

The Endeavour Magazine

For Christian Thought and Action

**Jesus
is our peace,
having destroyed the barrier,
the dividing wall of hostility.**

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A Question of Tribute

Luke 20 is full of questions. Jesus had already visited the Temple, as recorded in chapter 19, where he caused a rumpus that welded the leaders together in plans to destroy him. They chose to do nothing immediately because of the crowds who hung on his every word. Luke 20 finds Jesus back in the Temple and this time the leaders confront him with the question: ‘By what authority do you do these things?’ In the Temple of course, leaving aside the

Romans, it was the High Priest who had authority along with the chief priests, teachers of the Law and the elders. Had Jesus asked their permission? Of course not and they knew it, which made their question something of a rhetorical question. What they really wanted was a showdown in public where Jesus had obviously offended them.

Jesus responds with his own question: 'John's baptism, was it from heaven or from man?' This no doubt wrong-footed the leaders, although they would all have known about John and his relatively recent demise. Now John's father was a priest and it was usual for the firstborn son to follow in his father's footsteps. John had chosen otherwise, which may well have angered his father's colleagues. John's mission to Israel, offering forgiveness of sins by baptism, usually only administered to Gentile converts (and so perhaps implying that Israel was no better than the Gentiles) and bypassing the Temple and priests, would also have angered them. Perhaps they would have feared a reaction from Rome to something that may have looked like a popular uprising, and perhaps they would have been jealous of John's following. Anyway, probably they would have had no sympathy with John who had challenged Herod, something they would not have risked, preferring to stay religiously and politically neutral.

Now what were they going to do with Jesus' question? One author has playfully suggested that they could have chosen to dodge it by saying: 'We asked you first!' However, they knew between them that Jesus had not asked permission of anyone who they would accept as being in authority and so they knew that there was only one answer to their question and that would be: 'Nobody gave me permission!' Jesus' question however had two possible answers neither of which was acceptable to the leaders. The question about John should have prompted in the minds of the leaders the same question about Jesus. They had not wanted to say that John's ministry was from God and so were unlikely to accept that what Jesus had done and was doing was from God either. Anyway, they chose to sit on the fence and so Jesus refused to give them any answer.

Jesus went on to tell the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen which angered the leaders again as they recognised that Jesus was referring to them. Again they wanted to take him prisoner but feared to because of the crowds. And so they plotted again to try to trap him by putting to him a trick question. They would send spies, as Luke says, but Mark and Matthew both refer to them as Pharisees and Herodians, unlikely partners. The Pharisees prided themselves on moral purity and religious devotion while the Herodians would regard themselves as realists, supporting Rome because they supported Herod who was put on the throne by Rome. Some would have thought of the Herodians as collaborators. And the question? Should we pay taxes to Rome?

The questioners realise that Jesus would be in trouble if he answers either yes or no. No would be likely to get him into trouble with the Romans who would see him as a renegade. Yes would give Jews the opportunity to accuse him of disloyalty to Israel, and putting Rome before God. It was perhaps ironic that the Pharisees would hope and expect that Jesus would say No, as they would, and so be taken to task by Rome, and yet, in order to trap Jesus, they were prepared to join forces with Herodians who would say Yes. Why would they want to plot the death of someone who they expected would agree with them?

Jesus sees through the hypocrisy of the leaders and once again, after asking for a coin which they are able to supply, Jesus answers with another question: 'Whose is this image and superscription?' 'Caesar's' they reply. Jesus then riposted with: 'Then you had better give Caesar back what belongs to him! And give God back what belongs to him!' (Tom Wright)

Now the coin would almost certainly have had both the image of Tiberius Caesar and an inscription proclaiming him as son of God. It was clear that the coin belonged to Caesar as it

bore his image. But what needed to be given back to God? What bore God's image declaring him to be the owner?

Primarily of course, as the NT declares, it was Jesus himself. The coin that was shown to Jesus would have eventually found its way back into Caesar's coffers. Luke is preparing his readers for the climax of his story when Jesus would also be handed over to the Romans. The coin made the false claim of 'son of God' for Caesar but the Jewish leaders and Caesar would be instrumental in crucifying the true son of God. No doubt Jesus had the leaders particularly in mind in what he said and held them responsible for their failure to worship God and for their abuse of the Temple. However, any Jew would have been able to remember that Genesis 1 proclaims that in this world it is specifically humans that bear the image of God. They only had to look around the assembled company to see what should be offered back to God – themselves! And so what applied to the leaders also applied to the rest of Israel and equally to ourselves. We all need to learn to give ourselves to God in the service of his son and our Saviour.

Les Boddy

(I am indebted to Tom Wright *Luke for Everyone*
and Conrad Gempf *Jesus Asked*)

New Booklet

Beholding the Glory A Study in John's Gospel

Sheila Harris

This booklet is designed to attempt to see Jesus through the eyes of those who met him and experienced the magnetism of his personality and the glow of divine radiance, that we may also catch some light of God's glory through them.

Copies of this booklet may be obtained from the Editor.

Price £1.50 including p&p.

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.**

Greek Gems

There are many places in the New Testament where the original Greek word reveals nuances of thought which considerably illuminate the meaning of the text. The following are a few examples.

1. John 19:13. ‘When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth and sat down in the judgment seat,’ (AV).

This translation is incorrect, as the verb translated ‘sat’, *kathizo*, means to seat, to make to sit down, when it has an object which is here Jesus. It can only mean ‘sat’ when it has no object, that is when it is intransitive. Here Jesus arrayed in royal robes is seated as the king, whether in mockery or in awe, or perhaps both. ‘Behold your king’, he cried!

2. 1 Corinthians 11:16. ‘But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.’ (AV).

The word *synetheia* translated ‘custom’ means a habit, a way of behaving, from which ethics is derived. Here Paul, having given advice to the church about women’s head covering and requested them to judge for themselves what was appropriate for them, is surely not telling them that he does not agree with what he has advised! The emphasis here is on ‘contentious or argumentative’. We, he says, do not behave in this way, nor the churches of God. Would that were so!

3. Luke 18:8. ‘When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?’

It has been argued that because in the Greek there is a definite article ‘the’ before faith, it should be interpreted as ‘The Faith’ doctrinally defined. In Classical Greek a definite article is used with abstract nouns such as faith, truth, love etc. but it is not translated. In New Testament Greek there is a complete inconsistency in the use of the article, sometimes with sometimes without. However, it is always context that determines meaning. The parable of the unjust judge teaches the lesson of God’s mercy to His people. Is this attitude of compassion to be found when he returns?

4. John 1:3. ‘All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life and the life was the light of men.’ (AV)

This is incorrect. Tyndale, the Bishops’ Bible of 1587 and other early editions correctly translate ‘it’ instead of ‘him’ which is correct. As the word *logos* is a masculine word, whatever refers back to it must be in the masculine gender but this does not imply a person. It was by means of the spoken word of God that the world was created. That word only became flesh at the birth of Jesus, though he was the embodiment of the same spirit of God Who created the world in the beginning.

5. 2 Corinthians 4:4. ‘The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the glory of God. (RSV etc...)

‘lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God should shine on them’ (AV)

The AV provides the far better rendering, as *augazo*, shine, derived from *auge*, the dawn, expresses the light of the Gospel shining like the daybreak upon the minds of those who would receive it.

6. John 21:15

Here the poignant distinction is made clear between ‘love’, *agapao*, and ‘be a friend’, *phileo*. ‘Simon, do you love me?’ (*agapao*) How could Peter now rise to the challenge, humiliated as he was by his denials and at last conscious of his shortcomings, no longer the confident follower? ‘Lord you know I am your friend.’ (*phileo*) Once more: ‘Simon, do you love me?’ (*agapao*) ‘You know I am your friend.’ Finally challenged by the Lord: ‘Are you my friend?’ (*phileo*) Peter, grieved at that so reminiscent three times, replied: ‘Lord, you know (*oida*) all things as a fact but you know by personal experience (*ginosko*) that I am your friend (*phileo*)! So Jesus, by acknowledging his honesty and recognising his contrition, accepted him as the true shepherd who would ultimately be privileged to follow his Master to a martyr’s death.

Honesty
is a fine jewel,
but much out of fashion.
(Thomas Fuller)

For the Christian,
honesty is not the best policy –
it is the only one.
(Anon)

In the image of God
A Review

In the image of God is a series of fifteen articles that seek to confirm biblical authority for the continued leading role for men in ecclesial matters. They appeared in *The Christadelphian* from January 2008 to May 2009. The authors (Michael Edgecombe, Rebecca Lines and Russell Taylor) are Australian Christadelphians and it is good to see that one of the team of authors is a sister. Too frequently it is brothers who write on the role of women when, as wise Bro Robert Roberts, quoted by the authors, said in *The Christadelphian* of February 1897: ‘godly women (can be) more qualified than (men) to exercise judgment and give counsel.’

The brotherhood provides few opportunities for this to happen and sisters who hold responsible positions in the world may be forgiven, after reading the opening of the series, for thinking that some gates might now start to open for them to use their talents on behalf of their Lord. Unfortunately these hopes are not to be realised for, when we read the February 2009 article, the opportunities being offered seem to be fewer than those already available today in many meetings.

But the authors correctly remind us that for a Christadelphian the roles given to sisters must have a biblical basis and not be motivated by the whims of the world, and this will be the aim of this review.

One cannot comment on all the references cited in the articles. Thankfully the authors present us with a divine principle laid down from the beginning of creation that, they maintain, applies down the ages to today – woman is derived from man and is subservient to him. The authors are aware of the social norms of biblical times and they draw evidence from a wide range of passages to confirm their conclusions, but, as will be seen below, this review considers that they have not taken full account of one important New Testament aspect. Though they insist on a secondary role for women, they cannot be faulted for not stressing that the relationship between man and woman should be within the context of Christian love. There is sensitive awareness that an overbearing husband generates corresponding animosity from the wife and that this doesn’t meet the Christian model of marriage. But failure to allow a wife to express her conscience to the full can lead to frustration, a frustration that is often shared by single women in a male-dominated church.

Their case, therefore, starts with creation. The authors recognise that the first creation account in Genesis 1 presents man and woman as an ‘entity’ of equals, but this, they maintain, is qualified in the second account in Genesis 2, where they see woman with secondary responsibility, derived from and supporting man. The text of Genesis 2 is sparse

but it is difficult to read into the relationship between Adam and Eve anything other than a participative partnership of equals; this seems to be supported by Eve naturally taking the leading role in Genesis 3, which isn't openly criticised. You can criticise Eve for not consulting her husband but that doesn't invalidate the style of their partnership, and, if this reading is correct, and on the evidence one has to be cautious, God includes it in his review of creation as 'very good'.

After 'the fall' there is no question that submission for woman is part of God's judgment, though if it was, as the authors argue, a feature before 'the fall' why introduce it now as something new?

Apart from God's judgment of Eve's sin, the question of what gives man the moral authority to lead is skated around. Leadership assumes greater knowledge, skill and judgment to apply that knowledge. Women may be biologically different but are they mentally inferior to men? If they match man at the intellectual level submission will be hard. Bishop Gore, widely respected by our Christadelphian forefathers, and who was not adverse to enhancing the role of women in the church, could foolishly write in 1900, (*The Epistle of the Ephesians*), that women are inferior to men 'on moral qualities, justice, stability and reasonableness'. Today this is laughable, and brother Roberts, in his article of 1897, already quoted, could see this was nonsense. It denigrates God to think that he ignores the qualities to be found in women to the extent of forcing her to submit to the judgment of a fool. But God doesn't think so, for, as with Deborah, he uses wise women in men's roles when necessary, and Israel respected and submitted to her. Never let our human prejudices limit God's prerogative for he doesn't treat women as second class.

The other articles, in the main, provide biblical evidence to support adherence to the principle of submission in the Old and New Testaments and, given the male-dominated culture of the near east, it is not surprising to find such evidence.

Yet there are striking biblical exceptions which the authors try to minimize. For example, to say Deborah deferred to Barak does stretch the meaning of Judges 4:6 too far: 'the people of Israel came up to her for judgment' and 'she sent and summoned Barak' – she was not waiting for him to arrive before acting. Some feisty lady!

