

2011

Next year will see the 50th anniversary of *The Endeavour Magazine* and the committee of the magazine has therefore agreed to make E125 a special issue. The editor requests our regular contributors and others to send him suitable articles, on a wide range of topics that have been and are still of concern within the brotherhood. Contributions from any who have been linked with the magazine since its inception would be very welcome. As the next issue of the magazine will mark its Jubilee, perhaps it would be appropriate to have emancipation and restoration among its themes.

It is our intention to double the number of copies printed in order to send two copies to each subscriber so that each regular reader will be able to offer a free copy to someone else. Please be thinking of someone who might appreciate such an offer. Like other recent issues, E 125 will of course become more widely available on our website about two months after its publication.

In 1961, the first dedicatory editorial made reference to moral, social and intellectual challenges that all needed to be faced in the strength and power of our risen and reigning Lord Jesus Christ. It went on to say that 'we are moved to examine with courage all that we think in the light of the Spirit of Jesus, to distinguish what are the real, the great truths of Christianity.' It finished by saying that 'we dedicate this endeavour to our Lord, conscious of our failings, but ever mindful of His divine power.. We trust that, under God's hand, it may succeed in some measure in clarifying the dynamic quality of our Lord and his teaching in the background of Today, in deepening the spiritual experience of Christ which is the only true spring of service, and appraising all that we think in the light of His call with courage and humility. It may, we believe, be another fruitful outcome of the community's growth, and develop the essence of its tradition to meet the challenge of the twentieth century.'

Perhaps it is up to others to assess whether the magazine has lived up to its expectations but the committee still believes that it has an important role to play in the development of our community as a forum for open discussion. The aims remain what they have always been as summarised on the back cover of this magazine. It is of no spiritual help to anyone not to be able to engage in frank and honest discussion of matters that are of concern to brothers and sisters because of the fear of being charged with heresy, as though all truth is already fully known and understood. We are all disciples and that means learners.

L e s

Boddy

New Booklets

Praying to Jesus

by Les Boddy

A5 booklet, 28 pages, £2 including p&p.

I am well aware that Christadelphians generally address their prayers to God, our Heavenly Father, through or in the name of Jesus Christ. Having been a Christadelphian for over 50 years, I am also familiar with the arguments put forward in our community to support the view that prayers should only be addressed to God and never to Jesus. It is to this latter view that I take exception, being convinced that there is sufficient evidence in the

New Testament to allow that Jesus's disciples may pray to him without feeling that they are bypassing God or dishonouring Him. This booklet is offered in the hope that it might enlarge our understanding and lead us to a richer relationship with the One who died for us. I invite readers to consider carefully the evidence put forward in it and, if they so wish, to respond with frank criticism, whether negative or positive.

Les Boddy

Climate Change, a Challenge for the Christian?

by Laurence Kimpton

A5 booklet, 44 pages, £2 including p&p.

Laurence is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, having been a teacher of Geography, an author of Geography textbooks and a contributor to educational projects on climate change in polar regions.

The purpose of this booklet is to discuss the Christian's response to climate change. As a foundation to a discussion of the various issues involved, the first half of the booklet contains a clear introduction to the science behind climate change and global warming, illustrated with helpful diagrams.

Copies of both booklets can be obtained from the editor.

Details on the back cover.

Cheques payable to *The Endeavour Magazine* please.

This review by Ron Storer first appeared on p 31 of E 11, Spring 1964.

The Design Argument

The Finger of God, published by *The Testimony*
Parklands, Stoughton Lane, Evington, Leicester.

This little book, which is very well presented and illustrated, is issued by the Testimony Committee. It brings under one cover various articles that have appeared in *The Testimony* magazine. These were mainly concerned with presenting the argument for design with respect to a number of natural history wonders. In this, many strange and wonderful details are brought to our notice. The book also affords an introduction to the works of other writers and scientists who have written on the creation versus evolution issue.

The life history of the Yucca moth, the Bucket orchid, the mushroom rearing ant, the Mason bee, the Portuguese Man of War, nematocysts and the battle in that river of life, the blood stream, and other wonders are clearly described in the language of the observing naturalists. Readers will without doubt be left with a sense of wonder and amazement; they will need an explanation and will be more ready to accept a Creating God than a chance Evolution. No doubt the publishers will be well content if this happens.

There remain, however, certain questions and problems that the book itself creates. If the argument for design be thus demonstrated, do not the details urgently raise the question whether the designer was all good? The ruthless setting of one species against another, armed with ingenious and seemingly cruel weapons of war; the disregard of one except as a prey for the other; the offensive traits developed in the world of competitive life, would seem

to implicate God in the cruel world of Nature, without showing any way out of the dilemma.

The phrase ‘The Finger of God’ as used by Jesus was with reference to the casting out of demons and would suggest that some forces in nature are not of God, however powerful and ingenious; and are indeed the subject of God’s action against them. It has to be remembered that the ingeniousness of the resistance of the blood stream is matched by that of the invading bacteria.

The Design Argument is therefore a two-edged weapon. If it be conceded that the spider is a specially designed creature endowed with poison, snare and pincers to catch and dispatch the fly, what of the tick – a degenerate spider. whose noisome functions afflict with all the skill of ingenious device but with no grace of performance. The bloated tick is no less cunningly adapted to its manner of life. Similarly the flea, a degenerate fly, is also specially adapted. It seems then to the present writer that the Design Argument, being based on the fruits of the intellect and hence not subjected to the considerations of good and evil, must give way to a deeper understanding, which we may call the ‘fruits of the spirit,’ in which the Spirit is seen as reaching out against the forces of darkness, chaos and unloveliness. (A treatment of some of the same samples in this way can be found in Hamilton’s book *Let the Forest Judge.*)

The outward pulse of Spirit is followed by the response of the material and organic world and in this freedom of the created thing, there is room for those responses and growths on the intended pattern that the story of nature exhibits. This view finds a place for the travail of nature, the groaning of the spirit, the fall of nature and of man and the Cross of Christ, as well as the ‘wood, hay, and stubble.’

This view would not be foreign to the thinking of Douglas Dewar, with whom the writer corresponded years ago, or with that of Dr Clark, whom he has known since a boy. Douglas Dewar allowed for the variation of the reproductive organs of creatures and hence for the growth of varieties with marked distinction.

What seems called for in these examples is a recognition of the interplay of the contesting forces, the striving of the Spirit and the recalcitrance of the material, at all stages. Ideas of creation which presume a total and immediate victory for the Spirit are not due to nature or to God and savour of magic. If this leaves us subject to the principalities and powers, it also leaves us with God and Jesus at our side and all the thrill of participation in the struggle.

Ron Storer

*The person who thinks there can be any real conflict
between science and religion
must be either very young in science
or very ignorant in religion.*
(Philip Henry)

Greek Gems

11 Kairos

The Greek word *kairos* is usually translated as ‘time’ but it actually means ‘the right time’, the appropriate moment, the opportunity. Jesus proclaims, in Mark 1:15, that ‘the time (*kairos*) is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand’, i.e. has drawn near – arrived, but

not fully fulfilled until his crucifixion, when he declared 'It is finished!'

So God works, speaks and moves when the situation is ready, when the time is ripe to receive his message. This is supremely manifested in the timing of Jesus' birth and ministry and the Gospel message. The world was ready – the Roman Empire with all its manifold facilities – transport, communication, administration etc. The Greek world too, with its language and questioning of the meaning of life, man and the world, was ready for the supreme answer in Jesus.

As we read the word of God we must look first at the time, place, person and situation to which the words were addressed before seeking their application in the 21st century. Context is vital to understanding.

Sheila Harris

Editorial Note

This is a brief note to try to put the record straight regarding statements which have been made in recent issues of *The Endeavour Magazine* regarding Brother Ralph Lovelock. A few readers have been concerned that other readers might be left with inaccurate information about events leading to his departure from the community. While a member of the CMPA, Ralph gave a series of talks on the first eleven chapters of Genesis in the autumn of 1964 at the London Bible Class in the Caxton Hall. The lectures were largely well-received by those who attended but later Ralph came under pressure from other members of the CMPA, which led him in 1965 to offer his resignation, which was accepted. At about the same time, he offered his resignation to his own ecclesia, Watford, but later withdrew it. Adverse criticism came from several sources in the community at large, directed at Watford and particularly to those who did not want to see Ralph disfellowshipped. After lengthy discussions with Ralph, Watford ABs decided that Ralph's views gave them sufficient grounds to recommend to the ecclesia that Ralph be disfellowshipped, as he showed no signs of relenting. At the centre of the discussion was the difficulty, not so much of evolution itself, but rather that of reconciling evolution with the traditional Christadelphian view of the Cross, which required direct descent from Adam.. It was for such reasons and following the recommendation of the Watford ABs, that Ralph was finally voted out of fellowship in 1966.

Editor

The Bible - Witness to God's Revelation

After many decades, the Bible remains for me a book of challenge, instruction and support. Now and then I have owned a book that I have read a second time. But other than the Bible, there has been no book I can pick up and read again over and over and over – and find new insights and guidance for life, and hope, encouragement, peace, mercy and love, as I can each time I open my Bible. Although it is composed of many types of writings, by many authors, and was written over a period of at least a thousand years, I find there a unity of themes and a consistency that is inexplicable except by saying 'this is a God-inspired book'.

On the other hand

The Bible itself says things that have led me to doubt the once-held and simple idea that God dictated the exact words used by the various authors; and have led me to doubt not only that the Bible is the Word of God but also that it is the words of God.

God's Revelation

Hebrews chapter one describes God's act of revelation:

In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe.

The second letter of Peter speaks of this key role of eyewitness testimony, as does Paul in I Cor. 15:

We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty (II Pet 1:16)

The consistent message of the Bible itself is: God reveals Himself to humans directly. He does so by His mighty acts, by speaking to men and women directly and pre-eminently by the life and words of Jesus. People like us experienced His actions, heard His prophets speak, and witnessed the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. These witnesses in turn speak to us. No one in the Bible speaks of God's revelation by saying 'God had a book written', although Paul allows that one can learn his message from his letters (II Thess. 2:15).

Indeed, I encounter in the Bible rather clear evidence that its authors were human. We would all recognize that we can see something of who Paul was from his epistles – we see something of his temperament, his priorities, his preferences for words, and his style of thinking and writing. We see him deal with contemporaneous and local issues as well as eternal truths. This is of course an expected outcome of God's choice to use human witnesses to get His message to us. It turns out God was also willing to allow these human witnesses to make mistakes of fact and mistakes of understanding in order to get His message to us through them. God allowed Mark (Mk. 1:2-3) to ascribe texts from Malachi and Isaiah, plus maybe Exodus, as being a text from Isaiah alone. He allowed Matthew (Mt. 9:18) to say Jesus first heard the news of Jairus' daughter after she had died, while Mark (Mk. 5:22-23) says she was still alive when Jesus first heard about her. God allowed I Samuel 17:51 to describe David as the slayer of Goliath of Gath and II Samuel 21:19 to say Goliath of Gath was killed by Elhanan. God has Luke in Acts 1:18 say Judas died from a fall; Mathew (Mt. 27:5) says Judas hung himself.

Inspiration

All of these observations about the Bible as it really is are thoroughly consistent with what Paul claims about the Scriptures in II Timothy. In the well-known text, he says:

You have known the sacred scriptures which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

Paul has in mind the Old Testament only – there was no New Testament when he wrote this. The Christian community extended these teachings to cover the New Testament once it came to be written and defined.

