

E128
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(*χαρακτήρ*) *charakter*

Truth

(The following editorial appeared in E28, the Summer 1968 issue.)

It has been said that most people can stand little truth. The author of this saying meant of course truth about themselves. No matter how easily and impartially we weigh up others, their weaknesses and their strengths, their virtues and their vices, it is entirely another matter to use the same impartiality on ourselves. We are too much involved emotionally for such an exercise to be easy, or even possible. There is something in the human make-up which does not permit us to stand outside ourselves for a moment 'to see ourselves as others see us' (much less how God sees us). Self-respect is necessary for almost any human achievement, and since we all have failings of one sort or another, self-respect is usually achieved by glossing over our failings. The man of God can overcome this by putting into practice the dictum of Paul, 'Let him that glorieth glory in the Lord,' that is, our self-respect is no longer based on exaggerated notions of our own grandeur, but is derived from association with God. We can be proud, not by overlooking our personal failings, but in the fact that God has chosen us, though we deserve it not. Such a transference of the centre of self-respect is not, of course, always achieved. Disciples may still be unable to face the facts about themselves squarely.

The inability to be frank with ourselves can also occur in a community. Groups of people may be unwilling or unable to assess themselves rightly. Politicians often exploit such situations for their own benefit. A party leader who dwells on national failings is unlikely to become a national leader, but one who encourages people to view the national scene through rose-tinted spectacles may well secure many votes thereby. Nationally such self-deception can be rudely shattered, since it does nothing to fill the exchequer, and no amount of wishful thinking can create material prosperity out of a deficit.

Religious communities risk dangers of a somewhat different kind. They are not usually exposed in the same degree to political leadership, though the temptations to seek power and office by being 'prophets of smooth things' are present, and however little the seekers may acknowledge their motives, this is political leadership, not feeding the flock of Christ. Religious bodies are more exposed to danger in the lack of any immediate and unmistakable sign that things are wrong. No businessman can ignore a deficit in his accounts and convince himself that it is not there. But there is no such simple way of knowing if a religious community is facing the facts about itself or not. More members, bigger collections, better buildings are not necessarily proof of a truly Christian group. One criterion for judging a religious community is the extent to which it can judge itself dispassionately. Good spiritual health increases the ability to judge oneself aright, and such failings as do occur can be frankly faced and remedies considered.

When faith is weak, when much is wrong that could be right, then the mildest and most constructive of criticisms are liable to be met with outbursts of violent anger. A general feeling of uncertainty makes a community touchy, and unless a real effort is made to correct this, it may prevent necessary discussions on the matters which have led to the uncertainty.

Surveying the Christadelphian scene no one will doubt that we have not been well prepared to meet the changing world of the twentieth century. We have kept out of sight issues that should have been faced until it has become painful to many even to ascertain what is involved. There has been an unadmitted feeling of uncertainty as we note that kinds of preaching successful in the nineteenth century create no response in the twentieth. Some hold that the solution is to hold fast to all our traditional ways, and not to engage in any radical reappraisal of our faith. The only merit of this course is that it involves no effort. But a vital Church will not be sustained on an acceptance of tradition alone. Each generation needs to find the Gospel for itself from the Scriptures, and to convince itself that this is what Jesus and the Apostles taught. Of course such a procedure involves work and courage. We will have to put aside the satisfaction of thinking that we know it all. We must be prepared to find that some of the emphases we have been placing hardly conform to the general tenor of Scripture. (Daniel and Revelation are not more important than many other books of the Bible.) We must have open minds to allow the messages of Scripture to come to us, and not merely try to justify what we heard in Sunday School. Only in this way can the vitality of our community in a changing world be preserved, and nothing less is worthy of the Cross.

Wilfred Lambert

A Prayer

Thank you Lord for this brand new day. Give me the wisdom to see its possibilities, the strength to face its challenges, and the grace to be open to its promise. Give me your heart of love to do a favour, to speak a kindness, offer a helping hand, soothe a hurt, celebrate a joy, share a sorrow, or in some small way give of myself in love to another in your name. Amen.

Is Bible Reading Simple?

I remember being shocked when brother Fred Barling said: 'We Christadelphians read too much Bible.' I had always seen the community's familiarity with the text of scripture as one of its greatest strengths. This was supported by the once pretty universal 'doing the daily readings' according to the Robert Robert's Bible Companion. The whole Old Testament was read once a year and the New Testament twice. It could be read in about twenty minutes per day, so it was said. Of course, if done collectively it took longer if you discussed what was read.

It was the idea that this could be regarded as Bible Study that Brother Fred was getting at. The daily readings could certainly make you familiar with the text of scripture – the actual words, including those in the least familiar parts of the Bible. But if the daily reading became a ritual, to be got through each day, there was no time to identify problems and ask questions. Christadelphians generally knew where to find Habakkuk and Haggai, Micah and Nahum, but there was a tendency to assume that it was all quite straightforward and simple and would lead to the conclusions held by the Christadelphian Community. Take it as written 'literally', unless obviously a figure of speech, we were told. Too many questions asked could be seen as a sign of defective faith.

The various sects on the outskirts of the Christian world, particularly those of an evangelical or other fundamentalist inclination, often fall back on the view: 'Well that's what it says; it means what it says.' This simplistic approach misses much of the richness of scripture in its belief that there can be only one meaning to the words. In minor matters (but what is minor?), Christadelphians allow variation in interpretation in a way not possible among the Jehovah's Witnesses sect, where Headquarters determines what everything means.

If we read scripture slowly and reflectively, we will often be confronted with what look like contradictions or puzzles about consistency of message. Our community has faced this in some areas, and in our beliefs, for example about the Devil or Satan and demons, we do not take the text in a straightforward way. We don't believe it as it is actually written. We use our reasoning powers to say it means something else, which we believe is wider and deeper. Often we deal with our inner misgivings by adopting standard explanations, as suggested in books such as *Wrested Scriptures*. But if we really work at understanding what the text actually says, and don't shoehorn everything into a pre-determined pattern, we may have less certainty about everything but be drawing closer to an understanding of the mind of God. God has not revealed himself in the most simple way that would have been possible, but has faced us with a challenge to think with the prophets, apostles and scribes who wrote about Him, to dialogue and even debate with them, and so be enriched in our mind and behaviour.

If God had just given us a simple textbook where the final answers were all presented, if they always meant exactly what they said they meant, with not the slightest ambiguity, we would soon be bored and fail to enter the real presence of holy men of God who wrote under the guidance of the spirit, but still as men and not as angels. We join their company and interrogate them carefully and respectfully, realising that they do not have a clear line which leaves no room for misinterpretation. What any one writer gives us will be useful 'for teaching the truth, for refuting error, for reformation of manners, and discipline in right living, so that the man of God may be capable and equipped for good work of every kind.' This in the second letter to Timothy.

In order to gain such benefit it is not necessary for everything a writer says to be the direct and unexaminable word of God. We find the word of God in it all by the hard work of dialogue with the writers. We ask them what they mean and look closely at the flow of their thought. If they seem to say different things at different times we look closely to see if there any clues as to what situation they were addressing. Being human they often gave different views of the ways of God. We try to see what the truth really is if they saw their lives in this or that way. If they seem to contradict themselves it may be because truth was gradually revealing itself to them in the school of God, where we learn a little at a time and can't expect to get everything quite quickly and neatly packaged up. In fact the Bible does not package its messages neatly at all. The messages even in one chapter can seem to lack any sense of order; one idea or aspect often doesn't follow tidily from another. The book of Jeremiah is a good example. It is as if Baruch left Jeremiah's messages on the table and the wind blew them on to the floor and they were put back in no particular order, but it makes the book of Jeremiah intensely interesting as we try to fathom out why he said what and when.

There may be a good deal of human imperfection mingling with the perfect ways of God in what a prophet may say. His own human understanding or prejudice may be jostling for a hearing, as for example in the various poetic denunciations of Israel and the nations, where the prophet's own lower sense of what God is doing may be out of balance with the divine transcendence. It is this factor that contributes to the need to avoid proving anything about God and his purpose by just quoting verses in isolation from their context.

It is interesting to compare these denunciations and note the variations of expression, where sometimes a prophet will speak for God as about to annihilate Israel and then on the same page in a later section this is modified and a remnant will survive or there may even be a complete restoration. Also human bitterness sometimes creeps into a prophet's threats made on behalf of God, words that it is difficult to imagine as coming from the God who is love. Some of the ways in which a prophet reports the wrath of God are cruel: there is sometimes a gloating over the fact that besieged Israelites will eat their own children, and blow by blow portrayals of what will happen to disobedient Israelites contain an amount of detail that turns one's stomach. We must never forget that the Lord Jesus himself said that on the two great love commandments hung all the law and the prophets. If a prophet reports his understanding of the mind of God in a way which denies this love, then surely the love has to have priority.

Any one speech by a prophet has to be seen in the total context of everything that Scripture records. The letter to Timothy has it again. The scriptures are able to make you wise unto salvation 'through faith which is in Christ Jesus.' We have to read everything through the Jesus lens. If we do this, then changes in our thought and action will be achieved and in this way, whatever the human imperfections, the Word of God, through the imperfect instruments, will achieve that for which He sent it.

Alfred Ward

Apocalyptic

Definitions are notoriously difficult to formulate, and 'Apocalyptic' is no exception to the rule.¹ The word 'apocalyptic' may be applied to a particular type of literature, which claimed to reveal or unveil God's purpose in history. The word 'apocalypse' means simply 'unveiling' and thus the last book of the Bible commences 'The² revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him ...' That is, the revelation was from Jesus Christ, given by God, and composed by John.

Prophecy was the declaration of the will of God and apocalyptic had a similar function. While the prophetic writings of the Old Testament are as readily understood today (by those who have a good knowledge of the life situation when the prophecies were originally spoken and/or written and of those to whom the messages were originally given), this is not necessarily the case with apocalyptic, for we need to only consult the manifold attempts to interpret the book of Revelation, especially by those who try to calculate when Jesus will return. While belief in the Second Advent is an important Christian belief, any attempt to ascertain its date is futile. In particular, over the centuries, there have been many attempts to chart the trumpets, woes and vials into their historical settings, and to identify certain characters, such as the Antichrist. These endless conjectural possibilities have been used to calculate the time of the end, in spite of the advice given in Matt 25:13 that we do not know the day or the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

'The type of student who has always shown intense interest in the apocalypses of the Old and New Testaments has always believed that they were relevant to his own day and generation, in the sense that their prophecies were about to culminate in the events soon to take place.'³ For more than one hundred and fifty years many Christadelphians, and not only Christadelphians, have had a fixation with predicting the future. This has been done by using numbers such as the 1290 days of Dan 12:11, the 1335 days of Dan 12:12 plus the various numbers in the book of Revelation and trying to calculate a timetable of past and future political events. For more than a century, Christadelphian literature illustrates the fascination of many with allegorical arithmetic, with the numbers such as 7, 70 and 490 playing their part. Reading the history of Christadelphian interpretation of apocalyptic, I believe that our preaching has been, and is still being, brought into disrepute when outlandish claims are made with regard to detailed future political events. In the Old Testament the literal fulfillment of a prophecy was esteemed very highly. However, 'when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken' (Deut 18:22).

We need to remember that some prophecies cannot be fulfilled because the actual course of events have proved to be different from what was predicted. Thus it is not surprising that 'interpreters all down the years have read a succession of new meanings [into the

words of prophecies] and [sought] to impose the conditions of their own day upon the prophecies.’⁴ The problem of unfulfilled prophecies is illustrated in Jer 25:11 and 29:10 where it is noted that the people of Judah and the surrounding nations were to serve Babylon for 70 years. It is difficult to fit this time period exactly into known history. An illustration of the use of Scripture to reinterpret Scripture in the light of unfulfilled prophecy is found in Daniel 9:25-27 which interprets the 70 years of Jeremiah as 70 weeks of years i.e. 490 years. (One suggestion is that, whereas forty years indicates a generation, seventy years indicates a full life span.)