Also, in Eph 5:22-33, where we are drawn to the 'fear, frightened' end of the spectrum of the Greek word translated by the RSV and others as 'respect' (v.33), for the word also bears the warmer meaning of 'honour' in Mark 6:4. (It is easy to read this text ignoring the overriding exhortation of verse 22, 'Be subject to one another out of reverence to Christ'. One commentator has rightly said this is the basis of democracy, a partnership of equals. When taken into account it softens our understanding of the patriarchal model of marriage that follows.)

There isn't space to comment further on examples quoted in the articles, but if you want to compare the authors' understanding with other readings then Ian and Averil McHaffies' booklets are a good source.

My main criticism and disappointment is that the authors have not tested their overriding principle against the teaching of the cross and its application to the lives of Christians today, and this can change our perspective.

The New Testament is a record of the dramatic impact of the teaching of the Cross on Jewish religious life and the world. Jesus likened his gospel to a scribe who brought from his treasure house new and old (Matt 13:52); He was concerned with the principles behind the

Law, which the Jewish leaders, concentrating on the letter, had lost. The authors quote Jesus' words that he came 'not to abolish but fulfil' the law and prophets' (Matt 5:17) to support the continuing application of the submission of women, but they did not go on to identify what Jesus saw as the underlying principle of the Law: 'to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the laws and prophets', (Matt 22:37). He was concerned with fulfilling the principle of love and it was, for example, on this issue that he challenged the harsh obedience to the letter of the Sabbath law; this is a rare occasion when Jesus expresses anger (Mk 3:5). As he proclaims in the Synagogue at Nazareth, he had come to liberate and free the captive and the oppressed (Lk 4:16ff), and this embraces the imposition of harsh laws, including those imposed on women. Luke, in particular, records the new respect and freedom of action that Jesus grants to women. The 'new' changed the face of the church: no Sabbath, no feast days, no temple, priest or sacrifices, with Gentiles on the same level as Jews, a community of equals bound to their Lord and each other in love. It was this gospel Paul discovered on the road to Damascus. He saw, like his Lord, the Law fulfilled in loving your neighbour (Gal 5:14), and he could no longer enslave a man or woman or deny a woman equal rights. The condemnation that hung over the world following the Fall was washed away, (Rom 8). Full freedom from the burden of the Fall was still future but this didn't prevent the church from reflecting it, as far they were able, in their lives in the here and now. Paul sets out this principle when writing to the Galatians. It is one of the great declarations of the gospel:

You were baptised into Christ . . . There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ (Gal 3:27-28).

Against such references as 1 Cor 14 & 2 Tim 2, that deal with local issues, this rings out as an overriding policy declaration for the new age. A similar declaration in Colossians speaks of 'putting on the new nature . . . after the image of its creator' (Col 3:10), the title of the articles. If the Galatians declaration echoes the Jewish morning prayer, the impact on its readers was even greater;

I thank you that I was not born a Gentile, a woman, or a slave (though the Talmud, instead of slave, reads 'a bore').

1 Tim 2:11 illustrates the tension this type of verse gives rise to when compared with Christ's work of redemption, for it appears to say that women, despite the cross, are still condemned to submission because they 'were deceived and became a transgressor'. Why, if Christ has released us all from condemnation – the argument of Romans 7 & 8 – are women, who are baptised into Christ, still left bearing the pressure of the corporate guilt of their sex? To say that 'they have to act in ways that clearly acknowledge the folly of the past', (*Women Priests*, the Christadelphian Office), is to miss the glorious revelation of God's grace in Romans and Galatians. And the problem is not resolved by compromising Paul's declaration, it is in looking again at Timothy.

It is surprising, therefore, that the authors only make a passing reference to the Galatians declaration in their final article (May 2009), for the passage is key in our understanding of the role of women in the church. The authors acknowledge its importance, but only in relation to the future: 'it reaffirms one of the central truths of our salvation' but only 'ours to inherit in Christ'. Others limit the present application of Paul's declaration saying it refers to status before God and not to the roles given to men and women in the church. Neither argument stands closer scrutiny:

- 1) That it applies now is demonstrated when Paul challenges Peter for not granting equality to Gentiles now, Gal 2:11.
- 2) Status determines the level of authority we have to exercise our roles. If we have equal status before God this is, as Paul says, 'in Christ', and it must follow that we all have equal status in Christ in the church. Our sisters, on this argument, stand equal with their brothers when expressing their conscience or working in the church.

Yes, there are other NT verses that do appear to paint an opposing picture of patriarchal relationships, but, as explained above, this is to be expected, even within the church, for the 1st century world was a culture of male dominance: changes take time. An example is Paul and Peter, both are anxious not to offend the marriage relationships of the world about them *‘women be kind and submissive to their husbands – that the word of God is not discredited – that an opponent may be put to shame’*, Titus 2:4-8, also 1 Peter 3:1-2.

Today the changes in the status of women recorded in the NT may seem small but to women of the 1st century they were huge. Their magnitude can be seen in the women who followed Jesus (Lk 8): he accepted the help of women who left their husbands at home and had freed their own money from the legal control of their guardians, and this often required the authority of a court. It is not surprising that the new freedom and respect to be found in the church attracted many women ‘of high standing’ – see *The Rise of Christianity* by Rodney Stark, ch 5, The role of Women in the Christian Church.

The issue of freedom between Jew and Gentile was resolved in the first century. The issue of slaves and women has taken much longer, and, as the articles show, the debate for women still goes on. The path forward is not an easy one. The surrendering of old thinking can be difficult, for the application of the spirit of love encourages us to move from following comfortable precedents to challenging the motive of our actions; this is at the core of Jesus’ teaching, for the new cannot be contained in old wineskins. I have sympathy with the steward who found the task too daunting and escaped his responsibility by burying his talents. Is the approach of the authors in maintaining the letter of previous law the right way, or do we respond to the challenge of the cross and the New Covenant founded on love? The conclusion of this review is that it is our responsibility, following the example of our Lord and not the world, to prayerfully seek a path which allows both male and female to explore and fully express their conscience without hindrance while submitting to each other in Christ (Eph 5:22). What our sisters are seeking is the opportunity to share their intellect and managerial skills, with us their brothers in Christ, on a level playing field, and this review is not convinced that the fourteen articles, despite their number of examples, have made a case to deny them this.

Ken Drage

‘But I prefer to believe . . .’

A survey reveals very different attitudes to early Genesis.

For some time I’ve been concerned about the negative stance to science made by our community. I’ve noted the passion in a flurry of anti-Darwinian letters in other Christadelphian magazines in response to the hype over the anniversary of this scientist’s birth and publication of his famous book. The theories of the Big Bang and Evolution have received virtually universal acceptance. I have endeavoured therefore to explore the minds of Christians so at odds with science and these two theories in particular.

I asked over 100 Christadelphians to take part in a survey to reveal their attitudes towards the early chapters of Genesis. I took a great deal of trouble to get a cross-section of opinion across the young/old, male/female divide and from as many different (types of) ecclesias as possible.

Of the 114 that I asked about the Genesis Flood, a whopping 71% were convinced that it was global. 10.5% thought that it was local and 18.5% weren’t sure enough to give a

response one way or the other. From a scientific perspective the Genesis (global) Flood did not happen. Science is emphatic about this and the evidence is very impressive. Let's look at just a sample of that evidence.

In the first place where did all the water come from and go? The earth has about 7 million cubic miles of ice (mainly at the poles) – enough water (if melted) to cover the entire planet to a depth of 60 metres if it were spread out evenly. The record tells us: '...all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered,' ('covering them 15 cubits deep'), but 31 of the Himalayan peaks exceed 7,600 meters. Lake Baikal is a headache for the global flood enthusiasts. A crystal clear (25 million year old) freshwater lake with 1500 species found nowhere else. Located close to the Mongolian border, Lake Baikal holds a massive amount of water—approximately 20% of all the liquid freshwater reserves on earth—more than any other freshwater lake on the planet! It would appear untouched by any *global* (and very salty) flood.

It seems strange that Egypt has no tradition of a great flood. In the biblical and Mesopotamian traditions, the events of the flood and ark tradition are set in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley. This may explain why this story is absent from Egyptian literature. Egypt then has no comparable flood, no ark and no Noah figure.

It was surprising to find that Robert Roberts discounted the idea of a global flood. Commenting in particular about animal distribution in *The Visible Hand of God* (p. 47-48), he wrote:

Now if the flood were universal in the absolute sense, it is manifest that these facts could not be explained, for if the animals all over the earth were drowned, and the devastated countries were afterwards replenished from a Noachic centre, the animals of all countries would now show some similarity, instead of consisting of totally different species. The animals taken into the ark would be the animals of the humanly-populated district only – a comparatively small district in relation to the face of the world at large.

So why, as a community, are we so convinced that it must be understood as global?

The Creation Account

Let's turn our attention to the creation account. When asked whether the 6 days of creation should be read literally, amazingly 68% said *yes*. 13% said *no* while 19% were *undecided*. Within our community, a belief in the 6 literal days of creation is firmly embedded. Only 13% were able to accept the findings of science in order to discount the literality of the text.

I then presented 3 possible ways or models of understanding the account and looked for their preferences. The 13% who didn't accept a literal reading of the *6 days* believed that a single creation was spread over very long periods of time (but with mankind being formed right at the end of this long process). Of the large percentage who model the days as literal, they actually understand the account in two different ways. 23% believe in a *young earth* with an age of less than 10000 years. 39% believe in the idea suggested by John Thomas (and others) of a geologically old earth with a prior dispensation that ended in catastrophic circumstances. For them Genesis 1 describes a recent (geologically speaking) recreation of life (and hence the use of the word 'replenish'). This has been called *The Gap Theory*, scientific evidence for which is very weak. 25% were *undecided* about these models.

It's interesting that those who choose to read the account literally are divided in their willingness to allow science to influence their understanding. Obviously *The Gap Theory* is heavily influenced by science but only in a way that allows them to be satisfied that a literal reading has not been compromised.

'No such things as dinosaurs'

I learned a great deal from the many comments that the various brethren and sisters made whilst completing the survey. It was revealed that as late as the 1960's there were small pockets of members (in our community) who believed that the earth was flat. I was staggered to discover this. One brother (back in the twenty first century) said that there were no such things as dinosaurs, and that this was just scientists 'playing around with bones.' Another believed that the fossil record was down to 'God deceiving the nations.' This is just a flavour of the comments made.

Though admittedly not from a scientific background myself, I was able to see that those whom I interviewed were well-versed in scripture but not well informed on scientific matters (as the above comments show). Generally, a view was transmitted of distrust in science as it relates to Genesis. One brother told me that: 'If modern science appears in any way to contradict the 6 literal days, can there be any question that we should believe God's Word rather than man's science?' 'Why should scripture have to accommodate science?' was another question put to me.

The quote in (1 Tim 6:20) to 'avoid oppositions of *science* falsely so called: which some professing have erred concerning the faith,' was mentioned more than once. The Greek word for *science* in this quote is *gnosis* which, according to Vine, simply means knowledge. 'Science in the modern sense is unknown in scripture.'

'I would rather believe . . .'

While discussing with a sister about the repopulation of the earth after the flood, I pointed out that, for example, there was scientific evidence that the American continents had been continuously populated since c. 10000 B.C. In reply, she said, with a little irritation, '*but I prefer to believe* what we're told in Genesis.' This was perhaps the most revealing moment of the survey. The mind will sift or ignore evidence to believe what it wants to believe. Another who took part in the survey said something similar: '*I would rather believe* what God has revealed than human wisdom . . . the scriptures are very clear that the creation took just 6 days.'

This is quite a contrast to the comment of the late A D Norris (writing in *Believing the Bible* p.125): 'Now the Scientific Method is an excellent and indispensable thing. It is that way of working which takes observed facts as its starting point, and reasons from them ('inductively, as it is called) to general principles ('hypotheses') which account for them. It is the method used to establish the truth of the Resurrection of Jesus, and the inspiration of Scripture. No objection can be raised to the employment of the Scientific Method, and it must be employed in all fields: of History, of Revelation and of Natural Science. Science too, in so far as it embodies the conclusions reached by the Scientific Method, is to be welcomed.'

It is crystal clear to me, that if many of those who took part in the survey had lived in the sixteenth century, they would have been just as sceptical about the new ideas of science then as now. It is not in the scriptures where we learn that the earth is a sphere and is in orbit around the sun. When the idea that the earth was moving at high speed was put forward it was generally greeted with incredulity. I'm convinced that it would be a thankless and hopeless task to try and convince so many, even now, that science *must* or *should* be taken into account, when they are clearly and passionately committed to a literal understanding of early Genesis.