Paul says the Bible is inspired. No other explanation can account for my decades-long attraction to the Bible as described in my first paragraph. He says it gives wisdom. He says it is profitable (useful) for many things. Yes, it is. I gain wisdom and profit from the Bible again and again. That I return to it over and over can have no other explanation. But notice carefully, Paul does NOT claim it is Gods' exact words. He does not claim it is without errors. He does not claim infallibility. Those ideas are our assumptions or our conclusions. Paul only claims it gives wisdom and is profitable.

Authority

If the Bible is 'wise', 'profitable' and 'inspired', but not the words of God, where then do we find an authoritative answer to our questions and an authoritative statement of the Gospel message. To that, the Bible's own answer is not 'read me' but 'listen to your teachers'. In early Hebrews we find a description of the process of learning the gospel message ('announced originally through the Lord, it was confirmed for us by those who had heard', Heb 2:3b). The traditions – in the good sense, God's traditions – were handed down leader to leader (II Tim. 2:2, I Cor. 15:3). Paul just before he talks with Timothy about inspiration

says ‘you have followed my teaching, way of life....’ and ‘remain faithful to what you have learned and believed, because you know from whom you learned it.’ In Hebrews we read the advice to ‘remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you.’ The community and its leaders were the way individuals learned the message and doctrines of the Gospel back then. The authoritative apostolic traditions, their witness to Jesus, did at least in part eventually get written down and made into a readable book – the New Testament. So we can listen to at least a part of the apostolic witness and understandings even today. Yet that is not enough. Leaders and teachers are still required to help us understand what we are reading and to define the authoritative understandings of the gospel. In all Christian communities, including Christadelphians, leaders define the truths to be believed, define what is outside the bounds of acceptable, and the community enforces conformity. Let us recall that we ourselves came to believe because we listened to the witness of leaders, or of other believers who had heard them. Clearly in my own case I first believed not at all from my own Bible study but from the witness of grandparents and ecclesial elders whom I trusted. The church, the community, therefore its leaders, were and are the ‘pillar and support of the truth’ (I Tim 3:15).

The Bible says

When then a question arises, can we answer it by saying ‘well, the Bible says . . .’? Sometimes perhaps so. At other times it’s not so straightforward. One cannot arrive at a correct view of the place of women in the meeting by simply quoting Paul’s words as though they are a new law or principle valid for all times and cultures. One must take into account the cultural implications of head coverings and women speaking and teaching that prevailed in Paul’s generation and in Corinth, and blend that with how Jesus treated the women who followed him, Paul’s other statement about ‘there is not male and female, you are all one in Christ’, and the New Testament evidence for women taking active roles of ministry. One cannot take the case of Saul and the Amalekites, and Samuel’s instructions from God (I Sam. 15:1-3), as evidence that God approves of genocide. Reconciliation of this text with the message of God’s love for all brought to us, revealed to us, by Jesus, is difficult. We perhaps need to simply allow that the narrator of Samuel understood God’s ways incorrectly, and wrote down what he humanly thought must have been true. One cannot take it as a simple historical fact that a person named Methuselah lived nine hundred and sixty nine years in the same sense that my grandfather lived 95 years.

What the Bible is

So the Bible is not the direct words of God. It is not our sole authority. The Bible itself is not the revelation of God, it is the human witness to the revelation of God. It is a human report on the Word of God, as spoken by prophets and Jesus. It is a human report of the Word of God, as revealed in the person of Jesus and in all the mighty deeds God did throughout the history of Israel and in the life of Jesus. It is the God-inspired human record of God’s revelation of Himself. In that sense, we encounter in the Bible the Word of God, and can even call the Bible the Word of God.

It is the Word of God filtered through and expressed by humans. Sometimes, it seems it does not manage to go beyond what the human authors understood in their time and place. Other times, it seems to express a delightful and surprising understanding of God and His plans that we suspect the human authors failed to understand when they wrote (for example, the ways in which the story of Abraham and Isaac anticipates the work of Jesus). Such is the impact of its inspiration. All of the delightful interconnections among parts of the Bible are there, often perhaps unrecognized by the authors, as a result of inspiration. All of the fulfilled prophecies are there because the prophets did indeed hear the Word of God. God’s revelation lying behind the text of the Bible is true, powerful, and authoritative.

This is all wonderful news! We need not be troubled by mistakes and inconsistencies

about facts in the Bible. They are to be expected. The un-Christ like advocacy of violence and the ethnic hatreds of the Old Testament need not trouble us. Instructions about behavior, in the Old Testament, in the Gospels, and in Paul's epistles, need to be read in light of the culture of the time and place in which they were written, and then we can decide how they apply to us today. We need to be careful to read Jesus' words with a clear understanding of how He might use Semitic hyperbole to get His point across – not always taking Him literally.

We can pick up a Bible and have a delightful conversation, through its words, with Paul and John, with Isaiah and Malachi, and with all the others, and finally with Jesus. Let them teach us. Hear what they have to say about our lives, both forever and in the week to come. We can let the Bible train us for righteousness and equip us for good works, no longer distracted by a need to be sure it is 101% historically accurate and theologically consistent. We can hear God and His revelation through the authors, and let God through them love us. Listen, think, pray, and be transformed by these wonderful writings of the witnesses to God's revelation.

Jim Bahr

Are there limits to fruitful discussion?

Most Christian communities express their position, their beliefs and practices in a creed, confession or statement of faith. This may be rigid and establish the conditions upon which one may be a member of that community or may serve as a general guide, within which there is a good deal of flexibility.

All would recognise in theory that a full understanding of God is beyond us and that we should tread carefully and reverently when we define divine things. 'Who has known the mind of the Lord?' But enough may be understood to bring us into a measure of fellowship with the eternal God, and on that basis with one another. We may also recognise that any two people reading the same document, such as any part of the Bible, will bring to the reading a whole range of experience and variety in understanding the meaning of words. This means that there will be a need for interpretation and defining what we mean by what we say. Such defining can be the basis of valuable exchanges of views and growth in knowledge and wisdom.

The Christadelphian community has its Statements of Faith, which cover mainly common ground. Most members acquiesce in these, though only a minority would claim to be familiar with all the subtleties in them, born of earlier theological controversies. The Statement of Faith is regarded as the standard by which the acceptability of members may be judged in the event of a disagreement. Generally speaking, this leaves a lot of scope for exploration and differing views on issues not covered by the Statement. These are seen as legitimate areas of discussion and, although occasionally they may generate more heat than light, only in extreme cases do they lead to unbrotherly strife and division. But where is the line to be drawn, between legitimate exploration on the one hand and rocking the foundations on the other?

May I suggest an example? Let us listen in to a discussion of the Judgement Seat of Christ among a group of brothers and sisters. Two scriptures are before us in particular: 'We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body' (**2 Cor 5.10**)

'We shall all stand before the judgment seat of God, for it is written: 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me and every tongue shall give praise to God.' So each of us shall

give account of himself to God.’ (Rom 14.10-12)

One member asks what believers visualise when they read those words. One quotes Christadelphian pioneer writings, which expected that there would be a major tribunal held in the mountains of Sinai of all those raised from the dead, to assess their worthiness to enter the kingdom of God about to be established. Some of the group feel that this is speculation with no real foundation; others feel that God would not be so cruel as to keep people waiting up to forty years to hear the verdict; then others say surely one’s salvation is not a matter of doubt: ‘it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom’ & ‘there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.’ And each of these passages is looked up and alternative perspectives expressed on them. The second leads to an extensive discussion of whether the law of the Spirit of Life freeing us from the law of sin and death makes it unnecessary to have a probing investigation of a person’s life. He or she will either have walked by the Spirit or not. No totting up of good and bad and striking a balance will be necessary, say some.

Another remembers a very well-respected brother suggesting years ago that the judgment seat is a metaphor and that in a flash the whole lives of the resurrected believers will flash before them and they will know immediately in themselves whether they are ‘worthy’ or not to enter the joy of their Lord. And the word ‘worthy’ is the subject of some debate, as salvation is never earned, but is the gift of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. Someone in the group points out that the text does use the language of a court scene, and queries whether we are entitled to interpret it in any other way than individual examination of their record. This leads on to discussion of the parables of judgment: the wise and foolish virgins – what is oil in your lamp? – and the gathering of all nations to be judged on whether they fed and supported Christ as found in his brethren – why does Jesus say ‘all nations will be gathered’, yet the tone of his words is more to individuals?

Well, by now they have a number of alternative views upon the table and agree to continue the discussion the following week or weeks. So far the discussion has been good-natured and no one is accusing others of being heretics. The matter is apparently one where variation of view is legitimate. In the ensuing discussions, the following matters arise, some more directly relevant than others, yet all have some connection with the judgement seat and the basis of judgement:

1. Who is raised? There is a debate on whether it is only the baptised or whether it is those with the knowledge of the gospel who are raised; one of the number has knowledge of the controversies on this issue and most feel it ought never to have become a source of strife between brothers and sisters, leaving it to God to raise whom he will. A bypath takes up a whole evening on whether baptism lifts one out of ‘Adamic Condemnation’, so that without it you are not accountable and will not appear before the judgment seat, whether it is in a flash or over a period of 40 years. Some think this view makes God the victim of his own laws, and he is unable to mete out justice if a knowledgeable but wicked person has not been baptised. This discussion gets a little less good-natured than the earlier ones. However they proceed.

2. Was it possible for believers less eminent than the Apostle Paul to say ‘I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award me on that day’, and he seems to answer our question by adding ‘and not to me only but also to all who have loved his appearing’. This leads to much looking up of scriptures which suggest that believers enter into life eternal on the basis of the whole tenor of their life rooted in Christ and led by the Spirit, not upon a record of every little good and bad deed done in the course of life, though there is 2 Cor.5:10.

3. The study widens into the rewards and punishment approach often adopted by the prophets, which suggests that God punished Israel and Judah and is a God of ongoing judgment, but this also leads to a discussion of how the innocent suffer as well as the guilty in such situations. Some mention the tower of Siloam falling on people who were not sinners more than others who did not so suffer.

4. 'God is love' occupies a lot of attention. 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life'. Some think this places a question mark over the whole idea of a judgement seat, and that it is to be treated symbolically. Some are worried that we are in danger of believing in an easy-going God. Someone raises the difficulty of God visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations, but another uses the well know evasive phrase: 'Ah well, what that means is that God is merciful for 1000s of generations, but punishes only for three or four.' Perhaps we should not say 'what that means . . .' when we find a 'difficult' passage, but rather say; 'This could mean. . .'

5. Then one member of the group innocently raises an issue: 'I've been thinking, will there be more people raised from the dead than we usually think? In 1 Peter 4 there is reference to seeming unbelievers being raised to give account of themselves 'to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead'. But another joins in and asks 'What about the billions of people alive today and those in former generations, who never heard of Jesus in a meaningful way, will they be raised to get a chance. Wouldn't that fit with our understanding of a just God. Surely they wouldn't just perish when they never had a chance?'

And at this point the smooth running of discussion collapses. Voices are raised 'But you are denying the truth'; 'You are falling victim to the easy- going God', 'Paul says they are without excuse', and then someone cries out 'You are denying the Statement of Faith', as if that made sensible discussion of what is a real problem to one person out of the question.

This little parable is offered to help us to determine whether there are limits to fruitful discussion. Should everything be open to discussion and cries of heresy be restrained, while dispassionate exploration takes place in the course of which we may discover new aspects of the gospel and be drawn closer to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus.

Alfred Ward

There are three great questions which in life we have over and over to answer:
Is it right or wrong? Is it true or false? Is it beautiful or ugly?
Our education ought to help us to answer these questions.

