

THE CRISTADELPHIAN
TIDINGS
of the Kingdom of God

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The CHRISTADELPHIAN TIDINGS of the Kingdom of God

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Superior Judgment Avoids Trouble

"A superior pilot is one who stays out of trouble by using his superior judgment to avoid situations which might require the use of his superior skill." This saying is on a poster for the Canadian Aviation Safety Bureau.

The wise pilot avoids having to use his superior ability by steering clear of the dangers that would require him to use it.

Would that all of us showed this wisdom in our lives! So often we walk where angels fear to tread, confident we will be able to extricate ourselves from the dangers we are courting.

Young drivers so often rely on their driving skills to get them out of a jam that they should have avoided in the first place.

Scripture teaches us that we ought not tempt the Lord our God. Jesus refused to. When Joseph was being tempted by the wife of Potiphar, "he hearkened not unto her." When she grabbed his garment and tried to seduce him, he quickly pulled himself right out of the garment he was wearing and "fled and got him out."

Paul told the Corinthians, "Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body."

Robert J. Lloyd

Editorial

“Decently and in order”

Paul writes to the Corinthians that “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints... Wherefore... Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:33,39,40, KJV).

Or, “God is not a God of disorder but of peace... in all the congregations of the saints... Therefore... everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (NIV).

Confusion and disorder

In Corinth — as the context suggests — there was confusion and disorder, manifesting itself in the conduct of some believers...

1. “exercising their freedoms”, no matter the effect on others (1 Cor. 8:7-13);
2. indulging in idolatry and sexual immorality (10:7,8,14);
3. “pushing the limits” (10:9);
4. grumbling against God’s appointed leaders (10:10);
5. switching back and forth between two “worlds” (10:14-22);
6. emphasizing, at every opportunity, what is “permissible” — to the downgrading of what is “beneficial” and “constructive” (10:23);
7. being “contentious” about brothers’ and sisters’ respective hair lengths and head coverings (11:1-16);
8. exhibiting gluttony and drunkenness at the memorial meetings (11:17-22);
9. expressing to other members of the One Body, by action or even words, that “we are independent”, or “we don’t need you!” (ch. 12); and
10. exercising their special “gifts” whenever they please — even if disruptive of routine or inappropriate or unedifying to others (ch. 14).

It is this last item that leads, most directly, to Paul’s command that everything be done in a fitting and orderly way (14:40). But it may be seen that the first nine items are of one piece with the tenth item. They all have to do with selfishness, indulgence, and independence. And they all seemingly ignore Paul’s exhortations to build up the One Body in love.

Peace and order

“Peace” and “a fitting and orderly way” (the KJV’s “decently and in order”) can seem so vague, so general. It’s all too easy to make light of the very words themselves, or the brothers and sisters who cite them: “They’re so old-fashioned!” “A narrow-minded conservatism, and a pointless dependence on tradition!” “I feel so much more spiritual with new and lively music!” “We need changes that appeal to young people today!” “We should be free to express our own feelings!” “God doesn’t care about outward appearance — only the heart!”

Therefore it may help to go over the list above, and to consider the opposites of what is listed there. Since those are the manifestations of confusion and disorder, then their opposites ought to be the manifestations of peace and order:

- (1) being careful not to use one's freedom in such a way that it becomes a "stumbling block" to others (1 Cor. 8:9);
- (2) "fleeing from idolatry" and immorality (10:14);
- (3) being mature enough to refrain from 'testing the limits' — or 'pushing the envelope' — just to prove *your* point (10:9);
- (4) accepting the wishes — even the 'rules' — of ecclesial elders without whining or complaining (10:10);
- (5) staying as far away as possible from a worldly lifestyle (10:14-22);
- (6) always thinking first of what is "beneficial" and "constructive" for one's brothers and sisters (10:23);
- (7) holding to the "teachings" (NIV), "ordinances" (KJV) — and, yes, even the "traditions" (NIV margin) — that have been passed along from older believers (11:2);
- (8) "waiting for each other" (11:33); i.e., curbing one's own indulgences and sharing generously with all others;
- (9) realizing that every member of the One Body has worth, and that we all need one another, and should care for one another (especially those who are "weak"); and
- (10) behaving like adults (14:20), "weighing carefully what is said" before speaking (v. 29), and "keeping quiet" so as to "speak to [oneself] and to God" (v. 28) (the last of these, says Paul, being especially applicable to women: v. 34).

The larger context can only take us so far; then we ought to look closely at the words themselves...

"Fitting", or "decent"

These are the translations of the Greek "euschemonos" — which denotes "graceful", or "in a seemly or pleasant manner". The word literally means "good [*eu*] form [*schema*]" — which in itself gives the lie to the idea that "outward appearance means nothing". The same word occurs in Romans 13:13 ("decently" in NIV, "honestly" in KJV), where it stands in contrast to the shameful Gentile social life of "orgies and drunkenness... immorality and debauchery... dissension and jealousy".

Just as there is protocol, or 'good form', for meeting monarchs and heads of state, or even governmental officials and judges and generals — so there ought to be 'good form' for meeting *the* King and *the* Judge, and for attending a service in his honor that is equal parts funeral and wedding!

"Orderly"

This word translates the Greek "taxis", derived from the root "tasso", which signifies an orderly arrangement. It is used of the fixed succession of the priestly courses

in Luke 1:8. There is, in other places, practically a military sense to the word; thus Paul, in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, commands avoidance of every brother who “walks disorderly” and “not after the tradition received from us.” There “disorderly” is the related “ataktous” — demonstrably a military term, signifying to be out of step, to break ranks, or to be insubordinate. The disorderly tendencies of the Thessalonians find a parallel in those of the Corinthians.

More generally, the equivalent Hebrew expressions for “setting in order” describe significant features in the service of God:

- a. Abraham carefully “set in order” the wood on the altar where Isaac was to be sacrificed (Gen. 22:9; cp. Lev. 1:7).
- b. God gave very meticulous directions to Moses to “set in order” the construction of the Tabernacle (Exod. 26:17), including the “ordering” of the lampstands (Exod. 39:37) and the table of the Bread of God’s Presence, and even the bread upon it (Exod. 40:4,23; Lev. 24:8). Did it make a difference how this was done? Evidently it did to God!
- c. The pieces of the sacrifices were to be “set in order”, by a very careful, explained-in-advance arrangement (Lev. 1:8,12; 6:12) — not haphazardly tossed on the altar like so much meat on a grill!
- d. On Mount Carmel, the prophet Elijah carefully “set the wood in order” for the sacrifice of the bull (1 Kings 18:33).
- e. As late as Hezekiah’s day the temple service — after being ignored for some time — was renewed and “set in order” again, much to the LORD’s satisfaction (2 Chr. 29:35; also cp. Josiah in 2 Chr. 34; 35).

For our purposes it is worth noting that, in the Old Testament, the “setting in order” pertained to the arranging of the lamps, the offering of sacrifices, and the laying out of the holy bread. In our service, this is approximated by the reading of the Word of God (“Your word is a lamp... and a light”: Psa. 119:105), and the preparing and partaking of the commemorative bread and the wine! These observations have serious implications for us, in how we ought to approach our Memorial Service.

“The voice speaking to us”

The New Testament concept that in worship all should be done in an orderly and fitting manner (i.e., 1 Cor. 14:40) finds its basis in the Book of Numbers. Notice, in Numbers 7, how the lengthy and repetitive lists of the dedication offerings of the elders of each tribe — exactly the same offerings, presented in exactly the same order, time after time — emphasize the importance and the solemnity of the occasion. Plainly, it could have been done (and described) much more simply. But what a ‘payoff’ there is:

“When Moses entered the Tent of Meeting to speak with the LORD, he heard the voice speaking to him from between the two cherubim above the mercy seat on the ark of the Testimony” (Num. 7:89).

The 88 verses that precede this final verse make Numbers 7, in the opinion of many, the most ‘boring’ chapter in the entire Bible! But notice how this final verse

‘redeems’ all the rest. When all the tribes have meticulously brought all their offerings and sacrifices, in perfect order, and when they have all been accounted for and catalogued, carefully and even tediously... only then does the LORD God Almighty speak to Moses from His own special place above the mercy seat. How could a chapter in the Bible qualify for ‘boring’ when it culminates with the voice of God speaking to man? What price would we pay, and what effort would we go to, in order that God would speak directly to us?

But, sadly, we may fritter away all the power, and majesty, and beauty, of our sacrifice and dedication to the LORD God. We may arrive at the Memorial Meeting late, tired, distracted, haphazardly dressed, and ill-prepared for our assigned tasks, or even to pray and sing with the entire congregation. Of course we know this is an appointment that we really *ought* to make — and so we come. But our minds may still be at the ‘unseemly’ places we frequented on Saturday evening (whether physically or merely in our minds), or occupied with plans for meals and activities immediately following the ‘service’, or with upcoming business matters of the following day.

If this is our attitude and our approach, then we may discover that the LORD God — who still sits enthroned above the mercy seat — may not ‘speak’ to us at all in the Memorial Meeting! Is there any greater tragedy?

“What’s love got to do with it?”

We have scanned parts of 1 Corinthians (particularly chapters 8 through 14). What we have left untouched until now is 1 Corinthians 13 (the ‘love chapter’). The question naturally arises, “What does *love* have to do with decent and orderly worship? Isn’t love by itself enough?”

But a moment’s reflection will show that the ‘love chapter’ is very aptly placed, right in the middle of a whole section about ecclesial order. To Paul, ‘love’ was not just an emotion — it was an action. Not just a noun, but a verb! We don’t just *feel* ‘love’; we *do* ‘love’... in our actions, or in our restraint of actions:

- Problems arose in Corinth with those who desired to do ‘their own thing’, with no regard for the stumbling blocks they might be putting in the way of others. But in the ‘love chapter’, Paul reminds the Corinthians that “love is not proud... and not rude.”
- Problems arose when some indulged their own appetites. But Paul reminds them that “love is not self-seeking.”
- Problems arose when some acted as though they did not need anyone else. But Paul said that “love is patient and kind... love does not boast... love protects.”
- Problems arose when some insisted on acting like children, who must be heard, and who must have their own way. But in the ‘love chapter’ Paul said, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me” (1 Cor. 13:11).

We don’t baptize children; we baptize responsible adults! Worshiping the LORD,

and remembering His Son, is not a game for children. Nor is it an arena for self-expression, or an opportunity for self-indulgence. It is the serious calling of adults, who have put away childish things.

John Thomas wrote, “The doctrine Paul taught, and the customs he established, afforded no scope for the gratification of personal ambition and democratic turbulence. He required that all things should be done decently and in order: and to the edification, or the building up, of the body of Christ in its most holy faith.”

In the right sort of service, there is more than enough scope for the experiencing

Exhortation

“Tohu bohu”

“Tohu bohu”... Actually, in Hebrew, the full expression would have a connective: “tohu w’bohu” might be the closest transliteration in English.

It is one of those phrases that sticks with you. The first time I heard it, from Sis. Marie Banta in a Bible class, I laughed. But once you’ve heard it and thought about it for a few seconds, it is practically impossible to forget it, and what it means. The closest English equivalent might be “topsy-turvy”... or “helter-skelter”... or “upside-down”.

“Tohu w’bohu” occurs in Genesis 1:2: “The earth was without form and void” (KJV), or “The earth was formless and empty” (NIV). “Without form” or “formless” translates “tohu”, and “void” or “empty” translates “bohu”.

“Tohu” occurs about 20 times in the Old Testament. It describes chaos, confusion, disorder — a state of randomness or formlessness.

“Bohu” occurs only three times in the Old Testament, and only in close proximity to “tohu”. It means that which is empty. It describes a vacuum, or an uninhabited area. You’ll understand what the word means if you have ever watched *Lawrence of Arabia*, in which T.E. Lawrence, with a couple of Arab companions, makes a thousand-mile trek across the Rub’ al Khali of Arabia, what the Bedouin call — to this day — the “Empty Quarter”. In the “Empty Quarter” one will find wave upon wave of sand dunes, constantly changing size and shape, but never changing character: sand, all sand, and nothing but sand — blown about ceaselessly by the brutally hot desert winds. Anyone attempting to cross the Empty Quarter will soon become totally disoriented by the lack of landmarks. If a great sandstorm blows up, and the sun is obscured, then there is simply no hope of finding one’s way until it subsides.

“Bohu” only occurs in the Bible alongside “tohu”. Besides Genesis 1:2, the other two instances are Jeremiah 4:23 and Isaiah 34:11. Some Bible expositors, taking their cue from this juxtaposition, suggest that the pair is a “hendiadys” — which literally means “a one-in-two word”, where two words combine to produce a new word. (Think about “fireman” or “drugstore” or “bestseller”.) Combining the two

words, then, “tohu w’bohu” would mean a “formless emptiness”, or an “empty chaos”.

Even when “tohu” occurs, as it does, without “bohu”, it may imply “tohu w’bohu”! That is, “tohu” alone may not so much mean “that which is formless” or “disorganized” only; but rather a place that is both “formless” and “empty”:

- a. the “wasteland” (Hebrew “tohu”) that Job describes (Job 6:18), with wadis (dry creek beds) and no water to be found, or
- b. the “desert land... the waste (‘tohu’) howling wilderness” of the Sinai (Deut. 32:10), through which Israel journeyed on their way to the Land of Promise.

Genesis 1

So, when we read in Genesis 1:2 that the earth, at some point after its creation, was “tohu w’bohu”, we need not think of simple nothingness (like a vacuum in outer space). Instead, we should think (with the Middle Eastern sensibilities of Jew or Arab) of a useless piece of land, a barrenness in which nothing of consequence can grow, a stretch of sand without order, with no fixed landmarks, no set patterns — and no discernible life. Just such a place was the “earth” before God began his creative (or, perhaps, His *re*-creative) work.

“Now the earth was ‘tohu w’bohu’, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Gen. 1:2, NIV).

