ecclesia. Our meetings need to be regular as it is easy to drift and forget. We need to forgive and be forgiven. We have a 'higher power' which we know to be God and we need to be in regular contact with Him and our Lord Jesus. Our enthusiasm and love for God should be seen in all we do.

The evening ended, as AA meetings do, with the Serenity Prayer, which is relevant for us all.

God grant me the serenity  
To accept the things I cannot change;  
Courage to change the things I can;  
And wisdom to know the difference.

And in the AA book it continues like this:

Living one day at a time;  
Enjoying one moment at a time;  
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;  
Taking, as He did, this sinful world  
As it is, not as I would have it;  
Trusting that He will make all things right  
If I surrender to His Will;  
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life  
And supremely happy with Him  
Forever and ever in the next.

**Sources :**

The talk by an AA speaker. Wikipaedia.

<http://alcoholissues.co.uk/about-alcoholics-anonymous-support.html>

**Averil McHaffie**

---

**He's behind you!**  
*(Oh no, he isn't! (Oh yes, he is!))*

## Deuteronomy 7

Just after Christmas we took our two grandchildren to see their first pantomime and it was a wonderful experience. The pantomime was *Snow White*, but it could have been any other, as different pantomimes require only minimal changes to names and script. It began, as all pantomimes do, with the appearance of an evil character who we were taught to hate. His malevolence was highlighted with green make-up and emphasized with pyrotechnics. And so we learned to hate him and we hissed and booed his every reappearance. Such heightened hating is a little scary; some of the audience found it necessary to hide behind the seats and others even under the seats.

In retrospect, it was a little sad, as I am sure the actor who played the part was a very nice man and in no way deserved the abuse he received nightly, plus matinees on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The burden he bore was that he had been cast in a role to tell us a story (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*) and teach us a lesson (*Good always wins in the end* and *Love will find a way*). Such a technique is a legitimate, very old, theatrical and literary device.

As one who struggles with Israel's, military tactics, foreign policy and disproportionate response to incidents, I wonder whether this device is being used in the drama that is Old Testament history when, for example, we are being told . . .

*'When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; and when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them and utterly destroy them; . . .'*

(Deuteronomy 7:1,2 AV)

This is God outlining stage 3 of the Exodus plan, the entering and consolidation of Israel's presence in the Promised Land. They were to attack and completely destroy the seven occupying nations and remove all traces of their religious practices from the land, **and they didn't**. They were not to show any mercy to them or make any treaties with them. They were not to intermarry with them nor adopt any of their religious practices, **and they did**.

Subsequent histories tell us that God's objective for them was never actually realised and so we trace vestiges of the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites *et al.* in their communities and in their religious, social and moral development, and Israel lived and died regretting it. The story has overtones of genocide and ethnic cleansing that we find impossible to contemplate. People are condemned eternally on the basis of their racial origin and this doesn't sit well with either the prophetic vision or our 21<sup>st</sup> century experiences.

If, as Paul affirms, '*. . . everything that was written in the past was written to teach us . . .*' (Romans 15:4 NIV), it may **just** be that this dramatic recasting of history as a teaching medium will enable us to contemplate the Deuteronomy story with more equanimity and as having a positive, contemporary, message.

What is the relevance of the specific seven occupying nations to us, as God's chosen people, today? Not a lot actually. So, is there any relevance in **Israel's historical situation** for the Christian era and for us, particularly, as a 21<sup>st</sup> century church?

I think there may be, because there **are** seven nations greater and mightier than us who, as we have marched into the Promised Land of the Christian church, we have failed to utterly destroy and whose traits and characteristics are evident in us and plague us as individuals and as a community. But, instead of Israel's Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, we, today, find our souls infiltrated by the

Hammerites, Bakelites, Parasites, Meteorites,  
Ammonites, Satellites and Cellulites!

Sometimes we think like them and sometimes we act like them. There are vestiges of their

philosophies in our corporate and communal life and their presence affects and distorts our thinking and behaviour. Let us consider some of the characteristics of these surrounding peoples and tribes.

### **The Hammerites**

I don't know what your experience of Hammerite is, but I find that by slapping on ONE COAT you can get a brilliant finish, even though the tin says TWO COATS. But unless you really go to town with the preparation, the brilliant finish holds together fine, but the corrosion underneath it just carries on. And underneath the gloss it's being eaten away. The Hammerites are basically a proud people who think that appearances matter, a frightened people who don't want you to get near, who don't want you to know that they are hurting and being eaten away.

Been infiltrated by the Hammerites?

### **The Bakelites**

Bakelite was one of the first thermosetting resins and was developed in 1909 by its Belgian inventor L. H. Baekeland. It was used for electrical components initially but eventually also for kitchenware, toys, radio casings and telephones. It had many excellent properties. It was easily moulded, non-conductive and heat resistant but it was **brittle**. The Bakelites are a people with a brittle faith. Their strengths, their durability, their ruggedness can suddenly disappear and they shatter and collapse and everyone is surprised and horrified

Ever felt any evidence of that?

### **The Parasites**

The Parasites are high dependency people whose survival is at the expense of others. They are a high maintenance people whose self-obsession makes them insensitive to the needs of others. They need to live in a close relationship with another who will, over time, find it at first irritating, then debilitating and then destructive. The Parasites are a people who need other people to obtain security. They need others to obtain approval and they need others to obtain status.

Are we affected by this nation's philosophies?

### **The Meteorites**

What we romantically call *shooting stars* aren't stars at all. They are the dying embers of debris as it rages against the atmosphere. They are spectacular, but astronomically irrelevant. The people of the Meteorites have two separate characteristics. They believe in the cult of the celebrity and stand in awe of the glory and display. They resolve issues with dramatic displays, unaware that the display is not their glory but their demise.

Spotted any Meteorite showers?

### **The Ammonites**

Ammonites are the fossilised remains of marine creatures that lived in the Carboniferous period. They are creatures from a long gone era who have no relevance to life today and no contribution to make to faith today. All they know about are yesterday's struggles and yesterday's battles, and they **lost** the struggle and the battle. They belong in museums, but they tell their story eloquently and can be very persuasive.

Beware the Ammonites.

### **The Satellites**

Satellites go round and round but keep their distance. They exist in remote regions far removed from the rough and tumble of everyday life and appear unaware and untouched by it. In keeping their distance they become observers and are peripheral to the action. Satellites put in appearance regularly and predictably but are really miles away.

It's easy to drift into the Satellites' way of thinking.

### **The Cellulites**

The Cellulites are probably the only tribe of the seven who have specific scriptural endorsement! James identifies their national characteristics, *'Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have*

*fattened yourselves . . .*' (James 5:4-5). They are insensitive to the needs of others and their prosperity is at the expense of others.

It takes no effort to become a Cellulite.

Time would fail me to tell of the Microlites, the Stalactites or the Marmites. So what do we do about the vestiges of,

the Hammerites, the Bakelites, the Parasites, the Meteorites,  
the Ammonites, the Satellites and the Cellulites

which plague us? We must recognise their influences in ourselves and deal with them and if we recognise them in others we have to cope with them.

So we learn, through the prophets and apostles, that becoming a holy nation lies not in xenophobia or genocide, but in a clearer perception of who, what and whose we are. We must let the Deuteronomy story teach us that evil exists, not just over the horizon of ethnic proscription or beyond foreign frontiers, or even within other communities, but within the indigenous homeland territory of our own souls.

So, perhaps this Old Testament episode is another story of origins and genesis which dramatises history to teach us the lesson of how and why things are as they are. But be reassured, GOOD always wins in the end and LOVE will find a way.

**Cedric Twelves**

---

**The job of satire is to frighten and enlighten,  
Richard Condon**

---

### **Jesus Christ: the Hidden Years** *A discussion topic*

It all began at a Bible Class when the topic was 'The Hidden Years' of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are many details given of the birth of Jesus and the events leading up to it: there are many details of his ministry: but what about the thirty or so years in between? Are these years as featureless as they seem?

The only firm information is given by Luke:

*The child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. (Luke 2:40).*

This terse but very expressive verse is followed by the account of the visit of Jesus with his parents to the temple at the age of twelve. But otherwise, we are told nothing directly about Jesus' early life, so what else can possibly be said?

However, the Bible Class discussion included some interesting points, some about the family situation, and some which suggested scripture might not be as silent on the 'hidden years' as we first thought. These highly tentative thoughts from the Bible Class have been extended, hence this article. (Any criticism should be directed at myself and not at those brothers and sisters who were present at the Bible Class.)

#### **The episode in the temple.**

*And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. Then, after three days, they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and*

*asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, 'Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You.' And He said to them, 'Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?' But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (Luke 2:42-52).*

At the age of twelve, Jesus obviously made a big impact upon the Jewish leaders in the temple. Perhaps this could be expected since Jesus was becoming the wisest person that ever lived. He would be greater than Solomon, and it seems that by the age of twelve, this was already obvious. Was Jesus, the son of God, to be less in intellectual stature and emotional maturity than the great men of the earth, such as Plato, Aristotle, Newton, Einstein, Shakespeare? Surely not.

And what would have been the expected reaction of the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, lawyers and scribes, to such an outstanding twelve year old? The usual response of a 'professional group' to a bright young potential member of that group is to take the young person under its wing and to groom him in their ways (it is a trivial comparison, but think of the football scouts who are out looking for children with football ability in order to catch them young for their team).

But it was not in the purpose of God for Jesus to become a leading Jew. The leaders of the Jews were the ones who turned the truth into a travesty of the word of God. They were not the role models that were appropriate for the one who was to bring in salvation for the world based on spiritual qualities which the Jewish leaders had abandoned.

But how much of a temptation was it for Jesus to be assimilated into their world? The human, worldly glory of God's chosen nation that would have been dangled before him could have indeed have been a great temptation to a young Jew. But Jesus resisted this temptation, as he resisted all others, and never allowed himself to become a Pharisee or a Sadducee. It must surely be counted a great spiritual success by the young Jesus that he spurned the worldly attractions that, say, the young Saul, later Paul, adopted.

So successful was Jesus in resisting any career in this direction that by the time of his ministry, he was unknown to the leading Jews. They had totally forgotten him. Any memory of the young Jew who made such an impact at the temple, the centre of Jewish life, had been erased by the beginning of Jesus' ministry. By the start of his public preaching, there is no hint that any link between the Jesus during his ministry and the young boy full of grace and wisdom was made.

### **Family tensions**

Have you come across any of the literature concerning children with exceptional ability or even had experience in your own family? There are potential tensions which can be actual. For example, the parents can devote undue attention and/or affection upon the bright child: they may be so pleased that they have given birth to such a talented offspring that it is easy for them to lose a sense of family proportion. The bright child may become spoilt and difficult, only with difficulty growing up to become a mature adult.

And there could be effects upon the relationships with brothers and sisters. Jealousy is common. There is the example in Genesis of the example of Joseph, the favourite son of Jacob, and the dysfunctional family relationships that developed there.

But there is no hint that such problems occurred in the family of Joseph and Mary and it says much for all of them that such tensions were avoided. True the (half-) siblings of Jesus were alarmed at the ministry of Jesus and even thought that Jesus was mentally disturbed (Mark 3:21), but this was a reaction from their spiritual blindness at the time and disappeared after the

resurrection. There is no evidence that the family was in any way dysfunctional. It may be an argument from silence but all the potential problems of the presence of an exceptionally exceptional child in the family were avoided, and a spiritual environment prevailed.