(John Lubbock)

The 'silly question' is the first intimation of some totally new development.

(Alfred North Whitehead)

Time – In the Old Testament

Time like an ever rolling stream bears all its sons away.' I often think of these words when I attend funerals of friends, when I am also reminded that 'the days of our years are threescore years and ten,' (Psa 90:10). We usually consider time as a dimension, which can be measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days and years. In our Bible we do not find such

exactitude in the measurement of time.

Importantly, what we do find is that while the Greeks, like many other ancient peoples, believed that history was circular and repetitive, the Hebrews believed that time and history is like an endless line. This is of importance in understanding Biblical chronology. Our method of measuring years, both forwards and backwards, proceeds from a central point in time – the birth of Jesus. We owe this system to the work of the Roman abbot Dionysius Exiguus (525 AD): ‘We have been unwilling to connect our cycle with the name of an imperious persecutor (Diocletian, who was Emperor from 284-305AD), but have chosen rather to note the years from the incarnation of our Lord .Jesus Christ.’¹

One question, which arises, is, how is time depicted in the Old Testament? While the Old Testament does not have a special word for ‘eternity’ there are three Hebrew words, each consisting of an inseparable preposition ‘le’ meaning ‘to’ or ‘for’ and a noun rendered ‘ever’. Hebrew words translated ‘for ever’ or ‘for ever and ever’ (Emphasis is given by duplication) generally refer to time in history, past or future and not eternity that transcends time. Their meaning depends on the frame of reference of the context.²

1. *lane tzuch*, from a word meaning ‘prevailingness’, is translated ‘for ever’ and in the majority of cases refers to history, to events on earth – ‘Shall the sword devour continually?’ (II Sa 2:26). When used in a negative sense it may be rendered ‘never – ‘They shall never see the light’ (Psa 49:19).

2. *la’ad*, from a word meaning to appoint a time or place, is generally rendered ‘for ever’. Though the word generally means ‘continuously’, the word ‘always’ would be a better translation.

(a) When used of God, it refers to His endless activity in history, – ‘The Everlasting Father’ (Isa 9:6). While the RV margin renders ‘Father of Eternity’ another translation is ‘He will always be a father to his people.’

(b) When used of Israel, it refers to its perpetuity in history, – ‘So will I ever sing praises to thy name, as I pay my vows day after day’ (Psa 61:8).

(c) When used of man it means ‘as long as he lives’ – ‘So shall I keep Thy law continually’ (Psa 119:44).

3. *’olam* is the most common Hebrew word and is a very elastic term. Its derivation, i.e. etymology, has not been explained.

(a) When used of past history it means ‘ancient’– ‘Be merciful of thy mercy. O LORD, and of thy steadfast love, for they have been from of old’ (Psa 25:6). This implies that for God (who is not constrained by time as mortals are) there was history before the creation.

(b) When used of the future in relation to God, the idea is of ‘endless in history’ – ‘But thou. O LORD. are on high for ever’ (Psa 92:8).

(c) When used of the future in relation to individuals, the meaning usually. is of ‘as long as s/he lives in history’ – ‘Yet the LORD God of Israel chose me from all my father’s house, to be king over Israel for ever’ (I Ch 28:4).

(d) When used of the future in relation to Israel the meaning is ‘from generation to generation – ‘Blessed be the LORD the God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting’ (the phrase ‘from age to age’ meaning ‘from generation to generation’) (Psa 41:13).

Finally, we may take comfort from Deut 31:8, ‘it is the LORD who goes before you; he will be with you, he will not fail you or forsake you’, and from the words of the Psalmist: ‘For such is God, our God, for ever and ever’ (Psa 48:14).

John Stephenson (NZ)

Notes

1 Cited by Jack Finegan in *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, Princeton University Press, 1964, p. 132.

2 C Ryder Smith, *The Bible Doctrine of the hereafter*, Epworth Press, London, 1958. Acknowledgement for his analysis of Hebrew terms.

A Mountain Top Experience

Smith climbs to the top of Mt Sinai to get close enough to talk to God.

Looking up, he asks the Lord, 'God, what does a million years mean to you?'

The Lord replies, 'A minute.'

Smith asks, 'And what does a million pounds mean to you?'

The Lord replies, 'A penny.'

Smith asks, 'Lord, can I have a penny?'

The Lord replies, 'In a minute.'

Creation and evolution

In 2009, the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of the publication of *On the Origin of Species* focused renewed attention on what many see as the challenge posed by science to Biblical Christian faith. 'Darwin's dangerous idea' is presented as having undermined belief in God, and if you listened to much of the media, you'd think people were simply divided into two groups: those with a rational respect for science on the one hand, all agreed on the mechanisms for evolution and rejecting God, and a bunch of fundamentalists on the other, all believing the world was made 6000 years ago and shaped by Noah's Flood.

The polarisation has become all the more acute with the vociferous challenge posed by the 'New Atheists', campaigning actively against belief in God and criticising religion, often in intemperate and vitriolic terms. Professor Richard Dawkins, probably the best-known of the movement, has attracted a wide following by his articulate, if in the view of critics ill-informed, advocacy of an assertive, 'proselytising' atheism. Atheists and religious fundamentalists alike demand that a choice be made: science or faith; rational thought or God; your brain or your Bible?

But is that supported by the facts? Must you choose one or the other? And does Christian faith, built on the Bible, require you to throw science out of the window?

First of all, the claim that believers are a small minority among scientists, compared to the general population, is simply wrong. One US survey among academic scientists by Rice University sociologist E H Ecklund showed a pretty even split between believers, atheists and agnostics; while another survey showed about 40% accepting, and 40% rejecting, a personal God – interestingly almost the same proportions as in a similar survey 80 years before. In the UK too, though religious belief is less common, it's not difficult to find Christians across all the main scientific disciplines.

Those Christians, like others, take a variety of views about creation. Some suppose a series of creative acts spread over long ages, perhaps symbolised by the 'days' of Genesis chapter one. Some see Genesis as describing a series of 'visions' of aspects of creation over an unspecified period of time. Others point out that the Bible is concerned to tell us that God is ultimately responsible for bringing about the world and life on it, not to explain how He did it, and so have no difficulty in concluding that a long process of evolution was the mechanism through which He chose to work.

This ‘gradual creation’ view is, of course, quite different from the fundamentalist view that the earth is only a few thousand years old, and that creation was very sudden: the world made in a week. But the Bible doesn’t require you to believe that! In fact, the popularity of the ‘young earth’ view is quite a recent thing, and early Christadelphians such as John Thomas clearly saw that the Earth is a great deal older than the 6000 years that ‘young earthers’ propose. Genesis nowhere says the planet is 6000 years old – which is just as well because towns like Jericho were up and running long before that – and it certainly doesn’t claim that rocks and fossils were laid down by the Flood. Those views may be popular with some fundamentalists, but they’re in danger of making Christianity look ridiculous.

So we ought to think a little more carefully about the subject and about Biblical belief. John Thomas, founder of the Christadelphian movement, had some good advice:

‘Investigate everything you believe – if it is the truth it cannot be injured thereby; if error, the sooner it is corrected the better.’

First, what’s the Bible for? The 1970s environmental book, *Only One Earth* by Barbara Ward and Rene Dubos, had the subtitle *The care and maintenance of a small planet*. It’s a description that could be applied to the Bible – because the Bible sets out how to run your life, how God wants His world to be run, and how believers can be part of His plan for the world. It’s above all **practical**; not just there to entertain or to amaze, but to guide what we do.

Then we need to think about what the Bible says – as distinct from what other people think it says, and from the various add-ons that have accumulated over time (extra beliefs for instance that may be common but aren’t actually supported by the text, or people’s **interpretations** of Bible passages). It’s more a library than a single book, and contains a rich mix of literal, figurative and poetic language: to insist on treating it as a sober historical account of events is often to miss the point.

Then think about why the Bible says what it does. If you ask ‘why’s the kettle boiling?’ you might answer ‘Because some of the water molecules have acquired sufficient thermal energy to overcome hydrogen bonding and undergo a phase transition.’ Or you might say ‘Because I fancy a cup of tea.’ Both may be right – but the second explanation has more to do with purpose and practical usefulness, and it’s that sort of explanation that has more in common with the reason the Bible’s preserved for us.

One thing the Bible is very clear about is that faith is **rational**, not ‘blind’. The ancient Israelites were to trust God not just because he told them to, but because they could see what He had done for them and their nation in the past: much of the Old Testament rehearses the facts to prove that point to them. Faith in the Christian sense isn’t, as Mark Twain put it, ‘believing something you know ain’t true’: it’s profoundly reasonable. Galileo was on the right lines when he said:

‘I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.’

A second thing the Bible makes plain is that the natural world, properly viewed, supports belief in God. Psalm 19 says ‘The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.’ Romans 1:19-20 shows that study of the natural world should point us TO belief in God, not turn us away; and Psalm 111:2 encourages that study: ‘Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them.’ So if the natural world points to God, what are the facts about nature?

First, it’s evident from a range of techniques that the earth has been around a long time – something like four and a half billion years. Geology reveals evidence of rocks laid down

over huge ages in widely contrasting conditions; of continents drifting and colliding, and mountains forming; of the earth's surface shaped by ice and rivers: while radioactive dating enables the age of different deposits to be estimated. Second, the physical laws of the universe look suspiciously 'just right' for life to exist – the world we live in would be impossible if key physical constants such as the strength of gravity, or of the forces that hold atomic nuclei together, were just a little different. And life as we know it would be impossible if, for example, water didn't have the very unusual property of being less dense as a solid than as a liquid (if this were not so, ice would sink, the oceans would freeze, and the world would be a frozen waste). That's consistent with the idea 'that a superintellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as chemistry and biology', to quote the (non-Christian) astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle – in fact, consistent with a creative God.

And what about the diversity of life? What's clear is that there are huge similarities between living things, past and present. Evidence from fossils points to animals and plants having developed gradually from common ancestors, and there's even more compelling evidence for evolution now that we can read the genetic code in living cells, the 'software' that determines the make-up of plants, animals, and you and me. Your DNA is about 98% similar to a chimpanzee's (quite a humbling thought) and by comparing the DNA of different species today, scientists can build up a 'family tree'. Evolution says that from a common ancestor, different species developed by a process of random changes followed by natural selection – the survival of the fittest, whereby a variant of some plant or animal that happens to confer an advantage in the struggle for food and reproduction gradually becomes dominant. According to Darwin, a long succession of such changes over billions of years led to the diversity of life today. Darwin of course didn't know what caused the random changes, but we do – apparently accidental mutations or copying errors in the DNA, just as a typist might make accidental mistakes in transcribing this article.

Certainly there are many similarities between living things. Similar designs, perhaps. But are those similarities the result of descent from a common ancestor? To support the view that they are, scientists point to evidence in the fossil record (including, contrary to some claims, evidence consistent with intermediate species) and evidence in the genetic code. Now that we can read DNA sequences it's possible to find what look very much like bits of genetic code 'before' and 'after' key mutations. Sometimes, evidence of the same mutation is present in the DNA of different species – chimps and monkeys, for example.

But does this evidence rule out a creative God? Not at all. While some may take the view that God used the same design elements time and again in successive acts of creation, it's entirely possible that a creator – God – had a grand plan in place, and then allowed a process of evolution to occur, perhaps ensuring that some apparently 'random' mutations took place at just the right time to ensure that over many millions of years, the forms of life took shape that conformed to the Creator's grand design. Ironically, the intervention of a Designer makes it a lot easier to believe in such a gradual process – the odds against a succession of mutations that would lead to organisms as complex as you and me become a lot less forbidding.