Some concluding observations.

Early Church Fathers such as Origen and Augustine realized that the *6 days* were not to be read literally. Origen, writing in about AD 225, wrote: 'What man of intelligence, I ask, will consider as a reasonable statement that the first and second and third day, in which there are

said to be both evening and morning, existed without Sun and Moon and stars?’ It is quite amazing that Augustine, writing in the fifth century, a very long time before the days when he could be influenced by scientific discovery, also saw *the days* as figurative. In his commentary, *The Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, he wrote:

Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the Earth, the heavens and the other elements of this world . . . Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics . . . People outside of the household of the faith think our sacred writers held such opinions, and . . . if they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the Kingdom of Heaven?

Finally, what did everyone in the survey think about evolution? Well, I didn’t have the courage to ask. I didn’t get any impression that any of the 114 did accept evolution. If they did they didn’t tell me. The scientific evidence for it is overwhelmingly strong. The physicist Dr. John Polkinghorne explains it (in a nutshell) like this:

Evolution is the story of how creation explores and brings to birth the very deep-seated fruitfulness with which its Creator has endowed it. God could have snapped the divine fingers and brought into being a ready-made world where everything is fixed and nothing changes. But God has done something cleverer than that. He’s created a world that can make itself. That making of itself is called evolution.

The Bible gives us a *theology* of creation, not a *theory* of creation. I take the view that science teaches us a great deal about *how* God works. In this sense, enjoying the findings and fruits of science is a form of worship. The findings of science are not relevant to our salvation, but we should embrace them (as a powerful and helpful tool) in our desire to seek truth. Many brethren and sisters will react strongly to some of the ideas put forward in this article. However, whether we believe in evolution (theistic) or that the earth is flat, we must be tolerant of (and not ridicule) each other’s position in relation to early Genesis and this should be reflected in ecclesial policy. The different approaches to early Genesis are not, in my humble opinion, essential to salvation. However, the findings of science are vital in our search for truth and a credible understanding of what the scriptures are actually teaching us.

Keith Lowe

Genesis 1:24, 25

The former has God saying ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind’, while the latter says ‘God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind’.

The modern exegete will claim that here it is made clear that no sharp distinction is to be drawn between natural process (v 24) and divine action (v 25).

Dr J Polkinghorne

What Dying People Want – A Personal View

It is a fact that although the character of DEATH of the Discworld is, in his own words, an ANTHROPOMORPHIC PERSONIFICATION, (he always speaks in capital letters), he long ago gave up the traditional skeletal horses, because of the bother of having to stop all the time to wire bits back on. Now his horses were always flesh-and-blood beasts, from the finest stock...’

The above is a quotation from MORT, the fourth of Lord Terry Pratchett’s Discworld fantasy novels. ‘Death comes to us all,’ quotes the blurb on the back cover, ‘but when he came to

Mort he offered him a job.’

I have been a fan of Lord Terry Pratchett’s fantasy novels for many years now; convulsed by their humour and wit and awed by some of their mind-expanding concepts and morality; so I and many other people were distressed to hear back in 2007 that Lord Pratchett, at the age of only sixty-one, is now suffering from an inability to tie his own tie, drive his car, etc. Truly DEATH comes to us all. In his case it is a rare form of Alzheimer’s disease which allows him to be able to write books, but not to type them!*

During the 2009 Christadelphian Summer School, I attended a workshop led by Wendy Johnsen, a Christadelphian, on the subject of *What Dying People Want – Discussion*. The charming sister taking us through the presentation was kindly and gentle in her persuasive way, to help us to think about the Hospice Movement. She based her arguments on the book by American David Kuhl *What Dying People Want*.

We read some Bible quotations, listened to some modern songs and then discussed what we should prefer to comfort us had we reached our time to die. My answer was, ‘Peace and quiet.’ When we broke at the halfway mark for coffee, I happened to meet a wise man in the lift, to whom I expressed my strong feelings that I’d maybe thrown a spanner in the works by saying that I’d rather be shipped to Switzerland to be put down than go into a hospice because I’d been seven or eight times at risk of death already, three of them with cancer, and would prefer not to bother again, especially now that I’m now not too far short of eighty. The wise man’s reply was one which I’ll quote later on.

As usual, at the end of a good workshop, we almost ran out of time, but a couple of the sisters raised the question of children being allowed to go to funerals, if they wanted. Most people seemed to think that was a good thing to do, since children hate to be kept out of things, becoming afraid and apprehensive if adults whisper in corners and appear to exclude them, so that the effect of these excluded feelings can frighten and haunt children for many years.

I left Summer School with the strong inclination to write something about the subject of the workshop; but lo! on the following Saturday Polly Toynbee wrote the following article in the Guardian newspaper. Its title is *The 1961 Suicide Act is an Instrument of State Torture*. Since she puts my feelings better than I can, I reproduce the slightly edited article below:

‘Every day in hospitals, nursing homes and at home, the state not only permits but orders the torture of the terminally ill. Confined within bodies too frail to help themselves, people are denied assistance from doctors to end their lives peacefully. If anyone counted up the numbers of the dying and the months of agony they suffer against their will in the many dying rooms of the nation’s institutions, then the 1961 Suicide Act would emerge as the cruellest torture instrument.

‘Because dying happens far from the public eye, the sheer scale of sufferings is a secret garden the medical profession prefers to keep hidden, denying doctors’ limited skills to prevent thousands ending up in a state everyone hopes will never happen to them. (Doctors, though are amongst those most likely to kill themselves when terminally ill, knowing what lies ahead).

Let’s be graphic: morphine (and its derivatives) is no wonder drug, though it is the only effective painkiller available, it usually dulls pain, but not always. At high enough doses it can induce unpleasant hallucinations. It is a depressant: don’t imagine you end life on some glorious high, floating away in a cloud of pleasurable dreams. It causes acute constipation, so the dying spend their last weeks thinking mostly of their bowels, of laxatives and enemas

punctuated by explosive ‘accidents’. Elevated end-of-life thoughts and feelings are often banished by pain and the indignity of bodily functions.

Palliative care doctors and nurses can be wonderful: I have seen them at their best, caring for my mother and others close to death. But collectively they strongly oppose giving their patients the right to die – and their voice carries extra weight both inside and outside the medical profession because they are the experts in death. They tend to claim that with the best care, anyone can live out their last days with enough comfort and dignity not to want a mercy killing. But following in the footsteps of Mother Theresa and Dame Cicely Saunders, this is a branch of medicine exceptionally heavily dominated by the deeply religious who believe only God disposes. Their influence in this debate has been immense – and baleful.

Either they deceive themselves or else they deny the evidence of their own eyes and ears about many patients’ experience. They are right that too few people get good end of life care; the Dying Matters coalition, set up by the National Council for Palliative Care, reports that the least affluent get the least care, as in life. But many, like my family, report excellent care that still can’t save a dying person from dreadful last days.

It was a cabal of Bishops, Rabbis and assorted religious enthusiasts who wrecked the Joffe Bill in the Lords through a devious putsch that broke Lords procedural practice, denying the bill a Commons debate. Even more spurious were their arguments, summarised by the Bishop of Oxford’s opinion that ‘we are not autonomous beings’ and so must wait for God to release us.

This week the law lords opened the door to a gentler way of death by a small chink, after the admirable Debbie Purdy’s long campaign for her own autonomy. Keri Starmer, the director of public prosecutions, must set out his interpretation of when people will be prosecuted for easing someone’s exit. But it should not be for one man to determine what to do once a law has become redundant. It is for Parliament to debate how to replace the Suicide Act, now hundreds of relatives of the terminally ill – and even of the severely disabled, but not terminal – have not been charged for assisting relatives to die. The Commons needs to bring forward a bill urgently. Every poll in the last decade has shown between 74% and 84% of the public want the terminally ill to have the right to ask a doctor for a peaceful death.

Safeguards are not hard to devise: someone in sound enough mind to write their will can be judged fit enough to choose when it’s time to die, without undue duress from greedy relatives. Besides, the loss of independence and becoming a burden to others may be a valid part of the reason why someone feels life has become undignified and past bearing.

Each person has their own threshold, with their own sense of what makes life worth living. When my friend Jill Tweedie, late of this paper, was dying of motor neurone disease, she was driven to rage by sanctimonious people telling her to consider how Stephen Hawking found so much value in life despite severe disability. What mattered to her was what she found bearable. She took her own life while still mobile, probably far earlier than if she had been guaranteed assistance from a doctor at a later stage. Every one of us will die and many will not have a quick and painless death. Experience in Oregon shows that simply knowing you can call for an injection eases anxiety and makes it less likely people will end their lives prematurely.

The absurd state of the law now means only the well-off can fly to Zurich and many are probably still too well to need to die quite yet: 800 Britons are on the waiting list. When my mother in her last days begged me to take her to Switzerland, it was too late. But I would have dreaded taking her while she was still fit enough to travel before the last stages. The very idea of a funereal last flight to a strange place is horrible to contemplate. The prospect

of that tastefully anonymous Dignitas death chamber seems a desperately grim way to go, all because of the hypocritical British law. Most people want to know they can die at home, surrounded by family or friends at a time of their choosing, with an injection no more distressing than a preoperative anaesthetic. We might never need it, we might never choose it, but to know there is an easeful escape is to take away fear of dying.

Surveys of candidates show the next parliament is set to be filled with a socially as well as politically conservative cadre of new MPs. There is not now long left for this House of Commons to change the law. This is among many other progressive reforms Labour has neglected, but there is still time – just.'

The Wise Man in the Lift, Ian McHaffie's comment on the subject:
'It is a bit illogical to say that it is all right to use medicine, vaccination, etc. to prevent people dying when they would otherwise have died young, and then to say "But God chooses the time of death" and therefore refuse to have dying on demand! Or to put it another way, if we think that God chooses the time of death, why do we keep delaying it by medical care?'

Perhaps what some Dying People want is Choice?

Rosalind Lomas

Terry Pratchett's website can be found on the internet at www.terrypratchett.co.uk where his passionate article on assisted dying, written for the Mail on Sunday, can be found. Also the Dignity in Dying website can be found at www.dignityindying.org.uk/

Thy Kingdom Come: a reflective enquiry

How will the kingdom come?

There are two phases to the kingdom of God from the first coming of Christ onward. There is the inaugural phase where Jesus was the embodiment of the kingship of God, so that where he was present the kingdom of God could be said to have approached. Paul could later say that believers had already been translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Then there is the consummation phase which will lead to God being all in all, in the day when his glory shall fill the earth – the new heavens and the new earth in which sorrow and sighing will flee away.

How will the second phase come to pass? Even if we acknowledge that there are some worthy things happening on the earth and that there are people of good will as well as purveyors of evil, yet the state of the world is such that one can hardly imagine how the transformation will take place. The standard belief among Christadelphians has been that Jesus would, on his return, shatter the population of the world with a terrible death-dealing disaster which would force them to their knees in submission. The kingdom would arrive by forcible conquest. Possibly this belief is not held with such conviction as was once the case, at least in public preaching.

However, this view sits uneasily with the cross of Christ, by which is heralded the triumph of what the world would see as weakness, but in which the true divine strength lies. The suffering of Jesus and of God, with him and in him, is the foundation of all truth. So how can the fullness of the Kingdom come by military victory? Will not the finality of victory be by the same transforming influence of the cross?

Would the threat 'love me or I'll kill you' achieve the divine purpose of developing a

planet filled with people who loved God and willingly gave their hearts and minds to him?

A kingdom of perfect people?

The whole concept of the kingdom in all its glory needs some further prayerful study. Problems arise when you contemplate a kingdom of perfect people. What scope is there for people to be real characters who voluntarily give themselves to the service of God and their fellows if there is no stress of any kind? Would the world be better if people all followed one rigid line, accepted under compulsion, so that they never debated matters, never had different perspectives derived from serious thought, never experienced suffering in themselves or others, never saw others in need so that there was never anyone requiring the exercise of compassion?

What if there were never any anxieties, no problem creation and no need for solution finders, working together to overcome difficulties; no new truths to be discovered and no need to give, for all would have enough? What if we had no need to learn or develop because we had all become perfect? What if we could not sin and temptation had no power to seduce us from the right path, because we were riveted on to it by superior power? What if we had no need to exercise self-control, because we were controlled by God anyway?