“Hovering”, or “moving” (as the KJV), is a Hebrew word that describes a devoted mother bird brooding over, or sheltering, her young. Through His Spirit or power, God is lavishing His love on the new world about to be born. Remember the “waste (‘tohu’) howling wilderness” of Deuteronomy 32:10? It was in just that place, a chaotic emptiness, that Moses said God found His people, Jacob or Israel. There He “guarded [the children of Israel]... like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young” (Deut. 32:11)!

The words describe a mother bird, and through her they portray the energy-giving presence of God — wrapping, protecting, and caressing, under His wings, the chaos of an empty and unfinished earth as He prepares to complete His creation.

And so, where there had been nothing but “darkness” (Gen. 1:2) before, now there would be light! “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light ‘day,’ and the darkness he called ‘night.’ And there was evening, and there was morning — the first day” (vv. 3-5).

First the earth was (in sequence):

- (a) formless (‘tohu’),
- (b) empty (‘bohu’), and
- (c) dark.

Then at God’s command (and in reverse sequence) it became:

- (c) bright with light (vv. 3-5),
- (b) “full” of vegetation (vv. 11,12) and animal life of every imaginable kind (vv. 20-25), and
- (a) well-ordered: its regular and recurrent heavenly lights and seasons ordained to mark out days and months and years (vv. 14-18).

And it was all “good”!

Here is the essence of God’s creative act: an earth filled with life, and regulated by His hand. Over this newly filled and ordered world God placed His greatest single “creation”: man and woman.

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth [that until just now has been ‘empty’!] and subdue it [i.e., bring order to what until just now had been ‘chaotic’!]’ ” (vv. 27,28).

“Tohu w’bohu” elsewhere

The other instances of this phrase are remarkably instructive:

First, Jeremiah 4 depicts an “earth” — “eretz”, the Land of Israel — that had once been “fruitful” (v. 26), with inhabited towns (v. 26), and God’s people dwelling peacefully in and around His city of Jerusalem. But how had His people responded to the wonderful blessings of God’s creation — of full and ordered lives — out of which they might glorify Him?

“My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good” (v. 22).

What was God’s reaction to this? Out of the north came a great “disaster” (v. 6), a “lion” who “destroyed nations” (v. 7) — the Babylonian king with his armies. “Look! He advances like the clouds, his chariots come like a whirlwind, his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us! We are ruined!” (v. 13). And when the war was finished, the trumpet ceased, and the battle cry quieted (vv. 16-19)... and when, thereafter, the “scorching wind from the barren heights in the desert blows toward my people” (v. 11), to finish what the invading armies had begun...

...Then, there was nothing left at all, but... “tohu w’bohu” again (v. 23):

“I looked at the earth [‘eretz’], and it was formless [‘tohu’] and empty [‘bohu’]; and at the heavens, and their light was gone [a reversal of Gen. 1:4!]. I looked at the mountains, and they were quaking; all the hills were swaying. I looked, and there were no people; every bird in the sky had flown away...” (vv. 23-25).

At every stage, the wonderful effects of God’s earlier creation were being reversed; the Eretz was being returned to its primordial state!

“I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert; all its towns lay in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger. This is what the LORD says: ‘The whole

land will be ruined, though I will not destroy it completely. Therefore the earth will mourn and the heavens above grow dark, because I have spoken and will not relent, I have decided and will not turn back' ” (vv. 26-28).

Secondly, Isaiah 34 depicts a day of terrible judgment upon Edom, one of Israel's staunchest enemies, because of their disregard for God's law and their hatred of God's people. The description is briefer, but still powerful. All the amenities of God's creative work... fertile lands with crops and animals for food, ordered and inhabited cities and societies... all were gone! And what remained in their place? Smoke and darkness and desolation (vv. 9,10). Thorns and nettles and brambles (v. 13). Jackals and owls and other desert creatures (vv. 13,14). Nothing but a desert... an “empty quarter”... a “tohu w'bohu”!

“God will stretch out over Edom the measuring line of chaos [‘tohu’] and the plumb line of desolation [‘bohu’]” (v. 11). These (the measuring line, and the plumb line) were the tools of a carpenter or builder... as if to say, ‘First I must sweep away all the rubble, all the trash, of that old work. Only then can I start again to build a new — and better — creation!’

“Tohu w'bohu” in the “creation” of Israel

What is true of God's natural creation is especially true of God's *spiritual* “creation” also.

The God who, “in the beginning”, brought light out of darkness, order out of chaos, and abundant life out of the stillness and emptiness of death... plans to do the same — and does the same! — with the *spiritual* lives of those who believe in Him.

He called a wild, disorganized slave rabble out of Egypt — a people that scarcely knew what they believed anymore. He led them through the desert, feeding and watering and sheltering and protecting them along the way (as a mother bird might care for her chicks).

Along the way, He showed them His glory. He built His tabernacle in the midst of their newly-organized ranks of tribes. He gave them His laws and statutes and ordinances. He provided them precise directions about how and when, and with what substance they might worship Him. Among other things, He instructed them as to:

- a. which days, and at what times, they might come before Him to offer specific sacrifices;
- b. what garments their priests and Levites should wear;
- c. the precise measurements of ingredients for their incense and anointing oil; and
- d. the preparation schedule, and time of sacrifice, and manner of consuming their Passover lambs.

Later, when God brought the children of Israel into the Land of Promise, He instructed them as to:

- a. when, and by what means, they might conquer the cities of Canaan;
- b. how they were to treat those whom they captured;
- c. how they would allocate the newly-acquired lands among their various tribes and families; and
- d. how they should keep the Sabbath — a special day for putting aside all ordinary labor, and for reading, praying, instructing their children, and worshiping Him.

It was in remembering the LORD their God, in the ways He appointed, that they became “a people holy to the LORD” — set apart, sanctified, removed from the presence of the other nations, and dedicated to Him alone. In the orderliness of their lives, insofar as they followed His rules and guidelines, they separated themselves to become the LORD’s “precious jewels”. While all the people of the world, and the cattle on a thousand hills, belonged to Yahweh, they — His special covenant people — were His very special possession: kept close to Him, in His bosom as it were, where as a Father He would always watch over and love them as His dear children.

In the shadow of His hovering wings — as symbolized by the cherubim that overshadowed the mercy seat in tabernacle and temple — they found repose, rest, and comfort. For those who truly loved the LORD, His laws were not burdensome. And even when He chastened them, they were reminded that it was because He loved them as sons and daughters, and yearned for their betterment.

He had brought them from darkness into light, from death to life, from emptiness to fullness, and from the terrible fear of a chaotic, pointless, random existence into an ordered and purposeful service in His divine family.... from “tohu w’bohu” into “the beauty of holiness”. So they might sing:

“Drop Thy still dews of *quietness*,
 Till all our strivings cease;
 Take from our souls the strain and stress,
 And let our *ordered* lives confess
 The beauty of Thy *peace*.”

“Breathe through the heats of our desire
 Thy *coolness* and Thy *balm*;
 Let sense be numb, let flesh retire;
 Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
 O still, small voice of *calm*!”

Perhaps they were not “free” as they had been, in the “waste howling wilderness” of Sinai, the “empty quarter” of the Arabian desert — but what did that really mean? It meant they were no longer “free” to live out sad, confused, bewildered lives — existences without meaning and without hope. Now, instead, they were God’s servants, specially chosen by Him and nurtured and instructed. Every day had focus and significance — today, tomorrow, and beyond — because they lived in His household and belonged to His family.

“Why should His people, then, be sad?”

None have such reason to be glad
As those redeemed by God.”

“Tohu w’bohu” in the New Testament

In the New Testament — *especially* in the New Testament! — there is found in Christ Jesus the remedy for the “chaotic emptiness” of a worldly life.

“Thou Whose Almighty word
Chaos and darkness heard,
And took their flight:
Hear us, we humbly pray,
And where the Gospel day
Sheds not its glorious ray,
Let there be light” (John Marriott).

Perhaps this is best demonstrated in the life of the man who called himself “Legion”, being (as he imagined) inhabited by thousands of little “demons” — his mind confused and disoriented, and his life a living hell. The madman who barely survived, naked, among tombs and dead bodies, came face to face with the Savior. When last we see him, he is “clothed, and in his right mind”, sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to his words. Upon his dark inflamed mind there had dawned the light of the glory of God in the face of His Son. Into the pandemonium of his existence there had come calmness and peace. Into the terrible loneliness of his world there had entered a friend to comfort him, bringing healing for his sores and covering for his nakedness.

Writing to the believers in Ephesus, Paul writes of those like the insane “Legion”, Gentiles who had been “*separate* from Christ, *excluded* from citizenship in Israel and *foreigners* to the covenants of the promise, *without hope* and *without God* in the world” (2:12).

But, he tells them,

- (a) where once they had been “separate”, they are now “brought near” (v. 13);
- (b) where once they had been “excluded” from God’s family, they are now “reconciled to God” (v. 16);
- (c) where once they had been “foreigners”, they are now “fellow citizens with God’s people” (v. 19);
- (d) where once they had been “without hope”, they are now “built on... the prophets” (v. 20), veritable beacons of hope; and
- (e) where once they had been “without God”, they now “have access” through Christ’s blood into His presence (v. 18)!

Their lives of “empty chaos” have been saved by grace, through faith — God’s gift to them (v. 8). They have been “created in Christ Jesus” (v. 10), and the “good works” enjoined upon them (v. 10) are anything but onerous. Not at all! The “good works”, which they joyfully seek to do, are the means by which their loving Father continues to “work” with them — for they are His “workmanship”, and in their partnership with the Creator they do their part to prepare themselves for His new, glorious, everlasting creation.

From darkness to light. From death to life. From emptiness and desolation to fullness and fruitfulness. From chaos and confusion to meaning and purpose.

Those who belong to Christ have come out of a trackless Sahara into a beautiful garden. Now that they rest in its cool shades, should they complain and fret about which flowers they must not pick, or which fruits they must not eat? Looking at the irony of such short-sighted dissatisfaction, the old Bible expositor Robert Candlish writes, “Insensible to the free grant of many trees, we take it amiss that even one should be withheld — and fret under the wholesome restraint of duty.”

“Tohu w’bohu” in Corinth

Similar problems plagued the Corinthian ecclesia. In Corinth there was much fretting under the wholesome restraint of ecclesial rules...

- (a) much concern about being able to “exercise [one’s] freedom”, even if it caused others to “stumble” (1 Cor. 8:9)...
- (b) much concern about “freedom” to enjoy oneself in certain activities, whether it was “expedient” and “edifying” (“beneficial” and “constructive”: NIV) to all or not (10:23)...
- (c) much concern about expressing one’s individuality in various forms of worship, even if it did not bring encouragement and comfort to everyone else (14:31).

To all this, the apostle Paul has various words of advice. But much of what he says boils down to one thing: that whatever is done, or not done, in the ecclesia must be out of “love” (ch. 13) — love which is “patient” and “kind”, love which “does not boast”, love which is “not rude” nor “self-seeking”.

And specifically, and finally, he reminds them that “God is not a God of *disorder* [*cp* ‘tohu’: *chaos and confusion*], but of peace” (14:33), and that “everything should be done in a fitting and *orderly way*” (v. 40).

God is not a “God” of “tohu w’bohu”, but a God who has a beautiful, holy, enlightened, and infinitely reasonable plan — which He will implement to fill the earth with His own special glory, in the person of those who conform to His pattern.

“Tohu w’bohu” in our personal lives

What is true of the ecclesia, the body of believers, is also true of every individual believer: As we follow Christ, we need to learn how to put aside the “tohu w’bohu” of our own private lives, and develop — by God’s grace — a regular, well-organized lifestyle, in which all we think, and say, and do shows forth His glory!

We do this, quite simply, by developing good habits. We do this regularly, daily and weekly, as a matter of routine:

- a. by praying,
- b. by reading the Bible, and other spiritually helpful books,
- c. by attending memorial meetings at regular times,
- d. by supporting Bible classes and other ecclesial activities,
- e. by instructing our children,

f. by seeking out how we can be of practical help to others, in the brotherhood and outside.

Of course, we will never do *all* that we should do — that’s not the point! We will never be saved by our “works”, but only by our faith! Yet our faith must show itself in a desire, at least, to do what we can — no matter how small or faltering — to advance the cause of God’s Kingdom on this earth, and to prepare others along with ourselves for Christ’s coming.

And, most importantly, in the simple process of doing reasonable spiritual things as best we can every day, we keep ourselves — our minds and hearts and spirits — close to the Lord. In developing and following good habits each day, we are like the sheep that follow the Good Shepherd. He is the one who protects us and guides us — we cannot care for ourselves. But we *can* decide to stay close to him, and not to stray off to pursue our own little selfish interests and pleasures. The order of our daily lives keeps us in his “peace”, beside his “still waters”; there we are fed and watered and tended.

If we stay close by the Good Shepherd, then we will not wander away into the nearby wilderness, where there is only “chaos” and “nothingness” — where confusion and fear await us, and where wolves and lions attack and devour.

As sheep, let us listen to the shepherd’s voice (John 10:3), and follow that voice

Exposition

Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians:

(4) God’s gracious purpose of redemption preceded the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3-6)

In Ephesians 1:3 the Apostle blesses God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he recognizes to be the source of blessing (“who hath blessed us”). On reflection we recognize the term bears two senses:

- (1) the LORD God is manifestly the source of all blessing, and
- (2) in their response to this, believers throughout the ages have expressed their gratitude to Him by blessing His Name. Notable in this connection is Psalm 103: “Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name” (v. 1).

None of the LORD’s blessings is to be forgotten, foremost among which is His readiness to forget our iniquities, a sentiment later reflected in the psalm, where we read, “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us” (v. 12). But the LORD can also heal our diseases and rescue us from the pit, crowning us with lovingkindness and tender mercies (vv. 3,4).