### **Was Jesus ever ill?**

We are told that Jesus suffered the trials that afflict mankind. Did these trials include illness? As Jesus grew up through infancy and childhood, was he afflicted by the common childhood illnesses? If he did not suffer illness, and never suffered the pains and discomforts of mankind's early years, how could he be said to have suffered like all mankind? And if he had never learnt to suffer pain, how could he cope with flogging and crucifixion at the end of his mortal life? Thus although there is no direct account of illness in scripture, we can safely infer that Jesus did become ill at times.

But there is a different aspect to this matter of illness. There are several Psalms which indicate that David not only experienced illness but at times it was severe and painful illness. Indeed, there is even a suggestion that at times his illness could have been covered by the term 'leprosy' (since the term leprosy seems to have included other illnesses besides the precise illness that we call leprosy today).

*There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden they weigh too much for me. My wounds grow foul and fester because of my folly.* (Psalm 38:3-5).

*For my days have been consumed in smoke, and my bones have been scorched like a hearth. My heart has been smitten like grass and has withered away, indeed, I forget to eat my bread. Because of the loudness of my groaning my bones cling to my flesh.* (Psalm 102:3-5).

However, looking at the historical accounts of David's life, there is no hint of illness. We are given no clue about when or where in his life David experienced his illnesses. But they not only existed, they had a major impact. And the Psalms of David cover many prophecies of the life of Jesus. Could it be that the illnesses that afflicted David are prophecies of illness that affected our Lord? If so, then presumably it would be expected that we would not be told when or where Jesus experienced illness, in the same way that David's illnesses are not recorded.

### **How close was the relationship between Jesus and his Father?**

There are many references in the gospels to the closeness of the relationship between Jesus and his Father, for example:

*'But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone in it, but I and the Father who sent Me.'* (John 8:16).

*'For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.'* (John 10:17).

*'I and the Father are one'* (John 10:30).

This relationship between Jesus in his adult life and his Father was a continuation of God's approval of His son when young:

*Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men* (Luke 2:52).

These three references are only a sample of the many specific statements that God was pleased with His son and approved of him. How was this relationship built up? In what way did the Father relate to His son? We are not told in scripture. There are many instances of the practical outworking of the relationship in prayer by Jesus, repeated prayer, particularly at times of decision and crisis. There are also the open manifestations of the voice of God at Jesus' baptism, on the mount of transfiguration and the meeting with the Greeks.

The traditional Christadelphian view, implied rather than being spelt out, is that Jesus was

brought up in the loving and godly home of Joseph, Mary and Jesus' younger brothers and sisters. The logic of this implication is that the baptism of Jesus was the first direct link between God and Jesus apart from the time Jesus spent in prayer.

But can this really be so? God was the true Father of Jesus. Was God a good Father? To even ask the question gives the answer: God must have been the best Father that there has ever been. But we are not told how this happened. Quite apart from any other consideration, the relationship was personal and private to them. It is doubtful if it would fall within our comprehension even if we were told (and perhaps some people feel that it is trespassing upon a subject which we should not even raise).

We can be sure, however, that it was an extremely close relationship. Jesus was able to say:

*'Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father'* (John 6:46).

*'Who is from God'*; the Greek is *para tou theou*, from beside God.

'From beside God' suggests a very close relationship. At that time Jesus was disputing with the Jews. As the argument intensified, Jesus responded by intensifying what he said about his experience with his Father:

*'I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father.'* (John 8:38).

'Which I have seen in the Father's presence' the Greek is *'para to patri'*. Most translations do not bring out the strength of the Greek, but the NIV is one that does:

*I am telling you what **I have seen in the Father's presence**, and you do what you have heard from your father.* (John 8:38).

Are we to take what Jesus said literally?

#### **'He who descended from heaven'**

And is there any relevance for other statements that Jesus made?

*'No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.'* (John 3:13).

*Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, 'I am the bread that came down out of heaven.'* (John 6:41).

Again, are we to take what Jesus said literally? Could he possibly have been to heaven as a son to meet his Father, so that these verses could be taken literally?

#### **Conclusion**

There is very little specifically written in the gospel accounts of the early life of Jesus apart from his birth and the temple visit. But by inference, perhaps it is possible to find that there is not such a gap in the hidden years after all. Is this legitimate scriptural exposition? Or is it unwarranted speculation?

There are many areas in the biblical narrative about which we would love to have our curiosity satisfied. But scripture only tells us what is necessary for salvation, not to satisfy curiosity. Does this mean we should adopt a passive and unquestioning attitude to scripture? I suggest not, and hope these thoughts are not idle or unholy speculation.

**Roy Boyd**

---

## Church Announcements

1. At the evening service tonight, the topic will be 'What is Hell?'  
Come early and listen to our choir practice.
2. Don't let worry kill you off! Let the church help.
3. For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.
4. Potluck Supper on Sunday at 5 pm. Prayer and medication to follow.
5. Please place your donation in the envelope along with the deceased person you want remembered.

The editor would be pleased to receive any jokes  
you would like to share with our readers.

---

## How are the dead raised and how are the wicked punished?

*But some one will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain (1 Cor 15:35-7).*

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important event in history. Countless thousands have been crucified, but only one has been raised from the dead to die no more. For each of us the resurrection will be the most important event in our life, the defining moment in our existence.

In New Testament times there were four main theories regarding the after-life. The Sadducees and Epicureans denied any kind of afterlife, Stoics were pantheists and believed in a universal 'soul' into which the individual returned at death, Platonists believed that at death our immortal souls are released from the shackles of our material bodies, and the Pharisees taught that at the resurrection the same kind of body would be raised.<sup>1</sup>

In view of the many conflicting theories regarding the afterlife, why did Paul rebuke the Corinthians who asked what appears to be a reasonable question, a question to which we are now seeking an answer? We suggest that the reason is found in verse 12 where we read, '*Now if Christ be preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*' The questioners were denying any kind of resurrection in spite of the clear evidence that Christ had been raised from the dead.

In response to the question, 'How are the dead raised?' Paul accepts none of the four human speculations. Instead, he uses Christ's analogy of a seed in John 12:24, where, referring to his own death and resurrection, Jesus says '*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit.*' In extending this analogy Paul emphasises that as the plant that comes up is very different from the seed that was sown, so the body that comes out of the grave is different from that which was buried. Thus we read in 1 Cor 15:37,42-44, '*And what you sow is not the body that is to be . . . What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body.*

Although these words appear to teach that the resurrected body is spiritual, this may create a difficulty when coupled with the doctrine of judgement as expressed by Paul in his second letter to Corinth, '*For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive good or evil according to what he has done in the body.* If a judgement follows resurrection, how is this compatible with the raising of bodies that are spiritual? There are two possible

answers to this question which depend on the meaning of 'raised' and 'judgement seat'.

### **What is meant by 'raised'?**

It has been suggested that the 'raising' is a process that begins with raising our natural bodies, followed by our appearance before Christ's judgement seat, followed by a verdict that will determine whether we are given a spiritual body or are condemned to perish. But there are two problems with this suggestion. Firstly, the long discourse on the resurrection in 1 Cor 15 makes no mention of the raising of the wicked at this time. Secondly, in v.52 we read, 'we shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet. . .'. This description allows no time for a judicial process such as in the parable in Matt 25:24-46.<sup>2</sup> This brings us to a consideration of the nature of Christ's judgement seat.

### **What is the judgement seat?**

In human Law Courts the judge's high backed and often finely carved seat symbolises his status and authority. Jesus, to whom all judgement and authority has been delegated (John 5:22 and Matt 28:18), requires no seat to assert his authority, nor does he require any judicial process to reach a verdict because he knows the minds of all men (John 2:25). We therefore suggest that 'judgement seat' is an anthropomorphic metaphor. In many Scripture references to divine action, human terms are used. The Greek word translated 'judgement seat' is *bema* which means tribunal, but this does not mean that Jesus will judge by our procedures. We therefore suggest that, as with the dying thief, our judgement will be an instant verdict that is determined at our death and dispensed at our resurrection.

### **Deathbed judgement**

The repentant thief on a cross was judged and given a favourable verdict as he was dying. In the parable of the ten virgins, the five foolish virgins were shut out on the arrival of the bridegroom and no appeal was allowed. Likewise, in the parable of the sheep and goats, no appeal was accepted. These two parables illustrate the awful truth that at death we are judged and our fate is sealed. Either we are in the 'Lamb's Book of Life' or we are not.

### **The testimony of Jesus Christ**

During his ministry Jesus gave little information regarding the resurrection apart from one occasion when, confronted by unbelieving Sadducees, he said, '*You know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given marriage, but are like angels in heaven.*' Since the raised body is sexless it will be radically different from our earthly body which has many features related to reproduction.

In Revelation 20 Jesus reveals much more information than Paul gives us in 1 Cor 15 which deals only with the resurrection of the saints who are raised at the last trumpet. We learn nothing more from Paul concerning the activities of the resurrected saints nor of the fate of the unrighteous. So in Rev 20 Jesus takes over from where 1 Cor 15 left off. In the first four verses, Satan is bound for 1000 years, which means that opposition to the reign of Christ and the saints is curbed. Then, in vv.5-6 we read, '*The rest of the dead did not come to life again until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power.*' Since 'first' implies another,<sup>3</sup> we have confirmation that there are to be two resurrections and that only the saints are raised at the first resurrection.

After the quelling of a post-millennial revolt, in vv. 7-10, we have a picture of a great white throne before which the '*dead were judged by what was written in the books*'. This implies a general resurrection of all those responsible for judgement. It is significant that the judgements are conducted from a throne and consist of verdicts based on the records in closed books.

Although we are told in the last verse that '*if any one's name was not found written in the book of life he was thrown into the lake of fire*', there is still a remarkable paucity of information regarding the status and future of those who are raised to 'everlasting contempt' (Dan 12:2).

### **The Rapture**

There is one other passage in the NT that gives us a glimpse into the resurrection of the saints at the coming of the Lord. *‘For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thess 4:16-17).* This passage supports our thesis, namely that the saints who are raised at the first resurrection, have already been judged by Jesus and have spiritual bodies. There is no need to imagine that the raptured saints will be transported to a place of judgement, since they have the assurance that they will always be with the Lord.

A passage in Daniel 12:1-2 may cause difficulty. Concerning end-times we read, *‘There shall be a time of trouble such as never has been since there was a nation till that time; but at that time your people shall be delivered, every one whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt’.* We need not assume that all this happens at the same time. The first sentence could refer to the first resurrection when those whose names are in the Lamb’s book of life are delivered. The last sentence then refers to the general resurrection at the end of the millennium.

### **Christ the first-fruit**

Since the harvest resembles the first-fruit, we should expect to find that Christ’s resurrection informs us about ours. Although Jesus appeared in bodily form with ‘flesh and bones’ after his resurrection, that body was incorruptible (Acts 2:37) and was able to pass through locked doors and ascend into heaven. Since the risen Lord had conquered sin and death it seems inappropriate to suggest that he was raised with a corruptible body. The raising of Lazarus was a demonstration of Christ’s claim, *‘I am the resurrection and the life.’* But it was only a shadow of the future resurrection, because Lazarus would die again. The raising of Lazarus was a visual aid of something vastly greater.