It has been well said that apocalyptic is the child of prophecy, and so there are points where prophecy and apocalyptic converge. But, while there are shared characteristics, we need to be aware that there are differences of form: the prophetic books consist largely of brief oracles usually in poetic form, while the apocalyptic books are basically written in prose and are more lengthy. Wilfred Lambert draws our attention to other important differences; ‘As to medium, the prophets were normally preachers whose message was intended to guide the whole Israelite community. They covered all aspects of life and belief. The writers of apocalyptic were not oral preachers, but authors of specialized works, often intended, it seems, for a limited circle of readers, rather than as preaching material for the masses.’⁵

We find differences between the eschatologies⁶ of prophecy and apocalyptic, with the interests in apocalyptic lying chiefly in the distant future with three particular features: the belief in a blessed future life, the Christian expectation of a new heaven and a new earth, and the idea that the end of the present world will be catastrophic. Finally, the abiding message of apocalyptic is that the kingdom of God will not be established by human hands but by a stone cut out without hands.

Notes

1 W. G Lambert, *The Background of Jewish Apocalyptic*, Athlone Press, London, 1978.

2 There is no definite article here in the Greek, so that the English word ‘the’ is supplied in the translation.

3 H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic*, Lutterworth Press.

4 Rowley *ibid* p. 172-3.

5 Lambert *ibid* p. 6.

6 Eschatology is the doctrine or teaching concerning the last things, the events leading up to the time of the end.

John Stephenson (NZ)

Truth exists; only falsehood has to be invented.

George Braque

The Creation-Evolution Controversy A few thoughts

For a number of years past I have been happy to accept Evolution as a scientific fact. Hence my positive review in E115 in 2006 of the book by Graeme Finlay, *God's Books – Genetics & Genesis*, which aimed at showing that ‘...evolution reflects the mode of God's creative work in the world.’ The last sub-heading in his final chapter was *God moves history to a magnificent climax*, beneath which he commented: ‘The story of evolution reached a climax in the generation ... with whom God could engage in dialogue. At this point, the story of life came to transcend mere biology. We are animals, primates; yet **more than** [emphasis added] merely animal.’

The Creation-Evolution debate came to mind again for me in this current year, firstly by David Brown's book review in E127 and subsequently by a reading of his booklet: *GENESIS: don't take it literally*. The cause of the debate was the natural reaction of Christians who believed that the Creation account in Genesis 1 should be understood **literally**. For them, the idea of evolution seemed to be a flat contradiction to the Word of God. This reaction was given added impetus by such books as *The Blind Watchmaker* by the avowed atheist Richard Dawkins. The book's title, of course, was obviously in response to that well known analogy of William Paley's, the watchmaker, frequently used by Christians to show the necessity for a Creator.

I can appreciate the appropriateness of Paley's analogy, in the sense that a watch and the natural world that we see around us, both require a creator to explain their origins. On the other hand, like most analogies, it cannot be an exact parallel: it is not considering ‘like with like’. For the watch, *inanimate* material has been used in its construction; in the other case it is *living beings* that are created – created *immediately*, if Genesis 1 is to be taken literally, or *over a period under evolutionary development*, if that view is accepted. Further, though the analogy can perhaps bolster the Christian disputant's confidence in the existence of his/her God, it cannot prove that God did not choose to use evolutionary methods in his creation of the world.

As a self-confessed atheist, in *The Blind Watchmaker*, Dawkins dismisses Paley's use of the analogy with the statement: ‘...it is wrong, gloriously and utterly wrong...All appearances to the contrary, the only watchmaker in nature is the blind forces of physics, **albeit deployed¹ in a very special way** [emphasis added]. A true watchmaker has foresight...Natural selection, the blind, unconscious, automatic process...and which we now know is the explanation for the existence and apparently purposeful form of all life, has no purpose in mind. It has no mind and no mind's eye. It does not plan for the future. It has no vision, no foresight, no sight at all.’ Dawkins sees no need for a ‘First Cause’ to start off all the evolutionary developments described in his book and, furthermore, regards them simply as happening by the *blind* forces of physics, completely without purpose.

When confronted with such views as the above, it is perhaps very natural for us, with our strongly held views of God as the Creator, to immediately leap to our defence. However, there is a danger here in a too-hasty reaction, for it can cause us to lose sight of the different aspects of the matter, i.e. between: 1) the denial of the existence of God, and 2) His methods in creation. Blind chance in the workings of evolution is obviously a denial of God's involvement – but a rush to dismiss the idea of evolution as a *possible* method used by Him and to instantly respond to the idea as a denial of scripture, might very conceivably blinker us to new advances in scientific knowledge. As we know, this has happened more than once in the past. It was not until the time of Galileo that the ancient geocentric view of the earth was seen as incorrect. Even up to the eighteenth century many of our forebears were happy to believe that the stars turned round the earth, and that they had been doing this for a mere 6,000 years. Galileo's announcement of the truth he had discovered was immediately seen as heresy by the church and he was sentenced under the Inquisition, a sentence that was not formally retracted by the Pope until 1992.

In August this year, quite fortuitously, while searching through our books, my attention was held by a book that I had purchased back in the late 1960s. This was Teilhard de Chardin's, *The Phenomenon of Man*. The title sounded fascinating but I realised that I could now recall almost nothing from my first reading of the book. A quick inspection showed its subject matter to be the author's description and interpretation of evolution. That I had remembered so little about it, was possibly due to the fact that in those days I was far more literally minded about Genesis, and suspicious of the evolutionists, which perhaps had led me to make a much too cursory reading of the book. The description at the front informed me that de Chardin (1881-1955) had been a biologist and palaeontologist of world renown, and also a Jesuit priest. It also informed me that the book's subject could be described as: ‘the surging evolution of the world

from the primal stuff of the universe, through life, to consciousness and man.' I also read that his unorthodox theological positions were at odds with Catholic doctrine and Jesuit leaders, who forbade him from publishing his writings. 'Shades' of the Galileo affair?!² (*The Phenomenon of Man* was published posthumously in France in 1955)³.

As a complete layman in the understanding of scientific technical terms, I will not, following my second reading of the author, attempt a detailed account of his descriptions of the processes of evolution that he understood as happening over the many lengthy periods and vast aeons of time that were involved. Sufficient to relate that I much enjoyed reading the work of an author who was an obvious master of his subject and, who had the ability to relate its substance and general meaning with enthusiasm and clarity. Not only that, but quite unlike the books of scientist Richard Dawkins, that dismiss any idea of God and see developments in nature simply as the *blind forces of physics*, de Chardin's book, from its early stages, takes the opposite view. It becomes increasingly clear as one reads on, that he sees over and above all a guiding hand, leading evolutionary developments with some ultimate purpose behind them.

When my understanding of Genesis was in *literal* terms, such ideas as the above would have seemed strange to me and I might possibly have wished to disagree with them. Since then, I have learned that it does not pay to jump to conclusions. De Chardin was aware of similar disagreements among scientists and, in talking of it, he used two expressions which I think can act as a lesson to us: he spoke of the *without of things* and the *within of things*. It is so very easy for us to judge matters from first appearances, including *apparently* plain textual meanings – without making any effort to explore further; and so easy to become inflexible over these first, hasty conceptions. De Chardin said: 'On the scientific plane, the quarrel between the materialists and the upholders of a spiritual interpretation...still endures...the materialists insist on talking about objects as though they only consisted of external actions...the upholders of a spiritual interpretation are obstinately determined not to go outside a kind of solitary introspection...Both fight on different planes and do not meet; each only sees half the problem.' He goes on to observe that, unless both the *internal* and the *external* aspects are taken into account, 'it is **impossible** to cover the **totality** of the cosmic phenomenon by one coherent explanation such as science must try to construct.'

This '*one coherent explanation*' is the overriding aim of the author, to arrive at a satisfying synthesis of his vast scientific knowledge and his Christian faith and understanding. His view that the workings of evolution are intimately connected with the purposes of God for our world, come through loud and clear. In the epilogue, towards the end of the book, he says: '...around us, in one form or another, some excess of personal extra-human energy should be perceptible to us if we look carefully, and should reveal to us the great Presence. It is at this point that we see the importance for science of the Christian phenomenon. The Christian fact stands before us. It has its place among the other realities of the world...it seems to me to bring to the perspectives of a universe dominated by energies of a personal nature, the crucial confirmation we are in need of...In the centre...is the uncompromising affirmation of a personal God: God as providence, directing the universe with loving, watchful care; and God the revealer, communicating himself to man on the level of and through the ways of intelligence.' Those thoughts will obviously resonate for us, with Paul's words in Romans 1:20.

Now I must admit that I do not fully understand all that is involved in de Chardin's technical discussions in the final part of his book, of the *modus operandi* of the final fulfilment of God's work in evolution. I would much welcome the considered views of a more qualified brain than my 'lay' one. But I will end with a simple overall flavour of the author's expectation. He envisages the time when: 'the reflective centres of the world are effectively 'one with God' [and here, anticipating a possible accusation of pantheism – in the sense of God identified with the world, he explains]: 'this state is obtained **not** by identification (God becoming all) but by the differentiating and communicating action of love (God all in everyone).' Here again, we are reminded of words of Paul, this time in 1 Cor.15:28, anticipating the time when all things are subject to God – when '**God will be all in all**'.

Cyril Marsters

Notes

1 The use here by Dawkins of the word *deployed* seems to have been a lapse in the author's intended argument, for to me the word has definite overtones of something deliberately placed in position by a guiding hand, for a definite purpose - exactly what a person believing in a need for a '*First Cause*' would expect.

2 On being asked to proscribe the works of Teilhard de Chardin, Pope Pius XII (1876-1958) is said to have remarked: 'One Galileo in two thousand years is enough.'

3 My copy of the book was published in a Fontana edn.1965. It is currently available as follows: *The PHENOMENON OF MAN* – Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008, ISBN: 978-0-06-163265-5, pb. 319pp.

We should never retreat before truth simply because we cannot explain it.

A W Tozer

The Trinity

The earliest period of the growth of the church was an era of exceptional literacy, as is evidenced by its literary records. And the church was no different. Basking in the twilight glory of Greek culture and coloured by Roman rationalism, there developed in the early community a number of educated thinkers, philosophers and leaders who influenced their respective flocks with their ideas. But, as ever since, there was a distinct division between East and West, as the Roman Empire extended its boundaries from the Atlantic to the Euphrates. In the third century, the Emperor Constantine sought to unite the Empire under the aegis of the Christian Church which by now had two cultural centres, in Constantinople, which had taken over from Rome, and Alexandria in Egypt, which had inherited Greek culture from Athens.

From the beginning, the question which dominated the thinking of the church was inevitably the relationship between Jesus and God. How could the infinite, invisible Creator of the universe reveal Himself in the weakness of human flesh? And how could Jesus claim equality with God, as he had appeared in time as a creature? Many leading Christian scholars and thinkers developed theories to resolve the problem. But the Eastern and Western worlds thought differently. Eastern thought, originating now from Egypt, was built upon Platonic thinking which taught that true reality lay in the fundamental, non-material essence or meaning that lies beneath the outward appearance and is its true reality. This metaphysical concept had originated from Socrates who taught his young pupils to look for inner purpose beneath the external which led finally to a vision of ultimate truth. Western thought, eventually centred in Constantinople with its mind centre at Antioch, looked at the outward appearance as the reality. This same dichotomy exists today largely through the scientific development of the Western world.

Constantine had sought to heal this breach at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD by establishing the doctrine of the Trinity, which asserted the absolute equality of Father, Son and Spirit as three

in one, as the formative creed of the Christian Church. This was later developed by Augustine into the official creed of the Catholic Church upon which he had imposed some rigorous strictures which remained the dominant character of Catholicism through the ages. This was largely influenced by his belief in original sin, which was a result of his past Manichaean background which taught the absolute dichotomy between good and evil, light and dark, originally a Persian concept.