Did Jesus mean that in that day there would be no children on the earth to delight our hearts? What if there were no need for replenishment of grace, because we had it all? No need for mutual support and therefore no sense of community, except to sing in multitudinous choirs, automatically in tune, without need for rehearsal? No capacity to weep, because there was nothing to weep about? No special experiences of joy – because all would be joy?

Would a kingdom of puppets glorify God?

Would life be worth much if there were no decisions to be made, no alternatives to be considered? Did not God create us in his likeness, with power to choose the path to follow? Did he not give humans a measure of freedom, rather than make obedient puppets who could not offer him praise from willing hearts, being pre-programmed to act automatically according to his will?

Of course, one could argue that there is a preliminary 1000 years in which perfect saints will rule over imperfect mortal people. But there is but the briefest of mentions of this possibility in a book of poetry and non-literal vision, where we cannot be certain of the correctness of any detailed interpretations we might make. Even so, if we take that passage literally, then the millennium is a failure because it ends in wholesale slaughter of a disobedient population. This means that the perfect saints have not been able to change the hearts of their subjects and a bloodbath ends human history, leaving the saints to live eternally a bland existence, devoid of challenge, with minds already made up for them and lack of the stimulus to growth and development which is the essence of a worthwhile life.

If not by violence, then how?

There is also the difficult question that if violence is not the means by which God will bring the nations to harmony with himself, then how will He and the Lord Jesus handle it? When you look at the genuine problems that exist in the world, how will the love of God prevail? How will criminals cease to operate? How will poverty be banished? How will competitive profit making be superseded by a society in which cooperation is the keynote and service in love become the overriding concern? How will accidents and humanly caused diseases and appalling living conditions for over half the world's population become a thing of the past? And how will all these things be achieved without coercion? It may take a long time.

There are circumstances that may drive the human race to a measure of sense, such as

climate change, overuse of earth's resources, overpopulation. The situation may become so dire that the human race cries out in anguish for deliverance – though not necessarily with humble obedience or loving humility before the God of Love. But if the race learns its own total inadequacy, this could partly pave the way for the love of God to find an entry, though can we expect that no one will still seek their own advantage, caring little about others?

Another issue which arises is that during the whole of human history those who have had a sufficient opportunity to respond to the will of God by the redeeming love of Jesus, actual or in prospect, would amount to a small minority of all who ever lived – probably a million or two out of maybe some ten billion at most. Because God is just, will there be more people raised from the dead ('the rest of the dead') than we had usually supposed? Will they rise to a long learning period, metaphorically described as a thousand years, which is administered by the saints who are already accepted after the 'first resurrection' – the body of Christ? This could be a different kind of judgment or assessment and would add to the magnitude of consummating the Kingdom of God. There are hints of such a climax, but we cannot go for sure beyond the fact that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son to inspire it to faith and obedience.

A greater Pentecost

Changing the world will require a truly almighty effort. In faith we have to accept that the Father and the Son will be equal to the need, without departing from the principles of non-violence and still maintaining love, compassion and mercy. Will the Holy Spirit be poured out in an even greater Pentecost which will outshine the first Pentecost in power and range? But the problem of the voluntary change of human wills and hearts remains vast.

The fact that we cannot answer these questions need not diminish our faith that the will of God certainly will be done on earth as it is in heaven. There is a hymn which expresses this blend of faith and puzzlement and comes out with faith triumphant. Two verses express it well:

I cannot tell how He will win the nations,
How He will claim His earthly heritage,
How satisfy the needs and aspirations
Of east and west, of sinners and of sage.
But this I know, all flesh shall see His glory,
And He shall reap the harvest He has sown,
And some glad day His sun shall shine in splendour,
When He the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is known.

I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,
When, at His bidding every storm is stilled,
Or who can tell how great the jubilation
When all the hearts of men with love are filled.
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,
And myriad, myriad human voices sing,
And earth to heaven, and heaven to earth, will answer:
At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is King!

Clues toward an answer

So we are led to sit at the Lord's feet and confess our ignorance. 'Who hath known the mind of the Lord?' Perhaps when we first came to think about the things of the Kingdom, we thought we knew all the answers. We applied the detail of ideal pictures in the Old Testament to what the kingdom would be like and how it would be established. We assumed that many elements of the old creation would continue unchanged in the new, as Robert Roberts did in the July 1885 *Christadelphian* in his moving, but perhaps flawed, vision of the 'Final

Consolation'. Perhaps we didn't even think about the questions.

There are, however some possible clues. In a recent talk a speaker said of the second coming of Christ (the *parousia*), that it would be suffused by the presence of God in Christ and that this would change everything. That didn't really explain it, but it linked with the opening words of John's first epistle, chapter three:

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not appear what we shall be; but we know that when he doth appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

That must mean that today's believers will find transformation then by very act of being in the presence of Jesus. Even now, if Jesus came to literally live in our house for a month, that month would be totally changed just by his presence. In the First World War, at Christmas 1914, the war was stopped for one day by the power, diluted though it no doubt was, of the Christmas message. The love and peace of Jesus, however dimly comprehended, triumphed for 24 hours.

In the ultimate future the awareness of his personal presence will be yet more powerful to the minds of all earth's inhabitants. A new habit of life will grow, a new disposition, a new heart, as the prophecy of the New Covenant puts it. And if the whole world is made aware of his presence, will not that influence be so mighty as, over time, to change everyone, without turning them into puppets? Television's influence illustrates, in a largely negative way, the power of mass communication. The Holy Spirit will, for totally benign and positive purposes, harness an even greater power of communication and will mediate the Lord's presence to everyone on the face of the earth, when the earth shall be full of the knowledge (knowing) of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. The Word will go forth to earth's remotest bound and in its own way will be invincible, though not coercive.

Even so, come Lord Jesus, come!

Crescens

It is unlikely in the foreseeable future
that there will be a serious shortage of ignorance.

(Anon)

There is no fear of knowing too much,
but there is much fear of practising too little.

(Thomas Brooks)

Knowledge without humility is vanity.

(A W Tozer)

Tyre, Tarshish and the Ships of Tarshish

The understanding of many Christadelphians is that Tarshish in Ezekiel 38 relates to Britain as a naval power. Like Ron Coleman¹ I have serious doubts about this interpretation, and in

a short article I can make only brief comments.

During the period that Ezekiel prophesied (593-571 BC), Tyre was still strong and his prophecies concerning Tyre and Tarshish were given in a political situation when mainland Tyre was being besieged by Nebuchadnezzar in 574 BC and when Tyre finally lost its independence. But Tyre was still important, with her fleet assisting the Persians in their sea campaigns against the Greeks. It was not until 332 BC that Alexander the Great captured the island by building a causeway.

Three questions need to be addressed: Who was Tarshish?, Where was Tarshish?, and What were the ships of Tarshish?

Tarshish the name

In the Table of Nations (Gen 10:4 and I Chr 1:7) – seemingly based on geographical distribution² – Tarshish was the son of Javan³, son of Japheth, son of Noah. His brothers were Elisha (a singular name like Tarshish) and Kittim and Dodanim (both plural words). For only one of these sons of Javan is there any unanimity of identification; Kittim – either a town or the whole island of Cyprus. Elisha is taken to be either part of Cyprus, or on Crete. Dodanim⁴ (Gen 10:4) Rodanim (I Chr 1:7) relates to the inhabitants of Rhodes.

The word Tarshish is the most problematical. ‘Even today we do not know the exact meaning in Hebrew of the name Tarshish.’⁵

Tarshish the place

In Jonah 1:3 we read how Jonah boarded a ship from Joppa and travelled to Tarshish. We also know from Ezek 27:10 that Tarshish was a trader with Tyre which had a monopoly in silver, iron, lead and tin.

Dr Thomas determined that in Ezekiel 38:13 ‘the merchants of Tarshish and all its young lions’ (KJV) referred to Great Britain and its Empire. Many Christadelphians, neglecting recent scholarship, continue this interpretation. However, the Greek translation (Septuagint) translates ‘young lions’ as ‘its villages’ which is the RSV rendering. But ‘young lions’ does not fit the context. ‘An emendation ‘its traders’ is plausible.’⁶

The most favoured location of Tarshish is Tartessus in Spain, but a recent suggestion is Carthage; the most famous of the Phoenecian colonies. However, wherever we locate it, Tarshish was a Tyrian settlement borne out by Isaiah’s oracle concerning Tyre: ‘When the report comes to Egypt they will be in anguish over the report about Tyre. Pass over [the sea] to Tarshish . . . the Lord has given command concerning Canaan to destroy its strongholds.’⁷ This was a time when Egypt’s political power had declined, with conditions favourable for Tyre

Ships of Tarshish

In the ancient world, the Phoenecians were noted for their alphabet, and also for their sea trading⁸ carried out in the largest and most strongly built ships of their time. Thus, it is not surprising to read that Solomon (960-930 BC) allied himself with Hiram (c970-940 BC), king of Tyre. As a result of the profits made, Solomon was able to build the temple at Jerusalem, while Hiram extended the harbour at Tyre and enabled Tyre to become the foremost naval power until the middle of the 6th century BC.

‘Solomon built a fleet of ships at Ezion-Geber which is near Eloth on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom . . . and they went to Ophir.’⁹ The location of Ophir is unknown.

Suggestions have been either India or South Arabia; the latter because in Gen 10:29 it is placed between Sheba and Havilah, situated in southern Arabia.

We also read that Solomon's 'ships went to Tarshish with the servants of Hiram; once every three years the ships of Tarshish used to come bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes and baboons.' (II Chr 9:21) The parallel record tells us Solomon 'had a fleet of ships of Tarshish at sea with the fleet of Hiram. Once every three years the fleet of ships of Tarshish used to come bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes and baboons.' (I Ki 10:22)

What we should not do is apply every reference in Scripture to *the ships of Tarshish* as being ships which came from or went to Tarshish, but rather to the type of ship being described. The phrase is a technical term for a particular type of vessel, as can be seen when, in Isaiah chapter 2, the fate of the high and lofty is described with reference to the cedars of Lebanon (v 13), the high mountains (v 14), the lofty towers (v 15) and the ships of Tarshish (v 16). It is fitting that such ships should be included, for the Tarshish type ships were the largest and most strongly built craft of their time.

'The Tarshish ships illustrated on the monuments were obviously armed; they are hung around with a row of shields and have armed warriors on the top deck. Propulsion was by two banks of oars. and there was also a short mast; the stern curves up in them like a crescent, whereas the prow drops down until it meets an obviously offensive forward-projecting keelson ending in a pointed ram.'¹⁰ The smaller ships had no mast and it has been suggested that they were used for local coastal trips. Fortunately we are able to see what these ships actually looked like. Two types of Phoenecian ships are depicted on a wall relief from the palace of Sennacherib.¹¹

1 *Tarshish Revisited*, Endeavour No 86, June 1991, pp 22-32.

2 The sons of Javen are found in the north-eastern Mediterranean-Anatolian region in *Genesis 10: Some Archaeological considerations* D J Wiseman,

in *I Studied Inscriptions Before the Flood*, Eisenbrauns, Indiana 1994 p 258.

3 In Ezek 27:3 the word Javan refers to the Ionian Greeks on the coast of Anatolia (Turkey) while in Dan 8:21 the word is applied to all the Greeks

4 Hebrew d (daleth) and r (resh) are very similar in script.

5 *The Phoenicians in the West*, 2nd ed M Aubet, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p 204

6 *Word Bible Commentary Ezekiel 20-48*, Leslie C Allen, Dallas, Texas, 1990, p 200

7 Isa 23:5-11

8 The Hebrew word for trader is Canaanite, as in Zech 14:21

9 I K 9:26

10 *The Phoenicians* D R Ap-Thomas in *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, ed D J Wiseman Oxford 1973 p 276

11 *The Phoenicians* Donald Harden, Thames and Hudson, London 1962 plate 50

John Stephenson

Christianity and Culture
Are cultural considerations relevant to interpreting the Bible?

There are many things in life that we take for granted – as normal, common sense, self-evident. Other peoples and groups often see things, and live, very differently. Customs, traditions, ideas, values, morals and societal structures that are taken for granted as normal and acceptable by one group can be totally alien to another. Some of these things may strike us as trivial or curious, others profound and serious, but all are important and can cause offence if the wrong thing is done in the wrong company. Some can merely cause embarrassment, such as whether it is polite to eat quietly or noisily, or whether we empty our plate at the end of a meal or leave a little to show that we have had enough.