### **How assured can we be?**

The apostle Paul could never be absolutely certain that he was saved (1 Cor. 9:27) but towards the end of his life he became more confident, so that he could say to Timothy that there was laid up for him a crown of righteousness which the Lord would give him on the day of judgement (2 Tim 4:8). In his letter to the Philippians he expressed his desire to ‘depart (die) and be with Christ’ (Phil 1:23). More significantly, in ch. 3:10-11, he wrote, *‘. . . that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings, being like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.’* This passage supports the teaching that the first resurrection involves those who are ‘raised to everlasting life’.

### **What will happen to the wicked?**

As we have seen, the ‘rest of the dead’, i.e. those who will not be raised at the first resurrection, will remain in the grave until the general resurrection at the end of the millennium. But we have been given very little information regarding the status of the sinners who, in the words of Daniel 12:2, will be ‘raised to everlasting contempt’ and, in the words of Jesus in John 5:29, will ‘come forth to the resurrection of judgement.’ All we know for certain is that the wicked are destined to be cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15).

In answer to those who asked, ‘Lord, will those who are saved be few?’ Jesus likens the narrow door to the kingdom to the door of a householder who has shut up his house for the night and refuses to open to intruders who weep and gnash their teeth when they see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and themselves thrust out (Luke 13:22-28). Is this scenario to be understood literally? Will the sight of the saints in paradise be the punishment of those who are rejected? This seems unlikely because in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, in Luke 16, Jesus is clearly mocking contemporary Jewish beliefs that the tortures of those in hell would be augmented by the sight of the righteous in paradise.

### **A punishment worse than death**

A passage in Luke 10:12-14 is relevant to the problem of divine punishment. Jesus is warning the towns that rejected him that it would be more tolerable for Sodom in the day of judgement than for them. The Sodomites were destroyed by being engulfed in volcanic ash. Therefore we need to envisage something worse than sudden death for those who rejected the gospel. Will the sight of the righteous in the kingdom be worse punishment than being buried in volcanic ash? We think not. So are we to imagine that they will be raised from the dead, suffer in some way and then be allowed to die again? Is the deliberate imposition of torture, with no possibility of redemption, part of God's justice?

To answer this question we need to consider the three reasons for punishment namely, retribution, deterrence and reformation. A Roman crucifixion illustrates these three aspects. It was retributive in that it was a method of executing those guilty of capital offences. But first and foremost it was designed to be a deterrent to others, so crucifixions took place in full public view and involved prolonged torture. However, since death was inevitable, in the normal course of events, crucifixion offered no prospects of redemption.

Most Western societies have abolished the death penalty and have imposed life imprisonment for the most serious offences. They have forbidden any form of torture, either as punishment or as a means of extracting evidence. To what extent are these principles in line with Bible teaching?

The Lord alone has the authority to punish. 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord' (Rom 12:19). Although seven of the ten commandments invoked the death penalty, this was rarely carried out. The sentence on Cain, the first murderer, was reduced to a life of servitude. David, who was guilty of two capital offences, was forgiven. Jesus likewise forgave the woman who, according to the law, should have been stoned to death. There is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, but what is the end of those who do not repent? Will they suffer a fate worse than death? Will they be tortured in some way?

Although torture, such as blinding and castrating of prisoners of war, is described in the Bible, there is no evidence that the Israelites indulged in torture. There is however evidence from Christ's parable of the rich man and the beggar that by NT times the Jews had acquired pagan ideas regarding divine retribution by means of torture by fire and it is clear from this parable that Jesus regards the notion that God promotes such retributive torture as risible. But does God use the death penalty as a means of deterring others? Ezekiel 18 makes it clear that this idea is no part of divine jurisprudence – 'the soul that sins will die.'

So if we conclude that God would not torture as a prelude to a sentence to death, we need to find another cause for the suffering worse than death for those who rejected Jesus. Could this punishment have been brought about when Capernaum and the neighbouring towns were destroyed by the Romans? The horrors of a Roman conquest are shown by the fact that the Jews in Masada, the last bastion of Jewish resistance, chose to commit suicide rather than submit to torture by their Roman conquerors. We are therefore suggesting that, as with ourselves, the punishment of the wicked is never-ending death and that the punishment of Sodom was more tolerable because their deaths were instantaneous. We therefore have no need to believe that the inhabitants of Capernaum and Sodom will be raised for further judgements and punishments. This suggestion receives support from the epistle of Jude.

### **The evidence of Jude**

Concerning Sodom, Jude 7 says they are 'undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.' In Biblical terms this means permanent destruction. There is no suggestion that they will be taken out of the eternal fire and judged and then punished again before being finally put back into the eternal fire. Such gratuitous punishment, that could have no redemptive or deterrent effect, seems out of tune with God's ways as revealed in Scripture.

We are therefore suggesting that the difficulties in understanding divine punishment arise

from taking Bible language too literally. So could 'resurrection of judgement' mean remaining in the grave? And could 'you will see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom' be regarded as a poetic and ironic way of saying that they would not share the kingdom with their faithful ancestors.

### **Conclusion**

As Christadelphians we are aware of the errors arising from interpreting Scripture literally. We do not believe that man was made in the physical likeness of God. We do not believe in a literal devil, nor do we believe that Jesus is God, nor that we drink the blood of Christ. We also reject the concept of torture in the fires of hell, so why should we insist on a literal judgement seat where rewards and punishments are dispensed? As we have shown, this concept is difficult to harmonise with so much evidence that appears to teach that those who attain the first resurrection are raised with celestial bodies.

**Alan Fowler**

### **Notes**

1 These four categories represent the spectrum of beliefs today, with Platonism being predominant in the Christian world due to the influence of Augustine who argued that 'Christ came to deliver not bodies but souls.'

2 The judgement scene in the parable of the sheep and the goats is not a pattern of the procedure of our judgement; it is about the principles of Divine judgement.

3 The Tudor Queen Elizabeth only became Elizabeth the first when our Queen Elizabeth was crowned.

---

## **Looking For His Coming**

I well recall my excitement as a teenager during the 1960s and 70s, listening to Sunday evening lectures on the Middle East and Biblical prophecy. This was the time of the Six Day War, the Yom Kippur War and other stirring events that were assumed at the time to have some kind of prophetic significance. The speakers always spoke with confidence and authority as they related biblical prophecies to current world events: the gathering of the Jews to their land, their conflicts with the Arab nations, the buildup of armaments among the world powers, the belligerence of the Soviet Union. At times it seemed that the gathering of the nations to Armageddon and the Second Coming was only a matter of months away at the most. I felt privileged to be living in the last generation before the setting up of the Kingdom.

From its beginnings every generation of our community has been confident that they are the last generation before the end, a confidence which came from seeing the world around them reflected in the symbols of Biblical prophecy. Our pioneers devoted much time, effort and ink to studying the endless convolutions of the 'Eastern Question' in the light of prophecy and found clear evidence that the Second Coming was just round the corner. The 'Eastern Question' referred to the manoeuvrings of the European powers to fill the power vacuum in the Middle East as the Ottoman Empire declined. It was all in the sixth vial of Revelation 16. Another generation saw in the two world wars of the twentieth century clear evidence that Christ's coming was at hand. The Cold War, with its massive build up of armaments and its division of the world into two hostile power blocs, was also seen as a sign of the end.

We are not by any means the first community to make a study of latter day prophecy. Prophecy students throughout history have used the symbols of the Apocalypse to shed light on their own times. Such speculation has been at its most intense during periods of upheaval and social breakdown, such as the convulsions of the Reformation and the Napoleonic wars, when events that would otherwise seem threatening and incomprehensible can be seen in the light of prophecy as part of a grand design, points on a timetable revealed and understood only by the elect.

This desire to find one's own times reflected in scriptural prophecy rests on the assumption that there is a timetable of events hidden within its symbols, and which, when interpreted

correctly, will reveal to the astute reader where he stands in relation to the end. Experts on the subject have often employed great ingenuity in compiling this timetable. By exploiting the ambiguity and obscurity of apocalyptic symbols and using highly flexible principles of interpretation, they can find any political situation in the prophetic writings of Scripture. In this way prophetic passages become like the pieces of a jigsaw that can be arranged in any permutation and still make a coherent picture. As events unfurl around them, each generation can modify the basic picture handed down to them, adjusting the principles of interpretation, bringing in new symbols as the political situation changes, so that their own times are invariably seen as the period just before the Second Coming.

Every few years an event of particular significance occurs: Russia intervenes in the Balkans (1877), Britain occupies Egypt (1882), the Israeli State is established or the Arab nations unite in war against Israel, and the invariable result is a flourish of preaching activity and a widespread conviction that now at last the Lord really is at hand. Attendance at meetings increases and people apply for baptism who might not otherwise have done so. After a while, however, the crisis is resolved, the dust settles and the excitement begins to wane. The end has not come, things settle into their normal routine and eagerness and faith are all too easily replaced by disillusionment and apathy.

In hindsight even the most confident claims can often seem misguided and premature. The twentieth century witnessed events compared to which the upheavals of the nineteenth century pale into insignificance. Who now knows what the Austro-Sardinian war was about, or the Crimean war or Mehmet Ali's rebellion against Turkey, yet events such as these were seen at the time as part of the immediate build-up to Armageddon.

The danger in this use of prophecy is obvious. The more often we proclaim that the End is nigh, or that world events and the Bible prove that Christ is coming, the less convincing we will appear, especially in the eyes of a sceptical world. Robert Roberts quoted an article in a contemporary newspaper which eloquently expressed the ridicule which the world directs at over-confident prophecy students:

I may mention that the Irvingites are just now expecting, or professing to expect, the immediate appearance of Christ. They have said pretty much the same thing as long as I can remember; but just now it is, they affirm, to be a matter not of years, but of days, and will probably happen before the month is out. Prophecies of this sort are always abundant  
whenever

there is a prospect of war. Directly the Grand Turk gets into trouble, the whole apparatus of horns and vials and trumpets and frogs is brought out and timid people, who have forgotten about the last conflict, get their nerves worked upon until they go to bed each night believing that the day of doom will come with the morrow's dawn. Now is the time for Dr. Cumming and all the rest of the rather shabby latter-day representatives of the schools of the prophets. Should there be another war between the Crescent and the Cross, we shall see a great demand for prophetic pamphlets, and experience has always shown that the demand is equalled by the supply (*Liverpool Mercury*, Quoted in *Prophecy Fulfilled and Fulfilling* (1882, p.29) by R. Roberts).

The immediate cause of this excitement was Russia's declaration of war on Turkey in defense of Serbia in 1877, another false alarm. Robert Roberts published this quotation as evidence of the willful blindness of the world to see the outworking of God's purpose. 'It was' he wrote, 'part of the public scoff to which the divine purposes have at all times been subject'. In hindsight we might say that the Irvingites deserved the ridicule that they brought upon themselves.