After Constantine's attempt to reconcile the differences of the various factions in the church, the debate still continued about the nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son. The two protagonists in this encounter were Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria and Arius the presbyter who was ultimately based in Antioch. The issue centred upon the distinction between the Greek word *homoousios* meaning of the **same** essence, the view maintained by Athanasius, and *homoiousios*, of **like** essence, endorsed by Arius, emphasising the distinction between human and divine. This debate led to numerous Councils and frequent excommunications and consignments to exile.

But in fact this relationship of Father and Son cannot be defined by logical reasoning or rational definition. As the New Testament shows us, it is a relationship of love not logic and can be understood only by personal experience. As Jesus said: 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.' (John 14:9) 'God has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' 'who is the image of God' (2 Corinthians 4:6 & 4). Only by looking to Jesus can we see God's glory. But this is personal faith and experience not dogma or doctrine. The Christian life is ongoing life experience not an adherence to doctrinal theories.

But the question of the Trinity still remains. The Hebrew word for spirit *ruach* means 'breath' as does the Greek *pneuma*. It is that which is breathed out from the person which motivates externally. So the breath of God brooded over the waters at creation to bring forth life and growth with the warmth of a loving Father. So spirit is not separate from God. It is the very outward expression of His being, His thought, His purpose. This was the breath that inspired, breathed into prophets and kings and ultimately breathed into Mary to bring forth Jesus who was himself filled, infused with spirit and thereby enabled to be the manifestation of God Himself, the very expression of the Father. As he was about to depart from human life Jesus breathed this into his disciples and told them that he would still be with them and in them to dwell, stay, abide, an inner presence in their lives. Paul shows us clearly in his letters that this is extended to all disciples if they open their hearts to receive him. So we do not need a person of the spirit as that person is Jesus Himself, now a spirit being, with and within us if with unveiled faces we all reflecting the glory of the Lord, as in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory as by the spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Although the concept of three, Father, Mother, Son, is deeply rooted in primitive religion, it is clear from the New Testament that there are three distinct functions of God, Jesus and the Spirit – God, the Creator Father, Jesus, the manifestation of the Father, and the Spirit, the essential life-force which flows from the Father to the Son and then into the world and through those who will receive it through faith.

The word 'person' is a transliteration from the Latin *persona* which means a mask, an outward appearance.

Sheila Harris

An Inquiry into the Origins of the 'Internal Devil' Dogma .

Paul Wasson, in his last article on *The Identity of Satan* (E127 pp. 15-19), made some excellent points that very much need underscoring. He implies that the terms Devil and Satan are synonymous and he maintains that '...Scripture never describes Satan in terms that suggest a symbol of the inner impulses of his victims; he is always described as an influence upon them from outside.'

Now, the 'internal devil' theory is never mentioned, or even suggested, in any Christian literature outside of the New Testament, commencing with Clement's epistle to the Corinthians, circa 94 CE, onwards. Indeed, 'satan' in the Hebrew Scriptures and 'the devil' in the Septuagint always refer to an external person, but never to anyone's sinful inclination. When therefore, Dr. Thomas and Robert Roberts committed their movement to the 'internal devil theory', they were indulging in a theological revolution, with no previous Scriptural support. Both of these pioneers carefully state their internal devil theory in *Elpis Israel* (pp.76-77) and *Christendom Astray*, respectively. Roberts, taking his cue from the Doctor, writes: 'There is no devil but man's own inclinations, which tend to illegitimate activity' (p.119 of 1958 edition). However, when they take the theory out on its first 'test run', within the pages of the New Testament at Mathew 4:1 (concerning the temptation of Jesus by the devil), the 'internal devil' idea falls flat on its face! Dr. Thomas writes concerning Math 4:1ff: '... "the Tempter came to Him". Who he was does not appear. Perhaps Paul refers to him, saying "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14)...the adversary assumed the character of an angel or messenger of light to him [Jesus]...as the god of the world...He [Jesus] believed not this angel of light and power, and would have none of his favours.' (pp. 77-79). Robert Roberts writes 'Some think the devil in this case was Christ's own inclinations, but this is untenable in view of the fact when the devil had ended all temptation he departed from Him for a season (Luke 4:13). It is also untenable in view of the harmony that existed between the mind of Christ and the will of the Father (John 8:29)'. Roberts then goes on to suggest that the devil could have been: 'The angel that controlled the political position of the Roman Emperor.' (This section of Lecture 7 has been left out of some editions of the book, e.g. see p122/3 of the 1958 reprint of the 1951 edition. Editor.) As time went on, the Doctor became even more convinced that the Satan of Matthew 4 was very definitely an Angel. He wrote 'Paul doubtless alludes to this personage [Satan] in 2 Cor 11:14 saying 'the Satan is transformed into an Angel of Light' (Eureka, chapter 12, Section 15). However, despite the internal devil theory falling at its very first hurdle, the pioneers refused to accept the Scriptural evidence, and made their theory into a dogma. Many of the early Christadelphians however, didn't believe it – Jane Norrie (the future wife of Robert Roberts), for example, was not alone in being baptized into the Christadelphian community, while still believing in a supernatural devil.

One well known Christadelphian scholar puts the problem like this :
'When doctrinal dissatisfaction rears its head, this is usually because the occasional restless individual has been doing his own Bible research (yes! by all means) regarding the devil or demons...where (let's face it!) there has been a tendency among us to paper over the cracks and pretend that there's really no difficulty. It's as well to be honest here and admit that in such doctrinal regions we have not had all the problems neatly solved for us in advance by our venerated 'pioneers.' (*Reformation – A Book for Christadelphians* by Harry Whittaker, p.47)

The Christadelphian scholar John Wilkins, writing in *The Christadelphian* April, 1965, in a letter to the Editor, states : 'The devil, human nature, [and] sin in the flesh, we know to be synonymous terms.' before then going on to admit his incomprehension at how the Christadelphian doctrine that Jesus was not resurrected in an immortal body (if article 17 of Doctrines to be rejected in the BASF is to be believed) is supposed to fit in with the other Christadelphian doctrine that Jesus 'destroyed' the Devil (Heb 2:14) by submitting his mortal body to destruction on the Cross. If Jesus destroyed the 'Devil' or His mortal human nature, how on earth could He be resurrected in that very same mortal human nature (with presumably that same 'devil') – which He had come to destroy?

The illuminating answer, given by Louis Sargent, the Editor, was :
'...the Devil is sin. This is a different proposition from saying that the Devil is human nature...Human nature is prone to sin; it is not 'sin'. Sargent's view here fits in with the views of his Editorial predecessor, John Carter who, writing in *The Christadelphian*, April, 1956, about 'Sin and its Condemnation', stated : 'His [Jesus'] flesh did not yield to Sin. Jesus had not to say with Paul that He failed to do what He would, or to bemoan that Sin dwelt in Him.' But if, according to these Editors, Jesus did not have 'Sin' in Him, and human nature is not the devil, then how can traditional Christadelphianism continue to claim the very opposite ?

Another problem with the traditional Christadelphian view, concerns the Beelzebul incident in the Gospels (Mark 3:22-27). The name 'Beelzebul', is a very rare word, and never turns up in any other, purely Jewish religious literature. This fact has led scholars to believe that Beelzebul is actually a jokey name for the Devil, (based upon a pun on the name of the god of Ekron, and also, coupled possibly with the Aramaic word for 'the Enemy' – *beel debaba*) which was purposely made up by wicked Jewish Scribes, who applied the term specifically to, and only with respect to, Jesus. Certainly, Jesus himself equates Beelzebul with the Devil and Peter Watkins in *The Real Devil* (on p. 59) concedes this point: 'The enemies say that Jesus is casting out demons through the power of Beelzebub, or Satan, the demon prince.' But the central point is that the Scribes may have slanderously believed that Jesus was actually 'possessed' by Beelzebul. Indeed this is a distinct possibility, according to the eminent Jewish scholar Geza Vermes. The Greek text of Mark 3:22 reads : *Beelzeboul echei*, which literally means 'He [Jesus] has Beelzebul.' Mark 22:30 also literally reads: 'They said He [Jesus] had an unclean spirit.' This may actually be the Gospel writer Mark's way of saying (without personally stating the terrible slander himself!), that the hostile Scribes were slanderously accusing Jesus of being possessed by the Devil. Indeed, many translations render the wicked accusation, exactly as such e.g. see most versions including the RSV, NEB, REB, NIV, ESV, JB, NASB, TEV, Weymouth, Beck, Wade etc.

Are Christadelphians, therefore, really prepared to be committed to a belief that concurs with the views of these evil, misguided scribes? Furthermore, was the belief that all human beings were possessed by an 'internal Devil' really an intelligible, mainstream, first century CE, Jewish belief? The main problem for many thoughtful Christadelphians, is that of reconciling the notion of a 'human-nature devil', with all the Scriptural evidence.

The word for 'destroy' in the King James version, at Heb 2:14 is *katargeo*. But *katargeo* does not mean 'destroy' (as apollumi does at Mark 3:6 for example) – *katargeo* does not mean 'loss of being' but 'loss of well-being', as Vine emphasizes. It therefore more properly means 'to render inactive or idle or ineffective'. This fact would then support the view that 'he who holds the power of death' of Heb 2:14, is a clear reference to the common Jewish notion that the Devil is 'the angel of death' (cf. Job 2:6, Jerusalem 1 Targum 3:6, and numerous examples in Rabbinical literature : Sukka 53a, Pesach 54a, B.K. 60b etc; cf. also Wisdom 2:24.) The terminology used by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews shows clearly that he was very well acquainted with the Logos doctrine of Philo of Alexandria. The author was therefore probably a Hellenistic Jew from Alexandria, and so he was probably Apollos. In Alexandrian Jewish Angelology, 'unholy' angels are considered unworthy even of the name 'angel', which is why all citations of angels in the Hebrews Epistle, refer to God's (holy) angels, as the pivotal verse of 1:6 (which controls the following context) makes plain. This is also why Apollos probably alludes to the devil, as being the 'Angel of death', but refrains from actually calling him even an angel. See James White's two articles, (*The Devil and his Angels* in the July and August, 1950, editions of *The Christadelphian*.) where he also concedes that 'the devil' of Heb. 2:14 refers to the Jewish 'Angel of death.'

How can the notion of a 'human-nature devil' cope with Ephesians 6:11-12, especially in the light of Harry Whittaker's well-reasoned analysis, concerning Ephesians 6:12, that : 'One thing may be regarded as certain. The entire verse is about angelic powers.' (*Bible Studies – An Anthology*, pp. 375-382) Consequently, Peter Watkins actually states that many Christadelphians are in reality, 'frightened away from the subject' of the devil and demons (p.9). He then immediately writes : 'Having come to see that the devil is in some way – yes it is usually put rather vaguely – a symbol of human nature, most students have pursued the subject no further...This attitude is unsatisfactory...[for] what are we to make of the bewildering array of Scriptures concerning the devil, Satan and evil spirits? Are they there only to embarrass us? Whereas many Bible readers know what conclusions are not to be drawn from the Scriptures, they are at a loss to know what positive purpose they are intended to serve.'

The question that therefore arises is, how exactly did the Christadelphians ever come to believe in a 'human-nature devil' in the first place, when the actual evidence for it seems so contrary? Where did this Christadelphian belief really come from?

There are in reality, three probable sources: Sadducean Judaism, Rabbinic Judaism and mediaeval rationalistic philosophy inspired by the works of Aristotle.

The Sadducees were in many respects, anti-supernaturalist, materialistic and rationalist. They denied the existence of angels, demons (spirits) and an afterlife. It is quite possible that in their rationalistic theological system, the popular views of Satan were 'demythologised', so as to become mankind's sinful inclination. The Deuterocanonical book of Ben Sira, lays great emphasis on the Jewish Law, the Temple, human free will, and denies the existence of a personal afterlife. It has all the hallmarks of being a Sadducean work (which is probably why it was excluded from the Jewish Canon). In Ben Sira, chapter 21, verse 27, the Greek translation (but not the Hebrew text) reads: 'When a man curses Satan, he is really cursing his own self.' Now this verse could well be interpreted to mean that because people have free will, it is no good blaming an Angelic Satan for one's sins, merely because God tests people's characters through Angelic mediation (Genesis 22:15; Job 1-2) – it is no good trying to offload the blame! The verse would then become an example of a well known form of Jewish expression – witticism! But if Ben Sira is a Sadducean work, then it may actually reflect the Sadducean disbelief in Angels of any sort – including an Angelic Satan!