Some believers don't go as far as the fundamentalists, and take the view that while the earth is very old, God created each 'kind' (species or group of related species) separately, with only very limited evolutionary processes occurring afterwards. That leads to them being roundly criticised as 'compromisers' by some fundamentalists, but still facing a problem in view of the massive evidence that evolution has taken place.

It is, of course, tempting to some to read Genesis as though it were a sober, literal account of events. But the Bible is not a scientific textbook: since it was written for people throughout history, a scientific account of how God brought the world into being, accessible

to all those generations, would have been inappropriate, indeed impossible. Instead, as we've seen, the Bible blends different sorts of language - literal, figurative and poetic - and to view Genesis as an entirely literal account leads to a wholly unnecessary clash with the evidence of the natural world – as though God had planted the evidence to mislead us into thinking that evolution had occurred! That should sound a warning signal, because if as we've seen, the natural world points TO God, the evidence won't be there to mislead.

This matters, because insistence on the idea of a 'young earth' and a sudden, recent creation has consequences. It is a real tragedy that some, told that the 'young earth' theory is the only acceptable one for Christians, turn away from faith, unable to swallow a view that's plainly at odds with science – whether evolutionary biology, geology or physics.

We cannot be sure about the processes the Creator used in bringing about the rich variety of life today. Some Christians will probably continue to think of creation as a sudden event, or a series of such events. But it's also possible, with the same respect for the Bible, to view creation as a gradual process, spread over aeons of time but all ultimately destined to fulfil the purpose of a God to whom 'one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.' Does that detract from the awesomeness of God? Absolutely not. In fact, a God who can set up the universe 'just right' for life to develop, then know 'the end from the beginning' (Isaiah 46:10) over what for us is a span of billions of years is far more awesome than one who zaps the world into being in six days.

Fundamentalists and atheists would both like to force you to choose science OR faith – one or the other – with the tragic result that many are turned away from faith in God altogether. The truth is very different: science AND faith, evolution and a God who's behind it all, are quite compatible.

David Brown

Further reading

Francis Collins, *The Language of God*, Pocket Books, 2007.

Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: do we have to choose?*,
Monarch Books, 2008.

Darrel R Falk, *Coming to Peace with Science*, IVP, 2004.
(Bible quotations from the ESV).

Holiness

This is an attempt to look for principles to bear in mind as we worship. Although we no longer have to keep to rituals such as those set out under Old Testament laws, the spirit behind those laws remains important and we are able to learn from it. The God we worship is holy and we need to understand the meaning of holiness before we can worship. Deep down we probably know what the word means, although, when asked to define it, we might not find it easy. Concordances tell us that there are two main words used. One describes something that is ceremonially or morally holy but the other is more applicable to this study and means consecrated, dedicated or hallowed.

Principles laid down in the law

Consecration

The first principle is consecration or dedication. To emphasise this, when the children of Israel were gathered at Sinai, they were given instructions that left them in no doubt that they were in the presence of an Almighty God. Moses was asked to tell the people to wash their

clothes and to consecrate themselves for two days so that they would be ready on the third day. Then the Lord came down to Sinai for all to see. However, it was very important that everyone should keep their distance and anyone who touched the mountain would have to die (Ex 19). The priests had to comply with a specific consecration ceremony and this involved the shedding of blood. (Ex 28 & 29). Their garments were symbolic and were said to be for glory and beauty. Remember the high priest's headdress that carried the message 'Holiness to the Lord'.

Singleness of mind

The instructions given in the Law demanded that worshippers should have singleness of mind. It is a principle, pure and simple, with no room for wavering. We should worship the Lord God and him alone. When we think of Ahab, who tried to have a foot in two camps, or the Laodiceans, who were lukewarm, we know without a doubt that singleness of mind is demanded. In these days, when this country is multicultural and multiracial, it may become very difficult to stand by this principle. But a principle it is and we must accept it. When faced with the presence of strangers in their land, the Jews were commanded to show friendship to them to remind themselves that they had also been strangers in another land. It is a positive thing to be friendly but, as far as religious beliefs are concerned, we have to think very carefully. Christianity is not a philosophy but a relationship with God and the Lord Jesus. Our children are growing up in this multicultural society and it will certainly exercise their minds. *'You shall have no other gods before me'* (Ex 20)

Symbols in the Tabernacle

Only the very best would do.

Instructions were given concerning the building of the Tabernacle (Ex 25) and it is quite clear that only the best would do. The gifts were to come from people whose hearts had moved them. They brought gold, silver and bronze. They also brought blue, purple and scarlet yarns, fine twined linen, goats' hair, tanned rams' skins, goatskins, acacia wood, oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones, and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breast piece which were to be used for work in the sanctuary. Then the best craftsmen had to be employed, craftsmen that the Lord had called and whom he had filled with his Spirit (Ex 35 & 36). Their names were Bezalel and Oholiab. God blessed them with skill, intelligence, knowledge, and with all craftsmanship. They were assisted by other craftsmen, also selected by God, whose hearts had been stirred up to join in the work. The work was not mechanical; God wanted only willing workers whose hearts were in the work.

There were also instructions about regular worship (Ex 30 & 34-38). Aaron was told to burn fragrant incense on the altar of incense. Every morning the lamps were to be dressed and every evening they were to be set up. This was to be done as incense offerings 'throughout your generations'. Any common incense was unacceptable; only the authorized incense could be burnt. This was made from sweet spices, stacte, onycha, galbanum, pure frankincense, seasoned with salt, pure and holy was to be put before the testimony in the Tabernacle where God was to meet with the people. They were particularly told that on no account were they to make anything for themselves from the same recipe for it was holy to the Lord. It was the same with the anointing oil (Ex 30). It was sacred (holy) anointing oil, blended by the perfumer from myrrh, cinnamon, aromatic cane, cassia, olive oil. Aaron and his sons were to be consecrated with this special oil so that in order to serve as priests.

Therefore:

- There is a need to consecrate ourselves, not as they did in the tabernacle but in our minds. We have to be clean and pure. Of course we will not be perfect but we know what we have to do when we fail.
- We need to have singleness of mind. There is no room for other gods or idols,

- whatever they may be.
- We must give God the very best.
- Incense represents prayer and we must pray.

Principles from Leviticus.

In Leviticus, there are more laws concerning the holiness of the priests. They were to have no blemishes. They were not to be blind or lame, not broken footed or broken handed, or crookedback, or a dwarf. They should not have a blemish in the eye or be scurried or scabbed. They were not to be defiled for any dead person unless it was a very close relative and the high priest was not even allowed to do that (Lev 21). The offerings too had to be perfect. Again, the blind, broken, maimed, scurried, scabbed, bruised, crushed, broken or cut were not acceptable (Lev 22). Once something had been dedicated to the Lord, whether man or beast, or property, it could not be sold or redeemed (Lev. 27).

Therefore:

- It is the heart that matters.
- We do not give God second best.

Examples from the Temple

Similar lessons can be learnt from the Temple worship. Skilled workers and valuable materials were to be used and Solomon built the Temple in the right spirit.

And the house which I build is great: for great is our God above all gods. But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him? Who am I then, that I should build him an house, save only to burn sacrifice before him? (II Chron 2)

When the Temple was dedicated, Solomon prayed. Perhaps our prayers do not receive the same spectacular response as did the prayer of Solomon but it is interesting to note the reaction of the people who 'bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the Lord' (II Chron 7).

Therefore:

- When faced with the glory of God, we should bow before him in our hearts if not in deed.

New Testament teaching

The teaching of the New Testament is also that these principles should be in our hearts. The reliance on formal tradition is something which angered the Lord Jesus.

Ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. (Matt 15)

The letter to the Hebrews (ch 10) summarizes the new relationship.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Therefore:

- We should not turn spiritual truths into traditions which then become more important than the original teaching. Unfortunately, this is something that all human communities seem to do if they are not vigilant.
- We should be holy with clean hearts. We will fail but there is forgiveness through the Lord Jesus.

Worship

We should be in awe as we stand before the Lord God as we read so often in the Psalms: *'The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble'* (Ps 99). Thomas had this same feeling when he met the risen Lord: *'My Lord and my God'* (John 20) as also did the Apostle John: *'I fell at his feet as dead'* (Rev 1).

Therefore:

- We need to be in awe before our God

Our response to the holiness of God should be to worship him. How can we do this? There seems to be no set way, although we must bear in mind the principles we find in the Bible. There are so many approaches these days from the 'happy clappy' to the silent. But worship must come from the heart. To worship, we must humble ourselves before God. Where, when and how are not prescribed but *'true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth'* (John 4). However, we can remember to

Praise: *I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord.* (Ps. 104)

Give thanks: *It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High: to shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night.* (Ps 92)

Meditate: *Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.* (Ps 19)

Contemplation of the lessons we are given in the Scriptures should give us an understanding of the holiness of the Lord God and also help us to praise Him and to worship Him in an acceptable way.

Lydia

The new Testament does not say that
Christians must lead holy lives in order to become saints;
instead , it tells Christians that, because they are saints,
they must henceforth lead holy lives!

(J I Packer)

The Trees of Eden

Following the creation of Adam we read, 'And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life

also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.’

From this description we learn that the garden in Eden was different from the surrounding natural world. It was a ‘walled-garden’, as shown by the fact that when Adam and Eve sinned and were driven out of paradise, they were prevented from re-entry by blocking a single east ‘gate’.

The Hebrew word translated garden would be better rendered orchard because it was planted with divinely selected food bearing trees. Since Adam and Eve were originally naked, the climate in this paradise must have been tropical or sub-tropical. This would have allowed the growth of highly nutritious trees such as bananas, dates, figs, coconuts, olives, oranges and mangoes, as well as nut trees such as almonds, walnuts and brazil nuts. If Adam had access to such a well-balanced vegetarian diet that included protein, carbohydrate and fat, it is no surprise that Adam was told ‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food’ (Gen.1:29).

In this study we are chiefly concerned with the significance of two trees planted by God in the middle of the garden, trees that teach profound truths concerning human nature and the origin of sin and its consequences.

The tree of life

Regarding the tree of life, Adam was urged to eat its fruit, for God said ‘You may freely eat of **every** tree in the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die’ (Genesis 2: 16-17). In the Hebrew this invitation to eat the fruit of the tree of life is emphatic – ‘eating you shall eat’. This emphatic idiom is called the infinitive absolute and it is also used to express the certainty of death if they ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, ‘dying you shall die’. It is also found for example in Deut.12:2 where we read, ‘You shall **surely** destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, upon the high mountains and upon the hills and under every green tree.’

There is no evidence that the tree of life conferred immortality. The fact that the leaves of the antitypical tree of life in Revelation 22 will be for healing suggests that the tree of life in Eden gave ongoing health and incorruption. So, when Adam and Eve sinned, the death sentence was activated by their being expelled from the garden and so being denied access to the tree of life and subject to the mortality of all living things.

The belief that the tree of life gave immortality derives from a misunderstanding of the words ‘Live for ever’ (Gen.3: 23). The Hebrew word *Olam* should be translated ‘for ages’ or ‘age lasting’. The length of time depends entirely on the context. For example, in Nehemiah 2:3 ‘Let the king live for ever’ refers to a human life span, whereas in Psalm 9:7 ‘the Lord sits enthroned for ever’ clearly refers to divine immortality. In Isaiah 32:14 –15, we read ‘. . .the hill and the watchtower will become dens for ever . . .until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high.’ Here ‘for ever’ is conditional and lasts as long as God decrees.