There will always be a temptation for those who long for their Lord's return to look for some visible evidence that we are living in the last days. Many aspects of the modern world do seem to suggest that a great catastrophe or crisis cannot be far off, not only from wars, international tensions and economic instability, which to a greater or lesser extent have always been present, but from the ecological dangers that threaten the world: overpopulation, the depletion of the

natural resources upon which civilization depends, melting icecaps and the consequent rising of sea levels and extreme weather patterns. All these interrelated factors point to an end of civilization as we know it and perhaps the extinction of life itself on this planet. The description in Luke 21:26, of 'distress of nations, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world', does seem to describe the state of our own world. It is hard to resist the conclusion that now at last we really are living at the end of the age.

But we should learn from the past and not be too confident in our attempts to predict the future. This is what Jesus warned against in his final discourse, the Olivet Prophecy. Luke's version explicitly condemns those who make the claim that 'the time is at hand'. Such people are to be treated as false prophets: 'Do not go after them' (21:8).

It is tempting to see conflicts in the modern world as signs of the end, and Jesus clearly stated that 'there will be wars and rumours of wars', but far from saying that these are a sign of the end, he was warning his disciples not to regard these things as such a sign. His point was that international strife is part of the endemic condition of history. And so he adds: 'this must take place, *but the end is not yet*' (Mark 13:7). It is ironic that the very prophecy in which these warnings occur has sometimes been used as part of a key to unlock the future.

History is the arena in which God is enacting His purpose, but that purpose, I believe, is not a rigid determinism which treats nations and their rulers as pieces on a chessboard. Prophecy is not history written in advance, enabling us to decipher a hidden code and construct a timetable of events leading up to the end. When Christ does appear a second time it will be sudden and unexpected, 'as a thief in the night' (I Thess 5:2). That is why he told his disciples that 'No man knows the day or the hour' and that included even himself. That is why, when his disciples asked if he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel at that time, his answer, which applies as much to us as to them, was 'It is not for you to know times and seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority' (Acts 1:7). It is surely futile and arrogant to go against his teaching.

The Lord's Olivet Prophecy exhorts his people to 'watch', which does not mean studying world politics in the light of prophetic passages in order to delve into the future, but to assess the degree of our own faith, the quality of our discipleship and our preparedness for his coming. The lesson of his final discourse is to 'be awake', 'take heed to yourselves', 'be on your guard'. The only obstacle to our faith is our own apathy and failure to 'stay awake'. If we take to heart these exhortations, and if we are inwardly equipped to face the future as faithful disciples, then it does not matter whether the Lord Jesus returns today or many years in the future:

Stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man (Luke 21:36).

**Mark Robertson**

---

**NB [www.endeavourmagazine.org](http://www.endeavourmagazine.org)**

**Thanks to Richard Gaston and Alex Green, the last ten issues of this magazine can now be found on the above website.**

---

**It's not what you know, but who you know!**

We have all heard of this old truism and some of us may have experienced its effects, either positively or negatively. But have you considered whether this urban wisdom applies to our spiritual destiny? I suggest that it does, and to a degree we probably do not often appreciate.

Many of the characters of the old covenant appear to have had flaws and errors overlooked by God simply because of the relationship He had with them. Two spring to mind as

illustrations:

### **Samson**

The character flaws in this giant judge read like a criminal record. He was rude to his parents, he killed and robbed in a fit of angst at losing a bet, he was cruel to animals and he had a soft spot for women, even sleeping with a prostitute. Yet when he slew a thousand men and felt thirsty he barked at God for water and God responded by providing a well. One can't help feeling that God was willing to overlook these failings for some reason.

### **David**

When David was discovered in the heinous sin of adultery and murder, God willingly forgave him. Yet, a few years earlier, Uzzah had been struck down for the seemingly innocent sin of touching the ark of God. This also in the context of many others who must have handled the ark without censure (1 Sam 5:1-2). One cannot help feeling that David suffered the lighter punishment for the greater sin!

We also think of Abraham nagging God down to ten righteous souls sufficient to save Sodom, and of Jacob who, despite his deceptions, was yet loved by God. The answer appears to be that these men and women **knew** God, and that He in turn **knew** them. This counted for more than what was stored up inside them for use in living a righteous life.

Move into the new covenant and we see Jesus voice this same principle. To the woman at the well He said : '**If you knew** the gift of God **and who it is that asks you for a drink**, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water,' Jn 4:10. Later in the gospel he says: '**If you knew me**, you would know my Father also,' Jn 8:19, and again '**If you really knew me**, you would know my Father as well,' Jn 14:7.

In 2002 I felt the power of this truth when I sat alone in a hospital room awaiting an important operation. I had been Christadelphian boy and man for 40 years (is that symbolic?) and yet in that moment I realised that I had to trade in all my stored up knowledge and doctrine for one thing only: Knowing God.

How many folk miss the grace that is available in Jesus because they are content to know **about** him, even talk **about** him, perhaps piously argue on his behalf but then fail to know him personally? As Jesus warned the Jews 'You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life,' Jn 5:39-40. The irony is that some folk judge a 'personal encounter with the risen Lord' as a rather intellectually liberal fantasy and yet it is the most thoroughly scriptural aspiration a Christian can have.

Let me leave the last word to Paul. Here was a man who knew scripture back to front and yet once he had met the risen Lord his perspective changed. He knew that eternal life found not those who loved the message, but those who loved the man.

'Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of **knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. **I want to know Christ** and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.'

Phil 3:7-11

**David Allsopp**

---

**And eternal life means knowing you,  
the only true God,  
and knowing Jesus Christ,**

**whom you sent.  
(John 17:3)**

---

### **Paul at the Areopagus**

The modern visitor to Athens, strolling round Mars Hill, the Areopagus, will see the bronze plaque on which is inscribed Paul's speech, recorded in Acts 17, in now seriously deteriorating Greek lettering, and sadly not even graced with a title. Such a visitor, probably unable to translate the writing on the plaque, may well be led to imagine that Paul stood right there on this steep hill, addressing the passers-by. But she would be seriously mistaken. Venturing gingerly up the slope, recently made safer with a flight of steps, and proceeding over the hill, she will find the remains of stone seats, originally placed in a semicircle – the usual shape in ancient Greece for a court or theatre on the side of a hill to facilitate acoustics. This was the original position of the ancient Court of the Areopagus where the aristocratic council held its meetings. By the time of Paul this Council, long stripped of its effective authority, but still retaining its name and power over religious affairs, had descended down into the busy market place, the Agora, to the Stoa Basileios. Whether Paul was arraigned here or on the hill is a matter of conjecture. The visitor may well like to imagine Paul on the hill, pointing his hand across to the Acropolis, crowned by the temple to Athena, the Parthenon, and declaring that God does not dwell in places like that, however beautiful, (which beauty he does not deny).

In typical Greek fashion Paul was invited to address the Council, purely out of interest in his ideas, which he poignantly expressed in their own idiom – and some listened. The literal translation of the Greek of Acts 17:22, 'in the middle of Mars Hill', would allow for either interpretation, the hill or the Council. I like to think of Paul standing overlooking the spectacular remains of Athens' past glory, proclaiming his message of the God who is supreme over all.

**Sheila Harris**

---

### **Index 1997-2008 Issues 97-120**

Thanks to Cyril Marsters for producing this new index that follows on from the one produced by Bill Robinson.

It contains three indexes listing the contents by  
(a) issue, (b) category, and (c) author.

**Copies can be purchased for £1.50, including p&p,  
from Ruth Masters - address on back cover.**

---

### **Inspired by Scripture**

In discussion with Cyril Masters I wrote, last December, of the role of interpretation in the understanding of the Old and New Testaments. We bring to anything we read, secular or sacred, our own presuppositions and use of words, so that no two people actually read exactly the same text; they see it through their own spectacles. Of course this doesn't mean total anarchy in our reading. Common threads can be established and shared, but never completely avoiding ambiguity. Legal documents try to achieve such certainty of meaning, but rarely inspire us with lovely thoughts and joyous hopes.

I pointed out that Scripture is not the only influence that affects our understanding of life. Participation in the work of the church, whatever its deficiencies, gives us a sense of the ongoing presence of God. Scripture and church are then married with the experience of life, from childhood onward. Out of reflection on these three factors there is born a sense of a God whose will instructs us in the way we should go, though not so that we have no thinking to do. We have to move beyond rote learning.

### **Foundation documents**

This perspective on interpretation has affected the way in which churches come to reinterpret their foundation documents, i.e. statements of faith, confessions, or creeds. They usually leave them untouched, but add verbal explanations, as it would cause unrest to change the hallowed words. Christadelphians are not immune from this situation; strict adherence to the Birmingham Amended (or Un-amended) Statement of Faith is a minority concern and most brethren and sisters get along quite well without ever reading it.

However, if a controversy arises, such statements of faith become rallying cries, but perhaps a few questions are in order without fomenting discord. As has been said: 'the unexamined faith is of little value'.

All Christadelphian statements of faith begin with an unnumbered foundation clause:

'That the book currently known as the Bible, consisting of the Scriptures of Moses, the prophets and apostles, is the only source of knowledge concerning God and His purposes at present extant or available in the earth, and that at the same time were (sic) wholly given by inspiration of God in the writers, and are (sic) consequently without error in all parts of them (sic), except such as may be due to errors of transcription or translation.'

This is obviously an omnibus statement. Inevitably it has to bypass many issues. It has generally been accepted that to say that all the writings in the Bible are given by inspiration of God does not obviate the evident fact of human involvement. The speakers or writers have their own styles and they often gather together material from a number of prior sources. Luke makes it plain that he had to work diligently at such compilation. Jeremiah is another example. Many parts of scripture, as in the Psalms, are the outpourings of how the authors felt. The psalmist who asks why his heart is downcast within him, was expressing his own emotions; he was not writing what God had dictated to him.

### **The way of the Cross**

Move on a little and we find that some of these emotions were far distant from the spirit of Jesus and included cries for personal vengeance, not reflecting the concept of loving your enemies. One wonders what the phrase, 'without error', means in such circumstances. The cross of Jesus was the price paid to establish a platform for human transformation. Anything that goes against it is a moral error. So the spirit of gloating over the dead Egyptians in the Red Sea in the Songs of Moses and of Miriam (Exodus 15) runs counter to the way of the cross, as does the Song of Deborah, blessing the murderous treachery of Jael and her tent peg (Judges 5), seeing it as part of the loving kindness of God toward Israel.

Similarly, the general acceptance of violence and warfare in the Old Testament, even to the point of genocide, is contrary to the spirit of the self-giving of Christ. The recorders of the Israelitish archives were convinced that they were following the will of God in killing every one of the Canaanites, men, women and children, and the fact that they did not thoroughly carry it out is presented as a grievous fault. Can we say that these archives are without error in justifying such behaviour, which was later repudiated by Jesus?

### **Dispensationalism**

Devout Christians have, therefore, sought for an interpretation which would harmonise these contradictory codes of conduct. Prominent among such explanations was that propounded by the evangelical, Darby, and others, who elaborated the principle of 'dispensationalism'. In effect, this says that God set forth different behaviours to be followed at different times in the world's history. Thus, in the pre-Jesus times, violence and warfare were God's chosen ways of dealing with evil. Then came the time of individual calling of followers by Jesus; they were subject to an interim ethic of non-violent resistance to evil and even of loving enemies. But a day of judgement would come, and so a third main era sees the return of Jesus as the conqueror, destroying the wicked and waging war on an unparalleled scale, to coerce the survivors of the bloodshed into forced obedience.