But the important point to stress here, however, is that Jesus (as Harry Whittaker points out on p. 117 of *Studies in the Gospels*) could quite easily have denied the literal existence of demons (and, on the same principle, the Devil) in 'just a couple of clear decisive sentences', and thus could easily have assumed a Sadducean position on Satan, (if indeed, this position had been true). Jesus, in His ministry, made a lot of totally 'mind boggling' theological statements: about divorce, about riches being an obstacle to eternal life, about all foods being clean, about sin not being the cause of blindness, about a future destruction of the Temple, and about the Messiah having to be crucified. But the belief that angels didn't exist was a common belief amongst many of the wealthier educated Jews, as well as the Sadducees, but Jesus – never afraid to espouse unpopular views – never took up this Sadducean belief. Why not? – when He could have done this so easily, and thus avoided all the potential misunderstandings, and the slander, that was associated with His ministry of healing. It was this very slander of course, which very much propelled Him to the Cross.

After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the anti-Christian rabbis of the proto-Rabbinic movement met at Jamnia and helped formulate a new form of Judaism, that eventually, after a long and bitter struggle, became known as 'Rabbinic Judaism'. Increasingly they came to reject the hitherto, very popular form of Judaism, which scholars now call 'Apocalyptic Judaism.' Many Jews, especially

in the Diaspora, were exceptionally alarmed by the great Jewish rebellions, in Judea and Galilee, against Roman rule (in 70 CE, and yet again in 135 CE). These revolts threatened Jewish religious liberties throughout the Roman Empire, but also fuelled widespread, anti-Semitic feeling. Pre-70 CE Jewish Apocalyptic literature, which promised an imminent appearance of the Messiah to defeat a supernatural Angelic Satan and demons, and usher in a Golden Age for the Jews, had – from a purely non-Christian Jewish perspective – been responsible for a complete disaster! Probably well over a million Jews, inspired by Apocalyptic fervour, were slaughtered or expelled from Judea, and Apocalyptic Judaism had produced a new rival faith in Christian Judaism. The reconstructed, new form of Judaism, emanating from Jamnia, perhaps not surprisingly, attempted to tone down popular Apocalyptic concepts such as angels, demons, an Angelic Satan as an enemy of God, and imminent Messiahs. The Mishnah, for example, has no mention of angels at all, and only one mention of demons (Avot 5:6).

After the 135 CE revolt, Johanan ben Yochai attempted to obliterate the very widespread, and the most ancient Jewish ‘fallen angels’ interpretation of the ‘sons of God’, in Gen. 6:1-4 (The fallen angel view was ubiquitous within Judaism, and was the view held by all social classes, including Philo and Josephus as well as being the interpretation witnessed in the original Septuagint). There was therefore, a certain ‘rationalizing’ effect within anti-Christian Judaism, no doubt stimulated by possible Sadducean influence, upon the scholarly debates at Jamnia. But these ‘rabbis’ at Jamnia represented a small anti-Christian scholarly elite, who were very probably unrepresentative in their views of Judaism. They became locked in combat with the other forms of Judaism that continued after 70 CE (including Hellenistic Judaism, Apocalyptic Judaism and Christian Judaism) and the movement initiated by these ‘rabbis’ only became normative Judaism in the sixth century CE.

However, Talmudic Judaism still firmly espouses belief in an Angelic Satan, who attempts, (as in Math. 4:1 ff.) to work through human weakness, or the evil inclination. The Talmud, still strongly distinguishes between the personified Satan outside man, and the evil inclination (the yetzer ha-ra) that exists within man. It is the evil inclination, that allows the external Satan the opportunity to work his will against man. This distinction between the external Satan, and the inner evil inclination, is also clearly exhibited in the common pre-70 CE Judaisms. The following examples make this point clear:

‘Sammael (an alternative name for Satan) abode in Manasseh... he served Satan and his angels... he [Manasseh] turned aside his heart to Beliar, for the angel of lawlessness, who is the ruler of this world is Beliar (The Ascension of Isaiah 2:1-4, circa 30 CE; cf. also John 12:31; 2 Cor. 6:15); ‘My heart is dismayed by the mischievous design [of the wicked] ... for Belial is manifest in their (evil) inclination’ (Qumran scroll 1QH xv, c.150 BCE).

‘All the Levites shall curse all the men of the lot of Belial, saying “Be cursed because of your guilty wickedness!... all the children of perversion are ruled by the Angel of Darkness (cf. 2 Cor. 11:14; Acts 26:18), and walk in the ways of darkness (cf. Col. 1:13).” (Qumran scroll 1QS 2:5ff).

‘Two inclinations are in our breasts... if the soul takes pleasure in the good (inclination), all its actions are righteous, and if it sins, it immediately repents... But if the soul incline towards the evil inclination, all its actions are wicked, and it drives away the good, and clings to evil, and is ruled by Beliar.’ (Testament of Gad 4:7; c. 104 BCE.)

Finally, in the Middle Ages, many Jews enjoyed freedom of religion in Muslim occupied countries including southern Spain. This period was a golden age for Islamic Science and Philosophy, and one of the contributory causes was the rediscovery of the rationalistic, philosophical works of Aristotle, which were translated into Arabic. Islamic thought then took on a very rationalistic hue, which, to many people, enhanced its credibility. Many Jewish scholars within the vast Muslim Empire, then rose to the challenge, and attempted to compete with the credibility of Islam, by producing a very rationalistic form of Judaism, known as ‘Jewish Aristotelianism’ which attempted to ‘harmonise’ Scriptural data with ‘human reason’, as proposed by Aristotle. The great Jewish philosopher, Maimonides, was a great exponent of this new rationalistic Judaism, but the great cost was that there was a growing tendency to see ‘Angels’ as mere personifications of natural, rationalistic, scientific causes. It was scholars like Maimonides, who gave an entirely new rationalistic ‘explanation’, not only of the Hebrew Bible, but also of the Talmud.

The very earliest Talmudic scholars, are known as the Tannaim, who flourished roughly during the first two centuries of the Christian era. Their literal belief in an external Angelic Satan, is clearly shown by numerous examples in the Talmud. Chapter Baba Bathra 16a, for example, states:

‘A Tanna taught: [Satan] comes down to earth and seduces, then ascends to heaven and awakens wrath; permission is granted to him and he takes away the soul [life].’

Just a few lines down, a later scholar (from the 3rd to the 5th century CE), builds upon the above statement, in the form of a witticism – which simply attempts to describe the utter heinousness of sin. This reads:

‘Resh Lakish said: Satan, the evil prompter, and the Angel of Death are all one. He is called Satan, as it is written, [Job] “And Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.” He is called the evil prompter; [we know because] it is written in another place, “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6), and it is written here [in connection with Satan] “Only upon himself put forth not thine hand” (Job). The same is also the Angel of death, since it says, “Only spare his life” (Job), which shows that Job’s life belonged to him.’

What Maimonides did was literalize this passage of the Talmud, and so equated ‘the evil prompter’, or Mankind’s ‘sinful inclination’, with Satan. As a consequence, the ‘Angelic Satan’ disappeared, leaving ‘Satan’ as a mere metaphor for ‘the evil inclination’. Aristotelian Judaism became so successful that today, most Jews do not believe in literal angels. The Encyclopedia Judaica, in its article on Angels, states: ‘The modern Jewish attitude to angels tends to regard the traditional references, and descriptions, as symbolic, poetic or representing an earlier world concept.’

Conclusion

I think that I have presented enough evidence to support the contention that what I have called the ‘internal devil’ theory was not part of early Christian teaching and that it does not make sense of all the Scriptural data. I would also suggest that the reason why the ‘internal devil theory’ doesn’t actually fit all the Scriptural data, is because essentially it derives from mediaeval rationalistic Judaism, and was only meant to fit in with ‘human reason.’

Tony Cox

I have learned by experience that no man’s character
can be eventually injured but by his own acts.
Rowland Hill

The radical (and unreasonable?) demands of Jesus

I feel distinctly uncomfortable when reading the beatitudes (in Luke’s account of them) because of the strong suggestion that discipleship will be exceedingly challenging. ‘Blessed are you who are poor... who are hungry now... you who weep now... when people hate you and they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil... Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven.’ (Luke 6:20-23 ESV). It seems unreasonable to be told that we will find happiness in times of despair and joy in times of persecution. Where does that leave those of us who are having a rather easy time of it?

When Jesus outlined the extraordinary high cost of discipleship, he likened it to a king with a force of 10,000 fighting men confronting another king with 20,000 men. The sensible thing to do would be to *avoid* conflict and 'while the other is yet a great way off...' to send 'a delegation and ask for terms of peace' (Luke 14:31-34). But Jesus is not asking us to do the sensible thing. Thus discipleship is presented as a battle against the odds. Each soldier (disciple) with a sword is set against two fighting men with one approaching in front, with menace, and another perhaps from the rear. To engage in this intensity of action would require colossal sacrifice, self-discipline, determination, total commitment and a complete disregard for one's safety and life. When Jesus thus concluded, 'so therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has (Greek- possessions) *cannot be my disciple*,' he was confirming the intensity and *compulsory* hardship involved in discipleship. This however is only the first of a series of radical demands.¹ For sure, the exacting conditions of recruitment rule out wimps and explains why so many potential disciples 'all alike began to make excuses.' (Luke 14:18).

Detest your family

'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, *he cannot be my disciple*' (Luke 14:26). The Greek word for 'hate' is from a primitive meaning 'to detest.' It is sufficiently intense to drive the 10 horns who 'hate' the whore 'to make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire' (Rev 17:16).

Within Judaism it was considered necessary (at least theoretically) for a gentile who converted to sever all connections with his or her previous family in order to become a radically new individual. There were signs that the family of Jesus rejected his message so during his ministry he spurned them publicly.² Jesus is not concerned with family values. He was determined that we understand the necessity of breaking away from intrusive family ties in order to follow him. If any family members 'get in the way' we should detest them.³ He foresaw the family rifts that would invariably result when one became his disciple. 'You think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother...' (Luke 12:51-53). Such family tensions will inevitably usher in the time when 'a brother will betray his brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise up against their parents and kill them' (Mark 13:12). His message welcomed the disruption of both family life and the maintenance of the present social order. His use of the intense word 'hate' coupled with the strict injunction 'if you can't hate...you cannot be my disciple', will not be explained away to retain a cosy image of Jesus. The Jesus of our popular imagination would surely have said something along the lines of - 'give discipleship a higher priority than family values, but always show love to members of your family, even though they reject my call.'

Hate even your own life

He also demands that we *cannot be his disciple* until we 'hate' even our own lives. As a minimum requirement, commitment to Jesus must far exceed devotion to family or to self. In practice, most Christians lived quite peacefully for the first few hundred years of Christianity, but accounts of martyrdoms served as powerful confirmation of the validity of faith in the message of Jesus. From the second century onwards, martyrology became a distinctive Christian literary genre. Such writings urge Christians to go willingly to their deaths for the faith and to endure all the tortures to which they will be subjected.⁴ They thus demonstrated commitment to and understanding of what Jesus actually demanded.

'Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me *cannot be my disciple*' (Luke 14:27). To take up one's cross is to choose the path of suffering and suggests sacrifice, self-denial and humiliation. The expression was not simply a broad metaphor for whatever hardship comes our way, like a difficult parent or in-law, but as a minimum requirement it implies 'a deliberate choice of an uncomfortable way of life.'⁵

Each one of us is called upon to lose our life in order to save it. Clearly we are not here to enjoy ourselves but to pursue the virtue of misery and suffering. '...by far the biggest reason for the lowering of our spiritual temperature is the corroding influence of the affluent society...The car, the telly, the Mediterranean holiday, the plush comfortable living of a generation which dotes on nice clothes and wining and dining - all this general softness and self-indulgence, this crass materialism - has bit by bit so invaded our way of life that often it is hard to tell us apart from the dedicated materialists among whom we live.'⁶ If we can accept the validity of this worrying observation then we are clearly not bearing a cross as Jesus requires.

Eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven

Jesus gives his disciples some rather harsh teaching about divorce which made them conclude that 'it is better not to marry.' A wife may be miserable and subjected to regular violence but Jesus only allows sexual immorality as an exceptive clause. Personal happiness and satisfaction within the state of matrimony are deemed as irrelevant in his world-view. He then points to a higher ideal of not marrying at all: '...there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it' (Matthew 19:10-12). Phew! So it's OK to marry - well, just about. Jesus doesn't put us under pressure on this one but dangles the idea before us as an ideal. Jesus, John the Baptist and Paul are presented as practising celibacy. Paul's advice (not commandment) in 1 Corinthians 7 is, in general, to avoid marriage. 'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman...it is good for them to remain single...exercise self-control...concerning the betrothed...it is good for a person to remain as he (or she) is...do not seek a wife.' I think we get the message, but what proportion of our community actually commits to this 'ideal'?

It's difficult to comprehend why so many face condemnation just for 'eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage' (Luke 17:27). The answer appears to be - they have disregarded the radical demands of Jesus. Likewise 'buying and selling, planting and building' are off-limits. All these *normal* activities are seen as a peaceful, positive and healthy part of the social structure of both ancient and modern life. Within the worldview of Jesus however they are considered degenerate.

The call to sexual renunciation

Classical romance literature celebrated sexual passion and encouraged fertility. Likewise Augustan marriage legislation, which encouraged marriage, pressured the divorced and widowed to remarry quickly. Marriage and procreation were seen as an urgent civic necessity of biological and social renewal. Christian authors created a new romantic genre promoting the ideal of denial, the antithesis of pleasure and the celebration of desire. 'The romance of late antiquity takes the form of a saint's life, in which the chaste desire of the legitimately married hero and heroine has metamorphosed into the otherworldly passion by which a Christian saint embraces a childless death.'⁷

In the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Thecla is impressed by the 'word of purity' as preached by Paul. This purity, in context, related to sexual renunciation. Thecla now refuses to marry her betrothed. She is brought before the governor who questions her: 'Why do you not marry Thamyris according to the law of the Iconians?' But she stood looking intently at Paul. When she did not respond, her mother Theocleia called out, saying, 'Burn the lawless one! Burn the bride that is no bride in the midst of the theatre, so that all of the women who have been taught by this man may be afraid.' The expectation of the author of this fictitious work is that the audience will identify with the heroine's rejection of her duty to family, city and empire. There was a close connection in this literary genre to the Greek romances, but whereas the latter stressed fertility, the former stressed sexual renunciation.

The ascetic ideal

The ascetic narrative of the Gospels is intended to subvert marriage and the household.⁸ The ascetic ideal was widely tolerated, even celebrated, within the Christian movement by many who had no intention of heeding its demands.⁹ The chronicling and promotion of ascetic behaviour at all levels, from abstinence to defiance in the face of death, was an important element in the formation of an alternative Christian language of counterculture to Rome and of the quest for moral superiority.

The teaching of Jesus contains much that is positive and attractive. However, there is also much that must be seen as totally unreasonable. No one can be his disciple unless they renounce all that they possess. In fact they are to live with the bare essentials and accept what is given to them by others (Mark 6:6-13 Luke 10:1-12). From one who takes away their cloak they must not withhold their tunic either (Luke 6:29). They must be prepared not only to disassociate themselves from family members but to hate them. Sexual renunciation was encouraged while divorce and remarriage was effectively forbidden. The call to lose one's life and take up one's cross suggests an ascetic, uncomfortable path where suffering will feature greatly and happiness will be found in despair.

Disciples were to condemn those who rejected their message (Luke 10:10-12); they were to go out preaching wearing no shoes and taking no food or money and to give no cordial greeting to anyone that they met on the road (Luke 10:4); they were to expect to be misunderstood and mistreated and reviled (Matthew 5:11-12), and to positively leap for joy when it happened (Luke 6:23); if struck on the cheek they were to offer the other also. Just as salt is useless if it loses its taste, so a disciple who lapses from full commitment is useless to Jesus (Luke 14:34).

In my experience, unsurprisingly, our community turns a blind eye to the full horror of these radical demands. Unfortunately, the full import of what discipleship entails, with its negative ramifications, is all too clear.

The fact is, Jesus believed and taught that the kingdom age was very imminent. His radical demands can only be understood in such a frenzied, apocalyptic context. Clearly his demands could not be sustained or justified over the long-term and later contributors of the New Testament recognized this and wrote about discipleship with reduced eschatological (end age) fervour. Today we prefer to follow a comfortable Jesus of our own imagination. Based on the compulsory requirements we've looked at, the vast majority of us are not, in truth, real disciples of Jesus. We don't have the stomach for it. The lives we lead are incompatible with his demands. So when we take these *unreasonable* demands out of the equation, what are we left with? That's the subject of a positive article on 'sensible' discipleship in the next issue.

Keith Lowe

Notes

- 1 In my experience, as highlighted in the previous issue of Endeavour, the call to holy poverty has fallen on deaf ears.
- 2 Mark 3:31-34
- 3 This is hard to fathom. A disciple may become hated by his family but why does he or she need to hate in return?
- 4 In February 2012 George Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, called on Christians in Britain to fight and even die for their faith in a bid to reverse the tide of secularization. Other early, 'sensible' Christians considered it unnecessary and even foolish to die for their faith. In their view, Christ died so that his followers would not have to do so.
- 5 H.A. Whittaker. Reformation p. 35
- 6 *ibid* p.5
- 7 *The Virgin and the Bride. Idealized womanhood in late antiquity.* Kate Cooper, 1996, p. 44
- 8 Scorning the pleasures of the body acknowledged that attachment to these pleasures was the undisputed source of strife among individuals and communities. A man who had neither heirs nor desire to produce them could be represented as one for whom the demands of self-interest laid no claim.
- 9 Women were attracted to the virginal ideal because it brought positive attention to them and gave them personal autonomy and an enhanced social status.

TOUCH

Praise we the Lord, who made all beauty
For all our senses to enjoy;
Give we our humble thanks and duty
That simple pleasures never cloy;
Praise we the Lord who made all beauty
For all our senses to enjoy.

This is the first verse of a rather lovely hymn rejoicing in the wonders of creation and praising and thanking the Creator for his gift of our five senses, by which we are able to enjoy every aspect of the world around us. Of these five precious senses, sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, I would like to spend a little time thinking about one of them, the last in the list, touch. 'And why?' you may be thinking. Well partly because I have been interested in the various meanings of the word for some time, but also because of a recent illness which has robbed me in part of the sensitivity in my fingertips thus making life rather more difficult than it was before. I have a sneaking feeling that many of you will be suffering in the same way!

What would it be like not to have any sense of touch? What exactly is touch? I am not going to get too technical here, just a simple explanation. The sense of touch is found all over our body whereas the other four senses are located in specific parts of our body. The sense of touch originates in the bottom layer of the skin known as the dermis. The dermis is filled with many tiny nerve endings which give the brain information about those things that your body comes into contact with. One of the most sensitive parts of the body are the hands where there are about a hundred touch receptors in each of our fingertips. So you may feel heat or cold, wetness or dryness, roughness or smoothness or most importantly pain.

How dreadful if we were not able to feel pain! There are some unfortunate people who are born not able to feel pain. 'Oh good!' you might want to say, but without pain we wouldn't know when we had something wrong with us. We would not feel heat, so we could easily burn ourselves and thus destroy our flesh. We would cut ourselves and not feel the pain, doing nothing about it until we found ourselves ill with an infection. Similarly, we would not feel the cold on a frosty day and, if it was really cold, we could suffer agonising frostbite without knowing it. You may have heard of the Roman Catholic priest known as Father Damien who devoted his life to the care of lepers in a colony. After many years of living and working among them he suddenly discovered that he too had leprosy. It was when he, not hearing his housekeeper's warning, plunged his feet into scalding hot water and didn't feel a thing.

Our nerve endings are able to detect different feelings and textures, the light touch of rain or a feather, the sting of a nettle, the sharp prick of a thorn, the harsh prod of a stick, the roughness of glasspaper.

But what of textures? There isn't one of us who does not enjoy the pleasure we can receive from touching things and appreciating their texture. The poet Rupert Brooke said he loved 'the cool kindness of sheets, the rough male kiss of blankets, grainy wood, live hair, shining and free, hot water, furs and the strong crust of friendly bread.' Joseph Beaumont spoke of

'Eternal Dove, ... soft as thy softest feather may,
We find thy love to us this day;

And in the shelter of thy wing
Obtain thy leave and grace to sing.
And in Tennyson's sad poem, 'Break, Break, Break, he refers to
'... the touch of a vanished hand.'

I also love the line in Harold Monro's poem about taking his dog for a walk. He says the dog, ecstatic at being walked, 'feels the joy of the earth through the touch of his padded paw!'

And what would **you** add? Perhaps smooth things like marble, glass, steel, silk, water, polished pebbles, or rough things like sand between the toes and shells on beaches. Do you like silk thread, homespun cloth and tapestry? Would you choose soft things like the fur of a dog or cat, velvet, or a baby's downy head? Maybe you like the warmth of the sun, or a caressing breeze on your face; the cool dew-covered grass or dry, crunchy autumn leaves under your feet.

At one of the schools where I taught some forty years ago, the woodwork teacher set up an after school club for the children to make little wooden objects, fairly crude shapes, but sanded and smoothly polished, to send to a school for severely disabled pupils who delighted in handling them. They were called feelies and what a joy they were to those children!

All of us cannot but be moved by the sightless, unhearing world of Helen Keller who learnt to communicate by touch. Blind and deaf after a childhood illness, a method of communication was devised by her companion (herself visually impaired) which relied on touch. For example, with one hand under the garden pump the word water was spelled out on her other hand. This was a major breakthrough. Likewise, we cannot be thankful enough for Louis Braille and his tactile writing system used by blind people which relies on feeling with the fingertips the raised dots punched out on the page. I remember how fascinated I was when in the sixties I visited The Bible Society in London and watched the printing of Braille Bibles.

But there are other meanings of the word touch. Touch can be a verb describing an action, meaning to handle, to feel, to come into contact with. I can touch things around me as I write this article – my keyboard, the mouse, the paper I will print on. It can also, of course, be a noun when, for example, we speak of the touch of a hand, the touch of an animal's tongue or paw, and the gentle landing of a butterfly. This is physical touch.

But there is yet another use of this word which is not physical but more abstract, an emotion, a feeling inside. When we are moved and warmed by something, we say we have been touched. 'I was touched by his kind words', or 'her letter of sympathy touched me'. In the words of Elizabeth Fry, the great Quaker prison reformer, 'Since my heart was touched at seventeen years old, I believe I never have awakened from sleep, in sickness or in health, by day or by night, without my first thought being how best I might serve my Lord.' At Bethany, Jesus' heart was touched and he was deeply moved to see the sorrow of Mary at the grave of her brother Lazarus.

I would like to concentrate on these two meanings of the word. They come together very nicely in a poem I have loved for years written by Gerard Manley Hopkins. It concerns a blacksmith called Felix Randall, a strong man, powerful and handsome, well known for his skills in the forge, who has had a long illness and, sadly, has died. Hopkins, a priest, has visited him while he was sick and had given him the last offices of the Roman Catholic church and now he mourns his passing.

Felix Randal

Felix Randal the farrier, O he is dead then? My duty all ended,
Who have watched his mould of man, big-boned and hardy-handsome
Pining, pining, till time when reason rambled in it and some
Fatal four disorders, fleshed there, all contended?