Other differences are more serious. In some cultures it is not permitted to touch a person of the opposite gender in public; kissing in public has often been banned and, in one country at least, for a woman to wear trousers in a public place is to commit an indecent act and render her liable to 40 lashes and an unlimited fine. In Antigua one cannot keep a pet dog; anyone who does so can expect reactions of terror or fury from neighbours or passers-by. Australian aborigines have no conception of personal ownership – nothing can be stolen – everything belongs to everyone.

Other differences are horrifying. In some cultures when a man died his wife was buried with him, strangled, burnt or buried alive. For some tribes the only way a young man could win a bride was by producing at least one freshly acquired head; a man without a human death on his conscience was scorned as a coward – rank and prestige increased in proportion to the number of heads obtained. What is right and applauded in one place can be criminal in another.¹

With such a diversity of customs and practices in the world, now and in the past, we may, with good reason, ask: what is the relevance, if any, of the very different traditions and way of life that existed in Bible times to our interpretation of the Bible and its instructions for us? It is often said that scripture must be allowed to explain itself; it is its own interpreter and considerations of culture, even if we could be sure, at this distance of time, what they were, are irrelevant to interpreting and understanding the Bible. Is this correct? How can we decide? How can we determine whether or not cultural considerations are relevant to Biblical interpretation?

The issue of **slavery** has been instanced as a possible pointer, but it remains controversial. Slavery was commonly practised in Bible times and the institution of slavery is nowhere condemned in Scripture. Today we view it as unchristian and contrary to New Testament teaching on the need for us to practice love, compassion, kindness, goodness, etc.² Some argue, however, that since it is not condemned scripturally what matters is how and not whether it is practised.³

In attempting to obtain guidance in the matter it may be helpful to consider some plain scriptural instructions that are generally ignored today. Without perhaps realising it we assume that, while there may be important principles involved, a literal understanding is merely part of the culture of Bible times and therefore not binding on us.

Foot washing 4&5

In a hot, dusty environment when people walked long distances, it was a standard contemporary custom for hosts to see that the feet of guests were washed on arrival (Gen 18:4; 19:2; 43:24; Jud 19:21; Lk 7:44; 1 Tim 5:10). Jesus said plainly that he required his followers to perform this service to one another. ‘If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.’ (Jno 13:12-17) Jesus was here standing custom on its head, while teaching a profound lesson. It was the slave whose duty it was to

wash the feet of guests. For a leader and teacher to do it was quite out of place. The principle is that we should be ready to serve each other with humility and be willing to perform the most menial services for each other. An awareness of this cultural background enables us to appreciate the force of what Jesus was putting across. Some groups, however, have assumed that Christ intended to institute a foot-washing ceremony for his followers. The Christadelphian community has sometimes been criticised as unbiblical because we don't practice it.

Kiss of greeting^{6&7}

'Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss' (1 Th 5:26). Five times in the epistles believers are instructed to kiss when meeting (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Pet 5:14). The principle is clear, that when Christians meet their special bond is to be marked by warm, hearty, fervent greetings. This was to encourage closeness and community among believers. Again, one would expect that it is the principle that is important. The actual physical manifestation will be determined by what is culturally acceptable, not by a literal observance of what the apostles specified. NLT renders it 'Greet each other in Christian love'. Today in the UK, kissing is more prevalent than it was at one time, but it is unusual for a man to kiss a man (that is viewed as 'queer'!). To insist on a literal observance of this instruction would be distasteful to many. It is said that at one time the church was compelled to decree that men were to kiss men only and women to kiss women only – such a scandal had it become.

Posture in prayer

It would appear that Jewish custom at the time of Christ was for men to pray standing (Mat 6:5; Lk 18:11-13). Christians generally knelt to pray (Lk 22:41; Acts 7:60; 9:40; 20:36; 21:5; Eph 3:14) – not followed publicly today in the Christadelphian community. There is no reference to praying while seated. The injunction that hands should be lifted in prayer (1 Tim 2:8) is generally ignored today as is the biblical practice of looking upwards while praying (Mk 7:34; Lk 18:13; Jno 11:41; 17:1) presumably looking skywards in the open air.

Church elders

It is clearly laid down by the apostle Paul that leaders and servants (EHP) or helpers (GNB) in the church [referred to, in different versions, as bishops, deacons, elders (ESV) or overseers (NIV)] should be married (1 Tim 3:2-5,12) and that their children should be believers (Tit 1:6 – all versions consulted except KJV NKJV and RDV render *pista* as 'believing' rather than 'faithful'). While it is not clear, and may be debatable, what are the modern-day equivalents of these ecclesial offices, one might expect that the instructions would be applicable to our recording and managing brethren, if to no others. It is equally clear that these unequivocal instructions are commonly ignored, for it is not at all unknown for recording and managing brethren to be unmarried. Furthermore, the requirement that their children should be believers would exclude many of our current officers from office. Again, the principle is that ecclesial officers should be persons of generally good character that will not bring the community into disrepute.

Several biblical practices are generally (but not always) not followed today. For example little attention is paid to the practices of fasting (Mat 6:16-18; 9:14-15; Acts 13:2-3), of the laying on of hands (1 Tim 5:22; Acts 6:6; 8:17; 13:3; 19:6) and of anointing the sick (Jas 5:14).

It is clear from the above that, while we pay lip-service to many scriptural injunctions, in practice we often recognise that there are principles to be followed, but that sometimes a literal observance is not appropriate in the very different circumstances of today's world.

Things didn't always stay the same

Another consideration that may be relevant to this question is that instructions given in one situation were ignored or altered when the situation changed. In the New Testament, for example, it is clearly stated that circumcision is no longer binding on the Christian. The apostle Paul makes this very plain in writing to the Galatians (5:2-6; 6:12-16) and the council of Jerusalem considered the matter and refused to give place to the Judaizers (Acts 15:1-2,5-6,22-29). In the next chapter, however, what do we find? Paul had Timothy circumcised! (Acts 16:3) Clearly Paul considered that, in the particular context of preaching to Jews it was important not to offend Jewish susceptibilities; doors would be closed to Timothy if he remained uncircumcised.⁸

At the same council, again to avoid offence to Jews, certain dietary restrictions were advised (Acts 15:20,28-29). Later, writing to the Romans (ch 14), Paul made it plain that diet was a matter for the individual conscience that should not be allowed to occasion controversy in the church. Still later, writing to Timothy (1 Tim 4:1-5), any who insisted upon dietary restrictions were to be resisted. Again, the instructions given were varied according to the particular circumstances and needs of the situation.

The believer's duty to be a law-abiding citizen is well-known (Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-17) as is the apostles' refusal to obey the authorities' ban on preaching (Acts 4:18-20; 5:26-29). We are aliens and pilgrims on the earth, having no continuing city, our citizenship being in heaven (Heb 13:14; 1 Pet 2:11; Phil 3:20). Paul, however, had no compunction in using his Roman citizenship to claim the protection of the state (Acts 16:35-39; 22:25-29; 25:10-12)

Marriage is a divine institution (Gen 1:26-28; 2:24) being a requirement for leaders and servants of the church (1 Tim 3:2-5, 11-12; Tit 1:6). It is therefore somewhat surprising to reflect that, in certain circumstances, celibacy is commended (Mat 19:10-12; 1 Cor 7:8, 25-40).

Over-indulgence in alcohol is plainly to be abhorred and avoided as one of the 'works of the flesh' (Gal 5:21) and repeatedly denounced as godless behaviour (Pro 20:1; 23:29-35; Rom 13:13; 1 Cor 5:11; 6:10; Eph 5:18; 1 Tim 3:3,8; Tit 1:7; 2:3) – thus giving a scriptural basis for teetotalism, at one time strongly advocated by some churches. Elsewhere, however, wine is viewed as one of the pleasures of life (Psa 104:15), second only to the delights of love (Song 1:2,4; 4:10; 7:9) and useful for its medicinal properties (1 Tim 5:23). Moreover, wine was used in a fellowship meal by Melchizedek (Gen 14:18), was a regular accompaniment to burnt offerings under the Law (Lev 23:13; Num 15:5,7,10) and 'the fruit of the vine' comprises an essential part of the communion service (Mat 26:27-29). Jesus turned water to wine (Jno 2:1-11) and spoke of himself as 'the True Vine' (Jno 15:1-8).

In these instances categorical instructions in one context are modified in another. It is plain, therefore that contextual factors are very relevant to the interpretation of commands that were given.

Further, Paul's comment that 'nature teaches' that it is disgraceful for a man to have long hair ((1 Cor 11:14) is difficult to understand. The Nazirite vow was a vow of special consecration to God when the hair was left uncut (Num 6:5; Jud 13:5; 1 Sam 1:11), the end of the period of the vow being marked by shaving (Num 6:9,18-19; Jud 16:17;), a practice that Paul himself followed (Acts 18:18; 21:26-24). Absalom's long hair was viewed as his glory, though it was also his downfall (2 Sam 14:25-26; 18:9). It does seem surprising that Paul ignored these Old Testament precedents when writing to Corinth. He evidently did not wish to remind his readers of them in the particular context.

What does all this mean?

In the Christadelphian community today, there are considerable differences in the way things are done in different ecclesias which can, upon occasion, generate strong feelings and heated debate. Such questions as: which version of the Bible may or may not be used; the pronouns used to address God in our prayers; the degree of formality and order of service; what part, if any, sisters may play in ecclesial life, worship and preaching including whether sisters may prepare the table for the breaking of bread service; what hymns may be sung and to what style of music and instrumental accompaniment; what styles of dress are acceptable – suits, ties and white shirts for brethren, sisters' head coverings (hats or scarves) and whether sisters may wear trousers; whether serving brethren must wear beards; the colour of underwear that may be worn; and many others. Some of these are matters of long-standing tradition ('It must be right because that's how we've always done it.'). Others are matters of biblical interpretation that may or may not be influenced by cultural considerations.

My appeal here is that careful consideration be given to the practical relevance of biblical injunctions. When must a scriptural command be obeyed literally and when is the literal interpretation culturally determined so that it is the spirit rather than the letter that should be observed?

Bob Burr

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Bible Versions

EHP: Message Bible (Eugene H Peterson)
ESV: English Standard Version
GNB: Good News Bible
KJV: King James version
LB: Living Bible (Kenneth Taylor)
M: Moffatt's Translation
NIV: New International Version
NKJV: New King James version
NLT: New Living Translation
REB: Revised English Bible
RDV: Rheims Douay Version
RSV: Revised Standard Version
RV: Revised Version

Lessons from the Natural World

The Conquest of Selfishness

In the natural world the lives of all plant and animals are devoted solely to their survival and the reproduction of their kind. In other words, all living things are completely selfish and

without pity for others. The English word 'beast', as used in the Bible, simply means a four legged animal but it is often used as a derogatory term for predatory animals, and the term 'bestiality' is commonly used to describe bad human behaviour. However all animals are equally selfish and can only behave as they are programmed to do.

This essential selfishness is built into their nature, it is encoded in their genes so that they have no freewill to be other than selfish and pitiless. So foxes are programmed to catch and eat rabbits and produce more foxes, and rabbits are programmed to eat grass and avoid being eaten by foxes and produce more rabbits. In the plant world all green plants compete with other plants for light, water and soil nutrients. There are no exceptions; domesticated animals bond to humans because we give them food and shelter.

The natural world is therefore a battleground in which all living things are struggling for survival as individuals or family or colony. But the marvel of this design is that there are no victors in this warfare and that all the multitudinous kinds of life are kept in balance. In spite of the fact that most living things produce large amounts of 'seed', no one species (apart from man) has the ability to conquer the earth. I suggest that this balance of nature is what is being celebrated by the declaration that everything in creation was 'very good'. It is therefore inappropriate to regard death in nature as a curse. On the contrary we see plant and animal death as an essential element in the balanced economy of nature.

Anatomically the human body is very similar to other primates. We possess no unique organs. Our bodies are designed to survive and reproduce on earth and we are equipped with the same selfish instincts as the rest of the animal kingdom. But the Genesis record indicates that man is the exception in being created 'in the image of God'. Since this cannot refer to our selfish animal nature, we need to consider in what respect humans are fundamentally different from the rest of the animal kingdom.

The uniqueness of man

Unique in the animal kingdom, man is conscious of self and conscious of God. We are able to look at ourselves and be conscious of an authority outside ourselves. Consciousness gives us freewill to guide our lives and control the selfish animal instincts that guide the behaviour of all living things.