This offers us a God who will establish his kingdom on the basis of a bloodbath, not on the basis of willing hearts and minds being offered to him, and, according to hymn 404 in the current Christadelphian hymn book, it is still the official belief of the community:

‘Our lord will come, but not the same  
As once in lowly form he came –  
A silent lamb, to slaughter led,  
The bruised, the suffering and the dead.

The Lord will come, a dreadful form,  
With wreath of flame, and robe of storm,  
To shake the earth and cleave the sky,  
And bring the day of judgment nigh.’

And the last verse invites the faithful to sing for joy at the coming of this Jesus who is not ‘this same Jesus’ whom we meet in the gospels. Little wonder that this hymn is rarely sung nowadays in most ecclesias. (Of course the New Testament does talk of judgment, but that is another topic, in which much interpretative effort needs to be expended.)

### **Permitted variations**

The Christadelphian community has generally, after its pioneer days, allowed variation of interpretation in relation to the earliest records. For example, many have held the view that the days of creation in Genesis chapter one are not to be taken as literal 24 hour days – else how can the record of the rocks be explained?

But, more particularly related to the issues of violence which contrasts with the teaching of Jesus, the issue of the Flood arises. Was it a universal tsunami in which, under most cruel circumstances, God indiscriminately destroyed millions of people who would not have been uniformly wicked? Or was it a relatively local disaster which the archivists used and enlarged poetically, to point out the holiness of God in ways which their culture accustomed them? In any case, brethren have felt at liberty to dispute the total universality of the Flood on practical grounds (eg the capacity of the ark), without being excluded from fellowship. Their view does however get very close to believing the record to be in error. Did Jesus accept the story as part of the Jewish heritage with lessons for his day, irrespective of its precise historicity?

### **Christadelphian reading of scripture**

Another aspect of the significance of the Foundation statement about the inspiration of scripture is how far our community’s actual practice is in accord with it. Do we in the actual attention we give to the reading of scripture treat all the Bible as on a uniform level of profitability? Quite early in our history a contradiction in practice arose. Brother Robert Roberts notes that all scripture was ‘profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be equipped for every good work’ (2 Tim 3:16,17). He therefore published what he called the ‘Bible Companion’. It meant that every Christadelphian would be reading all the Bible each year according to the same reading plan and would be harvesting profit on a maximum scale.

However there was one major hint in his plan that all scripture was not to be received on an equal basis. The New Testament was to be read twice while the Old Testament once only. This suggests that the writings of the New Covenant held a superior position over the earlier writings of the Old Covenant. After all, Jesus was the mediator of a new and better covenant, though the distinction is not made in the Foundation Clause of the Statement of Faith. The whole Bible is treated as displaying a monolithic unity, perfect in all its parts.

### **The dangers of the ‘Bible Companion’**

A further danger arises from the concept of reading all the scriptures every year, from the stories of the covenant with Abraham to the minutest line in the genealogies in Chronicles, implying that they are all of equal importance. I am sure many of the older generation will remember when we

‘did the readings’, at least when there were visitors, and our eight-year-old minds had to listen while doleful denunciations from the prophets were read out, or while someone laboured through mispronunciation of the genealogical tables. The idea of familiarity with the Bible was good, but was 20 minutes to half an hour of reading ever enough to encourage reflection and seeking of deeper insight? It gave familiarity with the actual text, but not a sense of its deeper possible meanings. There was little time to ask questions and puzzle over problems. I came eventually to see what Brother Fred Barling meant when he challengingly suggested that Christadelphians read too much Bible.

I recently considered the extent of likely profit from annual reading of all the prophets. I counted up the columns of print from Isaiah to Malachi inclusive, and categorised them under two main headings. I found that, of some 470 columns, two thirds were of denunciations and promise of punishment and the other third, including much of the second half of Isaiah, offered narrative and pictures of hope. An occasional systematic visit to the negative two thirds could be illuminating, especially if we gave ourselves time to appreciate the magnificent poetry which the prophets deployed with such consummate skill. But to put ourselves through an annual litany of doom and disaster would be to give ourselves a one-sided view of the merciful God, whom we meet in our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **The heroes of faith**

Similarly how should we treat the stories of the ‘heroes of the faith’?. When we read of these characters, we have to realise that God was mercifully overlooking their times of ignorance and seeking to find the gem at the very heart of these men and women. They waged war, they committed violence and followed the cultures of their times. Yet in the midst of their ‘non-Christian’ activities, they felt the presence of God, so that Jehoshaphat could cry on the battlefield ‘Lord we know not what to do, but our eyes are upon thee.’

David was ‘a man after God’s own heart’, but had many flaws which would have been acceptable in the violent culture of the times, but which contrast with the way of the cross. But he was presented as the one from whose dynasty the one would come who would fill the earth with the glory of God: ‘and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.’

One side of David’s behaviour is not for us to emulate, e.g. his ruthless guerilla activity in the time of Saul, little short of banditry at times; the violence of his reign; his final vengeful counsel to Solomon as his death loomed. There are also moments of compassion and mercy in his life, but God overlooked the flaws of his violent career. In spite of many misperceptions and faults, David saw God as living, and His hourly presence in his life is exhibited in the Psalms, for many of which he was responsible. For this trust, God overlooked the times of his ignorance. Indeed, that overlooking is the key to

deriving benefit from reflecting on so many Old Testament passages which in many other ways are far from the spirit of the cross.

### **Living in the presence of the Lord**

Steady attention to all scripture will enable us to gain insights which develop this sense of the presence of the Lord. It is not a question of a book or library which is morally or logically flawless, but of an opportunity to associate in fellowship with men and women who wrestled with the problems of what the Lord required of them. We share their ups and downs and make a little progress beyond just a whisper of God, while we await the daystar to arise completely in our hearts in the day for which we long.

Meanwhile let us keep ever in mind the opening words of the Epistle to the Hebrews:

When in former times God spoke to our forefathers,  
he spoke in fragmentary and varied fashion through the prophets.  
But in this the final age he has spoken to us in the Son  
whom he has made heir to the whole universe,  
and through whom he created all orders of existence.

(NEB)

Alfred Ward

---

**A Critique of**  
***The anniversary of Darwin's birth***  
**by Stephen Whitehouse in *The Christadelphian*, Feb.2009**

Stephen opens his article by stating that Darwin has:

*'probably done more harm to the Christian faith than any religious persecution or oppressor in history. His theory of evolution has caused many millions to doubt God's work of creation and the truthfulness of the Bible. Rather than believing the scriptures to be the inspired word of God, they have turned to 'irreligious talk, and controversy with what is falsely called knowledge.'*

The first point I would make is that this evaluation of Darwin's legacy fails to distinguish between two different things: a) the evolutionary **theory** itself, and b) the various **reactions** to it. Stephen's evaluation seems to me a rather knee-jerk reaction because of fear that, at first sight, the theory seems to oppose his own beliefs. The overwhelming apportionment of blame to Darwin rather than to those who reacted to his theory, in some cases so violently, and in others so thoughtlessly, seems to me unfair. Far too often, when confronted with views that are seemingly opposed to our own, we appear to react in an intemperate way – we produce hot-headed polarisation, instead of a quiet consideration of the issues.

During the (almost 5 year) voyage of the Beagle, Darwin made overland treks to many different places to carry out his geological studies and naturalist observations. He collected many insects, birds, molluscs, small vertebrates, invertebrates and plants, and spent many hours recording all his finds. After the voyage, he spent further years recording and evaluating his collections and in carrying out other natural history researches at home. These experiences, which had impressed him with the vast diversification in nature that he had observed, were to exercise his mind as to how all this had come about. The result, as we know, was the publication in 1859 of his 'On the Origin of Species'.

Now I submit that Darwin was not out to undermine anybody's religious beliefs, as Stephen appears to imply, but was genuinely concerned to **understand** how nature's great diversity had come about. I also submit that **most** of the present-day scientists who have further researched evolution, and accept that it is happening, are also genuinely concerned with the **truth**; they are not out simply to undermine religious faith. In both disciplines, science and religion, mankind is searching for truth: to understand things as they are.

Stephen complains that *'liberal clergymen soon adopted the concept of natural selection as an instrument of God's design.'* These men then, obviously, did not see evolution as an impediment to belief in the Creator. Stephen also berates the Church of England for the statement: *'Charles Darwin, 200 years from your birth (1809), the Church of England owes you an apology for misunderstanding you and, by getting our first reaction wrong, encouraging others to misunderstand.'* Likewise with the Roman Catholic Church, he objects to their statement that *'evolution is no longer a mere hypothesis, but rather 'a fundamental church teaching.'* In spite of both churches resisting the theory of evolution at first, having obviously considered the matter and concluded that the science was correct, they have had the grace to admit that they were earlier mistaken.

Under his sub-heading *A sad state of affairs*, Stephen deplores the position adopted by the Royal Society that *'creationism had no scientific basis and should not be part of the science curriculum for children.'* Strictly speaking, they are correct. Creation **cannot** be investigated by science, therefore no such investigation has been done; it follows that it is not a matter for inclusion in a **science** curriculum. However, I fully agree that it was a mistake on the Royal Society's part to reject the suggestion of its Director that creationist beliefs should be treated as a *'world view'*. The rejection deprives children of the opportunity of experiencing, and learning to evaluate different beliefs, ideas and ways of looking at things.

I fully concur with Stephen's view that Professor Richard Dawkins has been *'highly vocal,*

*almost to the point of obsession, in promoting the theory of evolution.*’ His book, targeted solely at children and pushing his atheistic ideology, suffers from the same defect of which he accuses parents and schools in ‘*abusing*’ children by teaching them religion. There are, of course, different methods of imparting knowledge to children. To ram specific doctrinal views into a child can be regarded as ‘brain-washing’; the more enlightened parent will surely take a more gentle approach, realising that in the final analysis, the young person must be able to make up his or her own mind. Dawkins is an out and out atheist and his writings provide an excellent example of causing a polarisation of arguments. As Charles Freeman remarks in his book AD 381, p.xiii: ‘*I find the somewhat frenzied denunciations of Richard Dawkins and his supporters simplistic.*’. He adds: ‘*One thing I notice about Dawkins’ work is that he has no sense of the emotions that drive people to search for religious meaning.*’ It is pertinent here to point out, that as well as people like Richard Dawkins, there are other *Christian* scientists who see no conflict between their acceptance of evolution and their belief in God as the Creator.

Stephen’s final two paragraphs, under the heading *Our Responsibilities*, read as a panic-stricken fear that the ‘*passing down of our beliefs to our children . . .*’ will be undermined by the ‘*militant anti-creation lobby.*’ What then is the answer? It certainly is not to stick our heads in the sand concerning modern knowledge. The early chapters of Genesis were not written as a scientific treatise; furthermore many believers interpret them in ways other than strictly literally. Nor, today, can we understand the earth as being only 8,000 years old, for instance. As our children grow up, inevitably they are not likely to accept simplistic beliefs which appear to them out of step with modern knowledge. And here, let us be clear that this knowledge is **not** all ‘*irreligious and frivolous talk, and controversy with what is falsely called knowledge.*’ If we wish to influence our children for ‘good’, then we need to **discuss** with them, rather than **lecture**, and teach them to face up to facts, to evaluate and to make their own decisions as to what they see as truth.