Sickness broke him. Impatient, he cursed at first, but mended
Being anointed and all; though a heavenlier heart began some
Months earlier, since I had our sweet reprieve and ransom
Tendered to him. Ah well, God rest him all road ever he offended!
This seeing the sick endears them to us, us too it endears.
My tongue had taught thee comfort, touch had quenched thy tears,
Thy tears that touched my heart, child, Felix, poor Felix Randal;

How far from then forethought of, all thy more boisterous years,
When thou at the random grim forge, powerful amidst peers,
Didst fettle for the great grey drayhorse his bright and battering sandal!

And there in the third verse we have the two uses of the word touch:
'touch had quenched thy tears, thy tears that touched my heart'.

Now here comes the difficult bit, though hopefully not among the brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus. Touch has become out of fashion, a no-go area. We are told that we'd better not get too close, you never know what it might lead to. Body language says it all, the ramrod back, the stiffening of the body or flinch, the lack of eye contact and the backing away. There is no place now where this is more the case than in schools, youth clubs and social work, and I am aware that those who work in these areas will know just what I am referring to, and maybe have had some unpleasant experience. Gone has that time when a friendly hug, an arm round the shoulders, a light playful tap on the arm or a little clasp of the hand was an acceptable way of showing genuine love, caring and sadness for an individual in trouble, or sheer pleasure and delight for someone having achieved something to be proud of. As a teacher, I well remember how over the years we lost the ability to show our feelings to children in an easy way by a simple act of touching a hand or shoulder. Many excellent teachers have had careers wrecked by false accusations of inappropriate contact.

How do you feel about physical touch? Would you call yourself a touchy-feely person? Do you try to be, because of your love for your family, friends and brothers and sisters, but find it a bit difficult? Some of us find it easy to kiss and hug each other while others really have a problem with it and even find it a bit distasteful. I have certainly come across a few people who are the most loving and kindly people but who have difficulties with physical contact. You may feel you are somewhere between these two. I suppose it depends on all sorts of factors, our own make up, our family background, our experiences with people in our lives, all sorts of things. I think I will just say here that in reading things for this article I have become very aware of how sexual improprieties are very much to blame for the demise of human contact and people showing their love by touch when trying to help those in need. As brothers and sisters in the Lord, we can be relaxed about physical contact, but that may not be the case with our neighbours or colleagues. How utterly sad that devoted fathers have to be careful when dealing with and having fun with their own beloved children, male and female! How abominable that trusting children are let down by adults purporting to care for them!

Something that sparked my interest in this subject was a little snippet in a newspaper I read some while ago. '**All of us could do with a bit more TLC**', (tender loving care) wrote Professor Francis McGlone, whose team at Unilever have discovered that the human touch has healing properties. Well, we as Christians could have told him that, couldn't we, surely? I read somewhere that the sense of touch is crucial to empathy.

In the Bible we read often of the laying on of hands. The action symbolises the idea that through physical contact one person

identifies himself with another before God. In the Old Testament it implied the transfer of a divine blessing, as in for example, Jacob blessing the sons of Joseph; or the burden of guilt, as in placing hands on a bull's head and then offering it as a sacrifice for a man's sins, as described in Leviticus. In the New Testament it is always a blessing and in the church a symbol of ordination and it was very much a part of the church's life. When the elders were chosen in the early days of the church, among them Stephen, the apostles prayed and laid their hands on them. After his dramatic experience on the Damascus road Saul is visited by Ananias who places his hands on him. Before and during the missionary journeys there are many times when apostles and church members had hands laid upon them.

In the letter to Timothy reference is made to Timothy having had the laying on of hands by the elders and Timothy is told not to be in a hurry to lay his hands on a would-be elder. And we have the suggestion in the letter to James that the sick should call for the elders to rub olive oil on him. Today much faith is put on different types of hands-on healing like massage and treatments such as reflexology, aromatherapy, Indian head massage, faith healing of all kinds; physiotherapists and chiropractors all help us with both physical and sometimes mental illness. We talk about a hands-on approach, active participation in healing rather than theory and drugs.

And what about the Master's touch? Throughout the Gospels we read of the work of the Lord's hands and his touch. The crowds with all their assorted diseases and illnesses came to Jesus after sunset on the Sabbath. He placed his hands on every one of them and healed them all. The leper threw himself down in front of Jesus and begged to be healed. Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, an outrageous thing to do but a simple but profound action. We know today, from studies in psychology, what powerful and long-lasting effects result from appropriate human contact. On hearing of Jesus' power many people came and tried to touch him! He touched the hand of Peter's mother-in-law and cured her of her fever. As the funeral procession of the young man arrived at the gate of the town Jesus did another very outrageous thing. Filled with pity for the mother – in other words, he was touched by her sad circumstances – he touched the coffin and told the young man to get up (another two-fold meaning of the word!). To everyone's surprise and horror he puts his hand on the coffin, knowing that for his fellow Jews that would make him unclean. When Jesus arrived at the house of Jairus, the synagogue official whose daughter was ill, he ignored the laughter of those who heard that he thought she was sleeping, and took her by the hand and told her to get up. On the way to the house we remember the woman who just wanted to touch the hem of his garment to know she would be healed. We have the occasion when Jesus took children to his side or on his knee, and so was in close proximity to them, to give important teaching to his disciples.

I wonder whether we tend not to appreciate how intimate and loving was the action of the Saviour when he washed, with his own hands, the disciples' feet. Feet are very basic things, not ugly exactly, but not pretty, very down to earth. To wash our own feet is a mundane task but to wash someone else's is not everyone's cup of tea. But on Jesus' part it was an intimate action, a moment of tenderness. He loved his disciples right through to the end. We must not forget his instant touch to the High Priest's servant's ear after he himself had been betrayed by one of the most intimate of touches, Judas' kiss. Thomas, not believing that Jesus had risen, was invited to put his hands in the nail imprints, whereas he asked the ecstatic Mary not to touch him on their meeting in the garden.

Now what about the Lord and the other form of touch, the abstract form, the emotional one. We know and love our Lord Jesus for these demonstrations of his love for all people, his disciples and his followers. Numerous are the times when his heart was filled with pity for the sick, the old and the weary, the outcast and the sinner, and the hungry when the crowds had been listening to him for days without having anything to eat. He loved and was touched by the earnest young man who wanted to be his disciple but who was unable to respond to the invitation.

In all these incidents we see Jesus becoming involved with all the sickness and sadness that his touch can remove with his healing hands. Tom Wright, in his commentary on Luke's Gospel, says, 'The presence of Jesus, getting his hands dirty with the problems of the world is what we need and what is promised in the Gospel. As we live in Luke's developing story we find Jesus quietly coming alongside us in our own muddle and fear. He welcomes our trembling touch and responds with that central Biblical command 'Don't be afraid.'

'Jerusalem, Jerusalem', Jesus cried, 'how many times have I longed to put my arms around you just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings and you would not let me.' There is one line from all the hymns in our hymnbook that stands out as special to me. It is 'Gather us in thine arms of love.' Here is our heartfelt plea to be gathered in love, to be embraced by our Saviour, to know we are safe and loved. And I am reminded of that passage in Hebrews 4: '*Let us then hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we have a great High Priest who has gone in to the very presence of God, Jesus the son of God. Our High Priest is not one who cannot be touched by the feelings of our infirmities*' (AV). He is touched by our infirmities.

One of the expressions we use a lot these days is 'keep in touch'. We don't want to lose contact with good friends. But isn't it hard to do this? So many things get in the way in our busy lives and that phone call, text, email or letter just doesn't materialise and months, even years fly by. Let this be a warning to us. We must keep in touch with our heavenly Father and our brother Jesus, and not let the years pass without speaking to them. As it says in James, 'Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.'

We all know of the two Greek words for love, *eros* the purely physical, sensual attraction, which does not appear in the NT, and *agape* which does. Its meaning is demonstrated in the whole life of Jesus and is illustrated in the way he spoke, taught, acted and dealt with the sick, the outcast, the rejected, the despised and the guilty who needed sensitive loving treatment. The healing touch of Jesus brought restoration, recovery and renewal.

Here are some extracts from a Prayer to Jesus our Saviour found in my mother's Bible after her death.

Lord, hold my hand I so need your loving kindness.
Lord, hold my hand, all through life in joy or grief.
Lord, hold my hand when I am sick with fear or anxious.
Lord, hold my hand when it is dark and storms are raging.
Lord, hold my hand and help me live it through.
Lord, hold my hand when I fall faint or waver;
Lord, hold my hand for I know your love is true.
Lord, hold my hand when I'm lonely, weary, ageing.
Lord, hold my hand when there's only me and you.

We are created beings with the capacity to love and be loved and to show feeling. We have been shown how to love and to care by our Lord. Like him we must be prepared to touch and be touched in the world around us. When we gather together to take bread and wine in memory of our Lord's death and his resurrection, let us remember that, just as we feel pain and hate having to suffer it and the discomfort it brings, Jesus hung on a cross and endured indescribable pain, no gentle touch there, as the nails were hammered into his hands. He put up with it for us.

At even ere the sun was set,
The sick O Lord around thee lay;
Oh with what divers pains they met!
Oh with what joy they went away!

Thy touch has still its ancient power;
No word from thee can fruitless fall;
Hear, in this solemn evening hour,
And in thy mercy heal us all.

Mavis Boddy

Worship

I have heard so many times, and increasingly more recently, 'Let's worship together.' or 'We're going to have a time of worship.', just before a congregation sings together. Also, the phrase 'worship set' is used to refer to the songs that are going to be sung. It seems to me that there is a narrowing of the scope of 'worship', an idea creeping in to Christian consciousness that worship = singing and only that. It may just be a lazy use of words or sloppy terminology, but if we aren't careful, we will start forgetting the importance of 'worship' being a way of living, and not just the songs we sing together.

The first use of the word 'worship' in the Bible is in Genesis 22:5, when Abraham '... said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.'" This is just before the offering of Isaac. I don't imagine that Abraham was referring to himself and Isaac going off and singing a hymn together! There is clear evidence that Abraham was referring to the act of sacrifice he was about to undertake.

The second use of the word is in Genesis 24, where it is used to describe the response of Isaac's servant to Rebekah's generosity. It says, in verse 26 & 27: 'Then the man bowed down and worshipped the LORD, saying, "Praise be to the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the LORD has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives.'" So this is very clearly a prayer, a prayer of spoken worship.

In the Exodus story, Moses constantly asks Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go (out of Egypt) so that they could worship God. Clearly this is more than just singing, which they could easily have done in Egypt. The worship was going to be a complete separation of the people from their oppressors and the toxic culture of Egypt, a time to truly worship God. The worship was to include sacrifice and burnt offerings to God (Exodus 10:25) and maybe other things, even Moses says to Pharaoh in verse 26 that 'until we get there we will not know what we are to use to worship the LORD.'

Many of the references to worship in Genesis and Exodus include 'bowing down', a symbol consistently used to show reverence and deference to someone of higher authority or to indicate humility. It is very rare in the scriptures that the word 'worship' is coupled with singing, not that I am saying that singing isn't worship, I am only advocating a much wider use of the word than the narrow term that it seems to have become in some quarters.

Worship breaks down to 'worth' 'ship' – the act of giving something 'worth', holding something in high esteem or honour, and most of the references in the Old Testament refer to one Hebrew word *shachah* meaning to bow/fall down/reverence/stoop. It has a wide range of possible meanings but all seem to point to putting yourself in a humble position and lifting up someone or something else. Incidentally, the other word translated as worship (KJV), that only occurs in Daniel, is *cgid* and has a very specific meaning – to fall down/prostrate yourself.

The Old Testament definition of worship seems to be completely tied up with putting something or somebody else above yourself and sometimes above anything else. Obviously this is relevant and appropriate when thinking about our relationship with God, but not always with other things.

The most common Greek word in the New Testament for worship is *proskuneo*, meaning to reverence, adore, fall prostrate before, followed by less frequent but still very common *sebomai*, to be devout, and *doxa*, meaning glory, honour or praise. Again, no mention of singing in any of these uses. Don't get me wrong, I am all in favour of singing, I think it's an important part of worship, but it doesn't seem sensible to refer to worship exclusively as singing, when biblically worship seems to be about a whole way of living and an attitude or posture toward God (when spoken of positively) or other things (when warned against).