While Psalm 103 is outstanding as a noble expression of thankfulness, the theme is one which recurs insistently in Scripture and surely it must find a place in the heart and prayers of every child of God. Paul, especially, was keenly conscious of

what he owed to his God and to the Lord Jesus. Typically, he exhorts the Colossians to abound in thanksgiving (2:7). Immensely talented as he was, he reminds the Corinthians that if one appears to be more gifted than another, this is no reason for self-congratulation: “What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?” (1 Cor. 4:7, NIV). But the supreme ground for the Apostle’s personal gratitude lay in the consciousness of the grace which had been extended to him when, as a feared persecutor, he received the revelation on the Damascus road. Saul, the blasphemer and persecutor, on his mission of destruction, obtained mercy and experienced the abounding grace of his Lord (see 1 Tim. 1:13,14).

To return to the beginning of verse 3; we note that the LORD God is referred to as “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”. Paul thus recognizes (and this we have already emphasized) the primary source of all blessing is the Father Himself. As a true Israelite, Paul knows of only one God, and the relationship Jesus bears to him is that of Son. This great truth figures prominently in Paul’s letters (see Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 1:3; Col. 1:3); later in Ephesians 1 we read, “...the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory” (v. 17). In an earlier letter, the Apostle had written: “Yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him” (1 Cor. 8:6). It is, then, in the light of the foregoing passages that we discover the evidences of Paul’s uncompromising monotheism. In the letter to the Ephesians, where we encounter such an emphasis upon the unique status of the Lord Jesus, it is surely highly significant that Paul stresses the Father’s total and universal sovereignty. This our Lord himself, after his resurrection, proclaimed to Mary Magdalene: “...I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God” (John 20:17).

In Ephesians 1:3 the emphasis is on the *spiritual* blessings we receive. These are available to the believer “in the heavenly places in Christ”. The NIV renders this: “in the heavenly realms”. The Greek plural term occurs first in the New Testament in Matthew 3:2 (“Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”) and recurs in the plural in verses 16,17 where the RV renders it “the heavens”. However, there can be little doubt that the expression refers to heaven, as in the Lord’s prayer in Matthew 6:10, where various versions render the plural by “heaven”. The term recurs in Ephesians (3:15; 4:10; 6:9). In the last of these references, the Apostle speaks of the Master being in heaven. It is this which puts us on the right track, for there we are told our new life is in Christ in heaven. This is the supreme blessing which no silver or gold can purchase; the forms in which this blessing is extended become apparent in a later part of the chapter. To quote James: “Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?” (2:5, NIV). The Lord himself exhorts us not to lay up treasures on earth but in heaven (Matt. 6:19).

These treasures are in the Lord Christ, and *in him* alone. It was to this great privilege, vested in Christ, that the disciples of all ages were destined in him before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Here we encounter the concept of the foreknowledge of the One who works all things according to His will. The LORD

God has existed from all eternity, a notion which, in our present condition, we cannot comprehend. What becomes increasingly evident in Ephesians is that the history of mankind, and especially its consummation, are predetermined by our God. This concept is brought out especially in the various passages where “the foundation of the world” is encountered.

But what are we to understand by “the foundation of the world”? If we examine the passages in which the expression occurs, we discover they divide themselves into two groups:

- (1) In common with Ephesians 1:4, we find “*before* the foundation of the world” in the following passages: John 17:24, 1 Peter 1:20; and
- (2) In the following more numerous passages we find “*from*”: Matthew 13:35; 25:34; Luke 11:50; Hebrews 4:3; 9:26; Revelation 13:8; 17:8.

The key word in these occurrences is “world” (*kosmos*). This has nothing to do with the physical universe but with mankind, as shown in 1 Corinthians 5:10 where Paul advises against withdrawing from human society (*kosmos*) in order to avoid moral contamination. As we examine the various passages it becomes increasingly apparent that the foundation of the world is the establishment of the order of things brought about as the consequence of the creation of man.¹ We may perhaps liken “the foundation of the world” to a constitution.² To quote the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: “In the broadest sense, a constitution is a body of rules governing the affairs of an organized group”, and this can apply to a state. In the case of the United States it is governed by the constitution which became effective in 1789 (see the 1980 edition, vol. 5, pp. 84,85).

So it was that God set up a constitution by which mankind has been governed, whether men recognize the fact or not. From the start of human history man has been subject to God’s law, which required total obedience. Thus sin, disobedience, brought about death. Man’s own endeavour to conceal the fact was in vain: the garments of fig leaves were replaced by the coats of skins, provided by God Himself. All this speaks to us of God’s work of salvation in His Son. This enables us to understand how in Revelation 13:8 the Lord Jesus is referred to as “the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world” (NIV). So it is clear that something, at the very beginning of human history, took place which prefigured our Lord’s sacrifice. This passage in its turn can lead us to the conclusion that the creatures slain to provide Adam and Eve with a covering for their nakedness were lambs, a conclusion confirmed by the fact that Abel, in sacrificing a lamb, satisfied divine requirements (Gen. 4:4).³

To return to Ephesians 1:3, we can now conclude God foresaw the call of His servants in his Son, and it is he — the Son — who at the Judgement says to the faithful: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). By our faith in God and our baptism into the Lord Jesus, we can be incorporated into the flock of the One whose purpose precedes the creation of mankind and controls all subsequent history. The concept of a divine purpose controlling human history in all its major phases may be illustrated by using the analogy of architecture. This is suggested by Hebrews

3:4: “For every house is builded by someone; but he that built all things is God”; the supreme architect is indeed the LORD God. In the case of a building to be erected, the details are drawn up by the architect and made available to all involved in its construction. This is what our God has done in the Scriptures. But while the privilege of knowing the divine purpose is the greatest available to us, this knowledge is in itself insufficient: it must awaken a proper response. This response becomes meaningful only if we live a new and full life in the Lord Jesus. The history of Israel reveals, tragically, that the privileges it enjoyed did not produce an appropriate response. Moses was at pains to make clear that the privileges available to the Israelites were accompanied by special responsibilities: “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all peoples that are upon the face of the earth” (Deut. 7:6); but this reminder was followed by the words, “Thou shalt therefore keep the commandment, and the statutes and the judgements, which I command thee this day, to do them” (v. 11; see also Exod. 19:5,6).

We can discern an echo of Moses’ words in the final part of Ephesians 1:4: the purpose of our call in Christ is to “be holy and without blemish before him in love”. The expression “without blemish” reminds us of Colossians 1:28 where the Apostle declares he exerts himself “to present every man perfect in Christ”. The perfection is achieved when we perfect *love* in our lives. How that love reveals itself in its various manifestations is, as we all know, set out in 1 Corinthians 13. Unless we show that love, whatever we do in the Lord’s Name is meaningless: we may even have faith to remove mountains, but if this is not accompanied by love, it is “nothing”. There can therefore be no more important prayer than that which asks our God and our Lord to aid us in the development of love. Love provides the environment in which the disciple should live. Later in Ephesians Paul instructs us “to walk in love, as Christ also loved us” (5:2), which appears to be a conscious reference to John 13:34.

Having spent some time in the consideration of verse 4, we can see the force of the words in verse 5: “...having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ”. Our natural state, in Adam, is to be “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). This is our status as sinners. God’s wrath is with the impenitent sinner (see, for example, Rom. 1:18; 2:5). Our God is indeed longsuffering but His patience can at length be exhausted and the consequences for the sinner can be dire, as in the judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah, and on Israel itself at various stages in its history, notably in the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. However, and this is the work of God’s grace, we can be adopted as God’s sons and daughters. The concept of adoption is peculiar to Paul; it occurs here in Ephesians 1:5 and also in Romans 8:15,23; 9:4; and Galatians 4:5. Adoption was practised by the Romans and the first emperor Augustus had, under the name of Octavius, been adopted by Julius Caesar as his heir. Thus the way had been opened for Octavius to occupy the supreme position in a great empire, but this was a status to be lost because of his mortality.

There can be no comparison between the status of an Augustus and that bestowed on God’s children by adoption. To the latter is offered the prospect of eternal life.

As with all God's privileges, this too is conditional: in Romans 8:23 Paul reminds us of the final and enduring form of adoption, the redemption of our body. It is only when the body of our humiliation is made like the body of the unique Son of God that our adoption into God's family will be complete and permanent.

Although the term "adoption" does not appear in the Old Testament, the concept is there: the LORD God became a father to Israel, a relationship of which a redeemed people proved itself unworthy: "I thought how I would set you among my children, and give you a pleasant land, the most beautiful heritage of all the nations, and I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me" (Jer. 3:19, NRSV). The failure of Israel is a perpetual reminder of how easily the status as a child of God can be lost.

The verse with which we are now concerned (v. 5) continues the thought in verse 4 by affirming that adoption is foreordained and, as the Apostle declares so consistently in this letter, it is on God's part "through Jesus Christ unto himself", and this is in keeping with the good pleasure of His will. God's will is absolute and sovereign, and nothing can prevail against it. The mention of God's will is recurrent in the letter and especially in this first chapter; with the mention of this will ("theleema") is linked the word "eudokia" ("good pleasure"). Although the divine will is sovereign, it is not arbitrary or despotic. Rather, as we shall see, it is synonymous with His grace.

In verse 6 Paul is not content with a bare mention of God's grace; rather he speaks of "the glory of God's grace", the contemplation of which moves him, and surely us, to praise. There is no thought in Paul's mind of anything but the fullness of divine grace. In Romans 5:20 the Apostle speaks of grace abounding in response to human sin, and this he had experienced himself — more than most, for he had been persecutor and blasphemer (cf. 1 Tim. 1:13,14).

In Ephesians 1:6 he is making a deliberate play upon words, for the verb used is cognate with the term for "grace": to bring this out we need a rendering something like the following: "the grace with which he graced us". But how is this grace revealed? "In the Beloved." What nobler word can describe our Lord than this — "the Beloved"! Even then, he is no passive recipient only, but also the means of conveying God's love to us: "Even as the Father hath loved me, *I also have loved you: abide ye in my love*" (John 15:9; see also John 5:20).

As we work through this wonderful letter we shall appreciate increasingly how completely Paul's mind is focused on the Father's activity in the Son. The consideration of verse 7 will give full support to this observation.

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Note:

1. The term corresponding to "foundation" in the expression "the foundation of the world" is *katabole*, which literally means "a throwing or laying down". Apart from the occurrences of interest to us it is used in only one other place in the New Testament: Hebrews 11:11, of Sarah conceiving seed. The other word for "foundation" in the New Testament is *themelios*, as in Luke 6:48.
2. It is interesting to note that B.F. Westcott in his commentary on Ephesians 1:4 states that the Vulgate renders "before the foundation of the world" by "ante mundi constitutionem" (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, London 1906, p. 8).

Apologetics

The Hard Questions: (25) Which God? The Exclusivity Issue: (9) Idolatry, Mythology, and Orthodoxy

In this penultimate article on the problem of exclusivity, I will further develop the idolatry perspective raised in the previous article, and also incorporate the aspect of mythology. Orthodox Christianity is not overtly idolatrous, but it is steeped in mythology.

Last month, I made much of the “reasonableness” of idolatry, at least from a human perspective. I wrote that we ought not think of idolaters in the Bible as hopelessly clueless semi-civilized primitives who lived in less enlightened times. Idolatry represented the end product of a process of belief that attempted to incorporate the great powers of nature into one’s life. However, God’s condemnation remained absolute and without deference to any alleged positive intentions of the idolater (e.g., Psa. 135:15-18).

Orthodox Christianity has as much resemblance to original Christianity as idolatry does to monotheism. The path to orthodoxy followed a somewhat different path than that which resulted in idolatry, but some parallels are evident. This is a rich and fascinating study that I will only outline here.

Early Christian believers came from either Jewish or Gentile backgrounds. On the one hand Jews shed the ineffective rituals based on Mosaic law, and on the other, pagans discarded their immorality and superstitions. Regardless of their previous lives, all believers witnessed the manifestation of power in the gospel and the forms of worship of first century ecclesias. This power was a spiritual power that led to new lives in Christ. Love, faith, unity, peace, and other virtues came to fruition in some of the unlikeliest of humans, including Paul the Apostle.

The first century ecclesias constituted a religious situation parallel to the world of the idolater of Isaiah 44, but set in a different context. Instead of wanting to identify with and obtain the powers of nature for the sake of one’s natural life (harvest, war, reproduction, wealth, etc.), people wanted to improve their spiritual lives and find salvation. They wanted to become individual participants in the burgeoning Christian movement. They saw the power that changed lives in the early church and, as they joined the various assemblies of brothers and sisters, they sought to isolate and understand wherein the motivating and sanctifying forces lay. In apostolic times, a combination of several factors worked together to create the ecclesia: personal emulation of Jesus’ representative sacrifice, the active Spirit powers, the communal strength of brothers and sisters serving each other in harmony, the power of prayer, the character-building adversities of life, and

the influence of inspiring brothers and sisters such as Paul, Barnabas, Priscilla, Aquilla, Epaphroditus, and many others.

As time progressed, inevitably the human desire to obtain spiritual benefits with a lesser investment wrought its evil work within the household of God. People wanted the power of religion, of course, but they wanted it in some easily attainable, immediate, tangible fashion. While it might come easily and naturally to make material and tangible idols to represent the powers of nature, how does one materially represent the power that converts a life or brings salvation? What idol would you make to represent the growth of internal peace, for instance? What object or image would you choose to concretize the concept of “faith?”¹ Idolatry does not easily fit into the spiritual scheme of Christianity. Moreover, with just a minimum of rituals, there wasn’t much to work with on that account.