**Cyril Marsters**

---

### **The Bible And Science, Facts and Theories**

DVD & booklet produced by Lawrence Cave of Sheffield

See [www.theevidence.org.uk](http://www.theevidence.org.uk)

This DVD and its accompanying booklet aim to show that there is no conflict between the Bible text and the observable facts of science. Whilst it is not as slick as the high-budget documentaries we’re all familiar with seeing on our television screens, (it rather has the feel of an illustrated talk with a few location pieces thrown in), the presenters are clear in their message and do a good job of explaining complex scientific ideas to a lay audience. It will undoubtedly provide heartening confirmation to those who already support its conclusions.

The DVD starts by explaining the difference between facts and theories with a couple of nice examples showing how understanding this distinction has gone drastically wrong. This theme is then expanded to the Big Bang to show that whilst this is only a theory, it is one that seems reasonable enough to accept on the facts available.

There are then two major problems that the presentation encounters. Firstly the case against evolution wouldn’t stand up to someone with a depth of knowledge of the field, and secondly there are contradictions in the Biblical arguments presented.

With regard to evolution, the argument can be summed up as being that

- a) the fossil record doesn’t have any intermediary species,
- b) comparing similarities in design of animals and humans could just as much be an argument for a common designer as for a common ancestor, and c) observable variation in species is only small in scale and there isn’t any evidence for more significant changes.

Let's take a look at these one by one. First of all there are examples of intermediary species. The reader might like to 'google' the rather cute example of *Odontochelys*. It's a turtle without a shell! This creature is reckoned to have been swimming around the waters circa 220 million years ago. It has the beginnings of armour-plating on its belly, and its ribs are starting to flatten out, but that's as far as it goes. Distinctly intermediary.

How about comparative biology? Well here the argument is dated. Science has moved on from simply comparing anatomical structures. Now it compares the genetic information that produces those structures and reports similar findings. You could still say that this is merely more evidence for common design, except, the genetic findings go deeper. They provide a whole new fossil record – fossil genes. These are genes that have become mutated so they don't work any more but linger around being passed down the generations until eventually they mutate away. What's interesting is that we find the same fossil genes present in related species, and it's even more compelling when we see they're broken in exactly the same way.

So we come to the small-scale variations that we see. Yes, it's true that, in the small span of time in which we can watch developments, these variations are small, but how about on the level of geological time – millions of years? Take for example the fossil record that leads up to modern day whales. Step by step we see the gradual loss of the hind legs of former land dwelling animals. Small changes do add up.

The presentation moves on to a section on what the Bible teaches about creation, and here we find the honest admission that the text doesn't actually tell us *how* God created things. Precisely! So why do we find the idea of evolution so repelling? It seems to me that grasping hold of this idea is the real key to resolving the false conflict between science and religion.

Unfortunately the presentation ignores its own conclusion and suggests that Genesis requires the stage by stage individual creation of all the different species exactly as they are in Genesis 1, and that evolution doesn't fit in to this scheme. There are a number of reasons from the text to indicate that we aren't intended to take the account of Genesis in this way. As well as this, if we apply the DVD's own criteria, and compare the theory with the observable facts of the fossil record, it fails. Firstly the order is different in the fossil record, and secondly the record shows different species of different genres coming and going throughout many more than the few individual stages of Genesis 1.

There is little doubt that this production is put together in a sincere and pleasant way. The presenters are friendly and articulate. It's just a shame that the main point seems to have been missed. It's not that evolution is right and intelligent design is wrong, or vice versa, the point is that *neither* are in opposition to scripture and we don't know all the facts. God's creative power will work however He wills it.

**Charles Crawford**

---

***Simple Answers to Big Questions for Little People***

by Arthur Mallinder, M A, 2005, 37 A4 pages.

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and the former US President George Bush are reported to be concerned about what their legacy will be. We lesser mortals, and especially those of us who have children or grandchildren, are more concerned about what the future might hold for succeeding generations. While we would like to think that we have left them a world that is sustainable, we recognise that the environmental challenges need global solutions, however hard we as individuals might try to do our bit.

But there is one area at least where we feel we can have a direct influence on our families: bringing them up 'in the training and instruction of the Lord' (Eph 6:4). To do so is not easy, as all who have tried will testify. But of all the things we would like to pass on to succeeding

generations, an active love of God is surely the most desired. It was this desire that encouraged Arthur Mallinder to write this book. Arthur is a fourth generation Christadelphian, and a grandfather (though he may not put them in that order of importance). He has seen families growing up and losing their initial enthusiasm and faith, and sets out in this book to give some advice to young people. The tone of what is written is grandfatherly and light-hearted – the voice of experience offering frank advice, without just repeating the old mantra.

Arthur deals with 11 topics: Creation or Evolution, or Both?; What about Genesis and the Days of Creation?; Temptation; Inherit; Do's and Don'ts; Inspiration and Revelation; Will there be a Judgement?; God's Plan; The Law of Sin, Death and Grace; The Trinity; and Why be a Christadelphian?. In total 38 pages are spent on these 11 topics: the arithmetic speaks for itself, even more so when you know that the lines are 1.5 spaced. In many ways, of course, that is in keeping with Arthur's aim, and makes the book(let) eminently readable. But I was left with the feeling that some topics could have been usefully enlarged, while others (such as 'God's Plan' – largely a retelling of the Bible in just over three pages) could have been omitted without weakening the general argument. It's always good to be left wanting more, something which this book achieves, but how far can big topics like Genesis and evolution be usefully explored in such a short space? Perhaps they can. Not many of us have an extensive scientific training, and most of us will never understand the complex scientific arguments put forward by both sides of the debate. And yet we must each have an answer that satisfies ourselves at least, based on facts and sound arguments.

Do not be misled by the 'Little People' in the title. The book is not for five year olds, but secondary age pupils, who are having to face up to the cultural, ethical and religious dilemmas they are experiencing away from the relative shelter of home and ecclesia. It is hard to get the tone right for this age group, who are of course all different anyway and at different stages in life. Perhaps sometimes Arthur assumes too little knowledge on their part, when he expounds Biblical stories with which they are surely familiar. No doubt the target readership will just dismiss this as their elders yet again not giving them credit for being intelligent. But if they take the general message that Arthur is attempting to pass on, they will do well. And the older generation will be very happy.

**David McHaffie**

This book is available from  
David McHaffie, 12 Mayburn Terrace, Loanhead, Midlothian EH20 9EJ  
for £4.00 (UK postage paid). Please make cheques payable to David McHaffie. All proceeds go  
to the Meal-a-Day Fund.

---

***Reading And Writing In The Time Of Jesus***

**Allan Millard**

New York University Press, New York, 2000 ISBN 0-8147-5637-9

The author is Rankin Professor of Hebrew and Ancient Semitic Languages at the University of Liverpool. This book was brought to my attention when I was researching the languages that Jesus may have spoken. My hardback copy has eight chapters complete with illustrations. All 229 pages held my attention throughout, while reference to the twenty page subject index and two page index of Latin, Greek and Aramaic and Hebrew words, together with an index of Old Testament and New Testament passages, enabled me to better understand the Bible as we have it in translation.

Regarding Aramaic and Hebrew, it may be noted that 'the personal names Barabbas, Barjona, Bartimaeus and Bartholomew begin with the Aramaic word for 'son of' (*bar*) not the Hebrew (*ben*). The Gospels also contain place names in Aramaic forms. The cases of *Gabbatha* and *Golgotha* (John 19:13,17) reveal the answer to a problem sometimes seen in the description of some words as 'Hebrew' in the New Testament . . . As John states that *Gabbatha* is the Hebrew equivalent of Greek *lithostraton*, 'pavement', and *Golgotha* of 'place of the skull', he

demonstrates that for Greek speakers there was no need to distinguish between the languages that Jesus spoke, 'Hebrew' applying to both' (p 141).

With careful reading of the Gospels we are able to find words which are not Greek but Aramaic such as *abba* (Mk 14:36), *eloi* (Mk 15:34) and *qorban* (Mk 7:11). Millard lists a score more.

Regarding literacy, the comment is made that 'there were people who could use three scripts and write in three languages. Although it is impossible to be sure that a man could write in Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek, bilingualism in the first two is certain, given the Jewish milieu, and bilingualism in Aramaic and Greek is hardly to be questioned' . . . 'Besides these three principal languages of Herodian Palestine, other languages were spoken by foreigners who came to Jerusalem to settle there, or visited for trade or for worship' (p 138).

An example of pilgrims travelling for worship is found in Acts 2:5-11: 'Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language . . .' Millard makes the interesting comment that although many would have spoken Aramaic 'the dialects had distinctive features which would have made mutual intelligibility difficult, especially with differences of accentuation and pronunciation, matters that made Galilean speech strange to Jerusalemites' (p 140). Apparently, Pentecost was a more propitious time of the year for travel to Jerusalem than Passover, and it has been calculated that the population would have at least doubled.

Most of us are conversant with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and we know that Hebrew was both written and spoken. But 'How widespread that was is impossible to define . . . There is no evidence for much Hebrew being spoken in Galilee at the time' (p 147).

There is a distinction made between those who read and those who heard the Old Testament. When speaking to the Pharisees, Sadducees, priests and scribes Jesus used the phrase 'have you not read?' but when giving the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said 'have you not heard?' How fortunate that we, in the 21st century, can not only hear, but also read.

**John Stephenson**

---

### ***Misquoting Jesus***

**Bart D Ehrman**

Harper, San Francisco, 2005. Pbk reprint 2007, 272 pages.

The author of this book is a highly accomplished textual critic. His assessment of the relative merits of the discrepancies of the manuscripts of the New Testament shows scholarly perception and frequently enlightenment. In attempting to trace the origins of the immense number of manuscripts to their sources, he examines the reliability of the various readings. His attribution of variants sometimes to scribal errors, theological bias or authorship proves his critical expertise.

Some of these variants he shows can be explained as scribal errors, especially in the earliest manuscripts when scribes were less professional. At other times a variant can be ascribed to an attempt to accommodate the text to the copyist's personal belief. Examples of the latter are the change in Mark 1:14 of anger to compassion and Luke 22:43-44 where Jesus' agony appears inconsistent with Luke's otherwise appraisal of Jesus as unperturbed, and so is omitted from some versions..

Other variants can be traced to theological bias, such as the relationship of Jesus to God, as in 1 Timothy 3:16. and John 1:18. Other variants were influenced by social factors such as the position of women, which led to the alterations in the manuscript readings of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. The author attributes this to the influence of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 which he argues may

not be Pauline. Anti-Jewish feelings may also account for the omission of Jesus' prayer for forgiveness on the Cross.

Fascinating and often illuminating as these studies may be, they were not the original purpose of the author in pursuing them. As he clearly states himself, his intention was to trace by means of the manuscripts and variants, back to an authentic, original text, a true version as the basis for his Christian belief. Through his study he came to see that this was an unrealistic ideal. Even the earliest manuscripts which are in Greek had already been translated from what we believe was the language of Jesus, that is Aramaic. So we actually have no 'ipsissima verba' – genuine words of Jesus.