Someone once said: 'Everything is an act of worship, you just choose what you are worshipping.' I think that's broadly true, as we make choices daily about what we are holding up as most important. It changes throughout the day and in different seasons of life. For some of us, most of the time it's God, and, for some others, God gets worshipped very infrequently, perhaps only one day a week when we join others to worship.

Of course, I'm no better than anyone else, I need to point the finger at myself more than anyone else. I often worship myself above God – looking after my own needs, desires, vanity before I look to God. I often put technology in a position higher than God, preferring to answer emails or do other things on the computer/phone than focus on my Father in heaven. Some of us put our health or appearance up as an object of worship, while for others it may be houses or cars, holidays, other humans, the list could go on and on.

I think that it is really significant that an act of sacrifice was the first event referred to as worship in the Bible. Abraham was asked to worship God by sacrificing the thing most precious to him, the thing he had invested everything in, his son Isaac. What is more, it is crucial that we see how Abraham was absolutely prepared to go through with it. God said to him: 'I swear by myself ... that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore ... and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.' For believing God, and that being credited to him as righteousness, Abraham was known as a friend of God.

Could I, in the same way, be classed as God's friend? I know I would have failed Abraham's test, I can't imagine ever being able to get even close to agreeing to deliberately harm my son or daughter. However, we are called to make sacrifices, we are called to put nothing above God in the things we give worth to, the things we worship.

More than that, worship really needs to be a whole approach to life, not just the singing we do together when we meet. Romans 12:1-2 says it all, more succinctly than I could:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. Live life in a way that puts God at the top in every thought, word and action; that's a life where your whole body is a 'living sacrifice'; that's a life dedicated to loving God with 'all your heart, soul, mind and strength'.

Colossians 3:23-24 puts the idea of 'life as an act of worship' into context for us:

'Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.'

For me, too much of the time, it is often purely aspirational, but through God's grace and the power of His spirit working in us, we

can all slowly move towards that idea, so that it becomes more of a reality. The whole of life can involve worship! It might include a fair bit of singing of course, but please, let's not allow it to stop there and let's not make the mistake of subconsciously accepting that by using lazy language.

Alex Green

The Hebrew Word

Sheila Harris posed the question what do we mean by 'word'?¹ She drew our attention to the Greek noun *logos*, which we meet in the prologue to the Gospel according to John where we are told that the word became flesh. 'In the LXX (Greek translation of the Old Testament) the meaning of *Logos* is much influenced by the basic Hebrew *dabhar*.'² What can we learn from the Old Testament about this noun, which is usually translated 'word'? Biblical Hebrew does not have a large vocabulary. The beginning student can usually read the Old Testament with knowledge of about 600 verbs and the nouns from which they are formed. One of the first nouns a student learns is *dabhar* which means 'word' or 'thing' and occurs more than five hundred times.

Not surprisingly, the related verb means 'to speak,' even though there is no agreement among scholars as to the etymology of the three consonantal root *dbr*. (We may note that there is a very common word '*mar*' which also means 'to speak' and is often found in translation as 'And he said, saying.') Of course, we speak words. They are the tools whereby we communicate with each other. 'A spoken word is never an empty sound but an operative reality whose action cannot be hindered once it has been pronounced.'³ 'So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose' (Isa 55:11). We note from this example that the term 'Word of God' can be applied to the divine message transmitted directly by or through the prophets. However, we need to bear in mind that every prophet acted as a messenger so that the spoken or written word was of greater importance than the prophet himself, so that 'once handed on, this word acts independently of the person of the prophet.'⁴

The phrase 'the word of the LORD' occurs 241 times in the Old Testament, and that it was used as a technical term for an oral proclamation is readily seen throughout the prophetic writings. 'It is very significant that the phrase always appears with the definite article.'⁵ It was not a random word but rather a particular word. If there is a definite word, what is a non-word? In the Old Testament, idols may be described as graven or molten images according to the method of their construction. We may think of any idol as a non-thing (*lo 'dabhar*) Isa 44:9-10.

We often refer to the Bible as the Word of God. It was God breathed and therefore it is not only authoritative but also inspired. The two instruments of God's action are the Spirit and the Word. A number of Christadelphians are wont to describe the Bible as the Spirit-Word. I believe that we should not coin such hyphenated words. That the Spirit and the Word are the two instruments of God's action is evident, as may be seen in the poetic parallelism of Psa 33:6

'By the **w**ord of the LORD were the heavens made,
and all the host of them by the **b**reath of his mouth.'

However, while we recognize that the Bible or Word of God is complete – canonically speaking – we often fail to appreciate the continuing work of the Spirit of God.

There is an interrelatedness of a word and a deed. Why should this be so? 'Once a word, *dabhar*, is uttered with intent, it has effect once again in *dabhar* – it becomes a thing.'⁶ Hence my Hebrew lexicon uses the two English nouns 'word' and 'thing' to translate *dabhar*.

John Stephenson (NZ)

Notes

¹The *Endeavour Magazine*, June, 2012, pp 7-8.

²G Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Eerdmans, 1968, Vol IV p 93.

³Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1967, p127.

⁴Jacob, p 131

⁵Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh, 1967, Vol II, p 87.

⁶G. A. F. Knight, *A Christian Theology of the Old Testament*, SCM, London, 1959, p 59.

A Prayer

Lord, I ask for your blessing on this moment only. Nothing else. The past is the past, though I often regret it. Tomorrow will come and often I'm anxious about it. But this moment only can I influence in any way and I need your help to do it.

Solomon's Temple – David's? – or Samuel's?

Solomon's temple was built in the tenth century BC and continued in use for over four hundred years until its destruction by the Babylonians. Although it was Solomon who erected the temple, most of the preparations were made by his father, David. The building of the temple had been close to David's heart and he spent much of the latter part of his life devoted to planning the materials for the project, the staffing and timetabling. But David was not allowed to build the temple ('...because you are a man of war and have shed blood.' 1 Chron 28:3), so he dedicated his life to facilitating his successor:

Hadoram brought all kinds of articles of gold and silver and bronze. **King David also dedicated these to the LORD** with the silver and the gold which he had carried away from all the nations: from Edom, Moab, the sons of Ammon, the Philistines, and from Amalek. (1 Chron 18:10-11)

Then David said, 'This is the house of the LORD God, and this is the altar of burnt offering for Israel.' **So David gave orders to gather the foreigners who were in the land of Israel, and he set stonemasons to hew out stones to build the house of God. David prepared** large quantities of iron to make the nails for the doors of the gates and for the clamps, and more bronze than could be weighed; and timbers of cedar logs beyond number, for the Sidonians and Tyrians brought large quantities of cedar timber to David. (1 Chron 22:1-4)

Solomon was always careful to acknowledge his dependence upon his father, David's role:

Thus all the work that King Solomon performed in the house of the LORD was finished. **And Solomon brought in the things dedicated by his father David**, the silver and the gold and the utensils, and he put them in the treasuries of the house of the LORD. (1 Kings 7:51)

Now send me a skilled man to work in gold, silver, brass and iron, and in purple, crimson and violet fabrics, and who knows how to make engravings, to work with the skilled men whom I have in Judah and Jerusalem, **whom David my father provided**. (2 Chron 2:7)

However, there is evidence that preparation for the temple did not originate with David. It actually originated with Samuel.

Evidence for Samuel's plan for the temple

There are only a few references to Samuel's involvement, but they show that he and David had been planning the temple together in considerable detail. Consider:

Zechariah the son of Meshelemiah was gatekeeper of the entrance of the tent of meeting. All these who were chosen to be gatekeepers at the thresholds were 212. These were enrolled by genealogy in their villages, whom **David and Samuel the seer appointed in their office of trust**. So they and their sons had charge of the gates of the house of the LORD, even the house of the tent, as guards. The gatekeepers were on the four sides, to the east, west, north and south. Their relatives in their villages were to come in every seven days from time to time to be with them. (1Chron 9:21-25).

The plans for the responsibilities of these 212 gatekeepers led by Meshelemiah included such matters as:

They spent the night around the house of God, the watch was committed to them.

They were in charge of opening it every morning.

Some of them had charge of the utensils of service, for they counted them when they brought them in and when they took them out.

Some of them also were appointed over the furniture and over all the utensils of the sanctuary, over the fine flour, the wine, the oil, the frankincense and the spices.

Some of the sons of the priests prepared the mixing of the spices.

Mattithiah, one of the Levites, who was the firstborn of Shallum the Korahite, had the responsibility over the things which were baked in pans.

Some of the relatives of the sons of the Kohathites were over the showbread to prepare it every sabbath. (1Chron 9:27-32)

If the discussions between Samuel and David had covered such minutiae, presumably they had already planned all the broader issues. Samuel was not, therefore, only a minor player in planning the temple.

And there is a further clue:

This Shelomoth and his relatives had charge of all **the treasures of the dedicated gifts** which King David and the heads of the fathers' households, the commanders of thousands and hundreds, and the commanders of the army, had dedicated. They dedicated part of the spoil won in battles to repair the house of the LORD. **And all that Samuel the seer had dedicated and Saul the son of Kish, Abner the son of Ner and Joab the son of Zeruiah, everyone who had dedicated anything, all of this was in the care of Shelomoth and his relatives.** (1Chron 26:26-28)

Thus not only had David donated men and materials for the new temple, as is well recognized, but the process of accumulation had started many years earlier. Samuel had dedicated, as had even Saul, along with the army commanders, and that is long before David appeared on the scene.

Did Samuel plan the temple?

Samuel was a man of vision as well as a great prophet. The absence of a centre of worship for the Lord, the great God of Israel after the tabernacle at Shiloh had been compromised, must have weighed heavily upon Samuel. Each year, as he set out upon his circuit, Samuel would have yearned for a proper place of worship appropriate to the God who brought Israel out of Egypt into the promised land.

The suggestion here is that Samuel did actually have a plan for a temple, a plan which either came from God or, at the very least, a plan which God approved. We tend to date the plan for the temple at the time when David made the suggestion to Nathan:

The king said to Nathan the prophet, 'See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains.' (2 Sam 7:2)

But scripture shows that the plans for the temple were laid long before David became king of all Israel and dwelt in his own house. Samuel had stimulated Saul to begin to allocate 'spoil' for that temple, but Saul did not pursue the matter further during his forty year reign. Indeed, Saul's progressive spiritual decline is shown by his offering the sacrifice himself instead of waiting for Samuel, his failure to obey God's command to kill Agag and his final descent into witchcraft. Samuel would have watched Saul's descent into ungodliness with dismay: Saul was clearly not going to build God's temple.

When David was anointed king as successor to Saul, Samuel had another opportunity to plan the temple. David proved to be the willing, enthusiastic, king that Samuel was seeking. It seems likely that the plans were actually Samuel's. Samuel had had many years, several decades, to refine the details for the construction and staffing of the future temple.

Now David fled and escaped and came to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and stayed in Naioth. (1Sam 19:18-19, quotations from NASB).

This single sentence is interesting because Samuel and David stayed together for some weeks, possibly even months. By this time, Saul's hostility to David was public and he had not only sent messengers to arrest David but he himself set off to do so. But all the messengers were frustrated in their murderous intent when they began 'prophesying' – as did Saul also, who had the added indignity that he was naked. These were strange events to us, but they had the effect of leaving David and Saul in peace for their discussions. What were those discussions? This study attempts to answer this question. As background, we will consider the greatness of Samuel as a way of leading into the undervalued role of Samuel in the building of what became known as the temple of Solomon.