But, it may be asked, if the natural world functions well under the influence of selfish genes, why should humans be different? There is clearly no moral problem in the selfishness of nature because animals have no choice. So why have humans been equipped with the ability to conquer selfishness? The answer is that freewill gives us the ability to rise above the automatism of a purely animal existence into a spiritual realm that is in harmony with the love of God. If we fail to use our freewill to control our selfish animal instincts, we are no better and sometimes worse than the animals.

The problem with freewill is that inevitably it gives us the freedom to make bad as well as good choices. We can either choose to curb our selfish instincts or we can exploit and pervert them. Perversions such as torture, partner beating, child abuse, vandalism, drug trafficking and deliberate drunkenness are not found in animals. But even if we refrain from such behaviour, this does not achieve anything because our freewill is intended to raise us above the animals.

How can we be sure that our freewill is used to raise us above the animals? Since we are genetically programmed to be selfish, how can we be trusted? The answer is that we cannot and for this reason we have been endowed with God-consciousness as well as self-consciousness. From his creation, man was endowed with speech. This means that, unlike

wild animals, we can understand abstracts such as good and evil and change our animal behaviour in accordance with a higher order of behaviour.

All the fundamentals of human behaviour are contained in the first four chapters of Genesis. Man, created in the image of God, was endowed with speech and freewill to choose whether to obey God or, like Adam, follow his selfish instincts and grasp the forbidden fruit. This fruit symbolised the divine authority to determine right from wrong, an authority that belonged to God alone and was later delegated to Jesus Christ (Matt 28:18).

Jesus Christ, 'the last Adam', reversed the Eden paradigm and did not grasp at divine status but conquered completely the selfish human nature that he bore (Heb 2:14-18). Christ's conquest of selfishness is beautifully expressed by Paul in Philippians 2:3-8:

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought not equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death on a cross.

This passage shows that the self-emptying life in Christ is utterly different from the self-seeking life in the natural world. Christ's 'death on a cross' is the ultimate expression of the conquest of selfishness.

The meaning of the cross

The cross of Christ is incomprehensible to many but Jesus explains the meaning in one sentence recorded in all three synoptic gospels:

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

This simple but profound statement tells us three things:

The cross of Christ is a symbol of self-denial.

The cross symbolises a way of living; not a mode of dying.

A follower of Christ must bear a cross.

1. A life of self-denial

The recorded life of Christ shows us a life devoted to others. At twelve years of age he was serving his heavenly Father. In his wilderness trial he resisted urges to use his divine power for self-gratification and self-aggrandisement. Jesus put others before himself. For example, after learning the dreadful news of the murder of John the Baptist, he sought to mourn in solitude, but when crowds gathered he healed their sick and then fed 5000 of them (Matt. 14:1-14). As he bore his cross on the way to Calvary, he comforted the mourning women and even as he was being nailed to the cross he sought forgiveness for his torturers.

2. The cross: a symbol of living

It is commonly assumed that Jesus died by crucifixion, but the record tells us that when the Roman spear was thrust into his side, blood flowed out. Blood will not flow out of a corpse under any circumstances. So Jesus was evidently alive when pierced and the 'lamb of God', like the Passover lambs, died by the shedding of his blood. We are therefore compelled to accept the RSV alternative text of Matt.27:48-5, present in some of the most ancient and important manuscripts such as Codex Sinaiticus, Vaticanus and Ephraimi:

And one of them at once took a sponge, filled it with vinegar and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. But others said, Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him. And another took a spear and pierced his side, and out came water and blood. And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

It was the infliction of this mortal wound that made Jesus certain that he was about to die.

The apostle John tells us that the legs of Jesus were not broken in order to conform to the Passover lamb whose bones were not to be broken. It seems very unlikely that John would then suggest that Jesus did not die like the Passover lambs. This is supported by the alternative translation of John 19:33-34 which reads:

And when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers had pierced his side with a spear and at once there came out blood and water.

Peter proclaimed that Jesus had been ‘crucified and killed’ (Acts 2:23). These two aspects of the cross are significant. In submitting to crucifixion, Jesus is showing how we should live by self-denial. In submitting to being killed by the shedding of his blood Jesus is showing how he has paid the penalty for our selfishness.

3. One sacrifice but many crosses

Jesus asks us to follow him by taking up our cross. Our cross is the symbol of the destruction of our selfish animal nature. In what way can we achieve this? Although we live in a world far removed from first century Palestine, the principles of conduct proclaimed by Christ in his sermon on the mount have not changed. Smiting someone on the cheek was, and still is, the worst possible insult. And Christ’s command that we should turn the other cheek is still a guiding principle.

‘Turning the other cheek’ and many of the other commandments of Christ, such as giving to those who rob us, blessing those who curse us and praying for those who abuse us, are so contrary to natural law that some people argue that they cannot be regarded as realistic behaviour. This argument stems from our animal nature; it is the instinctive response of our selfish genes. We face a stark choice, either we conquer our animal nature or we will perish like the animals (Ps. 49:12).

Conclusion

There are many different ways in which the NT describes the changes that must occur if we are to follow Jesus Christ. We must be ‘transformed by the renewing of our minds’ (Rom. 12:2), we must become ‘new creatures’ (2 Cor. 5:17), we must ‘cast off the works of darkness’ (Rom. 13:12) and we must ‘put off our old nature...and put on the new nature’ (Phil. 4:22-24). All these figures of speech emphasise the fundamental changes that must take place in the mind of a follower of Christ. In this article we have tried to show that, in the final analysis, these changes involve a reversal of our selfish biological nature and that crucifixion is essentially a symbol of this new way of life based on self-denial.

Alan Fowler

Thank you Lord

With prayer we should begin the day.

With prayer we end it too!

To thank the Lord for all he’s done,

For homes, for health, for food.

**We take so much for granted,
We think it's ours by right.
Yet we forget what God has done,
That we're always in his sight.**

**Do we take the time to think
On what is right or wrong?
To read from his most Holy Word,
To praise in prayer and song?**

**No, we forget when times are right
Of all our Lord has done.
We only call our God in fright
When all our world's gone wrong.**

**So let us thank our God today
For all that God has done.
And let us raise our voice in praise
Giving thanks for Christ his Son.**

Malcolm J. Richards

The poem on the previous page was written by Malcolm for the staff of Burrswood, to thank them for his enjoyable stay there. Burrswood is a Christian hospital and a place of retreat and healing in Kent. Their vision is *'To see the sick healed, the sorrowing comforted, wholeness restored and faith inspired, all in the name of Jesus Christ.'* It is a place of breakthrough where lives are transformed through a fresh encounter with the love of God. Typical of this encounter is: an experience of healing, a renewal of faith and a gift of hope.

Malcolm presented his poem to the staff at the end of his stay with them. He explained that his poem was originally prompted by reading Luke 17:11-19 where we hear of the ten lepers who met Jesus on his way to Jerusalem.

*They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice,
'Jesus, Master, have pity on us!'
When he saw them, he said,
'Go, show yourselves to the priests.'
And as they went, they were cleansed.
But only one of them, a Samaritan,
returned to say thank you.'*

ISRAEL – personal jottings

In the last ten years about 750,000 Jews have emigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union. Penniless, and dazzled by a world of credit cards and consumer goods, the upheaval is dramatic, and if elderly, the language barrier insuperable. Only top scientists and computer specialists find they are welcomed. Lesser educated people have to take what menial jobs they can get. When in Russia they felt like Jews, now in Israel they feel like Russians – second class citizens!

Under the Law of Return if you can ‘prove’ Jewish ancestry, the Israeli government pays the flight, finds accommodation (a small flat in a block) but that is it. You have to find work, and if unemployed, social security payments are low and OAP pensions minimal.

When I started pastoral and preaching work in Israel, some 5 years ago, sister Elisabeth Willis (Maidenhead) introduced me to two Christadelphian Russian-Jewish families, asking me to contribute towards their welfare. Yelena Makovskaya, a single Mum, and her daughter Tali, then 7 years old, live in Kiryatshmona on the Lebanese border. Yelena works as a part-time cleaner at the local school. In the war with Lebanon 18 months ago, over 900 Katusha rockets were launched on the township, and Yelena and Tali were in a bomb shelter for three weeks with very little food and water. Thankfully they were rescued. On my visits, I help with some shekels. Yelena has no Hebrew or English but Tali is teaching her Mum Hebrew!

The other family, Nina and Victor Aleksandrovitch, live down south in Beersheva. They are at the back end of their 80s. Victor is virtually blind and very sick. I visit with a Christadelphian brother, Josef Frederic, who is fluent in English and translates into Russian as I say a few words and pray, when we break bread together. We are given a sumptuous meal – borsch, chicken, fish, cheese, fruit, ice cream and coffee. This costs them a month’s pension! They are a sweet dear couple and they reluctantly accept a gift of shekels when we leave.

I mention Josef. Last year he went back to the Ukraine, since, on the death of his father, he had inherited a plot of land. But he was wrongfully accused of theft by the authorities and imprisoned for 3 months. Temporarily released, he jumped ship to Haifa, stowed away, and when nearing shore swam to the beach. He returned penniless and needed help. Thankfully, he now has a job in Tel Aviv stacking shelves in a supermarket.

Another mission – preaching to Filipinos. There are 250,000 Filipino care-workers in Israel, mainly young females. They are paid 300 American dollars a month, have free accommodation, living in-house with retired Jewish people who pay their wages. They send home each month 50 dollars by Western Union, since the Philippines is a poverty stricken third world country. They are naturally sunny happy people. There are four delightfully spiritual Christadelphian Filipina girls. One is Lota Bautista married to Shaun Hayes (who is

English) and whom I baptised in the river Jordan at the ‘Yardenit’ Baptismal Site on August 12 2005. It is incredible to baptise a convert in the Jordan, perhaps the spot where the Lord Jesus was himself baptised! I took a party of eight in a hired ‘sherut’ (large taxi) and we had a joyous celebratory meal at a restaurant beautifully situated on the Sea of Galilee. When in Israel I stay with Shaun and Lota in their flat in Tel Aviv. Lota runs a hair-dressing salon in a shopping Mall. Shaun works in a hotel near the beach, changing bed clothes and cleaning toilets. I baptised another convert, Marina Gamboa, Lota’s friend, again at the ‘Yardenit’ (*Yarden* is Hebrew for Jordan), on Jun 2 2006. The ceremony was followed by the joyful baptismal meal, with eight of us happy together, and I asked the Israeli driver to join in. I explained what it was all about accepting Yeshua as HaMashiach. He was not totally convinced!

A further mission. In Israel there are about 12,000 Messianic Jews. They are not officially recognised by the Israeli government and, by publicly proclaiming Jesus, they can forfeit their jobs. They also suffer persecution from the ultra-orthodox, such as the Hasidim. In Tel Aviv, David Fiquette, an American Messianic Jew, runs an underground shelter for the destitute – drug addicts, prostitutes and refugees. Last year ten Sudanese turned up in robes and sandals, their total worldly possessions. In the shelter there are beds for the chronically sick and a clothes store to kit out anyone in need. Daily Bible readings take place. Cash is always needed for chicken soup powder, coffee, milk powder, sugar, rice and bread. I am called upon to pray over the ill drug addicts who occupy the beds. David preaches that only Jesus can save them from their addiction.

In late afternoons (when it is cool), one day each week, I accompany David and helpers (one a converted cocaine addict) patrolling the streets of down-town Tel Aviv offering sweet hot coffee and sweet biscuits to drug addicts and the homeless. One ‘venue’ is ‘Satan’s Motel’, a 30 room derelict hotel which houses pimps, prostitutes and druggies. The authorities and the police ignore these activities since the vice is contained in this one area, and they recognise that David is doing good work. I have been warned if I upset the trafficking I will end up getting my throat cut! No big deal, the Lord Jesus takes care of me.

We do, of course, laugh and shed tears in turn, but we always rejoice in the Lord. David has a sense of humour and inevitably asks me to read the verse in Revelation 7:9 about the redeemed: ‘There was a great multitude that no man could number’ — to which he adds ‘and all of them are Christadelphians!’ We always have a big hug when I leave.