And this brought him to a real awakening that the Bible is a living word, transmitted to us by humans in many and various ways (Hebrews 1:1). It is God giving His message through individuals and supremely through His Son, who is presented to us in various ways through the four Gospels. But the fundamental message is clear, the application is ours. In spite of variants the received text of the Bible is actually better authenticated than any Classical literature. We should be thankful for its preservation and for those who have preserved it for us often at great cost to themselves, as the voice of the living God active now in our world through us. The truth of the Bible lies not in the words. They are only the vehicle through which the message of life and hope from God through Jesus is revealed to us. The truth lies in the true word of God the Lord Jesus who came to reveal his Father to us.

**Sheila Harris**

(NB Bart Ehrman now describes himself as an agnostic,  
not due to distrust in MSS but because of the incompatibility  
of God's love with human suffering and evil.)

---

### **Approaching Apocalypse**

A dramatic fusion of Art, Music and readings from the book of Revelation.

by David Miles

Shown at St Martin's Church, Birmingham, in November 2008,  
when about 1000 people attended over a week.

This dynamic and dramatic encounter with the book of Revelation, brilliantly illustrated by David Miles' moving images and inspiringly produced by a dedicated team, led by Rosie Boulton and Simon Hall, of musicians, singers and readers, presents the spectator with a powerful challenge. The words of Scripture portrayed visually and aurally, as John saw and heard them, accompanied by trumpets, music, thunder and ripples of shimmering waters bring realistically before the audience, the whole gamut of world history, the torments, the trials but also the triumphs. The bestial presentations of animals, serpents, as well as magnificent horses, presaging war, torture, persecution and famine, strongly reminiscent of Jesus' Olivet prophecy, actualise the tragedies of humanity. But throughout the performance the glimmer of hope shines like a golden thread – the woman clothed with the sun and the songs of the saints. Above all God is enthroned eternally in glory and majesty, surrounded by His faithful servants singing His praises and His ministering creatures whose eyes witness everything on earth. First of all we see Jesus, the lamb slain, but now risen, in shining radiance, holding the stars in his hand and standing among the lampstands, representing the churches. He is there, in their midst, eternally present within and among them. And finally we see the water of life leaping, sparkling, down from the city of God, infusing life and joy into the world.

**Sheila Harris**

---

## The Elect, Salvation, and the Righteousness of God

We've all hopefully been there – in that situation described in Acts 16:30! Whether we are being informed for our own benefit, or whether we ourselves are witnessing to others, we all invariably find ourselves in the position described in that part of the passage that reads: 'Sirs – what must I do to be saved!?' The answer usually involves a brief description of how one becomes a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, and this often, perhaps inevitably, involves an explanation of how the death of Jesus secures our salvation. The explanation usually takes the form of an elucidation of a divinely orchestrated legal scheme, whereby God's justice is somehow portrayed as being harmonised with his mercy. We explain (or have explained to us) that God wants to forgive sinners, but cannot unless His justice (or 'righteousness') is somehow honoured or satisfied.

For Evangelical Christians, the claim is made that God's justice is rightly satisfied when Jesus legally takes the place of Mankind, and is said to suffer the punishment which Yahweh's Law demands, and which all sinners deserve. Once this legal obstacle has been removed, God can now, it is said, righteously forgive sinners.

Traditionally, Christadelphians too, have also effectively seen the scheme of salvation, as being set within a legal framework. This time however, Jesus is strangely seen as 'rightly' undergoing crucifixion, in order that God's justice ('righteousness') may be openly demonstrated to the world. This is supposedly seen in the crucifixion, which publicly illustrated what human nature deserved (even Christ's) – destruction in death. The crucifixion is also simultaneously deemed to demonstrate that Yahweh was righteous and just to have sentenced transgressing human nature ('sinful flesh') to death in Eden. It is said that once this fact has been individually acknowledged, then God's honour and justice is said to be upheld, and the way is now 'legally' opened for the person to receive forgiveness (upon faith, repentance and baptism).

Christadelphianism and popular forms of Evangelical Christianity therefore, both agree that the crux of the Gospel involves an explanatory account of the death of Christ – the elucidation of a legal 'mechanism' for the atonement.

However, when we studiously read the Acts of the Apostles, we encounter a surprising fact – in all Apostolic preaching, there is NO systematic explanation for the death of Jesus! In fact Jesus' death seems to only be significant for what follows after it – the resurrection! Instead of Apostolic proclamation of atonement theology – exactly how the death of Jesus effects our salvation – we have instead a focused attention on the resurrection, and Jesus' (not Caesar's!) exaltation to the supreme position of Lord of the world (cf. Mat 28:18). The word 'gospel' ( *Gk euangelion* ), was the word used in the Ancient world, for the accession to power of a new Roman Emperor.)

It is as a result of His resurrection, that Jesus has been proclaimed Lord, and confirmed as Messiah (Acts 2:36), the Son of God (Acts 9:20) and Judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42). These facts, testified to in advance by the Hebrew prophets, are the proclaimed central core of the Gospel. The basic Gospel message, went out with its own inherent power (Rom 1:16, 1 Thess 2:13), 'calling' (Rom 1:6) people into the New Covenant. Belief in these Gospel facts, (as testified to by the apostles, Acts 1:22) and simple, trustful acceptance of them, (followed by repentance and baptism), secured for one, the forgiveness of sins and admittance into the community of the Saved!

When one scours the Acts of the Apostles for the 'apostolic message', there doesn't appear to be anything else. The BIG question therefore is, how did the early Christians 'get away with' the preaching of a Gospel that was so 'doctrinally minimalist'? The usual 'answer' is some sort of assumption that the Apostolic era may well have been a very 'special era of grace'. The Apostolic Gospel was doctrinally minimalist, but this was before Paul began his Christian vocation, and added theological content to the early 'primitive' Gospel preaching. It may have

been easy for these first Christians to become converted, but we now, with the benefit of mature Pauline theology, have a higher intellectual standard to attain – namely, the comprehension of atonement theology! Consequently we can now truly understand, and then preach, exactly how one really does become a Christian!!

The problem with this approach is that Paul's preaching, in the Acts, tends to conform exactly to that 'primitive' Gospel preaching, of the first Apostles, (See Acts 9:20, 17:2-3, 28 ff, 13:16 ff, 18:5). How then are we explain the problem? Why is so much of OUR proclamation of the Gospel message concerned with (legalistic) atonement theory, whereas original Apostolic preaching wasn't?

The problem, I believe, has two related sources: misunderstanding of the concept of 'the righteousness of God' and misunderstanding of Paul's 'explanations/illustrations' of what the death and resurrection of Christ actually entails.

### **The righteousness of God.**

Probably never has such an important concept been more misunderstood, than the concept of 'the righteousness of God'. Indeed, one notable scholar, at least, believes that this is possibly the worst possible translation of the Greek *dikaiosune theou*.

Historically, it was this concept that lay at the very heart of the sixteenth century Reformation. The Latin Vulgate version had often translated the word 'righteousness' (*tsedeq* or *tsedaqah* in Hebrew; *dikaiosune* in Greek) as *justitia*. In Greco-Roman jurisprudence, *justitia* meant 'justice' or 'righteous judgement', and this has tended to colour the meaning of the word. The meaning of the phrase 'the righteousness of God' therefore, for most of Western Christianity in the pre-Reformation era, was 'the justice' or the 'righteous judgement' of God, by which saints are rewarded, and sinners punished. When therefore Paul states that the Gospel 'reveals the righteousness of God' (Rom. 1:17), this was taken to mean that God, in His activity of revealing 'the Good News', would justly give to each person his due – He would punish sinners and reward the good.

For a religiously sensitive person, like Martin Luther, however, Romans 1:17, was somewhat incomprehensible! How could the Gospel be good news for sinners? How could they possibly stand in a just judgement? Afterwards however, Luther realised that often, in the Hebrew Bible, God's 'righteousness' or 'justice', wasn't His strict 'distributive justice', but what appeared to be a kind of 'saving righteousness'. The 'righteousness of God' wasn't something that necessarily punished, but something that could rescue! (e.g. Isaiah 51:14).

It is here that we have one insight into the Hebraic meaning of the term. To quote from *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. By G. Bufferick, New York: Abington, 1962, Vol. 4, p 80), 'righteousness' as it is understood in the Old Testament can be: ' . . . a thoroughly Hebraic concept, foreign to the Western mind and at variance with the common understanding of the term.'

Basically, there are three Hebraic understandings evidenced in the Old Testament. The primary meaning is concerned with RELATIONSHIP. 'Covenant' is the biblical word for relationship.

' . . . basically righteousness is a concept of relationship. He is righteous who has fulfilled the demands laid upon him by that relationship in which he stands.' (G E Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p.440)

For those in covenant relationship with God, this meant obeying the covenant charter. 'Rightousness' therefore had an obvious ethical meaning. However, there was a third meaning. The words 'righteousness' and 'condemned' were legal terms in Ancient Judaism, referring to the status awarded by the judge in civil law court disputes. If the judge found in favour of the plaintiff, he was said to be 'righteous', and thus for him, he was 'vindicated'. If the Judge found in favour of the defendant, he was also given the status of 'righteous', and could be said to be 'acquitted', (the loser was said to be 'condemned'). At the time of Christ, 'the Righteous' were

those who considered themselves to be God's people (i.e. Israel, or exclusive sects within Judaism), who would be 'vindicated' and proven to be 'righteous', before the whole world, at the Final Judgement.

The primary meaning of 'righteousness', however, especially with respect to Yahweh, was the relational (or covenantal) meaning. 'Righteousness' in Hebrew thought primarily refers to fulfilment of obligation, which arises out of relationship. In reference to God, it denotes the fulfilment of obligations which God has taken upon Himself, to sustain creation (Gen. 8:22), and to sustain and deliver Israel according to His covenants. According to Gerhard Von Rad (*Old Testament Theology*, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965; Vol. 1, p. 373): 'Righteousness is loyalty to a relationship.'

In the Old Testament era, therefore, 'righteousness' was not only a moral attribute (ethical conformity to the covenant) BUT ALSO a concrete righteous act or activity. For Jews in the Old Testament era, 'the righteousness of God' often meant 'His saving (rescuing) activity in accordance with His consistent faithfulness to His covenants.' It denoted activity that displayed the 'trustworthiness' of God's character, which was manifested in His acts of rescue for His covenant People despite their persistent unfaithfulness!

This is why 'the righteousness of God', in the Hebrew scriptures, is often not feared, but celebrated and praised! (e.g. Psalm 51:4). It is also the reason why, in newer, more accurate translations of the Bible, the word 'righteousness' is often translated by words such as God's 'deliverance', 'saving power', 'power to save', 'vindication', 'triumph' or 'victory'. (See verses like Ps. 51:14, 98:2, Isa. 45:8, 51:5-8, 62:2, in modern translations such as the REB, CEV and the NRSV.)

The Hebrew words *tsedeq* and *tsedaqah*, usually translated 'righteousness' in the Old Testament, both derive from a root word *tsadhaq*, which means 'to be right', in the sense of 'to be normal'. Mankind however, is neither right nor normal. Man is a sinner! Only God can make Man normal, or put him right. The *hiphel* or verbal form of *tsadhaq* – which is *hitsdiq* – bears exactly this meaning. It means 'to put right' (and hence, 'to vindicate').