It is sometimes suggested that the phrase, ‘lest he put forth his hand and eat and live forever’ implies that Adam had not previously eaten of the tree. But the Hebrew tense of the verb ‘eat’ can mean continue to eat.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil

It is commonly assumed that the forbidden fruit was an apple. But Adam and Eve were originally naked, implying a tropical or sub-tropical climate. Apples do not fruit in hot climates since they need a cold spell in the winter to stimulate fruiting.

The notion that prior to sinning Adam and Eve were like untrained infants (as in Deuteronomy 1:39), who could not distinguish good from evil, also seems unlikely because Adam and Eve were created as adults and endowed with a language. If they had not understood the prohibition, how could they have been condemned for doing something they did not know was wrong?

Since knowledge in general is highly rated in Scripture, the knowledge that they were denied was a particular kind of divine knowledge regarding what is good and what is evil. We are therefore suggesting that the phrase ‘knowledge of good and evil’ is idiomatic and relates to the divine prerogative to judge what is right and what is wrong.

A passage in Isaiah 5:20-21 supports this proposition: ‘Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and shrewd in their own sight’. This passage illustrates very well the challenge to divine authority when Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit. This denial of God’s authority was expressed precisely in the words of the serpent which said to Eve, ‘has God said?’

Divinely imposed penalties

After sinning, appropriate punishments were prescribed – Adam was expelled from the Paradise garden and was ejected into the hostile world of nature which was called ‘the field’ (Gen. 3:17-18). Here he would encounter ‘thorns and thistles’. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with thorns and thistles – they are part of God’s creation. But such plants would surely not have been planted by God in a paradise garden, so the penalty for Adam was that he now had to deal with raw nature outside the garden

Eve was punished by being subjected to her husband’s authority and suffering the hard labour involved in child rearing. There is no evidence that the Hebrew word *itstabon*, translated ‘sorrow’ in Gen.3:16, means pain in childbirth, because in the next verse the same word is applied to Adam, who was subjected to hard labour in fighting hostile plants.

Satan was cursed by being transformed into a snake. The common assumption that the tempter in Eden was actually a snake is clearly wrong because the tempter was described as a cunning beast and was changed into a snake **after** Adam and Eve had sinned. The tempter was named snake (Heb. *Nahash*) in anticipation of its fate, a figure of speech called prolepsis. All snakes are obligatory carnivores so ‘dust shall be the serpent’s meat’ is a symbolic curse, as also is the statement that the seed of Eve would crush the Serpent’s head.

These punishments do not stand alone. Adam, Eve, and the serpent, are typical of humanity throughout the ages. Adam typifies our mortality, as shown in 1 Cor: 15:21-22 ‘For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even in Christ shall all be made alive.’ Because, like Adam, we all sin, the tree of life remains inaccessible. We all die because we all sin, as Paul shows in Rom. 5:12: ‘Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men **because all men sinned**’. This verse provides no justification for the notion that we suffer disease and death as a result of Adam’s sin. We die because, like Adam, we all sin. Sooner or later every infant will succumb to its selfish animal instincts.

The concept that we all die because of Adam’s sin arises from the teachings of the Roman Catholic Augustine who believed that following the ‘fall’ Adam’s body became corrupt and that this corruption was transmitted through his sperm to his offspring and so on from generation to generation. This so-called doctrine of original sin is contrary to the scripture teaching that sins of the fathers are not visited on the children. This principle of Divine

justice is enunciated in Deuteronomy 24:16 and the whole of Ezekiel 18 devoted to establishing the principle that we die because of our own sins.

Those who believe in the doctrine of original sin often go further by insisting that Adam's sin not only brought death to humanity but also introduced death into the natural world. This notion is based on an interpretation of Rom. 8:20-22, 'the creation was subjected to futility ...and has been groaning in travail until now'. But whatever Paul means by futility and travail, it no longer operates, so there is no scriptural imperative to believe that God cursed the whole of His very good creation with disease and death following the fall. Paul's teaching in this passage is ambiguous, so we should not be dogmatic regarding what Paul meant by futility and travail.

However, on the question as to whether Paul's statement, 'As in Adam all die' includes death in nature, an answer is found in the fact that Adam was placed in a mature and fertile garden. The nutritious trees of Eden would have needed fertile soil. This depends on a host of living and dying organisms including viruses, bacteria, protozoa, fungi and numerous little creatures such as worms, beetles and millipedes. These organisms are essential for the recycling of dead vegetation, and when they die, their bodies are added to the wonderful mix we call humus. The birds that follow the plough consume the living organisms in the soil and at the same time their droppings return nutrients to the soil, which sustains new life. Thus fertile soil is a microcosm of the world of nature. Death nourishes new life and is an essential element in the balance of life on earth. We have no reason to suppose that death was not part of God's very good creation.*

Conclusion

The two trees of Eden were allegorical, teaching profound lessons regarding human nature. The tree of life informs us of our mortality and our utter dependence on God for a future life. The tree of knowledge of good and evil teaches us that God is the sole arbiter with authority to determine what is right and wrong and that we must submit at all times to God's moral authority and reject the temptation to follow the Satanic impulses urging us to reject His authority.

Alan W. Fowler

Footnote

*Predation and death are an integral part of the fossil record from the beginning. So if we believe that sin introduced death into the non-human world then the fossils must have been laid down after the fall, in about 6000 BC. Some explain the fossil record as the remains of animals and plants that perished in Noah's flood in about 2500 BC., so-called flood geology. A critique of flood geology will be found in the author's *A Drama of Creation*.

PS Our suggestion regarding the symbology of the trees of Eden leads us to a resolution of the ongoing conflict between the views of Robert Roberts and Edward Turney. Although Turney correctly rejected the dogma of the Augustinian original sin, neither he nor Roberts realised the profound significance of the tree of life.

Prayer for Tolerance

Our life is not to praise, or to condemn,
But just to understand. To earn our wage
Among our fellow players on Life's stage
By prompting and by understudying them.
Never to flatter, or with jealous heart

To mimic or decry, but just to show
The sympathy that feels. We never know –
One day we may be called to play their part!

Only to understand! Jest with the clown;
Sigh with the lover; suffer the mistake
Of fools; help on the shy and try to make
Their sensitive emotion all our own.
Those are the rules: it's not a great demand.
But, Lord, how hard it is to understand!

Bruce Hart

The First Account of Creation

There are two accounts of creation at the opening of the Bible, one brief, the other extensive. The first ends, not at the end of the first chapter division, but at verse 4 of chapter two. The second account then starts immediately and continues throughout the Old Testament and on to the end of the book of Revelation in the New Testament. The first account is very different from the second. This article considers the first account and makes some comparison with the early part of the second. It should become manifest why the short first account opens the whole Bible.

Comparing the two accounts of creation in Genesis

An obvious feature of Genesis 1 is the pattern. For example, several phrases recur: 'And God said, Let ...', 'And there was evening, and there was morning ...', 'And God saw that it was good.' This pattern suggests a structure, although it is not followed slavishly. Is the account poetic? It depends upon the definition of Hebrew poetry, very different from English poetry. Hebrew poetry often has a double idea (parallelism), double because it is either repeated or given a converse or a supplement, typically found in the book of Proverbs but found elsewhere in scripture. Genesis 1 is not of that doubling pattern, but neither is it the narrative prose found in the second account of creation from Genesis 2:5 onwards. It is a unique style of writing appropriate to the grand scale of the subject.

The name of God differs. Genesis 1 uses *elohim* and the second account *Yahweh elohim*.

The characteristic word for God's creative activity is *bara*. This word is used only of God's creation, which in modern times is envisaged as creation out of nothing (ancient traditions thought of God's creation as order out of chaos). *Bara* is used five times in the short first account, emphasising that God is the originator of all things. It is a characteristic here; it is by no means unique to this opening account, but does not occur in the second creation until chapter 5, i.e. God's power and wisdom in creation is emphasised in this first account.

Genesis 1 reaches the climax of its creation with man (male and female). Man is last to be created. The second creation starts with man, and all else happens after his formation.

The first account is completed by God's 'rest' on the seventh day. The second account makes no reference to a 'rest.' The implication is that the first account ends in completeness; the second account does not reach completion until the end of the sixty six books of

scripture. The differences are summarised in the table.

	Chapter 1-2:4	Chapters 2:4-3:24
	First account	Second account
God	Elohim	Yahweh elohim
Style	Structured, 'poetic'	Prose
Order	'Man' last	'Man' first
The Man	Jesus Christ	Adam
The Woman	The Ecclesia	Eve
The 'Rest'	Seventh day	None
Creation	Complete SPIRITUAL	Incomplete NATURAL

These differences between the two accounts suggest that the two accounts serve two different functions. Some aspects of creation have been selected to be explored in more detail.

Who is the man in Genesis 1:26?

At first sight, the man in Genesis 1:26 is Adam, made in the physical image of God; most Christians have this understanding. But is this really the meaning of such an important creation of God? And what does: 'Male and female created he them' mean? Perhaps we should look further for scripture's own teaching about 'image of God':

*And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of **Christ, who is the image of God.** (2 Cor 4:3-4 see also Rom 8:29,20; Col 1:15; 3:9-11).*

The New Testament is clear: Jesus Christ is the one who is created in the image of God. He is the one who manifested all the moral qualities of his Father, God's righteousness, holiness and wisdom, all shown to perfection in our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the express image of His person. Thus it is not Adam who is the subject of creation in Genesis 1: it is Christ, the firstborn of all creation.

It was not the birth of Jesus Christ when Mary was his mother and God his Father. Genesis 1 does not refer to this apparently solid creation through Adam that we see and experience as natural men and women which passes away like a vapour and has no continuing value or existence. No matter how real and solid it appears to us at the moment, no matter how emotionally involved we are with it now, viewed from the eternal God, it is no more than temporary. Jesus Christ has shown us the way to the only creation that matters:

the new permanent, spiritual creation which began when Jesus was resurrected. This is the lasting creation of God.

If Jesus is the man created in Genesis 1:26 at his resurrection after the death of his temporary, mortal body on the cross, who is the female? Surely the bride of Jesus, the ecclesia brought to completion at the return of Christ to the earth in the fullness of time:

*After all, no-one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church--for we are members of his body. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. **This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church.** (Eph 5:29-32 see also Rev 19:7; 21:2,9; 22:17).*

Thus, the members of the Lord's ecclesia form the bride. The 'now but not yet' principle applies: by faith we are members of the ecclesia (described in various other metaphors – the temple, the body of the Lord, the kingdom or reign) and therefore members of the new creation in baptism, but the fullness will not be realized until the resurrection, when the members of the spiritual body will be members not by faith, but by sight. We will then fully be the bride of Christ: 'male and female created he them.'

God's creation

*And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. **Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts.** And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which **God had created and made.** This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven. (Gen 1:31-2:4)*

This first account of creation, which covers the whole of creation, ends with the completion of God's work. Which creation is this? Is it the natural creation, the account of which begins in the second chapter of Genesis and continues for millennia? This is the creation which mankind sees and which fills his mind with its solidity and reality. But we are told that man and animals are but 'vapours which pass away'. This creation is not only incomplete but it is temporary, nothing but vanity of no enduring worth, before we pass away like the grass and the flower of grass.