Thus, the path to orthodox idolatry did not first come in the form of making images to represent religious values. First there came a distinct shift in the belief system. Of greatest significance was the deification of Jesus, which began probably late in the first century and reached formality in 325 with the formulation of the Nicene Creed.² This new view of Christ was an understanding, a “doctrine,” and not a physical image. The deified Jesus was soon represented in images, sculptures, and artwork of many sorts. Christianity never did devolve completely into material idolatry, although the icons of the Eastern orthodoxy and the cathedral affectations of the Western Catholic church did suffice for material representations of religious values.³

Had the early theologians retained the understanding of Jesus as we know it in truth (that he was a representative human, fully mortal, one who conquered sin living within the framework of human nature), would we have had the proliferation of Jesus-image icons that developed within the next few centuries? In the first century, worship consisted largely of small groups of brothers and sisters dedicated to mutually aiding each other in spiritual and natural matters. By the fifth century, worship meant assembling in large ornate buildings dedicated to rituals directed at icons of Jesus. The now apostate church “needed” the stature of the man-God, the divine, the God-who-became-man-to-rescue-our-immortal-souls. Thus, the idolatry of the Christian era was largely a matter of the changed perception of the work of the Savior, and then it became materialized in many ways. There was a close and necessary connection between a deified Jesus and the abundance of material representations of him, many of which achieved idolatrous status in their own right.

The Protestant reformation attempted to remove material and tangible forms, such as they were, from the Catholic Church, but they never (except for those smaller sects identified by Bro. Alan Eyre in *The Protestors*) pulled the plug on the root of the problem: the deified Jesus.

Mythological concepts of Jesus

Orthodoxy as we usually encounter it today in the form of evangelical groups does not seem to bear too many marks of idolatry, but the root of the problem, a

deified Jesus, remains. Several other mythological features remain firmly in place, notably the doctrine of incarnation, that is, God becoming a human. This sort of interchangeability between the Divine and human realms is a common feature of mythologies, and is mentioned in Acts 14:11. Orthodoxy has had nearly two millennia to recognize and repair this problem, but to say that it's firmly entrenched would be the understatement of the year. The divinity of Jesus is the *sine qua non* [essential feature] of orthodoxy, and the incarnation, as absurd as it is on any level (theological, practical, metaphysical), is the process by which God allegedly became man. This idea is patently mythological, and I'm sure it has its origins there. Trying to reconstruct what Constantine might have been thinking as the controversy swirled in the religious world around him, Rubenstein writes:

...Athanasius maintains that this utterly transcendent God transformed Himself into a man, suffered, died, and then resurrected Himself! Doesn't this mixture of Creator and creature sound pagan?... He therefore hastens to add that the Father's method of generating the Son is beyond human understanding.⁴

Rubenstein goes on to discuss the nature of Jesus under such an arrangement, and the necessary implications on the atonement:

Athanasius apparently thinks that Christ-like behavior is to be limited to a few desert saints like Antony, while the rest of us sinners wait in hope of unmerited salvation. It substitutes the sacraments of the Church for sacrificial action in the world. What, one wonders, would Jesus have made of that?⁵

Rubenstein nails the point: we cannot form a valid relationship to a false Jesus (Bro. John Launchbury's series on the atonement also highlights this critical issue). The implications of a deified Jesus included mythologizing the mode of salvation and incorporating the idolatry of sacraments, icons, rituals, and pilgrimages. Understanding the atonement depends on knowing who God is, who Jesus is, and what humanity is. Theology does count, and it counts a lot. It doesn't have to be complicated, but it does have to be right.

Today, many concepts or images exist, all under the name of Jesus. The Eastern and Western Catholic systems retain their highly visual and ritualized images, and the inevitable image worship that developed from them. Protestant churches may have rejected the overt imagery, but the deified Jesus concept abides. Speaking in broad terms, the protestant Jesus is a necessarily magical god capable of saving the immortal souls of his adherents; the requirements for being an adherent varies among denominations.

The Jesus of the evangelicals is a talismanic god, invoked for assistance in any circumstance of life, from the need for instant salvation to finding an open parking space. There is also the Jesus of the Unitarians and other organizations that have rejected Biblical veracity; we might not feel so akin to them for that reason, but their Jesus retains the same name, holding the form of religion, but denying the power of it. He has become only a great moral teacher, one among many, and the singularly defining aspect of resurrection is considered nothing more than a teaching myth.

More mythology

The battle between supernatural forces of good and evil is another obviously mythological feature of orthodoxy. There's probably not a mythological tradition anywhere in the world that doesn't have some version of this conflict, and it is a major feature of the oldest mythologies. In the somewhat sophisticated "Christian" version, the supernatural force of evil, the Devil himself, plies his nefarious work not by direct confrontation with God, but by contesting for the immortal souls of mankind. This form of an adversarial supernatural power fits right into the Christian scheme of salvation versus punishment.

And what shall we say of the ubiquitous immortal soul? Found in mythologies worldwide, the immortal soul certainly ranks as the primal expression of human arrogance. Even worse, it necessitates the equally mythological locations of heaven and hell. Again, there's probably not a mythology anywhere without these features in some form.

It's not my purpose here to catalog the errors of orthodox Christianity. Nor do I intend to show how these errors destroy any possibility of a meaningful relationship to God. Our writers have vigorously addressed these vital topics. My point here is to show that what might sound very close to us is, in fact, plainly mythological. Just as we would have no trouble excluding ourselves from a hypothetical idolater or devotee of some ancient mythology, we should have the same judgment about adherents to the conventions of orthodox Christianity in its many forms.

The early Christian departure from the Truth involved layering important principles upon existing mythological beliefs. Again, this is a subject ripe for detailed study, but the only point I want to make here is this: despite the similar terminology, orthodox Christianity is so much a mythological affair that it provides few insights into Biblical teaching.

Same terminology, different meaning

The troubling aspect is the overlap of terminology: God, Jesus, Bible, salvation, Holy Spirit, baptism, salvation, and so on. We can listen to people of this persuasion talk about their belief in Jesus and think that they are pretty well lined up with us. However, the words are only a veneer, and the meanings behind them are worlds apart. Many people use the word Jesus or the phrase "Son of God". What they mean with these words differs at an essential level. Do not be deceived by similar terminology. What can sound very similar represents a system of falsehood that bears no resemblance to any truth about the world. Similar terminology masks ideas that share no harmonious relationship.

Ask yourself this question if you are sometimes vexed by the separateness we maintain from orthodoxy: "Would I be likely to accept the religion of an idolater or one who believed in any mythology? What if a Molech worshiper or one who believed in the Greek pantheon came into my presence? Would I consider their form of worship as close enough to mine that I would I extend my boundaries to include that person?" If the answer is "No," and I expect it would be, then you should have the same response when asked about a practitioner of orthodoxy.

The underlying principles are the same in each case.

However, the main issue is not how we regard those entrapped in the errors of orthodoxy. The main concern of our life is how we respond to the love of God and our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who have revealed themselves to us in truth. Knowing the truth, we have no excuses for our discipleship.

(Next: Pluralism and Propositional Theology.)

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Footnotes:

1. There is certainly a warning for us here concerning the statement of faith, and other tangible aspects of worship.
2. For a well-documented and insightful history of this movement, read Richard Rubenstein's *When Jesus Became God* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999). It has been popular in our community, and for good reason. Rubenstein stated that "selling" a human Jesus, one like them, at that time in the Roman Empire was not at all feasible; the people needed a divine, iconic figure, one such as readily available in a deified Jesus image. Rubenstein accounts for social and political influences in this process.
3. The word "iconoclast" (literally, "image breaker") comes from the artifact-smashers of the Reformation ages. Pictures of the Virgin Mary, crucifixes, and cathedral artwork items were destroyed by frenzied mobs of zealous Protestants in outbreaks of what became known as "iconoclastic furies".
4. Rubenstein, p. 118.
5. Rubenstein, p. 119.

Special Invitation

For many years, unity discussions have been taking place with Churches of God of the Abrahamic Faith. In the interest of promoting friendship and mutual understanding between our respective communities, we print the following invitation:

*You, your family and friends are invited to the
32nd annual Church of God of the Abrahamic Faith Gathering
at Denison University in Granville, Ohio, July 23-29, 2007.*

*The main speakers this year will be as follows:
The Brothers Ross: "Five Brothers / Five Sisters"
Timothy Whittaker: "Good King Hezekiah"
Tony Isaacs: "The Spirit in Us"*

*Contact Brad Rek 330-609-6957, lisarek8@cs.com
Information is available at www.cgaf.org*

Bible Study

Rightly Dividing the Word: (3) Recognizing the Flow of Thought

Our goal in reading the Bible is to hear what God is actually saying to us, and to understand what He means by what He is saying. That requires us not only to look closely at the words, but also to read them in their context, which determines their meaning.

Context, as we have seen, includes:

- a. to whom the words were first spoken,
- b. their particular circumstances and place in history,
- c. the flow of thought in the Bible passage as a whole (ignoring chapter breaks),
- d. how this teaching is used by Jesus and his apostles, and
- e. the way in which our understanding of a passage fits with the message of the Bible as a whole.

To illustrate how context can shed light upon meaning, we will consider Paul's writings to the Corinthian believers. Familiar, but not always well-understood, words of the Apostle Paul illustrate the importance of following the flow of his thought. Sometimes we read, "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1) as if it was an introduction to Paul's reproofs and instructions about their communal meals in remembrance of their Lord's sacrifice. These familiar words are, instead, a continuation of the difficult words of 10:33, "even as I try to please everybody in every way". Paul is actually saying that we must imitate him "in trying to please everybody in every way", just as his doing so is an imitation of Christ.

Human wisdom rejects or mocks the idea of trying to please everybody, and even among disciples of the Lord the words of Paul are often misunderstood. What did he really mean? The context gives us the answer. Paul's words (10:31-11:1) sum up powerfully his answer to the question "about food sacrificed to idols" (1 Cor. 8:1). Chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11:1 are Paul's inspired answer.

The letter was written from Ephesus to the Corinthian believers a year or two after Paul had left Corinth, where he had resided more than 18 months (1 Cor. 16:8,9; Acts 18:11,18; 19:1). Many people, mostly Gentiles and some Jews, had been baptized in Corinth during the stay of Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

Thus the believers in Corinth had been converted to faith and discipleship in Christ during the previous three years before Paul wrote this letter. They were wonderfully enthusiastic, and many were blessed with gifts of the Spirit. However, they were short on experience of life in Christ. Many had left lives of gross idolatry and immorality (1 Cor. 6:9-11) to begin a new life in the Lord, but were

surrounded by idolatrous and immoral practices. It was, all in all, an extremely inhospitable environment for new believers.

A particular problem in Corinth was the selling in the market of meat that came from sacrifices to idols. To eat meat that had been dedicated to idols seemed to many disciples like a return to idolatry. Their sensitive (“weak”) consciences forbade it. However, other disciples, knowing now that an idol was nothing, felt no inhibitions about eating such meat, and did so. Self-confidence in their knowledge was thus weakening the resolution and wounding the consciences of the “weak”, thus causing them to sin against Christ (1 Cor. 8:4-12).

Paul is so concerned for the “weak” brothers and sisters that, if what he ate caused his brother to fall into sin, he would never eat meat again so that he would not cause him to fall (8:13). This unselfish concern for the spiritual welfare of fellow disciples is what Paul means by saying in 10:33 that he tried to please everybody in every way. “Please” is not used here in the sense of currying favor, but as acting for the spiritual benefit of every disciple.

In parallel instruction in Romans 14 and 15, the Apostle writes (15:1-3), “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself...” — an understatement that should humble us who think we are strong.

Those self-confident in their knowledge that idols were nothing felt that they had a right to act according to their own clear conscience and not to be judged by another’s conscience (1 Cor. 10:29,30). However, Paul relates in chapter 9 how he had “rights” as an apostle. He had a right to have a wife as did Cephas (Peter). He had a right to receive support, his living, from those to whom he preached the gospel — as the Lord had said (Matt. 10). Yet he had not claimed or used his rights — an example he is urging upon the self-confident Corinthians.

Paul was free from all (in the sense that no man could give him orders), yet he made himself a slave to everyone to win as many for Christ as possible. To the Jews he became like a Jew to win the Jews (e.g., circumcising Timothy, not to save him, but to make it possible for him to speak in synagogues). To those not under the law of Moses he became like them (e.g., eating with Gentile brothers in Antioch; refusing to circumcise Titus) in order to win Gentiles for Christ. He had become all things to all men so that he might save some (1 Cor. 9:19-23; Acts 21:17-26; Gal. 2:3,11-16).

In chapter 10, Paul attacks the pride in their knowledge that idols were nothing; this pride led some believers to attend feasts in idol temples, where prostitutes served worshippers. Using the example of Israel coming out of Egypt, led by the cloud and baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, Paul shows how they failed. He is warning self-confident disciples: “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (v. 12).

In 10:14-22, Paul urges these brothers to flee from idolatry, and he bluntly shows how wrong it is to partake of the Lord’s Table while also eating at the table of

demons, or idols. Paul is quoting (and actually agreeing with) these self-confident brethren when he says, “All things are lawful for me” (v. 23) — meaning that, in Christ there is no law against what they were doing. “But”, he adds, “all things are not helpful; ‘all things are lawful for me’, but all things do not edify [build up spiritually].”

In our age, there are many wicked practices and pastimes that are not identified and forbidden in the Bible. We must test everything we do by asking, “Is it helpful?” “Does it edify?” “Is it enslaving me?” “Am I doing it for the Lord?” (1 Cor. 6:12,13).

Paul concludes with practical instructions in 10:24-28, beginning with the principle, “Let no one seek his own, but each the other’s well-being.” He makes the same point in verse 33, “just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.” Some objected to having their liberty of conscience judged by the conscience of others; to them Paul answered (vv. 31,32): all that we do must be done to the glory of God and must not give offense (i.e., must not cause others to stumble or sin).

Like Paul and the Lord Jesus we must seek to please all. This is a first principle of life in Christ Jesus. We are to seek the spiritual welfare of others, that they may be saved. In this we must be imitators of Paul as he was of Christ.

Let us, therefore, remember the connection between 1 Corinthians 11:1 and the apostle’s words in the previous chapters. Let’s not glibly say or agree with someone else saying, “You can’t please everybody.” Our aim, as imitators of Paul, must be to “please” all men, in the Biblical sense.