The noun 'righteousness' therefore embraces the verbal idea of 'putting right', or 'putting in the right' one who in the first place is in the wrong, or else who is suffering, in need, or who in any other respect requires to be 'saved' and helped. (A Jewish ruler or Judge, could therefore be described as 'righteous', not in any abstract virtuous way, but because he vindicates the cause of the wronged (cf. Prov. 17:15).

In Psalm 112:9 and Daniel 4:7, 'righteousness' is closely connected with 'showing mercy to the poor'. Later developments of the word stress the aspect of 'generosity' and 'benevolence' to the helpless. There are several times in the Septuagint, for example, where *tsedeq* or *tsadaqah* is translated as 'pity'. In the Rabbinical writings *tsadaqah* (or its Aramaic equivalent), means mostly 'almsgiving' and 'benevolence'

We see an illustration of this development at Mathew 6:1, where the AV has 'alms', following the Received Text, and the RV has 'righteousness' following the Alexandrine Text, but both words go back to the same Aramaic original, the equivalent of the Hebrew *tsedaqah*. When Jesus used this word, He did not mean ethical 'righteousness' as such, but He was probably following the development that the word 'righteousness' had reached by His day, and therefore probably meant 'almsgiving' or 'benevolence'.

In Judges 5:11 'The righteousnesses (the literal translation of the Hebrew) of Yahweh' alludes to His righteous acts – His righteous acts of 'vindication' or 'deliverance', which He has wrought for His wronged people, by giving them 'victory' over their enemies. 'Righteousness' therefore can on occasion be paralleled, and thus equated with, the noun 'salvation' (Isa. 45:8, 51:5, 46:13, Psalm 24:5 et al.)

Isaiah 41:2 states: 'Who stirred up one from the East, whom victory meets at every step?' (RSV). The word 'victory' here is the Hebrew *tsedheq*. Cyrus' 'victorious' action, on God's motivation, was then the RESCUING, or SAVING, of Israel, from the power of Babylon. In Isa. 41:25-26 (RSV) we have the words: 'I stirred up one from the north . . . he shall trample on rulers as on mortar . . . that we might say 'He is *tsedheq*', or 'That's what *tsedheq* is!'. So *tsedheq* is God's saving activity exercised for His poor, needy and helpless covenant People.

Although the word obviously has an ethical meaning (God is of course morally righteous), it increasingly also comes to have a soteriological (saving) meaning, from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards, as Israel comes increasingly under foreign domination. 'Yahweh's righteousness' comes increasingly to mean 'Yahweh's saving activity (on behalf of His often faithless and disobedient people), in accordance with his fidelity to His covenant obligations.' It is important to note, with this Hebraic background in mind, that the word 'righteousness' in the New Testament (*dikaiousune*) ALSO, AT TIMES, HAS THIS WIDER SALVATION MEANING.

Although the Apostle Paul wrote in Greek, his frequent references to the Old Testament demonstrate that his thinking was basically Hebraic. Consequently, he often uses 'righteousness' (*dikaiousune*) in multiple senses – sometimes in a truly ethical sense, and sometimes, practically as the equivalent of 'salvation.'

In Romans 10:10, 'belief unto righteousness' is more accurately 'faith unto salvation'. In Romans 6:16, 'sin' is contrasted with 'obedience', and 'death' is contrasted with 'righteousness'. The presumption here is that *dikaiousune* means something to do with 'life', that is, with 'salvation'! Similarly, at Romans 3:21, 'the righteousness of God' essentially means 'God's saving activity', or 'the salvation that God accomplishes' through Christ.

2 Cor. 5:21, with an Hebraic understanding, probably means: ' . . . for our sake, God made Christ, who did not know sin, to be a sin-offering for us; so that in Him we might become the embodiment (the personification) of God's gracious outreach (saving activity).' As Dr. Tom Wright states in his translation, such an understanding of the text, fits in with not only Hebraic thought, but also with the passage's whole context.

The revelation of the 'righteousness of God' at Romans 1:17, means, in accordance with Hebraic usage: ' . . . here is revealed God's way of righting wrong . . . ' (NEB), or ' . . . God's covenant justice is unveiled . . . ' (Dr. Tom Wright's translation).

The point is that now, within the field of human experience, the saving activity of God has been, and is being, openly revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Hitherto, in the past, the activity of God often worked inscrutably and invisibly, but now it is on open display, in the preaching of the Gospel (Rom 1:17). It is here, in the Gospel proclamation, that God is seen as being faithful to His covenant obligations, to save and rescue Israel. Now however, in fulfilment of the basic underlying Abrahamic covenant, Yahweh is seen as opening out His covenant to the Gentiles. Yahweh is not showing favouritism, to a largely disobedient Israel, but is extending out His saving activity (His 'righteousness') to everyone. Yahweh still rescues His oppressed people – the poor and helpless who cry out to Him for help, salvation and ultimately for the kingdom of God (Psalm 69:33, 72:12-14) – but His people are now redefined as Jews and Gentiles, and the 'oppressor' is now Sin!

Through the faithfulness of Jesus, Yahweh's covenant with Israel has been fulfilled. By His full obedience, Jesus has proved Himself Yahweh's 'true covenant partner' (cf. Acts 3:14, 7:52 – He is 'The Righteous One') and has offered to God the obedience that they failed to deliver (cf. Isa.42:6- 7). (In Jewish thought at the time, Israel's Messiah was thought to represent His people.)

Through the Gospel, which proclaims the faithfulness of Jesus, Yahweh has fulfilled His covenant obligations – He has demonstrated His 'righteousness' (or 'Covenant justice', as Wright

generally translates the term, in order to attempt to hold together all the various nuances included in the phrase 'the righteousness of God'). These nuances include Yahweh's faithfulness to His covenants, His integrity, His trustworthiness, His justice, and His commitment to 'put the world to rights', through the Abrahamic covenant, after the Adamic sin. Bearing in mind all these Hebraic connotations, Wright also renders the word 'righteousness' (*dikaioisune*) in his translations, variously, according to context, as 'covenant membership', 'covenant faithfulness', 'covenant status' and 'faithfulness'.

By gaining a proper Hebraic understanding of 'the righteousness of Yahweh', we gain a more accurate first century picture of how Jesus' saving work was conceived.

### **Paul's 'explanations' of what the death and resurrection of Jesus achieved.**

I think it has to be realised that when Paul elucidates the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection, he does so, not via the explication of 'mechanisms', (legal, or otherwise!) but by way of a very common mode of expression – metaphor. A classic case of this is in Romans 3:21-26, where Paul actually combines three metaphors. One is taken from the law court – the metaphor of 'justification'; one is taken from the institution of slavery – the metaphor of 'emancipation'; and ONE is taken from the institution of sacrificial ritual – the metaphor of 'the expiation by blood'.

Under all three metaphors, Paul describes an act of God for Mankind. In one God takes the part of a judge, who acquits the prisoner. In another, God takes the part of a benefactor, who secures freedom for a slave. And in the final one, God takes the part of a priest, who makes expiation for sin – God Himself has put forward the means by which guilt is removed.

Paul doesn't explain much further any of these ideas, nor elucidate how these ideas come together in any one single image, but all these metaphors emphasise crucial Gospel facts. Our status or position before God has been altered by God Himself, from 'condemnation' to 'acquittal', from 'bondage' to 'freedom' and from guilt to innocence. We are NOW, ALREADY seen by God as having been given the legal status of 'righteous' (= according to Hebraic understanding, being 'vindicated', 'acquitted', members of God's new covenant, all in advance of the Final Judgement).

This is accompanied by the experiential facts of a real re-orientation towards right living (Rom 6:17), and the possession of a power that leads to moral competence ( 1 Thess 2:13). A guilty person cannot acquit himself, a slave can't free himself, and a morally 'unclean' person cannot become 'clean', without supernatural means. God however, through sheer grace (arbitrary favour), has made this change possible.

Paul often focuses on the metaphor of the law court, with its legal terminology, because the picture of guilty men actually being acquitted before a divine tribunal, reverently speaking, appears to be something of a absurdity'. Don't the Hebrew scriptures declare that it is the unjust judge who justifies the wicked!/? (Isa. 5:23; Prov. 17:15)

Paul however, uses the image as a DELIBERATE PARADOX TO MAKE THE POINT THAT Yahweh is graciously kind to the wicked and the unthankful. A challenging metaphor was the best way Paul could make the point that the personal relations between God and Man, CANNOT BE PUT IN LEGAL TERMS AT ALL (Phil. 3:9).

When Paul states, in Romans 3:21, that 'the righteousness of God' has been revealed, he means that God's gracious outreach, His saving activity (in faithfulness to His covenant agreements) is now operating, NOT through Israel's Law code, as before, but through the good news of His Son, the very proclamation of which, has its own mysterious power! (Romans 1:16, 1 Thess 2:13). Paul is not, in this verse, explicating some mechanism or legal device, by which the 'justice' of God can be satisfied, whilst at the same time, His 'mercy' is exerted to save the sinner. In Hebraic thought, no such antithesis was envisaged. God saves and rescues His covenant people, not in spite of His 'righteousness', but because of it!

**In conclusion** therefore, one can state that the Apostolic preaching of the Gospel didn't have a developed theology of atonement, because, in a very real sense, it didn't need one. The objective facts concerning Jesus, spoke for themselves, and their very proclamation produced a 'spiritual dynamism' within the hearts of the believers, calling them to enter God's new covenant, with all its benefits. Acts 2:23 states that Jesus was delivered up to wicked men, by the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. This means that God foresaw and allowed His Son's crucifixion, but it doesn't mean that in any moral sense, He approved of it!

Jesus, throughout His life of perfect submission to divine principles, developed such a strength of character, that He could truly be said to be the 'Pioneer' of salvation for all His followers (whatever they too have to suffer before entrance into God's Kingdom). (Hebrews 3:1, 5:8-10 12:3-6). All of this has to do with 'real life' as it is, and God's gracious response to the mess that we all have helped to create, rather than legalistic or mechanistic atonement theories.

#### **Prayer**

'God of covenant grace, we confess our inability to understand  
why it is that you should be so concerned with sinners like us,  
and how it is that You are both just and justifier,  
both dealing with our sin and yet still calling us to Yourself.  
But where we cannot understand, we can trust.  
And where we can trust, we can rest.'

Professor James Dunn, p.49, *Romans*, BRF Publishers.

**Tony Cox**

---

### **Joseph of Arimathaea's Easter**

'He's gone,' says Joseph, and, with Pilate's leave  
Eases the nails and lowers him from the tree,  
Wraps him in reverent and tender thoughts  
And lays him in the cave called Memory.

That cave is deeply hewn in Joseph's heart;  
All that's within will always be his own;  
In memory's cave the treasure of his past  
Is safe for ever, walled and sealed by stone.

'He's safe,' says Joseph, 'safe in this cool place  
And no one now can take my Lord away.  
In years to come I'll still see his dear face  
As clearly as I've seen it on this day.'

'He's gone!' cries Joseph at the empty tomb:

But Mary says, 'He's left a word for you:  
He cannot rest content to be your past  
So he is risen to be your future too.'

**W. H. Vanstone**

---