Hamas and the West Bank. Hamas spell it out: ‘We are going to kill the Saturday people first – the Jews; and we are going to kill the Sunday people second – the Christians.’ Throughout Israel there are Bible bookshops, some run by Messianic Jews. In Gaza city a young Muslim, Rami Ayyad, was converted to Jesus and ran the shop and spoke to all about his new found faith. Hamas fighters shot him in the back of the head, dismembered his body, threw the parts into the street and burned down the shop. He leaves a pregnant wife and two little children.

Bethlehem is now part of the West Bank, which is so sad. It was 60% Arab-Christian but Hamas are driving out these believers. The minister of the Baptist Church has been attacked

and badly wounded. The Christian populace has shrunk to 10%. To get in to Bethlehem you have to pass through the 25 foot and forbidding Defensive Wall which now runs right through the Land separating the Israelis from the Palestinians, 425 miles long. The entrance is guarded by Israeli soldiers with Uzi machine pistols. It has certainly prevented suicide bombers infiltrating Israeli territory and killing innocent civilians. Palestinians hate it and call it the Apartheid Wall, since it indiscriminately cuts through and destroys cultivated fields and orchards on which hundreds totally depended for a living. When doing Bible readings in Lota Hayes salon, a man about 50 years old came in with a tough-looking young man, who turned out to be his 'minder'. The penny did not drop and I greeted them *shalom aleykhem* (Hebrew for 'peace be with you') but I should have said *salaam aleykem* (Arabic for 'peace be with you') since they were Palestinian Arabs. The man nearly exploded. It turned out the land which his family had owned for centuries had been bisected by the Wall and the half left was worthless and his large family had lost its livelihood. He eventually calmed down. We discussed the ever-pressing question 'to whom does the Land belong?' I said: 'The Lord God (Allah), He is the owner, not the Israelis or the Palestinians.' When they left, I did manage an *Allah Akbar* – 'God is great'. Phew!

On my forthcoming visit to Israel, I expect to go to the Saviour's birthplace, and check out if the Baptist Church and the Bethlehem Bible College remain functional.

Table Tennis. I do have fun in Israel as well as fellowship. I am registered on the National Computer System as a qualified table tennis coach. Last year I played an ex-international, and National Coach, a mere 68 years of age! I managed to beat him three games to two. I was presented with a silver miniature 'Fiddler on the Roof', a gracious gift. I get to a youth club in Bat Yam where there is a table tennis team. The club is for kids from dysfunctional families. One 15 year old, whose mother is a drug addict, has to take care of three young siblings. I challenge them to play for 50 shekels a game and I always manage to lose, but it does put a little bit of food on a few tables. The lads look forward to my visits and when I depart it is with *mazal toy* (good luck) ringing in my ears. They are smashing lads from such poor homes.

Finally, to visit the Land of Israel is a great blessing. It is amazing to break bread with brothers and sisters on the mount of Olives, overlooking beloved Jerusalem, a wonderful panorama. One imagines it is the same spot where the Lord wept over the city. It is marvellous to pray in the garden of Gethsemane and think of Jesus' agony and arrest by the Temple guard. *Eretz Israel* – where the Saviour was born, grew up, called his disciples, preached the saving gospel, and where he was crucified and died for the sins of the whole world! Gloriously, it was where he rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, where he reigns in splendour. We can be thankful his presence is ever with us through the spiritual power of the Spirit, by which our lives are transformed day by day.

Thank you Heavenly Father, thank you Lord Jesus, that life is a real joy, and that your love and saving grace rests upon us. We wait in expectation for the coming of your holy Kingdom, when Israel and her people will be redeemed and peace will descend on both Jew and Arab alike.

Bill Davison
July 6 2009

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.’ (Mat 27:46; Mk 15:32) Could his Father have actually forsaken Jesus? It hardly seems likely. Could Jesus have been reciting Psalm 22, and was this what the two gospel writers were indicating when they recorded these words? Possibly, but an alternative is put forward here.

Background

Jesus spent the three years of his ministry preaching the kingdom of God. He did this in many different ways and he showed great skill in using the circumstances around him. On some occasions he spoke about the kingdom to large numbers of people, the Sermon on the Mount being a good example. But he also took every opportunity to talk to individuals, and did this effectively because he had insight into the spiritual state of each person. He did his best to build up a deeper spiritual understanding in every single one of them. We can learn not only from what Jesus said, but also from the widely different ways that he related to others. There is no place for ‘one size fits all’ when we communicate with others.

Such a variety of people: rich and poor, tax gatherers, Roman centurions, intellectual members of the Sanhedrin, Gentile women, even hated Samaritans, were all helped by him. For each person, Jesus had a separate approach, but there was never a social gap, never did he either talk down or show undue deference. He spoke to all without favouritism, he had no ‘respect of persons’. No two conversations were alike. Jesus tailored what he did and said to bring each one closer to God and His Kingdom. Jesus knew ‘what was in the heart’ of everyone. He could take each person’s knowledge and aptitude for spiritual things, and raise them to a new level of understanding.

For example, Jesus healed blind Zachaeus immediately and allowed him to be his host without further ado (Lk 19:1-10). In contrast, another blind man (Mk 8:22-26), whom Jesus could also have healed immediately, required to have his faith built up first. Therefore Jesus initially led him out of the village, then gave him partial sight so that he saw men as trees walking and only after these stages did he restore his sight. (One wonders what Jesus said to him as he led him out of the village; surely he would not have remained silent and missed an opportunity to build up his faith.)

Likewise, Jesus’ approach to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) would have been totally unsuitable for Nicodemus, a sophisticated member of the Sanhedrin (John 3). Nicodemus was given a blunt message for his lack of spiritual understanding – with a rebuke which he was well able to bear. He learned his lesson so well that by the time of the crucifixion he had become an open supporter of Jesus. The Samaritan woman, however, was led over a period of three days into a recognition both of her spiritual thirst and the peril of her moral position.

The Jews

‘The Jews’ in this time of Jesus were a disparate group, united only in their opposition to Jesus. Sadducees, Pharisees, scribes and lawyers came together to try to catch out Jesus in verbal battles, and their animosity was such that they finally engineered the death of their

Messiah.

There are few occasions recorded in scripture where any of the Jews came as individuals with a genuine wish to learn truth from Jesus (with one or two notable exceptions, such as Nicodemus). Most of Jesus' contact with the Jews was on public occasions when they confronted him in front of an audience. In his responses to the Jews, Jesus copied his Father and adopted the tactics God used, recorded in the prophets. For example, in Jeremiah 31:29-30, where God corrects a false saying, we read:

In those days they will not say again, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children's teeth are set on edge'. But everyone will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge.

Similarly, in John 8:39, Jesus corrects false interpretations about their descent from Abraham:

They answered and said to Him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham.'

Notice an important characteristic both of God and Jesus: the primary aim was to bring people back to God. By the time of the pre-exilic prophets it proved to be no more than a small 'remnant'. In the case of Jesus, it was only after the resurrection that the number of his disciples began to be known.

Among the many ways that God tried to teach the Israelites was by parables. See for example, Isaiah 5:1-7, where the prophet recounts the well-known parable of the Lord's vineyard which produced only worthless grapes and ends sadly with the words:

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel and the men of Judah His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.

Jesus similarly spoke of a vineyard in the parable to be found in Mat 21:33-45 which also ends sadly with the words:

Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.

Notice that the Jews appreciated why this parable was given:

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them (verse 45).

In His mercy, God made many, many attempts to bring the Israelites back to the covenant. But after their persistent refusal to obey His word, He eventually turned His back on them and spoke bluntly and unmistakably:

Woe to the wicked! It will go badly with him, For what he deserves will be done to him. O My people! Their oppressors are children, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who guide you lead you astray and confuse the direction of your paths. The LORD arises to contend, and stands to judge the people (Isaiah 3:11-13).

Woe to those who drag iniquity with the cords of falsehood, and sin as if with cart ropes; who say, 'Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it; And let the purpose of the Holy One of Israel draw near And come to pass, that we may know it!' Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight! (Isaiah 5:18-21).

Woe to them, for they have strayed from Me! Destruction is theirs, for they have rebelled against Me! I would redeem them, but they speak lies against Me. (Hosea

7:13).

By the end of his ministry, Jesus was also spelling it out to the Jews:

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' (Matthew 23:13-16).

If we go through the Old Testament, we can marvel at the many different ways God tried to help the Israelites in patience and love. If we go through the gospels and note the number of times that Jesus spoke to the Jews and the different techniques he used to try to open up some spiritual perception in them, as well the frequency with which he responded to their questions and attacks, we marvel at his patience and love. Jesus was the true son of his Father.

On the cross

The way that Jesus conducted himself through his trials, ordeals and while on the cross was a continuation of his whole ministry. Even in the extremity of his suffering, Jesus showed his love for others. He commended his mother to John to ensure that she would be cared for in spite of the disgrace, in human terms, which Jesus had brought upon his family and friends.

When Jesus brought salvation to one of the criminals, he was still showing enormous concern for others. Even with the agony of mockery, verbal abuse, flogging and crucifixion, Jesus could still help – a criminal! Initially abusing Jesus, the thief changed his mind, was converted by Jesus, and came to the conclusion that Jesus was not only innocent but truly was the King of Israel, as the Roman notice over his head proclaimed. Is it not remarkable, that Jesus could make such a spiritual impact on a deviant character at such a time?

And even an enemy of the Jews, a Roman centurion, confessed that Jesus was the son of God. What a contrast with the thief in worldly terms – we truly are all one in Christ!

Does this conversion of the thief and the centurion guide us to the true meaning of 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' It is difficult to believe there was a literal forsaking. Not after Jesus has revealed the unity of Jesus and his Father (and his disciples) in chapters 14-18 of John's gospel. So could Jesus have been making an appeal to those who would understand where the words came from?

<p>Verses 7 and 8: All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip, they wag the head, <i>saying</i>, 'Commit <i>yourself</i> to the LORD; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.'</p>	<p>Verses 39-43 And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "You who <i>are going to</i> destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross. In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking <i>Him</i>, and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we shall believe in Him. He trusts in God; let Him deliver <i>Him</i> now, if He takes pleasure in Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"</p>
<p>Verse 16. For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet.</p>	<p>Verse 35 And when they had crucified Him, .</p>
<p>Verse 18: They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots.</p>	<p>Verse 35 They divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots;</p>

The quotation is, of course, the first line of Psalm 22. This was perhaps one last effort to reach the unbelieving Jews who opposed him: the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes and lawyers. They would be very familiar with the psalm, and should have been able to see the prophecies being fulfilled in front of their eyes. If a Jew would only go to this Psalm with an open mind he would see this fulfilment of God's word. What was particularly significant was that these prophecies were not fulfilled by Jesus himself but they were things that the Jews and the Romans had done to him. In other words, Jesus (or his disciples) was not manipulating them. The detailed and improbable prophecies were evidence of the hand of God, provided a Jew could view the situation objectively.

On the cross, Jesus was thus continuing his mission of preaching in a way suitable for every individual person, whatever their background. For the Jews, Jesus was making one last attempt appropriate to their own knowledge of scripture to find an opening into shut minds: 'Go to Psalm 22, read God's word and understand that you yourselves are personally witnessing the fulfilment of these prophecies'.

One wonders if this last minute preaching effort by Jesus had any success: did any of those unbelieving Jews finally understand what Jesus was about? It would be good to think that some did, and will come with the thief on the cross and the centurion into the Kingdom in due course.

Summary

The ministry of Jesus was to preach the Kingdom of God to everyone who had ears to hear. Jesus not only talked to crowds, he spoke to many people individually, each time in a way which would help each one. He could do this because he had insight into the particular needs of, and knew the best way to help, each one – provided they would allow themselves to be helped.

The suggestion here is that the question 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' was to make one last attempt to reach the unbelieving Jews by directing them to the prophecies in Psalm 22.

Roy Boyd

The Kingdom of God
is like
a grain of mustard seed,
not like
a can of nitro-glycerine.
(J B Thomas)

For Your Library

Change us, not God: Biblical meditations on the death of Jesus.

John Launchbury, 2009.

Paperback, pp 200, ISBN 098240929X

**Available from WCF CreateSpace.com
(wcfoundation.org)**

This little book demonstrates that we do not need a complex theory of atonement in order to benefit from the death and resurrection of Jesus. He died to generate a transforming power to lead us from the way of sin and death to a new and living way.