In this exercise of searching for the meaning of the inspired words, we have seen the importance of the context. We have attempted to learn a little about Corinth (perhaps from a Bible dictionary), and about Paul’s preaching there from the Acts of the Apostles. We have bypassed the artificial chapter breaks to appreciate how 1 Corinthians 11:1 sums up the apostle’s instruction in chapters 8, 9, and 10. Thus we have followed the flow of Paul’s reasoning through these chapters. In this we have been aided by comparing similar teaching in Romans, and recalling practical examples from Paul’s life.

Of course, we have only begun to see what these chapters can teach us. In our day, there are many idols around us — particularly those in the many forms of worldly entertainment that press in on our lives. How Paul’s words here, particularly chapter 10, apply to our attitude to these idols is very relevant to us. That, however, is another subject.

(Next: Definitions and context.)

*Bob Green
(Brantford, ON)*

*“He who marries a heathen woman is as if
he made himself son-in-law to an idol”
(Jewish proverb).*

Bible Study

Stones

The other day my friend Cheran gave me a stone. It was carefully wrapped in paper, very well taped, and tied up with string. Cheran has a wonderful ability to appreciate the small things in life, things that perhaps others take for granted. Cheran's interest in stones, and his willingness to share his stones, reminded me of how God shares His thoughts about stones with us in Scripture. God wants us to be aware of what can be done with stones. He also warns us that we could be hurt if we choose to use stones at a time, or in a way, that is not within His will. We have many examples in the record of how stones were used appropriately and inappropriately.

A stone for a pillow

One of my favorite stories about stones is when Jacob fled from the anger of Esau and spent the night at Bethel ("the house of God"); there he used a stone for a pillow. As he slept, he saw angels ascending and descending upon a ladder, or stairway, that extended to heaven. In that dream God made promises to him. Jacob was promised that he would inherit the land, that his descendants would be as numerous as the dust of the earth, that blessings upon all the earth would come through him, and — finally— that God was going to be with him wherever he went and would bring him back to the land. The next morning Jacob took the stone he had used as a pillow, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil upon it. Then he made a covenant with God there (Gen. 28:10-22). Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, had also set up an altar at or very near Bethel; several times he went there to worship (Gen. 12:8; 13:1-4). Could this stone — the one that Jacob used at Bethel — have been one of the stones Abraham had originally used for the altar of worship in "God's house"?

A watchtower of stones

Later in Jacob's life, when he left Laban to return to his father's land, as God had directed, he used stones again (Gen. 31:1-3). Jacob and Laban gathered stones together into "a heap of witness" between the two of them. They used words in both Hebrew and Aramaic to describe the heap of witness. Two languages but the same meaning, so that there could be no misunderstanding as to why that heap was there. Not only that, but the place is called "Mizpah" ("a watchtower, or beacon"). The Lord was brought into that covenant as a third witness, to watch between them, when they were not able to see each other. The word "watch" means "to lean forward", as if straining to see into the distance. The heap of stones became a memorial for both of them: not only were they to remember their promise to each other, but also that God was in the watchtower (Gen. 31:43-55).

Graves of stones

There are several more heaps of stones in Scripture. Often the graves of condemned men were heaped with stones. Israel lost a battle at Ai because Achan had stolen some of the spoil from Jericho. Stones were heaped onto the grave of Achan, after he and his family had been stoned and burned. He and his family were remembered by a heap of stones in the valley of trouble. After Achan was buried, Israel defeated and burned Ai. The king of Ai, after being hung, was also buried beneath a heap of stones. Ai (“a ruin, or heap”) was all that Israel left of that city (Josh. 7; 8).

Later in Israel’s history, David’s son Absalom stole the heart of the people of Israel from David. He also tried to steal David’s throne. But he was killed and thrown into a pit, where a great heap of stones was erected over him — all that marked his grave (2 Sam. 18:9-18).

A memorial of stones

In contrast, perhaps, the most profound and important heap of stones mentioned is in Joshua 4:3-9,20,21. This is the stone reminder that God commanded the Israelites to build themselves, when they crossed Jordan and came into the Promised Land. Men from each tribe took stones from the center of the river where the feet of the priests had stood and built a memorial at their camp in Gilgal. They would carry those stones in their minds wherever they went, as a memory of a mighty God who could do all things. So Joshua instructed them to tell their children why those stones were there (vv. 22,23).

Altars of stones

Altars were made of stones, but not all altars were used to worship God. God had strict instructions for Israel not to offer their children on the altars of Molech (Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5).

Solomon was led away by his foreign wives to seek after and worship on other altars than the one that he had helped to build, in God’s beautiful temple. God took the kingdom away from Solomon because of it (1 Kings 11:5-13).

On Mount Carmel, the 450 prophets of Baal made an altar and danced around it. They yelled, and cut themselves, but the sacrifice on Baal’s altar was not consumed. In contrast, Elijah repaired the altar on Mount Carmel, which was built out of twelve stones. He built it “in the name of the Lord”. He made a trench around it, arranged the wood on it, and poured twelve jars of water over it until everything was soaking wet and the trench was full. When Elijah called on God, the fire of God completely consumed the offering, the wood, and the altar, and also dried up all the water. When the people saw this they fell on their faces and acknowledged, “The Lord, He is God” (1 Kings 18:22-40).

Death by stones

Execution by stoning was a means of punishment under God’s law. The law commanded that a person be stoned for gathering wood on the Sabbath, for serving other gods, for promoting the worship of other gods, for disobeying parents and

living a useless life, and for some types of sexual immorality. Sometimes stoning was used outside the law, and usually by an angry mob. The people of Israel took up stones to kill Caleb and Joshua when they brought back a good report of the land. Shimei threw stones at David when David was fleeing from Absalom. Naboth was murdered by stoning when Ahab wanted his field and Naboth refused to sell it to him (although the formalities of the Law seem to have been observed). Zechariah son of Jehoiada was murdered by stoning because he openly denounced the idolatry in which Joash was involved after the death of Jehoiada. Jesus himself was almost stoned during his ministry. Stephen was stoned by Saul and the angry mob in Jerusalem, after he defended his faith in Jesus Christ. Paul survived stoning three times. Interestingly, Mary the mother of Jesus, when she was found with child outside of wedlock, could have been stoned for that sin.

“A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones together” (Eccl. 3:5)

David, the man after God’s own heart, knew the value of not throwing stones. David’s experience with Goliath is the only place in the Bible where it is recorded that he took up stones against his fellow man. Throwing stones was not part of the way David lived with his fellow Israelites. David’s charisma seems to have been greatly enhanced by his willingness to accept others without throwing stones at them, and this certainly allowed him to do God’s work very effectively. David reflected the kind of acceptance extended to each of us by grace. The discontented and distressed sought him out and lived with him in the caves of the wilderness while he was on the run from Saul. He valued people, and in turn he was respected and his friendship was valued (1 Sam. 22:1-3; 1 Chron. 11:17-19). David, himself, was later spared from stoning, even though he was guilty of taking another man’s wife and then murdering her husband. He was covered by the grace of God for the very sin upon which Jesus was later asked to pass judgment...

“The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the midst, they said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do you say?’ And they were saying this, testing him, in order that they might have grounds for accusing him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground.

“But when they persisted in asking him, he straightened up, and said to them, ‘He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.’ And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And when they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and he was left alone and the woman, where she was in the midst.

“And straightening up, Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?’

“And she said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go your way. From now on sin no more.’

“And therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of

life' ” (John 8:1-12).

Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground near the temple. The temple was thought of as “the house of God”, and presumably they were to come there to worship at the altar of God. Jesus bent down, perhaps just as the God whom they worshiped “leaned forward and looked into the distance” to see His plan of salvation realized through His Son. Jesus wrote on the ground, in the “dust of the earth”. The God whom they worshiped had formed man from the dust of the earth, and later had promised Jacob that his descendants would be as numerous as the dust of the earth. Jesus wrote in that dust with his finger.

The only sinless man there, and therefore the only one truly eligible to cast a stone in punishment, chose instead to use his fingers to write rather than to pick up a stone. He held the woman’s life in his hands and — instead of crushing her life with stones — he gave her life back to her! After all of the accusers had left, he finally looked at the woman. “The Light of the world” (John 8:12) shone upon her in her darkness, and showed her the way of grace. Forgiven and covered by the grace of God, she was asked to reflect the glory of God in the way she lived her life from then on: “From now on sin no more!” She became a light and a continuing message to those who knew the grace extended to her.

A foundation of stone

Jesus built his church upon a rock. That rock was the belief that Peter had first demonstrated by declaring his faith in Jesus Christ. Peter’s name means “the rock or stone”. Even though he declared his faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, he also was rebuked as an adversary to God’s will. Later he cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant; then he forsook his Lord during the trial and crucifixion. Later again, he ran to the tomb when the stone had been rolled away, eager to see what had become of his Lord. Finally, by the sea of Galilee, he was asked three times if he loved Jesus, and then was given the commission to care for, tend, and shepherd the sheep of Jesus’ flock. He began the great work of building the household of God with Christ as the chief cornerstone.

A great round stone

“And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his garments as white as snow; and the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men” (Matt. 28:2-4).

After his death Jesus was buried in a grave, with a great stone across its mouth. Soldiers were hired to watch the grave and to prevent the disciples from carrying away his body. The angel descended, just like angels had done upon Jacob’s stairway in Bethel, and the stone was rolled away like the reproach of Egypt was rolled away from Israel at Gilgal. If the stone had remained where it was, there would have been reason to doubt that Jesus had risen. That stone, and that grave, could not hold Jesus; the stone was removed so that the glory of God could be revealed.

“He who quarries stones may be hurt by them” (Eccl. 10:9).

Each of us carries stones. Some of these stones have been with us for so long that we don't even notice that we are still holding them. Like Achan or Absalom, we throw stones for selfish reasons or in order to promote ourselves, although we know that it will only end with a heap of stones in the valley of trouble. We are so good at finding legitimate reasons for throwing stones at others, and we are efficient at gathering more to heap upon them.

What are the stones we are holding? Could they be stones of pride, or jealousy, or refusal to forgive? Could they be bitterness, or unbelief, or a harsh and critical attitude? God's grace cannot work effectively in our lives unless we drop the stones that we are holding so that our hands are free to grasp His gift of grace.

We need carefully to analyze our reasons for going to the stone quarry, so that we don't hurt others — or ourselves — by the stones we gather there.

Let us take up stones to build the house of God, not tear down that precious house, stone by stone!

A stone in the pocket

Let us pick up a stone and keep it in our pocket for a memorial. Let it be a reminder to us that the Rock of our salvation is in the watchtower and is a witness in our covenants with one another. Let it be a reminder that He is the one to whom we should build altars.

Every time we reach into our pocket and touch that stone, we can take a moment to worship the God who formed man from the dust of the ground — the same God that extended great and precious promises to those who believe. Let that stone remind us to build our homes and our lives with stones that fit in with the chief cornerstone.

That stone can remind us that the only sinless man never threw a stone at the woman who committed adultery, and does not throw stones at us either.

When our children ask us about the stone in our pocket, we can tell them — like the Israelites did at Gilgal — about all the wonderful things God has done for us in our lives. We can tell them how He brought each one of us personally out of a land of darkness, and how that beacon of light shone into our life. We can tell them about His mighty power, His everlasting love, and His amazing gift of grace. We can share with them the stories about the stones of Gilgal, “the rolling away” of sin from Israel... about the altar that Elijah rebuilt when Israel cried “the Lord, He is God”... about the smooth stones in the pouch of a shepherd boy named David, and the one in his sling that killed the giant that defied the Lord God of Israel.

We can tell them about the stones that killed Stephen because of his great faith, and about Peter the rock, who spent the rest of his life working to tend the sheep and lambs of Jesus. We can tell them about the stone that was rolled away from the tomb when the grave could not hold our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“I love Thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised and I am saved from my enemies. The cords of death encompassed me, and the torrents of ungodliness terrified me. The cords of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God for help; He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry for help before Him came into His ears” (Psa. 18:1-6, NASV).

Cheran's gift to me is not polished. It is not very large. It holds no value in most people's eyes. That stone, however, rests on my desk where I work every day. It reminds me that a small, unpolished stone in God's eyes has very great value. We are God's living stones now, possibly rejected by the world around us, but seeking to offer our spiritual sacrifices and build something of substance, that when it is tested and tried will reward us for our work (1 Pet. 2:5; 1 Cor. 3:12).

Like Peter the rock, we have declared our faith in Christ as the Son of the Living God. We must build our lives upon that rock.

We may often fail to do what we should, perhaps denying our Lord, or perhaps running away from him. But ultimately we may come back to that rock that was rolled away from the garden tomb, and on our knees thank our God for the grace extended to us through the sacrifice of His Son.

*Eileen Henthorn
(Victoria, BC)*

* * * * *

“While you were watching, a stone was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the stone that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth” (Dan. 2:34,35).

“It is evident that the dominion of the Image is not broken by a human power. The stone which destroys it is represented as not in hands; that is, it symbolizes a supernatural power. If the stone had been poised in a man's hands ready to smite the image, we might look for an earthly conqueror to overthrow the dominion of the Autocrat, as he will overthrow the rest. But the power that wields the stone is plainly declared in the interpretation. It is the God of heaven Who pulverizes the image, and sweeps its chaffy dust away by the whirling tempest which wrecks the kingdoms of the world and transfers them to His saints. The kingdom of the stone grinds to powder whatsoever it falls

Letters

More on global warming

The following questions are sometimes asked about global warming:

1. Is it a man-made or God-made phenomenon?
2. Is it a true sign of the times, since it was not prophesied in the Bible?

Man-made or God-made?

A United Nations report, issued in February 2007, says that the current global warming crisis is “very likely” the result of human activities. The scientific authors of the report defined “very likely” as between 90 and 99 percent probable. The report said global warming is the result of large amounts of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases being released into the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels.

Science also tells us that there have been prior periods of global warming that were the result of natural climate changes, and unrelated to man’s activities. The end of the last ice age, which (supposedly) occurred about 10,000 years ago, is one such period.