The only creation that has any enduring worth is the spiritual creation. Jesus is the firstborn from the dead, incorruptible, truly spiritual, valuable and enduring. This is the creation that is referred to in that first Genesis account. To us at the moment, it is by faith that we have experience of that which is not vanity, not corruptible, true. God has revealed His mystery, His secret, kept hidden (except in shadow) in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: *Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 16:25-27 see also 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 3:8-10; Col 1:26 2:1-3).*

Mankind at large does not comprehend this 'mystery', this 'secret' of God. It is hidden to the scientists, philosophers and wise in this world. It is only to the 'remnant' chosen by God to whom this truth is revealed. God's wisdom, His truth, is not of this world: *He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end. (Ecclesiastes 3:11)*

Time: God's view, man's view

The concept of time is very different for God and for mortal man. Man thinks of time as linear in the sense that one thing follows another in due order; we understand the history of the world and man's doings as an orderly sequence of happenings. For God, time is not like that. God is eternal:

With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. (2 Pet 3:8)

God can set things in motion and wait for their fulfilment. Time can pass in a way that man cannot possibly plan for, but God's purpose will be fulfilled in His time: there is no need for Him to be impatient.

And there is a further aspect. God has infinite power. He is in total control. Therefore His purpose is sure and steadfast. There is no doubt that God's word will be fulfilled.

For man, plans are precarious: even life itself for the planner is a hope not a sure thing:
Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. (Jam 4:13-14)

In contrast, God can plan for the future and He can absolutely guarantee that His plans will succeed. Hence the timescale of past, present and future is less significant. He can speak of His future plans as if they are already implemented, because He is totally sure that they will take place. This 'confusion' of future as past is a frequent ploy in His word, as a means of teaching those who will listen, about His purpose and power.

*Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, **and calleth those things which be not as though they were.** (Rom 4:16-17 KJV)*

*For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, 'AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,' although **His works were finished from the foundation of the world.** (Heb 4:3)*

This linking of past, present and future is found frequently throughout God's word.

God's rest

By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven. (Gen 2:2-4)

This account of the completion of the work of God and His rest on the seventh day is a prophecy of the final end of His purpose with creation in general and mankind in particular. It becomes the model for God's purpose with the children of Abraham, and the nation of Israel governed by the Law given through Moses. This rest on the seventh day, the Sabbath, is described in detail in the epistle to the Hebrews in chapters 3 and 4 – and then the term 'rest' as the culmination of God's plan disappears.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. (Ex 20:8)

For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:11)

But Israel failed to keep the Law of Moses and their failure is exemplified in the way they either ignored the sabbath or found it burdensome:

Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies – I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. (Isa 1:13)

Here metonymy is employed: the Sabbath becomes a symbol for the whole of the Law of Moses. In this treatment of the Sabbath, the sinful Israelites were copying their predecessors in the wilderness. The vast bulk of the Israelites out of Egypt failed to serve God because of unbelief and were barred from entering the land. Only two showed the degree of faith to succeed, Joshua and Caleb.

The writer to the Hebrews uses the entry to the promised land, the ‘Sabbath’ for the Israelites, as a type of the true rest which God tells us about in the first account of creation. This rest remains for the true followers of God, those who truly believe and put their trust in Him. But in the words of Jesus and the remainder of the Bible, there is very little about the actual rest of God. The Lord Jesus Christ does take over the word ‘rest’ on occasion:

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. (Mat 1:28)

How is it that Jesus makes so little of the sabbath in his teaching, when it forms such a large part of the account in creation and in the Law of Moses? Because the Sabbath was a means which God used to teach mankind.

Men and women are taught the ways of God, and the ways of God are not the ways of men. The Sabbath was a means of teaching men and women that they should leave the ways of their human nature, and serve God. Mans’ ways are labour; God’s ways are resting from the labour of mankind, as Jesus taught in the two Matthew quotations.

Jesus led a life of total service to his Father. There was no human labour, no following the ways of human nature for six days, then devoting the seventh day to God. Every minute of every day was filled by thoughts, words and deeds of service to God’s ways. His total life was a ‘sabbath,’ a rest from the works of human nature. Therefore Jesus did not preach a sabbath: he was the Sabbath.

This is how we should behave. We should follow the Lord and our whole lives should be a Sabbath.

Therefore when the Lord spoke about the future, he spoke in terms of unity with God. There must be no division between human work and God’s rest: to serve God totally as Jesus did throughout his life, is how we should serve God now, how we are joined with Jesus and with God. These are all Sabbath, God’s rest:

The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (Joh 17:22-24)

There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:1-5)

The believer now

God's servants have the enormous privilege of being part of the true gospel now, through belief, repentance and baptism. This new status of leaving the natural creation behind and becoming part of a new fellowship 'in Christ', is described in many ways. The spiritual life means that we are part of the body of Christ, we are living stones with him, we are his temple, his kingdom, his priests. The range of metaphor is great, conveying the brilliant hope in which we live.

Summary

The first account of creation, Genesis 1:1-2:4 is a summary of the whole of God's creation: a statement of His purpose with the world. It provides a suitable opening to the power, grandeur and love of the creator.

The man made in the image of God is the Lord Jesus Christ, and the female linked with him is the bride of Christ, the church of God.

The 'rest' of God on the seventh day is used as a teaching model for mankind to follow God's ways and obtain rest from the travail of human ways. The Lord Jesus Christ was totally devoted to God his Father. This is the Sabbath, the model for his disciples to follow in their lives and obtain the true rest from human nature. The rest of God in its completion is the unity of God, Jesus and the disciples in the new creation, fulfilling the words of Jesus particularly in John 17 and the end of the book of Revelation.

The rest of God, however, is not only something for the future, it is present now for those in Christ.

(I am very grateful to Sister Sheila Harris who, in many discussions, has patiently invited me to look at scripture spiritually.

Roy Boyd

Thou art God

Thou art the peace of all things calm
Thou art the place to hide from harm
Thou art the light that shines in dark
Thou art the heart's eternal spark
Thou art the door that's open wide
Thou art the guest who waits inside
Thou art the stranger at the door
Thou art the calling of the poor
Thou art my Lord and with me still
Thou art my love, keep me from ill
Thou art the light, the truth, the way
Thou art my Saviour this very day.

David Adam

The Lost Message of Jesus

by Steve Chalke, Zondervan, Oasis.

This essentially easily readable book is based upon the belief that God is a God of love, not, as often represented, a judge of sinners and that in Jesus we see this enacted and the Kingdom

of God now accessible to everyone through Jesus. Amply illustrated by personal anecdotes and individual experiences, he traces the record of Jesus' life, showing how it illustrates the dynamic truth that God loves all people. This challenge to the exclusive privilege of the Jewish people caused immediate opposition as well as his extension of care for the outcast, the rejected and the sinner. The Kingdom, he declared, is here now and his message of good news is simply 'God is love.'

The history of Israel is in fact a proof of God's love by His teaching them principles for developing a sound and healthy society, not imposing restrictive rules. It is God who suffers with His people rather than sits in judgment upon them. The Bible in fact asserts the inherent goodness of all God's creation.

He then traces the story of Jesus' life, once more punctuated by live anecdotes, but placing it clearly within the context of the time beginning with his birth, as an illustration of involvement in ordinary humanity. His ministry of outreach to the rejected and underprivileged further shows this inclusive and universal message, interspersed with moving, intimate stories of forgiveness, given and received, to the alarm of the priests. Jesus turned a negative repentance for past shortcomings into a positive change to a new life of love for others, including enemies – a practising non-violence. The whole ministry of Jesus was to accept people as they are and to lead them individually on their way to God, not to impose rules and edicts as the story of Zacchaeus shows and the parable of the Great Banquet, acceptance without discrimination. Jesus washing the disciples' feet at the Last Supper was the supreme demonstration of humble service.

The crucifixion was the vindication of Jesus' teaching of non-resistance. He identified himself with the rejected; he absorbed all the pain caused by alienation from God. But the resurrection was the ultimate victory, the proof that Jesus is the Messiah and his message of inclusion in God's kingdom is available for us all now.

Sheila Harris

About Time

Lloyd Geering

St Andrews Trust, Wellington, New Zealand, 1989

ISBN 0-9597726-7-7

This is the publication of three lectures: 'Shaped by the Past', 'Keeping up with the Present' and 'Choosing the Future', given in St Andrews Presbyterian Church, Wellington, New Zealand. 'The theme was prompted by the reading of *A Brief History of Time* by Stephen Hawking' (p 1).

The verbal system in our English language, and in New Testament Greek, can express past, present and future. However, Biblical Hebrew (which does not have a verb 'to be') does not have such a system. This is hidden by translation into English in our Bibles. The distinction is between actions, which are either completed (the Perfect state) or **not** completed (the Imperfect state).¹

Our attention is drawn to the declaration of the name of God in Ex 3:14, which the KJV translates as 'I am who I am' but the RSV, in a footnote, renders it as 'I will be what I will be.' 'Scholars have wrestled to find the best way to express the original into English . . . because the verb does not mean 'to be' but 'to become.' I suspect the writer of the Book of Revelation was attempting something similar when he referred to God as 'he who was and is and is to come' (p 5).

Dr Geering notes that the language of the ancient Hebrews ‘turns out to be a valuable clue to the way in which we humans relate to time. . . . For time does not exist simultaneously as past, present or future.’ (p 5).

What of **the past**? We have been shaped by the past. and it is only through memory that we retain a consciousness of the past. We experienced this in our ecclesia when we saw a victim of Alzheimer’s disease gradually lose all memory of the past.

(1) History may be defined as the aggregate of past events or as ‘the presentness of the past’ (p 8). We are reminded that the past, which we may admire, at the time of its reality was not the past but the present for its participants.

(2) Yet the past cannot be altered, for it has gone forever. Thus, when we try to reconstruct the past we have only fragmentary information. As more information comes to light, be it documentary or archaeological, we gain a better understanding of the past. Moreover, the prayer of Moses proclaims that time has no meaning with God. ‘For a thousand years in thy sight are but yesterday when it is past.’ (Psa 90:40) ²

How important is **the present**? The only reality that time has is in the present moment, fleeting though it may be. The important point is made that with the passing of time, the ‘present’ is always lapsing into the ‘past.’ Further, ‘the really important thing about the apostolic period for the Christian tradition is that the apostles responded to the challenges of the present’ (p 18). I believe this is one of the important ideas in the lecture, for here we see creative growth rather than stagnation.

1

The future has no present existence. As we well know, the future will often be determined by the choices we make in the present. How, then, do we make these choices? Dr Geering notes three possibilities.

(1) To opt out of making any choice is to fail to realize that ‘not only does time make change possible: time makes change inevitable’ (p 14).

(2) Not all change is beneficial ‘but neither is something to be preserved because it prevailed in the past’ (p 14). We are reminded that the Romanic Catholic Church became anchored in the mediaeval period and the Lutheran and Presbyterian Churches to the 16th century Reformation. Other groups, such as the open Brethren, Churches of Christ and Christadelphians, endeavored to return to the ‘simplicity’ of the 1st century church. The appeal to the past – looking to a particular time and seeing it as a model for the present – leads to the danger of allowing the past to enslave us when the past is glorified. Dr Geering also notes that when this happens, ‘it assumes the character of an absolute, to which all subsequent forms must conform . . . we see this happening in a good deal of’ church life.’(p 11). In my opinion, by neglecting changes in social and cultural conditions since the 1st or even the 19th century, with regard to church practice, the Christadelphians are destined to remain a male dominated community.

(3) The appeal to the future, by using our imagination, seems to me to be the way forward, even though people move through time at different speeds, and the point where they meet have the same present, they will find that they are out of kilter with one another. However, Dr Geering believes that ‘if one successfully keeps up with the present, becomes free from the imprisoning limits of the past, and remains ever open to the future, one is indeed experiencing what early Christianity chose to call eternal life (i.e. ‘life of the age to come’: my translation)’ (p21).