Samuel's greatness as a prophet

It is easy to underestimate Samuel as a prophet. Consider these two references:

Then the LORD said to me, 'Even though Moses and Samuel were to stand before Me, My heart would not be with this people; send them away from My presence and let them go!' (Jer 15:1)

There had not been celebrated a Passover like it in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet; nor had any of the kings of Israel celebrated such a Passover as Josiah did with the priests, the Levites, all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (2 Ch 35:18)

The first reference links Samuel with Moses, the great founder of the nation of Israel, as examples of God's servants, at a time when Israel was about to be transported for iniquity. The second is a surprise. There is no hint of any Passover, let alone a great one, in the histories of Israel. Yet Samuel's Passover was greater even than that of Hezekiah.

The New Testament also recognizes Samuel's greatness:

And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. (Act 3:24)

After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. (Act 13:20)

And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, (Heb 11:32)

After the period of the Judges, Samuel 'the seer' is recognized as the first of the great line of prophets written in the Bible.

Samuel's successes and his failure

Looking back over the period of the Judges, Samuel would have seen a progressive corruption leading to the climax of the ghastly tale of the iniquity of Benjamin, and its near destruction as a tribe. This was followed by the attempt to use the holy ark of God as a magic talisman, a debasement of the teaching concerning true worship in the Law of Moses. Shiloh with the tabernacle had been discredited by the disgraceful and sacrilegious actions of the sons of Eli. Even though Samuel had grown up there, and had received his first direct communication from God at Shiloh, there is little hint during the time of Samuel's ministry that the site had any great significance for either personal or national worship. The priests and Levites who should have been the judges and spiritual leaders, had failed abjectly. Thus there was much that was wrong with the spiritual state of the nation. The burden on Samuel was great. Yet under the guidance of the God of Israel, Samuel was able to implement a strategy to bring the nation back to the Lord.

Samuel did many great things, welding the nation of Israel together. It was Samuel whom God chose to anoint the first two kings of Israel: Saul whose physical appearance was so deceptive and who proved to be such a failure spiritually, and David who became the beloved of the Lord. It was Samuel who organized the kingdom, the manpower and the finances, that changed the nation of Israel into a kingship. The scale of these changes during the time of Saul must have been considerable. Although there is no formal statement that it was Samuel who set up the schools of the prophets, there is circumstantial evidence. The prophets were to become a major force in the spiritual life of Israel in an attempt to prevent the nation repeating the mistakes of the times of the Judges.

However, it would surely have been a matter of grief to the exceptionally spiritual Samuel, the prophet of the living God, that the tabernacle was not functioning as the spiritual centre as it did when the nation first entered Canaan. Instead he established an annual circuit between Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpah. Additionally, it is likely that his home at Ramah would be recognized as a centre of authority for spiritual matters. It seems that Naioth, adjacent to Ramah, was the first centre for the school of the prophets.

The site for the temple

The first thing that David did was to take the city of Jerusalem. Why did David do this? It seems likely that he knew that this city was to be the site of the future temple. Again, since Samuel was the main planner of the temple, it would have been likely that Samuel had indicated that it should be built in Jerusalem.

Now the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, and they said to David, 'You shall not come in here, but the blind and lame will turn you away'; thinking, 'David cannot enter here.' Nevertheless, David captured the stronghold of Zion, that is the city of David. (2 Samuel 5:6-7)

For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. (Psalm 132:13)

But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain. (Psalm 2:6)

Although Jerusalem had thus been taken from the Jebusites as the city for the future temple, it was some years later that the exact site was chosen:

David said to Ornan, 'Give me the site of this threshing floor, that I may build on it an altar to the LORD; for the full price you shall give it to me, that the plague may be restrained from the people.' Ornan said to David, 'Take it for yourself; and let my lord the king do what is good in his sight. See, I will give the oxen for burnt offerings and the threshing sledges for wood and the wheat for the grain offering; I will give it all.' **But King David said to Ornan, 'No, but I will surely buy it for the full price; for I will not take what is yours for the LORD, or offer a burnt offering which costs me nothing.'** So David gave Ornan 600 shekels of gold by weight for the site. Then David built an altar to the LORD there and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. And he called to the LORD and He answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering. (1 Chron 21:22-26)

Summary

Evidence is presented here that the temple that became known as Solomon's temple was, in fact, planned by Samuel as far back as the time of Saul. However, the reign of Saul was not a fertile period for spiritual matters. When David was anointed, Samuel found a much more receptive mind for the plans of the temple. David later took Jerusalem and dedicated large numbers of men, and enormous quantities of materials for Solomon to use in completing the temple.

There was a period, described in 1 Samuel 19, when David sought out Samuel and spent at least several weeks with him at Ramah and Naioth. This peaceful period would have been the perfect opportunity for plans for the temple to be drawn up. Samuel was the driving force for the temple but his part is usually not appreciated and his role undervalued.

Roy Boyd

*The test of your character is
what you would do if you knew no one would ever know.*
Bob Jones

Leaving The Reason Torn, Re-thinking cross and resurrection through R S Thomas,

Alison Goodlad, 2012, Shoving Leopard Productions,
ISBN 978-1-905565-18-4, pp 114, pbk. £12.95.

In this book Alison Goodlad, the daughter of Brother and Sister Ron Coleman, faces the question of how we understand religious truths and especially the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Inevitably this presents us with vital questions about pain, suffering, justice, sin, atonement, judgment etc. Theologians have pondered over this for two millennia. They have tackled it with theories, rational explanations, dogmas and doctrines. But these are all a merely human attempt to reduce the problem to logical argument – an approach deeply ingrained in modern thinking, especially in the Western world through scientific research into meaningful diagnosis and intelligible formulae, above all by answers and proofs. But religious truth defies this analysis. Our attempts to define are purely putting indefinable realities into logical categories, whereas they are mysteries beyond logic. These problems are sometimes most clearly expressed through the innocence of children's questions, such as 'Who made God?' and 'Why did He create the world?' – mysteries beyond us.

So Alison proceeds to show that these ultimate questions cannot be solved by reason or argument, but much more powerfully through poetry. Poetry is an expression of feeling, emotion and imagination, enabling us, as Shakespeare says, to see 'sermons in stones and good in everything,' (As You Like It) and to find 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends, Rough hew them as we will.' (Hamlet)

Plato had taught centuries before that true reality lies not in the outward appearance but in the inner meaning or purpose. And so in poetry we find the means to express our inner thoughts, fears and dreams which are the true meaning of our lives. As Paul writes to the Corinthians: 'We look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal but the things which are not seen are eternal.' (2 Corinthians 4.18.)

And so Alison turns to the poems and the life of R.S.Thomas, the Welsh poet and priest, who through the whole of his long life expressed his deepest thoughts through the medium of poetry. The subject that puzzled, fascinated and intrigued him was the Cross of Christ – how to reconcile the pain and suffering with the love of God. And he saw this dilemma lived out in his own and others' life experiences. When he moved from the quiet security of his young life in Anglesey, where he felt at home by the sea and in the countryside and went as vicar to a church in rural Wales, he was faced with the rigours and deprivations of the country people and felt in their lives something of the pain of the Cross. In his poetry he portrayed the Cross within the framework of the natural world. He

moved from the comfort of assurance into the challenge of suffering – a step from orientation to disorientation with constant questioning. Even towards the end of his life, when he recognised the power and assurance of the resurrection, he only seldom reached a moment of sustained exultation, only once a year, not a joyful reorientation. But his poems are a valuable illustration of a lifetime's experience of growing with God through the challenge of trial and temptation, the suffering of others and the pain of the world.

Alison has paid a worthy tribute to this great poet who poured out his heart to share with others their burdens, fears and doubts but also hope and faith. There is no logical exposition of the whole Christian experience because it is based upon love not reason.

'God so loved the world that he gave his Son...'

And Jesus voluntarily gave his life so that we can share it, if we come humbly to receive God's gift of forgiveness and new life.

Life given, life received, life shared.

Sheila Harris

Although a book about poetry there is much here for anyone who wants to deepen their appreciation of the Atonement, including suffering.

R S Thomas, 1913 – 2000, a poet of national importance, spent his working life first as curate, and then rector of rural Welsh parishes. As he struggled with the suffering of his Welsh hill farmer parishioners and their families it was to poetry that he turned to express himself in his search for meaning in a situation for which, despite theological college, he was totally unprepared. Later, he turned to the themes of crucifixion and resurrection and into territory beyond the theoretical, rational explanation of the event. He challenges the imagination, stretching and invigorating us. But as in life, so in his poetry there are no neat resolutions.

The book is formed of two sections. The second follows the chronological development of R S Thomas' poetry throughout his long and productive poetic life. The first, and this is where there is much of interest to the Bible student, provides the theological background, ranging from Atonement theories to the counter-testimonies of the Psalmist and Job. R S Thomas is the inheritor of the voice of this biblical counter-testimony.

Linking both sections is the notion that when wrestling with dilemmas, poetry provides an imaginative language with which to see God and the world afresh. Poetry can hold theory and emotion simultaneously, retaining multiple meanings. From here comes the title of the book, a line from one of R S Thomas' poems – 'leaving the reason torn'. 'Reason may be torn but the way is left open to the torn God, for us to experience at-one-ment.'

Three ideas that resonate with me are:

First the orientation, disorientation and re-orientation of our spiritual lives. Perhaps most easily understood if we think of home improvements. It is ok as it is (orientation); improvements first create chaos (dis-orientation) but then come the benefits (re-orientation).

Second, the exposition of Job which is the most convincing I have ever heard.

And third, one particular poem on page 93, 'Never Arriving', making explicit reference to Psalm 42, where the tortured soul, yearning for God in the same way that parched deer long for cooling streams, knows of the 'deep calling to deep':

But the silence in the mind
is when we live best, within
listening distance of the silence
we call God. This is the deep
calling to deep of the psalm-
writer, the bottomless ocean
we launch the armada of
our thoughts on, never arriving.

Alison's book has been highly acclaimed by theologians. Paula Gooder, Canon Theologian of Birmingham and Guildford Cathedrals says: 'This timely book provides not only an inspiring introduction to R S Thomas' theology of the cross and resurrection but a clarion call to a different way of doing theology: one that lives with loose ends, ragged edges and suggestion rather than clear answers and certainty.' I can't express anything as eloquently as any of them but I would just add – treat yourself to a copy and read it!

Tina Neate

A High Note in the Song of Songs

The Shulamite maid refers to her mother three times and twice to her mother's house – but never mentions her father, whom we must therefore presume to be dead.

Nevertheless, there is an indirect reference to him in chapter 7 verse 2: 'You are beautiful...O prince's daughter' (JB version). Now, according to 2 Sam 8:18, David's sons were priests (NEB,GNB,JB). This cannot be correct, as only the descendants of Aaron could be priests, so perhaps it should read 'David's sons were princes – chief rulers (AV), royal advisers (NIV).

Was the girl a daughter of one of David's princely sons? This royal connection could explain how her mother came to have her own house – and in Jerusalem too! It would also explain the girl's familiarity with Solomon's court, as evident in the Song.

Michael Craddock

(χαρακτήρ) *charakter*

This word occurs only once in the NT. It comes from the verb *charasso* (χαράσσω) which means to engrave or inscribe, most often on coins. It can mean an instrument for marking or engraving or can refer to the imprint made by the instrument. An emperor would engage someone to make a stamp with his picture on it which would then be used to impress his likeness onto coins, making it clear who was in charge in the empire. Those who had not seen Caesar could get some idea of what he was like from the precise representation of his likeness on coins. This is where we get our English word 'character' from, although it has a wider meaning referring for example to characters in alphabets, in plays and in descriptions of how people behave, what kind of a person they are.

Charakter is to be found in the opening words of the epistle to the Hebrews where, amongst other staggering things, the author says of Jesus that he 'is the exact likeness of God's own being' (GNB). The writer makes it clear that for him God had spoken to the Jews in OT times in many ways through the prophets, but he is even more emphatic about saying that through His Son God had now spoken more definitively than ever before. In these introductory words he outlines what he intends to claim on behalf of Jesus telling his readers how highly they should esteem him. As the true image of God in flesh, Jesus revealed his Father's character as never before.

Paul tells us that God put his stamp of ownership on us by giving us the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13). What then of our characters?

Les Boddy