Regardless of how we view science and the natural history of the earth, God’s hand in the current crisis cannot be overlooked. Since the world has rejected Him, the Bible says God has “given them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient” (Rom. 1:28). Quite probably God has *allowed* this condition to develop, through man’s self-centered and evil pursuits, as a further demonstration that, without him, there is no hope for the world.

Sign of the times?

The signs of the times that Jesus prophesied would occur prior to his return include wars, famines, diseases and earthquakes (Matt. 24:7). While none of these events is new, the increasing numbers and/or scale of them, in these last days, is evident to all believers.

Although Jesus did not mention global warming directly, there are strong links between it and the four signs, which further points to God’s involvement in the crisis:

1. Politicians predict that future wars will be fought over water, which will become increasingly scarce as glaciers dry up from global warming.
2. Future famines are likely to occur from global warming, due to expanding deserts and lack of irrigation water.
3. Diseases are also predicted to increase from global warming, through the spreading of flies, mosquitoes and other germ-carrying life forms.
4. Future earthquakes and global warming are linked through a process called *isostatic rebound*, which occurs when glaciers melt and the massive weight

of the ice on the earth's crust is reduced. This process can reactivate faults, increase seismic activity, and lift pressure on magma chambers that feed volcanoes.

Accordingly, global warming can be perceived, more correctly perhaps, to be a *catalyst* that is contributing to the signs of the times and latter day events.

Science and the Bible

The United Nations report also concluded that global warming has become “an unstoppable, runaway train”. It is unusual for science to provide such a doomsday scenario, and to reach conclusions that are in harmony (albeit imperfectly) with the Bible's predictions of a coming “time of trouble such as never was” (Dan. 12:1). It reflects man's growing helplessness in the face of rapidly deteriorating world conditions. Until now, scientists have been generally optimistic that environmental and other problems could be resolved.

When Noah was building the ark, his “hammer” was God's warning to the world of impending destruction, and also pointed the way to salvation. In these times, global warming may be the “hammer”. It could be one of the most powerful preaching tools we presently have. Global warming will be resolved, but not by man's efforts. The resolution awaits the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Martin Owen (San Diego County, CA)

RR's preface to Bible Companion

Attached is an excerpt from the “original” preface to Bro. Robert Roberts' Bible reading tables. I wish you had published this in your issue on important Christadelphian writings instead of the sterilized version that most of are used to reading.

As much as one loves the style, the preface carries overtones of self-reliance and ritual reading. One could think, “If I just adhere to the daily readings, some day I'll be spiritual and I'll be in the Kingdom.”

Salvation depends on developing faith in the living God, and certainly Bible reading — and understanding, and application — is a major necessity in this process, but it also involves living, learning, praying, serving, etc., to develop a real faith in God and His living Son, Jesus Christ.

David Levin (Baltimore, MD)

“Salvation depends on the assimilation of the mind to the divine ideas, principles, and affections, exhibited in the Scriptures... The mind is naturally alien from God and all His ideas (Rom. viii. 7; I Cor. ii. 14), and cannot be brought at once to the Divine Likeness... Spiritual-mindedness, or a state of mind in accordance with the mind of the Spirit as displayed in these writings, can only grow within a man by daily intercourse with this mind, as there unfolded. Apart from this, the mind will return to its original swinishness. The advice then, for every man and woman anxious about their salvation, is — READ THE SCRIPTURES DAILY... ”

Much spiritual fructification is only to be realized in connection with fructifying influences of the Spirit in the Word.

“...By a strict adherence to this plan, from year to year, the reader will reap much profit, and find himself or herself gradually losing the insipidity of the natural mind, and taking on the warm and exalted tone of the Spirit’s teaching, which qualifies for the inheritance of the Saints in light.”

*Ah, the sad lot of the editor! Reprimanded for what he puts in, and also for what he leaves out! But of course you are right: it is never enough **just** to read the Bible — although there is really no other place to start in the journey of spiritual development! For that journey must also lead to faith, and to the application of faith in one’s daily life.*

Your point is Bro. Green’s also, in the previous installment of “Rightly Dividing the Word” (March-April issue). There he points out in John 5 that the Pharisees were adept at “searching the Scriptures”, but they were not led by their studies to the recognition of Jesus for who he was — and thus their reading was to no avail.

George

Christadelphian books

Dear brother George,

I read with interest your selection of the “best and most profitable Christadelphian books” and heartily agree with your choice. Two of my favourites are *The Ways of Providence*, by Bro. Robert Roberts, and *Studies in the Gospels*, by Harry Whittaker. The former was presented to me at my baptism 45 years ago, and it still thrills me to consider the ways in which God works in our lives. When we are doing the readings from the Gospel chapters, my husband and I often refer to Bro. Harry’s masterpiece to our profit. Especially helpful are his various suggestions for difficult sections (such as the parable of the unjust steward).

*Your sister in Christ,
Pat Bartle*

Joseph and his brothers?

Do you think that Joseph had a pretty good idea ahead of time that he’d be seeing his brothers come down to Egypt to buy grain? Even before they showed up, he might have already thought out the whole complicated ordeal he put them through. Given the severity and extent of the famine, after the years of plenty, it seems to me likely that he had been planning his “lessons” and hoping to see them. Have you read it this way?

David Levin (Baltimore, MD)

Yes, I think that’s entirely possible. What Joseph says to his brothers, at this crisis

for them, suggests that — during his own terrible trials, that had come earlier — he had begun to work out in his mind the providential purpose of his God in those trials: “And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance” (Gen. 45:5-7).

And even much later, when his brothers still exhibited a continuing fear of the brother whom they had wronged, he spoke to them in a similar vein: “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children” (Gen. 50:19-21).

And why not? The one who had received the title “Zaphenath-Paneah”, “Supporter of life” or “Savior of the world” (Gen. 41:45) — the one who was so plainly a pattern of the coming Messiah — was well prepared and well situated to teach his brothers

OPPORTUNITY TO TEACH

The Christadelphian Heritage School (CHS), held in the Simi Hills Ecclesia in the greater Los Angeles area, California, is recruiting teachers and an administrative assistant. The school term is September 2007 through June 2008. This is an ideal opportunity for retired school teachers and young brothers and sisters just out of college — who would like to dedicate a portion of their lives to providing a spiritual and academic educational experience for our children.

Grades are kindergarten through middle school. The school meets on a four-day week, with occasional field trips on Fridays. Curriculum materials are provided. Some financial assistance is available.

The governing principle of CHS is to provide quality education within a Biblical context. It is of the utmost importance that our children be in a safe learning environment, where their best interests and their individual progress are paramount. The small student-to-teacher ratio ensures that our children receive personal attention and an education of the highest caliber. With such a personalized education, we are able to accommodate those with special needs to help them achieve their individual potential. The results have been most positive both in spiritual and secular areas.

If you would like additional information please contact Bro. Greg Robinson at (805) 491-3923. E-mail: greg@bigbrand.com

With love in Christ,
Bro. Greg Robinson, CHS Board



Bible Mission News

Heart Searching in Ecuador

The three-hour bus journey back to Quito from Ambato presented us with ample opportunity to reflect upon the events of the past two days. We were returning from spending time with a brother in isolation and supporting him visiting Bible contacts.

It had been planned that we should spend one day of our visit together. Our brother was keen to share discoveries in his Bible study and at the same time show us something of his local environment. Travelling to the east of Ecuador, we skirted around the volcano Tungurahua. The volcano, 5,000 metres tall, was belching huge columns of ash every fifteen minutes. Our journey took us through Baños, a town famous for its basilica and “Virgin of the Holy Water”. (This Virgin is claimed to have miraculously saved people from exploding volcanoes, accidents and other misfortunes.) Following the river Pastaza, famous for its spectacular waterfalls and lush vegetation shading wild orchids, we passed through scenery of steep mountains and deep ravines. We eventually arrived at the gateway to the Amazon Basin. This was where our brother had planned for us to hold our service of remembrance of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

So in the open air, overlooking a wide riverbed meandering into the distance, we broke bread together. The only spectators were huge birds circling above us enjoying the afternoon thermals. Our thoughts focused on the reading from Ephesians 1 and 2 and the spiritual blessings offered to us in Christ. We marvelled at the love of God in our being chosen, blessed and predestined.

Our brother told us of his long search for truth. He began to question the teachings of the Roman Catholic church as a teenager; then, after visiting various other groups, he was drawn to a newspaper advertisement placed by the Christadelphians. He had found what he was searching for — the truth — and has never looked back. Over the last few years an enthusiastic group interested in studying the Bible, several of which are his friends, has been formed in his town of Ambato. We know that similar stories are continually repeated throughout the world.

On our return journey to Ambato, we were told that the road had to be closed to traffic at 6 pm. The following day was “Good Friday”, and hundreds of pilgrims were preparing to walk 34 kilometres through the night to remember the crucifixion in the town famed for its Virgin. Our brother noted how strange it was for the three of us to be travelling in the opposite direction to what he described as “this river” of people. We contemplated the teachings of the Apostle Paul in

Ephesians 2: “But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”

During the long bus journey back to Quito, we thought about the events of the past two days. There is fertile ground in this town and we are leaving it behind! This same feeling always accompanies us wherever we visit. There is a real need for brothers and sisters whose hearts burn within them to preach the gospel, and who are eager to learn Spanish — a language so vital to outreach in Latin America. Then on reflection, we might ask: Why look at others? What are we going to do about it? Our consciences have been truly pricked!

*Bill and Carol Rawson
Kevin Hunter, CBMA Representative for Ecuador*

2006 Bible school, El Salvador

On December 23 an event began which had been anxiously awaited by both the adult members and children of the Christadelphian community in El Salvador: our annual year-end Bible school. It was held at a camp in a pine forest of the Chalatenango mountains, near the border with Honduras, 55 miles north of the city of San Salvador. On this occasion 100 persons had a marvelous experience at the school, including brethren and sisters from Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Los Angeles, California.

For three relaxing, comfortable and happy days, the members and their children enjoyed much stimulating fellowship, all together in one place and far away from our normal daily concerns. We lived as one big family, taking our meals together, playing games together, and chatting until all hours of the night. Most



El Salvador Bible School

importantly, we sought fellowship with God through hymns and prayers, and Bro. Jim and Sis. Jean Hunter led the adults and young people in uplifting Bible classes. Jim based his talks on Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which was very gratifying because the apostle reminded us that we are called to form one single body in Christ, to work together as a team and as members of the great Christadelphian family. Jean led the young people through the early life of Jesus, while the younger children studied Jesus' parables and how to apply them to their daily lives.

During recreational periods we played games designed to remind us that we must always work together as members of one single body, and that we should share each other's joys or sufferings. Thus in the course of these three days we shared what some considered the best time of the year.

As a happy footnote, one of the young people present at the Bible school, Alejandra García, 17, was baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in the San Salvador ecclesial hall on Sunday, March 18, 2007 in the presence of 150 joyous onlookers.

It is our fervent hope that Jesus will soon return to the earth and establish his kingdom, so that we might be able to enjoy for all eternity the fellowship of the saints.

*Manuel and Silvia Fernández
Jim Hunter — CBMA linkman for El Salvador*



Brothers and sisters at the El Salvador Bible school

A Sure Foundation Guatemala City, Guatemala

The ecclesial growth in Guatemala City has been slow, but the core group of the 12-member ecclesia are very strong in their faith. They could well use the assistance of resident missionaries to help with all aspects of the work in this country. My wife Miriam and I were able to visit the ecclesia in March and to enjoy their fellowship and hospitality during four days. We helped with a few public lectures, but unfortunately the response of our contacts to our invitations was poor. We were encouraged, however, by the attendance and participation of the members, who send their love and greetings to the worldwide brotherhood!

Bro. Jorge Lemus (baptized December 2006) took time off work on the Monday (March 26) and guided us around the centre of Guatemala City, as we looked at different places for future overnight accommodation and alternate areas of the city for another ecclesial meeting location. There is a need to find a more centrally located meeting hall, in a safer area of the city, than the one that is currently used.

We were very thankful for the support of Bro. Oscar and Sis. Teresa Martinez from El Salvador (the neighbouring country to the north), who bused down Saturday morning (a six-hour trip) in time for the lectures that started at 3 pm. They returned Sunday afternoon after lunch. Their dedication and participation was a source of encouragement to all of us. Teresa and Miriam led a Sunday School class during the lecture for the children that were present.

We ask you to keep our brothers and sisters and their families in your prayers, as we all, with eager anticipation, wait for our Lord's Return.

Don Luff



Brothers and sisters in Guatemala 2007

Addresses for Bequests and Donations for tax ID numbers please contact the editor

Christadelphian Bible Mission of the Americas (CBMA) supports preaching work throughout the Caribbean and the Americas, Spanish Truth Corps, Domestic Truth Corps, etc. c/o Charles Brinkerhoff, 15925 La Ronda Cir., Hacienda Heights, CA 91745-4244.

Christadelphian Bible Mission Canada (CBMC) welcomes donations for Bible Mission activity, the *Tidings*, and bequests for similar causes. Box 55541, Unit 119, 15280 101 Ave., Surrey, BC, Canada, V3R 0J7.

Christadelphian Save the Children Fund provides Bible learning materials, personal items, and scholarships to needy mission areas. For details see: www.christadelphianchildren.com.

Christadelphian Indian Children's Homes (CICH) donations in US dollars can be sent to: CICH c/o David & Connie Stiles, 3 Blue Acre Rd., Middletown, CT 06457-5012.

Williamsburg Christadelphian Foundation (WCF) supports pastoral and preaching activities throughout the world. c/o Ray Pratt, P.O. Box 86, Deland, IL 61839-0086.

Joy Fund, Inc., provides grants to ecclesias, individuals, and families to assist with basic needs. c/o Stan Newton, 6861 Skyview Dr., Huntington Beach, CA 92647-2938.