The title reflects the fact that so many theories about why Jesus died are concerned with finding a way for God to forgive and 'save' us, without compromising his opposition to sin, said to be displayed in sentencing us to eternal death. So God had to find a solution to this dilemma and provided it by requiring the death of Jesus.

John gives three versions of this perspective:

Ransom. God had to buy us back from the devil who had gained ownership over us. The death of Jesus was the ransom price, but God tricked the devil by raising Jesus from the dead. This view prevailed from about 200 to 1100 AD.

Satisfaction. Sin called God's honour into question just as disobedience to a feudal lord compromised the authority of the local baron. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury at the beginning of the twelfth century, taught that the death of Jesus reasserted God's dignity and honour, instead of us all having to die.

Substitution. God couldn't just let us off the death penalty for our sins; so Jesus died instead of us and so freed us from the consequences of our sinfulness. This view, called 'penal substitution', became popular with the Reformation and is still held by many evangelical Christians.

(The third viewpoint is somewhat adapted in a variation with which some readers may be familiar, that the condemnation of human nature, set off by Adam's sin, could not just be cancelled. So Jesus, dying as the sinless wearer of that nature, upheld God's original decision and opened a way for God to forgive us. One writer called this 'heaven's etiquette'.)

All these views were a matter of changing God's handling of our sins. But John Launchbury insists that His purpose was to change us and make us eligible to receive God's forgiveness and by the resurrection of Jesus give us 'a living Lord'. A particularly helpful thought offered in this book is that 'Jesus gave his life' – all of it. I take this to mean that we are saved by his life and ministry, by his resurrection, by his ascension to the right hand of God and by his presence with us now, as well as by his death, which was the cost of it all to Jesus and his Father. (A study of the epistles with which I followed up reading this book, found that 90% of the references to Jesus saving, redeeming or delivering us were to his whole person. 10% specifically referred to his death.) As the author says: 'Jesus devoted his life to bringing us into life' and 'God wanted us to be like Jesus and each to be willing to give up every aspect of our life that we may truly find it.'

In Jesus, God provided a 'mercy seat', a covering, to help us overcome our fear and shame, so that we may have courage in coming to his throne of grace. In Old Testament times as well as now, God has always sought to win hearts and minds. He 'wants to build a society of beings who will love one another through their free will.'

As the author sees it, salvation is rooted in God's declaration of both our sin and his love. Accepting this, we are liberated from our guilt and placed on the path of trust in him, which issues in our participation in his work of transforming us.

John Launchbury emphasises the humanity of Jesus in this work as he shared in our human experiences and temptations; yet at the same time he was 'the human manifestation of everything God is and says' and was himself made perfect in the process. He also has helpful thoughts on Jesus as intercessor and mediator, who does not have to persuade God to forgive

us, but powerfully brings the message of God to humankind, being directly and personally involved in our lives, helping us to overcome our weakness. He thus represents God to us and rescues us from the destructiveness of sin. 'The completeness of his love for us gives overwhelming confidence about his judgment toward us.'

This review is inadequate to express fully the value of the book but, if thoroughly read and reflected upon, it could have a lifelong impact on the reader – even more than lifelong, unto eternal life.

Alfred Ward

Lower Criticism

As Sheila Harris noted in her recent article¹ some of the variants in translation found when we compare different versions of our English Bible can be explained as scribal errors. Textual critics, who attempt to discover the original text, engage in what is termed *Lower Criticism*. My interest in this area has remained ever since, some forty years ago, I was required to study this subject, with only Hebrew, Greek, KJV and RSV Bibles as texts. Fortunately, in this century, most of us have recourse to versions such as the REB and NIV and a good study Bible having footnotes which state 'some Hebrew manuscripts' or 'Syriac' or 'Septuagint'.

Kethibh and Qere

This is a feature of printed Hebrew Bibles whereby corrections of recognised errors are made in the margin or footnote, while the uncorrected words are retained in the text. 'In the unpointed rolls read in the Synagogues, the *Kethibh* (i.e. the uncorrected form) is similarly retained in the text, but no *Qere* (corrected form) is given in the margin or footnote. The reader is expected to be familiar with the text and to know when a word is to be corrected.'²

A deliberate change in reading, due to reverence – not superstition as I have heard some Christadelphians state – relates to the Divine name; technically known as *Qere Perpetuum* (Permanent *Qere*). The consonants of the word YHWH were written in the text but were given the vowels of the word 'lord' giving the English 'Jehovah.'

It may be helpful to know why we have such variations in words or even phrases. Hopefully the following examples will give us an understanding of some interesting verses especially for those who use only the KJV or the NKJV.³

Transposition

Those of us who use a typewriter often fall prey to this type of error and depend on an editor to make the corrections. The transposition of two consonants can be found in such verses as Psa 49:11:

'Their *inward parts* (thought) (*qrbm*) are their houses for ever' (KJV) as per MT⁴
'Their *grave(s)* (*qbrm*) are their houses for ever' (RSV)

Visual Confusion between letters which are similar in form, eg Isa 14:4 which is a taunt against the king of Babylon. A marginal note states that 'the meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.'

'The *golden* (*mdhbbh*) city has ceased' (KJV)

‘The *boisterous* (*mrhbbh*) city has ceased’

‘The *taskmaster*⁵ has ceased” (LXX)

Aural Confusion between letters which are similar in sound. There was an absence of vowel signs before the 7th century AD. eg I Sa 2:16

‘Let them *not fail to burn* the fat presently’ (KJV)

‘Let them *burn* the fat first’ (RSV)

Expansion of the Text

This contradicts the principle that the shorter reading is to be preferred. Most of us know that Psalm 119 consisting of 176 verses is divided into 22 sections each of which commences with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Another acrostic psalm is Psalm 145 but consists of only 21 verses commencing with the consonants *aleph to mem* and then *samek to tav*. However the RSV using *nun* inserts an extra sentence at the end of verse 13:

‘The Lord is faithful in his words, and gracious in all his deeds.’

Another example of an insertion of an extra sentence is found in Gen 4:8:

‘Cain said to his brother, “Let us go out into the field.”’ (RSV)⁶

Wrong Pointing of Vowels which arose because early Hebrew manuscripts did not have vowel pointing. The first example is Isa 7:11

‘Ask it either *in the depths*, or in the height above.’ (KJV)⁷

‘Let it be *deep as Sheol* or as high as heaven.’ (RSV)

The second example is Amos 6:12

‘Will one plough *there* with oxen?’ (KJV)

‘Does one plough *the sea* with oxen?’ (RSV)

Misdivision of Letters so that the words were divided in the wrong place; Jer 23:33

‘What is the burden of the Lord? thou shalt then say unto them, *What* burden?’ (KJV)

‘What is the burden of the Lord? you shall say to them, *You are* the burden?’ (RSV)

Most of us have progressed from writing with a pencil, to a fountain pen, to a biro, to a typewriter, and perhaps even a word processor. We can even use photocopiers to copy documents. How thankful we should be to those scribes who toiled so many centuries ago.

John Stephenson (NZ)

Notes

1 *Misquoting Jesus* in Endeavour 121, June 2009.

2 *A practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew* J Weingreen, Oxford University Press, 1959, p 22.

3 Unfortunately in some sections of the Christadelphian community there is a resistance to the use of modern versions

4 Masoretic Text: the compilation by rabbinic copyists and text editors whereby a fence (Heb *masora*) was placed around the Torah

5 Septuagint (translation of the Seventy) or Greek translation

6 Samaritan Pentateuch

7 ‘Whether it is deep - Ask - or as high as the sky.’ Masoretic Text

Letters to the Editor

I should like to thank Tony Cox, in his article *The elect, salvation and the righteousness of*

God, for emphasising the fact that, in the New Testament, the message of the Gospel is the good news of the resurrection – the risen and living Lord. The word ‘atonement’ has no New Testament Greek translation and the only place in which it appears in the Authorised Version is in Romans 5:11, where it is a translation of the Greek *katallage* which means to be put into friendship with God.

In his allusions to Tom Wright’s book on justification/righteousness, although he endorses the association of this word with law, court and justice, he nevertheless agrees with him that its meaning is in essence the faithfulness of God to His covenant promise to Abraham, of blessing to all peoples and therefore through Jesus now accessible to Gentiles, ourselves.

But his main argument of the necessary simplicity of the meaning of Jesus’ death for us, is surely that the resurrection was a total defeat of all the evils, including death, which had killed him and the total vindication of the whole of Jesus’ life, which then became a living, spiritual power, available and accessible to those who would open their hearts to receive the spirit of the living Lord. Paul writes: ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory,’ and ‘that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.’

How are the dead raised? Reply in 2 words!

Brother Alan Fowler is to be thanked for reminding us that several of our doctrinal tenets, such as the devil and hell fire, are based upon a figurative or metaphorical meaning and not a literal interpretation. So he argues, why should the questions of judgment, punishment, and the fate of the rejected, which have been sadly disputed and dogmatically asserted for many years, not be similarly treated?

But Paul has the perfect answer to the question raised in 1 Corinthians 15:36 in the Authorised Version in two words: ‘Thou fool!’ The whole question of the future life is totally beyond our comprehension in our present state. He shows in the rest of the chapter that the condition of the future body is wholly different from our present experience – what is natural becomes spiritual and mortal, immortal, something we cannot know in this life.

So we accept our future hope in faith, knowing that all is in the loving hands of our God. Let us be humble enough to acknowledge that we do not know. ‘Faith is the evidence of things not seen’ and through this we are accepted.

Sheila Harris

Design Obsolete ?

The Editor quoted an eminent writer (See p.1, issue 120, Dec 2008.) as saying that Darwin dealt a death blow ‘to what was a very poor argument for the existence of God, namely the argument from design.’

God’s existence cannot be proved, but the design argument does provide sound thinking on which to have faith in a mighty intelligence behind the natural order. Did not the apostle Paul, when talking to Greeks at Lystra, use what we see and experience as evidence of God’s existence? Is that not the essence of the design argument, though there have been variations over the years?

We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He

has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy. (**Acts 14:15-17**)

God is not only mighty, but he cares!

Roy Marshall

Response from the editor.

The eminent writer that Roy refers to is Jonathan Sacks, as stated in my editorial.

Roy feels passionately that the/a design argument is valid and helpful and in some sense no doubt he is right. If his quote from Acts illustrates what he means by that, then I am sure that Sacks would be in full agreement, for it is essentially a Jewish statement of faith in the one God, the creator of everything. The argument from design that Sacks refers to as ‘a poor argument for the existence of God’ was probably the one that William Paley published in 1802 involving a watch and purporting to **prove** thereby the existence of God.

Sacks says, correctly I believe, that ‘it belongs instead to the tradition of Ancient Greece and to the idea that the most important truths are those that can be proved.’ I think that he would no doubt agree with Roy that the existence of God cannot be proved **and** that He is a mighty intelligence who cares.

Design is one of those slippery words that can mean one thing to one person and something somewhat different to others. Those who use a design argument seem to do so in order to challenge atheistic evolution and the notion that everything has happened purely by chance. However, many believers and scientists accept both that God is creator of everything **and** that the natural processes that He has used to bring about the present world could be of an evolutionary kind. We all perhaps need to learn to encourage others to abandon atheism without falling out over different views of creation.

Editor

(Readers who wish to see the article concerned can do so by going to timesonline.co.uk/faith, searching for Jonathan Sacks’ contributions to Credo and finding the one entitled *Genesis and the origin of the Origin of Species*, dated 29 August 2008.)

Church Announcements etc.

The Fasting & Prayer Conference includes meals.

Ladies, don’t forget the rummage sale. It’s a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Don’t forget your husbands.

Miss Charlene Mason sang ‘I will not pass this way again,’ giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.

Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.

The ladies of the Church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the basement on Friday afternoon.

The pastor would appreciate it if the ladies of the congregation would lend him their electric girdles for the pancake breakfast next Sunday.

(Thanks to Cyril Marsters for supplying
the above church announcements.)

Beelzebug (n.): Satan in the form of a mosquito, that gets into your bedroom at three in the morning and cannot be cast out.

Even in his last years, granddad had a mind like a steel trap, only one that had been left out so long it had rusted shut.

Frisbeetarianism, n. The belief that, after death, the soul flies up onto the roof and gets stuck there.

Negligent, adj. Absentmindedly answering the door when wearing only a nightgown.

Balderdash, n. A rapidly receding hairline.

If it wasn't for the last minute, nothing would get done.

When everything is coming your way...you're in the wrong lane!