Notes

1 However, the Perfect & Imperfect forms of the Hebrew verb, when taken in their context, lend themselves to a variety of shades of meaning. For example, the Prophetic Perfect may express a situation that lies in the future, but be spoken of as if it has actually taken place.

2 Isaac Watts drew his inspiration for his hymn ‘O God our help in ages past’ from this

Such Is Life! By Lloyd Geering
Steele Roberts, Wellington, New Zealand, 2010
ISBN 9 781877 448881

After having ‘an encounter with Ecclesiastes’, (the subtitle of his 214 page book), Professor Geering concludes: ‘as we face the coming worldwide crises, little could be more relevant than the words of these two Jewish sages, Ecclesiastes and Jesus of Nazareth’ (p 210). A sage is defined in my Oxford English Dictionary as a profoundly wise man. It has even been suggested that, just as there was a school of prophets, there was also a school of sages.

I doubt that many Christadelphians would agree with the observation that ‘it is pretty clear that by his phrase ‘kingdom of God’ Jesus did not mean the political restoration of the kingdom of David’ (p 206). Dr Geering also states ‘once we strip away from the historical Jesus the mantle of supernatural divinity with which later tradition clothed him, the recoverable outlines of the human figure who emerges show him to be more of a sage than a prophet, priest, or king’ (p 32).

We are reminded that the Bible is a library of books and great value is gained by reading each book on its own. After re-reading Ecclesiastes, and only then, I found much to think about by reading Dr Geering’s book, even though he has been regarded as a religious atheist with his denial of the immortality of man, and of the past physical resurrection of Jesus and the promise of a future resurrection of Christians.

Four streams may be discerned in our biblical library: Torah, Monarchy, Prophecy and Wisdom (Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes wherein the focus is on the daily life of the individual). It is true that ‘the Wisdom tradition taught that all strife and conflict could be avoided if only people walked the path of wisdom’ (p 19). I prefer another definition: ‘The Wisdom literature may be called the documents of Israel’s humanism, not in the rejection of the supernatural, or even as intending a concern chiefly with man’s welfare, but because its general characteristic is the recognition of man’s moral responsibility, his religious individuality and of God’s interest in the individual life.’¹

‘Wisdom was most commonly expressed in a form called a “mashal” the root meaning of this word is ‘to be like,’ more correctly translated as ‘parable’ (as in the LXX), even though the English translations often render it as ‘proverb’ (p 17), for in Biblical Hebrew the saying usually involves a comparison. Hence, Ecclesiastes uses couplets, as in 1:6

***The wind blows to the south, and goes around to the north;
Round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns.***

What we find in reading Ecclesiastes is ‘a unity of mood rather than of order’ with Qoheleth (the Preacher) taking the position that a person knows only what through experience and reflection he or she finds out for him/herself: ***I applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with*** (1:13).

Dr Geering believes that two themes may be discerned in the book of Ecclesiastes:

- (1) Vanity of vanities, everything is vanity.
- (2) The best thing we can do in life is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in what we do.

This is actually Dr Geering's philosophy of life, for 'the New Theology of Dr Geering is that God cannot, or will not, reveal Himself manifestly to man.'² In a sermon at Victoria University, prior to his trial for heresy by the Presbyterian Church, Principal Geering used a passage from Ecclesiastes for a text: ***He has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.***

Such is Life is not a commentary, but a book intended for the general reader. It takes the form of a dialogue with the contribution of Ecclesiastes printed in ***bold italic*** type and the 'invention of his responses' in *italics*. The dialogue consists of eight chapters: Ecclesiastes, who are you? — What do you mean by 'God'? — Nature and us — Is life unfair? — Is death the end of us? — Chance or purpose? — Why search for wisdom? — Conclusions about life.

A teacher of Biblical Hebrew for sixteen years, Dr Geering states that his first task was to prepare a fresh translation of the Hebrew text "into the English language and secular culture of the 21st century CE" (p 173). How faithful to the original text is his translation? In my opinion, the result reflects the ideas expressed in his book *Christianity without God*.³

For example, in the chapter *What do you mean by 'God'?* the attempt is made to 'get rid of God. 'As for ***elohim***, we suspect that when your ancient ancestors created the idea, they were, without knowing it, projecting their own human thoughts onto the forces of nature (p 67). Ecclesiastes responds: *in this history of God, as you call it, where would you place my thoughts about God?* It is clear that under the influence of the Jewish prophets you were moving beyond the 'gods' of nature, for you used the term ***elohim*** as if you were talking of a unity (p 77).

In his translation, Dr Geering translates the word ***elohim*** by the word Nature 27 times. I wonder how George Knight, who preceded Lloyd Geering as Professor of Old Testament at Otago University, would view this translation, especially in view of what he wrote. 'Men have created 'god' in their own image in all ages and cultures. At (Genesis) 1:27 we are to learn that the Bible reverses all man's religious conceptions about 'god.' Here we learn that it is not the god of our ideas who created the heavens and the earth.'⁴

How reliable is this 'exegesis' (the process of bringing out the meaning of a text). I believe that Dr Geering often engages in 'eisegesis' (reading meaning into a text rather than deriving meaning from the text itself)⁵ when he translates the word ***elohim*** (God) as Nature. By so doing, he may appeal to those who don't believe that in many and various ways God spoke of old . . . but that in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.

When we come to the chapter *Is death the end of us?*, the verses in Ecclesiastes, which are analysed, are quite familiar to Christadelphians. However, 'most Bible-lovers, should they accidentally stumble upon this book, will surely be surprised by what they read' (p 9). Here is a sample of the dialogue:

'As Job saw it, existence in Sheol was not really life at all' rather it had become simply a euphemism for death . . . I'd like to find out if you thought as he did (p 100). *I'm happy to do that. What I said was this; in the underworld of the dead to which you are going, there is no working, no thinking, no knowledge and no wisdom.* 'I understand that some Jewish sages suggested that, although at death the body turns to dust in the earth, the breath that gave life to the body returns to the God who gave it. Do you believe that too? (p 101). *I don't know what to believe. Who knows whether mankind's breath of life rises upward to the heavens and the animals' breath of life descends downward to the earth.*

'A century after you, some devout Jews known as Pharisees took Job's desperate cry for help a stage further. Although they came to believe that since the world had a beginning it

would also have an end — a Final Judgment. . . It was not surprising that when the notion first took root in Jewish culture it was strongly rejected by traditional Jews such as the Sadducees . . . Nevertheless, it finally came to be widely adopted, first by Jews and later by the two great religions of Christianity and Islam’ (p 108).

But I must again protest: Who can tell us what will happen in this world after we have gone. ‘Paul had an experience on the road to Damascus that convinced him that he had personally encountered this risen Jesus, and soon began preaching the resurrection of Jesus as the beginning of the general resurrection. So Paul really believed he had empirical evidence (the kind you are always seeking) of the general resurrection that was shortly to occur. And though the Greeks simply laughed at Paul when he spoke about it at Athens, his fellow Christians deemed his personal convictions to be quite sufficient evidence for them’ (p 110).

When opening his latest book, I thought it would be worth reading. However, Dr Geering reminds me of those Athenian Greeks who lived almost 2,000 years ago, for he seems to believe that the religious beliefs which we find in our Bible are merely human projections. Perhaps, now I have more appreciation of those words of Paul; ***If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain.***

Notes

- 1) *Israel’s Wisdom Literature*: T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1964, O.S.Rankin p3.
- 2) *Layman’s Answer: An Examination of the New Theology*: Hodder & Stoughton, London 1968, Prof E. M. Blaiklock (Professor of Classics at Auckland University) p 26.
- 3) Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2002
- 4) *Theology in Pictures*: Handsel Press, Edinburgh, 1981, George A F Knight p 2.
- 5) I believe that some Christadelphians are prone to this practice, especially when they try to predict the future.

John Stephenson (NZ)

Personal Story and Apologia

One Sunday morning in my early twenties, I gave one of my early attempts at an exhortation. Our recording brother thanked me for my efforts, but remarked that I had veered slightly towards ‘Clean Flesh’ ideas, which were not in accordance with our faith. He suggested that I study the Statement of Faith. I had never heard of the ‘Clean Flesh Heresy’, so I didn’t know what he had meant, but, worried about my apparent misdemeanour, I obtained a copy of the Statement of Faith. I could find no reference to ‘Clean Flesh’ in the Doctrines to be Rejected section, but learned from item 27 that we must reject the idea ‘that there is no Sin in the Flesh’. Obviously then, the two doctrines were opposed – with ‘Sin in the Flesh’ being the correct one.

From the ‘Truths to be Received’ section (clause 5) I learned that the sentence that God had passed upon Adam had actually changed his physical makeup. It was *‘a sentence which defiled and became a physical law of his being, and was transmitted to all his posterity’*. This then must have something to do with ‘Sinful Flesh’. I learned from clause 8 that this same defiled nature applied also to the Lord Jesus himself, who was *‘raised up in the condemned line of Abraham and David’* and who would *‘by dying abrogate the law of condemnation for himself and all who should believe and obey him’*. The application of Sinful Flesh to Jesus was confirmed by clauses 9, 10, and 12. I learned that God had *‘determined’* the *‘condemnation of sin in the flesh, through the offering of the body of Jesus . . .’* ?

I was well used to hearing brethren speak about the sins of the world, the deceitfulness of

the human heart and suchlike expressions. However, I had taken those to refer to people who sinned by *choosing* to ignore God's wishes and by going their own way. I now began to wonder, from my study of the S. of F., and from questioning other brethren, whether I had understood all this on a purely superficial level and had failed to see the matter clearly. At the time, I did not attempt to question the S. of F. I had been brought up in Christadelphia from my youngest days and it was axiomatic with me that Christadelphians knew just what they were talking about and that they had *The Truth*. But now, the matter of sin had been summed up for me in a terribly devastating and extreme way and these ideas were going to take a while to get used to.

Continuing to think about the matter, I found it disturbing to realise that sin was not simply in our actions, but was a literal entity in our very bones as it were. We were actually 'defiled' by sin through a sentence that affected our 'physical being'! Our very bodies were 'sinful flesh'. The Statement was saying in effect that we were utterly depraved in our very flesh! If we were so *inherently evil* how could we possibly hope to do any *good*? The idea that our human nature was so corrupt that Jesus was sent to have this same human nature destroyed on the cross I found most depressing. In particular, I could not understand how Jesus himself, described as 'holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners', could have had a *body of sin* that had to be destroyed.

These bleak thoughts led me into a depressed and negative state of mind; a feeling of general sinfulness, with the idea that trying to lead a Christian life was hopeless. I now see this period as a spiritually unhealthy stage in my life. (But, had I been asked just what were the specific sins that worried me, I now realise that I would not have been able to name them). This pessimistic mood continued for quite some time until, providentially, I was given a publication that had the effect of snapping me out of it. This was *The Sacrifice of Christ*, Edward Turney's lecture delivered in the Temperance Hall, in 1873. The purpose of the lecture was to describe Turney's changed doctrinal views.

I found the lecture very helpful, just what I stood in need of. He gave far more believable views on the problems of Sin, Human Nature, and Christ's Sacrifice than the ones which had confronted me in the S. of F. He provided a positive outlook in place of the negative state into which I had fallen. His long lecture, detailing all his arguments, I could not hope to cover here; but let me give the kernel of his views which were so helpful in lifting me out of my negativity.