Christadelphian Heritage College donations may be sent to; Christadelphian Heritage College, c/o Brantford Ecclesia, 442 Dunsdon St., Brantford, ON, Canada, N3P 2B1.

Christadelphian Tidings Publishing, Inc. publishes this magazine and other works on the truth. P.O. Box 530696, Livonia, MI 48153-0696.

Christadelphian Tape Library records and distributes audio/video/DVD's and CD's of various Bible schools and study sessions. Reuben E. Washington, 196 E. Stearns St., Rahway, NJ 07065-4923. Phone: 732-381-4590. Fax: 732-499-8415. christadelphiantapelibrary@verizon.net.

CBMA Overseas Book Service welcomes gifts of used Bibles, reference books, and Christadelphian books. Please contact Sis. Jan Berneau, 1221 N. Whitnall Hwy., Burbank, CA 91505-2110. Phone: 818-842-2868. jberneau@earthlink.net.

Spanish language literature is available at P.O. Box 947, Monrovia, CA 91017-0947. jdhunter@gte.net 626-303-2222.

Karolyn Andrews Memorial Fund (KAMF) provides help in cases where brethren or families have been victims of persecution because of their faith. Checks in any currency to: KAMF c/o P.O. Box 87371, Canton, MI 48187-0371.

Christadelphian Care-Line provides a service for those who need fully confidential help with emotional and spiritual problems as well as family issues. 866-823-1039.

Alcohol Help Line provides a service for those who need fully confidential help overcoming alcohol dependency. 866-823-1039.

News & Notices

AVON, IN

In Avon we still eagerly look forward to the return of our Lord, and in the meantime occupy ourselves exhorting one another as we see the day approaching. We welcome by way of transfer Sis. Debbie Davis (Detroit Livonia, MI), and Bro. Jerry and Sis. Jessica Cotner (Ann Arbor, MI).

We are pleased to have had many visitors in the past few months. We especially thank Bre. Allan Harrison, Paul Sparacino, Kent Ellis, Pat Bryan, and Dan Styles for their words of exhortation.

Dean Brown

BEDFORD, NS

Recent visitors have been Bro. Neil Carr (Mississauga West, ON); Sis. Sarah Luff (Hamilton MacNab, ON); Bro. Phil, Sis. Janice, Sis. Amanda, Bro. Paul and Alyssa Baines, and Bro. Ken and Sis. Wendy Dickson (Sussex, NB); and Bro. Sean Stull (Denver, CO).

Our Learn to Read the Bible seminar continues with a few interested friends, one of whom is considering baptism. We plan a Study Day on prophecy for Saturday, October 20, 2007, with Bro. Brian Luke, Aust., at Grand Lake Oakfield Community Hall, NS.

Congratulations to Bro. Ken and Sis. Nipun Easson on their marriage on March 16, 2007, in Bangladesh. Bro. Ken has been doing missionary work there since last September. We wish them well in their walk to the kingdom together.

Ronald A. A. Hill

BOSTON, MA

We would like to thank everyone who has assisted us with the Asende family. Your support helped them through the winter, especially with clothing and transportation.

We have also been blessed with four baptisms: JOHN and TAMMY RUNDLE and MARCOS and GLORIA SANTOS. In addition, Bro. Matthew and Sis. Kelly Coye have transferred from the Abington Ecclesia. In the meantime Sis. Priscilla Walther has transferred to the Los Angeles, CA Ecclesia. We commend her into the care of the brethren and sisters in her new ecclesia.

The Boston ecclesia would like to announce a change of time. Effective April 22, 2007, memorial service will begin at 10:45 AM.

Jeff Wallace

BRANTFORD, ON

We were pleased to welcome four members from the Milton, ON (Dawn) Ecclesia to the Central fellowship and as members of the Brantford Ecclesia on Sunday, February 18. It was a very joyful occasion as we extended fellowship to Bro. Barrie and Sis. Cathy Heywood, along with Bro. Patrick and Sis. Melanie Warner. We look forward to working together in our Lord's service as we await his return.

Once again the youth in this area benefited from two weekend activities. On Saturday, February 10, approximately 230 parents and children gathered at an outdoor recreational facility for a full day of activities. The children ranged in age from toddlers to 12 years old. The studies for the day were centered on “David — A Boy of Faith”.

On Saturday, February 17, the SCYC group, about 150, received studies from Bro. Steve Faver, Montana, on “Signs and Symbols in Scripture”, as well as enjoying sports activities in the evening.

We grieve with Bro. Paul and Sis. Roxanna Chalifoux over the death of their second child Stephanie. Stephanie was born prematurely with a number of health problems and lived only a few days. This is a difficult time for them, and we ask for your prayers for them that the comfort of the Word will sustain their faith.

God willing, Bro. Brian Luke will be ministering to the Brantford ecclesia from April 23 through May 3, 2007 at CYC, sisters’ classes, Sunday services, a special lecture and Bible classes. We also look forward to Bro. Brian’s visit to Ontario during the month of October. He has agreed to speak at the Brantford Fraternal Gathering on October 6, 2007, on the theme of “The Last Days of the Apostle Paul”.

Donald Luff

DOHA, QATAR

We have been blessed with the visit of Bro. David and Sis. Ruth Green (Clevedon, UK). We were happy to receive his words of exhortation and share fellowship again.

We would like to report that Bro. Randy Vaughn has returned to the USA; Bro. Austen and Sis. Crystal Kenzie, to Victoria, BC; Bro. Steve and Sis. Sandra Hracs, to Calgary, AB; and Sis. Kathy Hlina to Vernon, BC. We are sorry to see all of them leave. If you are traveling to Doha please direct your enquiries to Bro. Ben Brinkerhoff at blissbrink@yahoo.com or 974-671-0605.

Steve Hracs

ECHO LAKE, NJ

We have had many visitors from nearby ecclesias in the past few weeks. In addition, we have welcomed as a visitor Bro. Ben Joseph (Moorebank, Sydney, AU). Bro. Ryan Mutter (Baltimore, MD) was kind enough to lead the adult Sunday school class.

We are very pleased to announce that MARIA QUAGLIERI was baptized into the saving name of the Lord Jesus Christ on February 18, 2007.

Jonathan Link

GUADALAJARA, MEXICO

Once again, we were privileged to be involved with preaching and ecclesial activities in Guadalajara. The ecclesia advertised a series of lectures which were held March 27-30, 2007. There were a number of visitors in attendance on all evenings with keen interest.

We witnessed the good confessions of faith in their interviews during the week, and subsequent baptisms on Saturday, March 31, 2007, of GREGORIO CANO AYALA and SALVADOR GARZA MEJIA. It was a lovely day for the baptisms in the backyard pool of Bro. Luis Ramirez. A number of family members and interested friends were present to witness this simple act of obedience. They participated in their first Breaking of Bread service, and all enjoyed a nice meal together. There have been 10 baptisms

in the last two years in Guadalajara, since Bro. Carl and Sis. Cynthia Paiva arrived from California. We also went through a pre-interview with another gentleman, who should be fully prepared very soon to make his commitment as well.

Don Luff

GUYANA

The Guyana calendar of activities to usher in 2007 looks very promising and exciting.

The following members were engaged in 2006 and have declared their intention to be married in the Lord during the year 2007: Bro. Cyrus and Sis. Elizabeth Europe; Bro. Roland and Sis. Sonia Harilall; and Bro. Kester Trim and Sis. Kendra Joseph.

The Kilcoy Ecclesia will be hosting the Guyana Bible School which is planned for April 6-9, 2007. God willing, the Bible school this year will be extended into a Bible campaign which will involve canvassing and open air meetings. The theme for this year's Bible school is "Even So, Come Lord Jesus." The speakers are Bro. Clive Drepaul and Bro. Ted Hodge. Bro. Clive will lead a study of "The Truth of the Fourth Beast," while Bro. Ted will lead us in "The Only Thing that Counts."

Bro. Charles Klass of Georgetown fell asleep in November, 2006, and sadly, his wife died almost one week after he was laid to rest. Sis. Sophia Hamilton of the New Amsterdam ecclesia also fell asleep on February 2, 2007 at age 91.

RAYON AGARD of Eccles was baptized on December 31, 2006, and SAMUEL TRIM of Mocha was baptized on February 25, 2007.

Bro. David and Sis. Joan Andrews, Trinidad, visited in December, 2006, and ministered to the brotherhood. Bro. Andrew Bradshaw, UK, also visited in January and ministered to the ecclesias in Demerara and Berbice. Bro. Gideon Drepaul, US, arrived on January 28, 2007. His visit coincided with the funeral of Sis. Hamilton. He returned on February 18, 2007.

Bro. Abedi Ndjelekulu and family's stay in Guyana has officially been extended for another year, for which we give God many thanks.

Frederick Hammond

HAMILTON GREENAWAY, ON

We are very pleased to welcome as new members Sis. Lisamarie Cromie (Brantford, ON) and Bro. Rob and Sis. Jodee Webb (Toronto West, ON). We look forward to a productive association with our new members as we work and journey together, by the Father's grace, toward the day when His kingdom will be established.

The Greenaway fraternal gathering will be held at Wildwood, Georgetown, ON, on September 8, 2007, starting at 2 pm. Bring your own picnic meal for supper at 4:30 pm. Bro. Ken Curry (Toronto East, ON), will speak on "The Challenge of Holiness — What Does God Require?"

Tom Thorp

KAMLOOPS, BC

Bro. Jon Fletcher has taken over the duties of the recording brother, replacing Bro. Gregg Ferrie as of November 1, 2006. His address is: 2515 Partridge Crescent, Kamloops, BC, V2B 6W5. He may be contacted by phone at 250-579-2291 or by e-mail at jfletcher@kamloopsbiblestudy.info.

We have received by transfer Bro. Nathaniel Massey (Prince George, BC) in July 2006. We welcome our brother to this small ecclesia and greatly appreciate his assistance.

In addition, our Bro. Daniel Ferrie is currently living and working in North Battleford, SK, and is attending their ecclesia. Sunday school student Joel Ferrie is living and working in Victoria and attending their ecclesia, and Bro. Nathan and Sis. Crystal Bartholomew are living and working in Kamloops and attending our ecclesia.

We were blessed with the birth of Zechariah Nathan Montgomery on July 8, 2005, a firstborn son for Bro. Dean and Sis Jenni-anne Montgomery.

Our gospel proclamation work has included a Learn to Read the Bible Effectively seminar, followed by Genesis, Prophecy. We are now almost finished with the Revelation seminar. We presently have two contacts, one of which is studying for baptism.

We have had many visiting speakers over the last year and a half and are very grateful for their fellowship. We thank Bre. Skip and Stephen Bartholomew, Tim Graeme, and Paul Osborn (Okanagan); Bill Hlina, David Drysdale and Dean Bailey (Vernon); Wesley Butler (Vancouver); Rapheek Soolaman (Maple Ridge); Mark Higgs (Victoria); Ron Kidd (London, ON); Mike LeDuke (Kitchener/Waterloo, ON); Wayne Osborne (Denver, CO); Colin Hollamby (Glenlock, UK); John Sivor (Adelaide, AU); and Bernard Burt (Coventry, UK) for their adult Sunday school classes, exhortations and — in some cases — mid-week Bible classes. We also would like to thank the sisters and families who accompanied these brethren in their labor of love. Bro. Jim Cowie (Brisbane, AU) also led a study day for us on “Christ in the Wilderness”, and Bro. Geoff Higgs led our 2006 fraternal in a study on “Peter”.

We have had many visitors as well over the past year, too many to record them all here, as it seems Kamloops is geographically at the crossroads of the ecclesial world here in BC. We truly enjoy all the company and support we receive, particularly at our study days and fraternals, and would encourage anyone passing through to give us a call and stop to visit.

Jon Fletcher

KOUTS, IN

It is with sadness that we report the death of our Sis. Elaine Johnston. Her maiden name was Evans, a founding family of this ecclesia. Yet another stalwart awaits the awakening call in the dawning of the age of righteousness. Our sister was born in Gorseinan, South Wales, on March 19, 1923. She died September 18, 2006, at the age of 83. On March 30, 1955, she was baptized, as she would recount, “that she might dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” She was a leader by example and fiercely proclaimed her convictions. We mourn her absence, along with her daughter Sis. Patti Bobis, her granddaughter Sis. Jorie Asbury, her husband Bro. James Asbury, and her grandson Bro. Jason Bobis, all members of this ecclesia.

Our annual study weekend was successfully held on November 4-5, 2006. The speaker was Bro. David Levin (Baltimore, MD). He gave a series of five talks on the topic “When Life Hurts.” We profited from his insights. He came with Sis. Cora, along with those who travel from many places to share this time of refreshment together. Their company made us glad. May it please our Heavenly Father to soon bring together in one the bride of His beloved Son, our Lord.

Noel Peare

LOS ANGELES HISPANIC, CA

With sadness we report the sudden death of Bro. Angel Alban in June, 2006. Only recently baptized, Bro. Angel was full of enthusiasm for the truth, never missing meetings. He died of a stroke after having surgery. He told his brother in the flesh that he wasn't worried because he now believed in the resurrection when Jesus returns.

The meeting has been blessed with four baptisms since our last report. MARTHA CERRILLOS, mother of Sis. Patricia Barbosa, first came to meeting in 1999. EDWIN SANCLEMENTE, a young man who came to our very first talks here in Los Angeles in 1998. These two were baptized in July, 2006. Then in March 2007, CARMEN and JESUS RODRIGUEZ were baptized. Jesus was a "walk-in" to the meeting about seven years ago and began bringing Carmen and his four children about 18 months ago. They live just a couple of blocks from the hall and, along with all the children, are a great boost to our little meeting.

It was a pleasure to have a month-long visit from Bro. Julio Silva, who lives in Florida. His work repairing and painting the hall was greatly appreciated!

Jim Hunter

SARASOTA, FL

We have enjoyed the presence at our ecclesial hall of many brethren and sisters. They came from Canada, the UK, and Australia. We want to thank all the brethren for their exhortations, and the sisters for their help with the music portion of our meeting.