Turney understood Adam to have been made a natural body, a man of living flesh and blood, part of a mortal creation described in Genesis as *very good*. He had all the *feelings, desires, impulses, etc.* common to natural man. But, Turney argued, *'these impulses are not sin . . . there is nothing in man with which the Almighty has endowed him, that is sinful of itself. But by the too great exercise of certain endowments or faculties, he oversteps the divine boundary line, then we have what is called sin, but not till then.'* He further argued that *'sin is an act, not a literal element existing in the flesh . . . Adam['s] transgression did not change his flesh; it placed him under sentence of death.'* This made sense and gave a much more positive outlook. In place of a feeling that we were utterly depraved, it gave the assurance that we could *choose* to direct the natural impulses into right channels. We could *choose* to do good.

As quoted above, Turney said that Adam's transgression did not change his flesh, *but placed him under sentence of death*. This sentence therefore meant that *'his life had been forfeited, or lost'*, he said. The consequences of this for Adam's descendants (of whom he had none at the time of his sentence) was that they all had sinned *'in Adam'* (Rom.5:12). He quotes this idea as expressed by Milton in *Paradise Lost*: *'His crime makes guilty all his sons'*, and, *'In me all posterity stands cursed.'* I think that we have a similar idea in Heb.7:9,10

where Levi is described as having *'paid tithes while yet in the loins of his father.'* Adam, having *forfeited, or lost* his life, was unable to pass it on to his descendants – they had all lost their lives *'in Adam'*.

Turney viewed Jesus as a new creation (as Adam had been), his life coming direct from God. Therefore he was *not* 'in Adam' – His Father was God. *'There were two things required of the "last Adam"'* Turney said: *'one was that he should run his probation after a perfect manner; the other that he should lay down his life for us. He could not lay down a life he did not possess. If his was lost or forfeited as ours is at birth, he did not really possess it free, and as his natural life was the price to be paid, he would in that case have absolutely nothing to pay with.'* Then, to show that Jesus' life really was his own to give, he quoted Jesus' own words: *'Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No man taketh it from me, I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.'*

Turney's lecture made more sense to me than the BASF had done. It told me that I still had *choice* for directing my actions; that human nature was *not* totally depraved: men and women did *good* deeds as well as bad. His views also explained the fallacy of a Saviour who had to die in order to destroy his own sinful body. In contrast, they showed one whose probation had been perfect and whose life therefore had *not* been lost (as had Adam's) through sin. It was this *unforfeited, or 'free' life*, which had been freely given as a ransom for us.

Apologia

On 15th March 2010 I sent a letter to the CMPA regarding the Christadelphian misrepresentation of Edward Turney's views (see E.123). I have an obligation to readers to give my reasons for raising a matter which, perhaps, some now feel to be no longer of importance. You will be aware of the Special Article 'Being a Christadelphian', featured in the Christadelphian magazine in June 2009. In the 'follow-up' article of November 2009 (p.403) the Committee, after insisting that the BASF was the essential 'test of fellowship', mentioned that the Doctrine to be Rejected, 'That Christ was born with a free life' is 'sometimes considered to be obscure'. They stated that: 'it refers to the false teaching that Jesus did not fully share the mortal, sin-prone nature of all mankind . . . often referred to as "Clean Flesh."' As I pointed out, this statement, though perpetuated in Christadelphia ever since the 1870s, was completely untrue – it was a misrepresentation of Turney's views. I trust this will be clear from my brief summary of those views as given above. I think that in all fairness, it is important that this kind of misstatement should be challenged.

Robert Roberts, utterly opposed to Turney's views on these matters, gave a lecture the following evening (later published as *The Slain Lamb*) in an attempt to refute them. Roberts was adamant that the 'Sinful Flesh' idea was the correct one. He was opposed to Turney and his views to the point of fanaticism, (which is clear from remarks made in the reports of both lectures). I am convinced that our BASF is worded as it is, to ensure that the views of Roberts prevailed over those of Turney. Not a good basis for a statement of beliefs!

My personal interest in the controversy that took place between the two men, will be obvious from my personal story. However, let me make it clear that the story is *not* now intended to act as an advocate for Turney's views. I still think, *purely from the perspective of literal interpretations* of early Genesis, that Turney's were by far the more sensible. But many years have passed since I was troubled by these matters, and today I see things very differently. Like many others today, in the light of modern knowledge I now no longer take the 1st chapter of Genesis literally. There are reasons also for not taking the 2nd and 3rd chapters literally. Keith Ward, in his book *What the Bible Really Teaches*, has an interesting perspective on these chapters:

. . . Adam is not the name of a historical individual who lived a number of years ago. The Hebrew word *Adam* can mean ‘man’ or ‘person’, and can be read in the sense of ‘human being’. This reading makes the phrase, ‘In Adam all die’ much more comprehensible. It means: in so far as creatures are human beings, and share in human nature, they are cut off from the Life of God.

The BASF is based on the same literal ideas of Genesis 2 and 3 that gave rise to the contorted beliefs held by, and insisted on, by Robert Roberts. It is time the CMPA Committee dropped the insistence that belief in every last detail of the BASF – which inhibits any personal theological thought and investigation – is a test for fellowship!

Cyril Marsters

Correspondence

Bro Les,

In response to your invitation on p 51 of E123, any comment of mine is of less worth than a simple comparison of the difficulties of editorial Christadelphia with the line of inspired scripture.

First, from p.50 of E123. The official editorial line is seen to be, quite obviously, that though Jesus possessed all the impulses common to mankind, he also had an exclusive, superior power, **not** shared with us, which enabled him to live a mortal life for 33+ years without one sin. I call this the official line because, in referring to it Cyril Marsters calls it ‘the . . . words of Roberts.’ It is therefore patently obvious, even to my simple mind, that in the 1870s, and thereafter, Christadelphia accepted those words and approved them for all time, however English speaking may alter.

Equally obviously, the BASF (also the brainchild of Bro Roberts) also has Jesus with a nature exclusively different from ours. Of course, such a power sets Jesus apart from humankind, rather than recognising him as ‘made like unto his brethren’.

Turning to BASF clauses 24 & 25, I cannot read these without wondering about the claim that, at the second advent, before the millennial kingdom is even set up, the ‘responsible’¹, defined as those who know not only the will of God but that they are required to comply with it, both good and bad, will be judged, the obedient being raised **not** from death to incorruption, as God’s word states,² but from death to judgement and – later – from acceptance to immortality, while the disobedient will be condemned to ‘the second death’. The whole process is officially confirmed as dependent entirely on the verbal confession, one at a time, by each person present, and the verdict pronounced by Jesus based thereon.

If I am to accept all this as true scriptural teaching, I do wish to know to which divinely created heavenly body the wicked, condemned before the start of the millennial reign, are to be transported to serve out their 1000 years on ‘death row’, since John, who received his apocalypse direct from Jesus (as did Paul the teaching of 1 Cor 15) places the second death ‘when the 1000 years are accomplished.’ That heavenly body cannot be the earth for it will be filled with the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, and that leaves room for nothing else!

My simple mind rejoices, however, at the inspired truth that the raising of the faithful dead in incorruption (*en aptharsia*, 1 Cor 15:42) and as spiritual bodies happens at least 1000 years before the raising to judgement of the dead of this age who are evil, plus the good and evil of the millennium, fully supported by scripture, such as John 5:24, where

those who believe on Him who sent Jesus are described in the AV as not coming into condemnation. However, the word for condemnation here is *krisis* – the concept of deciding a matter, usually according to law. That is how my Strong’s Concordance puts it. So John is saying in effect that true believers will not come into a ‘Great Assize’, the term beloved of Christadelphia a century ago or more when Bro Roberts was a shorthand writer in a court of law.³

Is it any wonder therefore that I turn with joy to the simple truth that ‘He is faithful and just TO FORGIVE’ the sins we confess, and also ‘to cleanse us from ALL unrighteousness!’ Remember: this is not our advocate being described but it is Almighty God Himself. Therefore I must join my fellow-servants in singing the wonderful words inspired by 1 Cor 15:

Be sure your labour’s not in vain;
Ye too from death shall rise again,
No more corruptible!⁴

The triumphant way we sing it is all due to Christ’s triumph over sin and death.

Notes

1. Was this the amendment which was inserted to maximize the acceptance of the BSF? If so, what was the purpose of it? Surely anyone who knows God’s will has already seen that compliance with it is essential.
2. There is to my knowledge only one way in which the Greek *egertheesontai aphthartoi* can be translated into English and that is as ‘shall be raised incorruptible’ (1 Cor 15:52).
3. I believe this to be the case from reading (60+ years ago) notes in a copy of ‘The trial: Did Christ rise from the dead?’, also by Robert Roberts.
- 4 This is the end of the last (third) verse of Hymn 256 in the current Christadelphian Hymn Book and must surely have been approved by the Christadelphian Office.

Sincerely – but sadly – your brother in Christ,

Brian Morgan

PS I have just noticed the five word phrase in my final paragraph; ‘faithful and just to FORGIVE.’ They mean simply that the very Justice of the Father is FORGIVENESS! So:

Why should his people now be sad?
None has such reason to be glad,
As reconciled to God!

The Early History of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God in Britain

By William Norrie (**died 1918**) — brother-in-law of Robert Roberts,
1905, Volume II, page 102.

Comments on changes 1864-1890.

A Question of Finality.

This question of the nature of the devil was the first of a number of additions that were afterwards made to ‘the gospel according to Dr Thomas,’ as originally propounded by him in the course of his first visit to this country, and subsequently in the *Herald of the Kingdom and Age to Come*, and which were adopted by those who about this time began to call themselves ‘Christadelphians.’ In the course of a talk that I had with R. Roberts respecting this first addition that he had made to the Gospel of the Kingdom of God necessary to be believed in order to have the right faith, I suggested that, if every addition to our knowledge, or apprehension of the true teaching of the Scriptures upon any subject, was to be

incorporated into the ‘creed,’ as it might be termed, there would be no end to it. To this he replied, that it was not so – that, with the true apprehension of the nature of the devil of the Bible, ‘finality’ had been reached, and there could be no more additions to the things necessary to be believed or disbelieved. Alas! He did not know what ‘heresies’ were soon to be brought in, requiring, as he considered, special abjuration in order to continued fellowship. It was not long afterwards that the doctrine of ‘mortal resurrection’ was added; then came the question as to the nature of Christ, and the ‘Renunciationist’ heresy had to be specially provided for. Afterwards the question of ‘partial inspiration,’ and more recently that of ‘resurrectional responsibility,’ had to be grappled with, and all had to find a place in the ever-expanding Christadelphian creed. All these several questions gave rise to bitter controversy, resulting in separations among those who had previously been harmoniously united in the one faith; and thus leaving one to doubt whether finality has even yet been reached with a creed which seems capable of indefinite expansion, and making one wonder to what dimensions it may yet attain, should our Lord much longer delay his coming.

William Norrie
(Quote supplied by Ian McHaffie)

The Funny Side of Life

Help wanted: Telepath. You know where to apply.

Interviewer: If you could have dinner with any person, living or dead, who would it be?

Applicant: The living one.

There is only one exceptional child in the world...and every parent has it.

A child’s greatest period of growth is the month after you’ve purchased new school clothes.

‘The covers of this book are too far apart’ (Ambrose Bierce’s one line review of a book)

The art of diplomacy is letting the other fellow have your own way. (Anonymous Indian diplomat)

An unemployed jester is nobody’s fool.

Experience is that thing you have just after you need it.

My pastor friend put sanitary, hot-air hand dryers in the rest rooms at his church and after two weeks, took them out. I asked him why and he confessed that they worked fine, but when he went in there he saw a scribbled sign that read, ‘For a sample of this week’s sermon, push the button.’