Bro. Dick and Sis. Betty Schenk requested that we transfer their membership from Sarasota, FL to Springfield, MA, which we did.

We are also pleased to announce the baptism of CHRISTINE DILLINGHAM. She is the granddaughter of Bro. Art and Sis. Eleanor Dillingham, of Sarasota. She was baptized on January 15, 2007. Also, RON BADLU was baptized on February 25, 2007 in the Gulf of Mexico, by his former Sunday school teacher, Bro. Ashraf Ali (South Ozone Park, NY). We want to thank all of Bro. Ron's relatives and friends from the New York area for coming to Ron's baptismal service in Venice, FL. We pray that God will guide our new sister, Christine, and brother, Ron, on their journey to Christ's kingdom.

Howard Souder

ST. LUCIA

We have been well blessed and the ecclesia has grown to fifteen members. On February 4, 2007, after a good confession of her faith, WILHELMINA BERTY GEORGE was baptized into the saving name of the Lord Jesus. Sis. Wilhelmina had just celebrated her ninetieth birthday! She is delighted to have learned the faith of the gospel during the past three years through her son, Bro. Andre George.

We are very sorry to report that Bro. Denis Fedee is no longer a member of the ecclesia.

In February, 2007, we held a campaign. Eight lectures were given in the Castries library and three in a small fishing village, Anse La Raye, down the coast. Eight thousand leaflets were handed out for the Castries lectures and about 800 in Anse La Raye. Contacts already on the mailing list were invited. The response was excellent! Each

evening there were more than thirty visitors present to hear the gospel of salvation presented by Bre. Eddy Anthony and Andre George (St. Lucia), and Dan Wilton and Martin Webster (Canada). Many new people signed for the postal course and we are busy following up with the approximately 250 active contacts.

We were thrilled with the response and greatly appreciate the support from CBMC. Without their assistance, these preaching efforts would not be possible. We give a hearty “thank you” to all who contribute to CBM to make such campaigns possible.

There is much work to be done here in St. Lucia. Please “come over... and help us.”

George Rock

TOLEDO, OH

It is with sadness that we report the falling asleep of three of our sisters in Christ in a very short time. Sis. Mary Ellen Monroe fell asleep after a long illness on September 30, 2006; Sis. Edna Wilson had several health problems and fell asleep on January 2, 2007; and Sis. Pat Henzler fell asleep after losing her battle with cancer and other lung problems on January 16, 2007. Their loss is deeply felt, and their singing voices and their service to the ecclesia will be missed. We are confident we will see them again at the resurrection, and in God’s coming kingdom on earth. We would like to thank the brethren and sisters from the surrounding area, and all those who sent their words of comfort and support.

We would like to acknowledge our recent visitors: Bro. Dan and Sis. Niki Styles and their children; Bro. Phil and Sis. Linda Beckerson; Bro. Matt Bilello; and Bro. John and Sis. Mary Bilello. We thank Bre. Dan Styles and Matt Bilello for their exhortations, and Sis. Mary for her assistance with the music.

Doug Henzler

VERNON, BC

We are pleased to welcome, by transfer from the New Westminster Ecclesia, Sis. Yvonne Teel. We have also welcomed two new arrivals: Brandon Abel Roy was born to Bro. Matt and Sis. Leah Siegler on October 4, 2006. Bro. David and Sis. Candace Drysdale were blessed with their fourth child, a boy named Simon Gareb, born on Feb. 3, 2007.

We are sorry to have to report that Sis. Charlene Zantingh is no longer in fellowship. We ask for your prayers for our sister that she might reconsider her position before our God. We are thankful for those brethren who have ministered to us over the past few months, including Bro. Steven Hornhardt and Bro. Ken Whitehead, both of Australia. It is always uplifting to have visitors from both near and far to join us.

David Zantingh

The Galilee Bible School

The Galilee Bible School will be held, God willing, November 13-18, 2007, at Kibbutz Ma’agan, on the southeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The teachers will be Bro. David Lloyd (Simi Hills, CA) and Bro. Don Pearce (Rugby, UK).

Last year’s Galilee Bible school drew 84 brethren and sisters from Israel, Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and North America. Come and join in the studies and international fellowship around the Word of Life, in the land of all lands. God willing, there will be a youth program, evening activities, and half days of touring included this year.

Minute Meditation

Learning Obedience

The writer to the Hebrews tells us, concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, that “though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.” If our Heavenly Father felt it necessary to teach His only begotten son obedience through suffering, we should not be surprised when we also have to endure suffering.

We should ask: what lessons are we to learn from the suffering we are enduring? Since we know that all things work together for good for those who are called by God, we must recognize that our suffering is for our good. We need to look for God’s purpose in bringing these experiences into our lives.

Recently I have experienced the most suffering of my life. As I lay in the hospital bed, cut across the chest from the open heart surgery, with both legs lined with scars from the tumor operation and from harvesting the veins for the bypass, I wondered what lessons God intended for me to learn through this difficult time. I knew that God had given me this experience for my benefit. I prayed I would be a good student, willingly learning what He intended, and growing in wisdom and understanding.

The writer to the Hebrews explains that we should expect some suffering in our lives, and that it is the Lord’s way of showing us that He really loves us. “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.”

I now have a better appreciation for what feeble arms and weak knees are, because never before have I ever had such feeble arms and weak knees. I am not allowed to pick up anything that weighs more than five pounds. My knees are so weak that I can barely stand; I have been using a walker for support. Although I know that I am not the only one to feel this way, for these surgeries are being done every day in hospitals around the world, I now know firsthand what it feels like, and how frail our bodies are.

Experiencing these types of problems can make us either bitter or better. Paul is a comfort to us when he tells us that there is no temptation or trial that we endure

which is not common to mankind, but that God is faithful and will not allow us to be tried beyond what we are able to bear.

These verses filled my thoughts as I lay wide awake in the middle of the night — hurting, it seemed, everywhere. It is one thing to memorize verses and be able to repeat them, but it is an altogether different thing to apply them personally while enduring the trial, the pain and the suffering that God is giving us for our ultimate benefit.

One lesson that came out of all this — loud and clear — is how much I am looking for and yearning for the return of our Lord. Old age and the conditions that go with it certainly help us to understand what Job meant when he said, “I would not live always.” Job also declared, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him”... because he knew that when our life ends, that is not all there is. Paul tells us, “For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.” What a comfort it is to know that in life or death, we are in our merciful Heavenly Father’s hands. Paul also longed for relief from the burden of suffering he was enduring as, with a heavy heart, he declared, “We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”

We want to live always, but not with this frail mortal body. Our experiences in suffering help us to long for the coming of the Lord, who will “transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

In the meantime, I thank God that He has spared my life. And I pray that all of us may redeem the time we have left, so that all we do may be done to the glory and honor of His Name.

Robert J. Lloyd

Coming Events (Lord Willing)

MAY

11-13 Nanaimo, BC Vancouver Island Sisters’ Weekend, Beach Acres Resort, Parksville, Vancouver Island, BC. Sis. Yvonne Rosenau (Nanaimo, BC): “My Strength is Made Perfect in Weakness”. Contact Sis. Beth Dangerfield, 1155 Ranger Place, Victoria, BC V8X 3P5 gdanger@shaw.ca 250-479-8422

18-20 Cachuma Lake, CA Men’s weekend. “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord: Making your home a spiritual retreat”. Contact Bro. David Lloyd 818-352-6486 davidrlloyd@earthlink.net

18-20 Hartford City, IN Fraternal gathering, Lake Placid Retreat. Bro. Paul Billington (Brantford, ON): “Signs of the Times”. Contact Bro. Jerry Asbury 618-288-5023 JerryandDot1@cs.com

19,20 Prince George, BC Fraternal gathering. Bro. Ron Hicks (Washington, DC): “Biblical Examples of Personal Sacrifice”. Contact Bro. Ken Loveridge loveridgeken@shaw.ca

19,20 Echo Lake, NJ Mid-Atlantic Gathering, Cherry Hill, NJ. Bro. John Pople (San Francisco Peninsula, CA): "Road to Atonement". Contact Bro. Jonathan Link 973-633-8534 jonlink@optonline.net

25-27 New York Metropolitan Sisters' Retreat. Pocono Manor, Pocono, PA. Sis. Gerry Ann Lloyd (Simi Hills, CA): "Facing Today's Challenges / Dilemmas". For complete information and registration contact Sis. Averil Ferguson 718-881-8705 averilpsm23@juno.com

26,27 Baltimore, MD Study day. Bro. Dev Ramcharan (Toronto West, ON): "The Life of Jacob". Saturday classes begin 1 pm; supper served. Sunday 5th class at 9:45, and memorial service at 11. Lunch served. Afternoon lecture 2 pm. Contact Bro. Andy Bilello 410-692-9855

26,27 Seattle, WA Fraternal gathering and study weekend. Edmonds Home School Center, Edmonds, WA. Bro. Bob Lloyd (Verdugo Hills, CA): "The Way of Life". Contact Bro. Tony Ball 425-397-6344 at_ball@hotmail.com

26,27 Sussex, NB Study weekend. Bro. George Jackson (Toronto East, ON): "God's Striking Revelation of His Son: A Study in Hebrews". Contact Bro. Brad Goodwin 506-433-6681 braddeb@nb.sympatico.ca

JUNE

9 Simi Hills, CA Study day. Bro. Brian Luke (AU): "The Friends of Jeremiah". Contact Bro. Gordon Hensley 805-955-0140 hensleymail@sbcglobal.net

16,17 New York Fraternal South Ozone Park Hall. Bro. Jeff Gelineau (Simi Hills, CA): "A Journey with Purpose". Contact Bro. Gideon Drepaal yerubbaal@yahoo.com

24-30 Rocky Mountain Bible School Glenwood Springs, CO. Bro. Ron Hicks (Washington, DC): "The Exodus"; Bro. David Lloyd (Simi Hills, CA): "Forgiveness"; Bro. Mark O'Grady (Wellington Tawa, NZ): "Phanerosis". Registration forms at www.denverchristadelphians.org

30-July 5 Terra Nova Bible School, Terra Nova Park, NF. Bro. Jeff Johnson (Australia): "Be Ye Transformed"; Bro. Jim Harper (Meriden, CT): "Meditations on the Ministry of Our Lord". Information and registration at terranovabibleschool.com. Contact Bro. Gary Hynes, 32 First Street, Mount Pearl, NF, Canada A1N 1X8 phone 709-747-2750 info@terranovabibleschool.com

30-July 8 Mid-Atlantic Bible School, Shippensburg, PA. Bro. Ron Hicks (Washington, DC): "Exodus — Escape from Bondage" (adults), and "Preparing to Preach" (teens); Bro. Mark O'Grady (Wellington Tawa, NZ): "All the Tithes are Holy" (adults), and "Genesis 1" (teens); Bro. Nigel Patterson (Newquay, UK): "The Letter to the Christadelphians (Studies in Colossians)" (adults), and "Daring to be Different" (teens). Contact Bro. Jeff Livermore, PO Box 135, Novi, MI 48376. Forms at www.christadelphians.net/MACBS. Information from MACBSRegistrar@hotmail.com

JULY

8-14 Southwest Bible School, Schreiner University, Kerrville, TX. Bro. Tec Morgan (Birmingham, UK): "Romans: The Gospel of Salvation" (adults), and "Prophets After the Exile" (teens); Bro. Nigel Patterson (Newquay, UK): "David: From Sheepfold to Palace" (adults), and "Daring to be Different" (teens); Bro. David Styles (Shelburne, ON): "The Ecclesia of the Living God: The Pillar and Ground of the Truth" (adults), and "Does It Really Matter What We Believe?" (teens). Contact Bro. Joe Hill, 11110 South Bay Lane, Austin, TX 78739-1580; joehill@io.com. Forms at www.planofgod.org

14-20 The NEW Manitoulin Family Bible Camp Manitoulin Island, ON. Bro. Ted Hodge, Jr. (Orangeville, ON): "Challenges of the Lord"; Bro. Bill Link, Jr. (Baltimore, MD): "Job — The Spirit of a Just Man Made Perfect". Contact Bro. Mike Moore 519-756-0175 michael.l.moore@rogers.com

14-22 Eastern Bible School, Ascutey Mountain Resort, Brownsville, VT. Bro. Mark Giordano (Norfolk, VA): "Wonders of the Kingdom"; Bro. Richard Morgan (Saanich Peninsula, BC): "The Two Sauls"; Bro. Michael Hughes (Hamilton, NZ): "The Message of the Miracles". Contact Bro. Peter Dixon peter@tecbs.org

22-28 Pacific Coast Bible School, Idyllwild, CA. Bro. Matthew Blewett (Durban, South Africa): "Finding Faith"; Bro. Kitson Reid (Birmingham, UK): "The Hand of God in our Lives"; and Bro. Ted Sleeper (San Francisco, CA): "That I Might Know Him". Contact Bro. Jeff Gelineau, 567 Astorian Drive, Simi Valley, CA 93065 mail@gelineau.org or Bro. Gary Patterson garympatterson@hotmail.com or visit our website at www.californiabibleschool.org

21-29 Midwest Bible School, Hanover College, IN. Bro. Peter Forbes (UK): "Romans: The Gospel in a Nutshell"; Bro. Dev Ramcharan (Toronto West, ON): "Titus"; Bro. Roger Lewis (NZ): "The Sign of the Prophet Jonah". Contact Bro. Lee Livermore, 7323D Chapel Villas Lane, Indianapolis, IN 46214, 317-271-1568, e-mail llivermore@hotmail.com

28-August 4 Manitoulin Bible Camp Theme: "I am the Light of the World". Bro. Jeff Johnson (Glenlock, Australia): "We are all one in Christ Jesus"; Bro. Martin Webster (Kitchener-Waterloo, ON): "Discourses in the Gospel of John". Contact Bro. Alex Browning jabrowning@rogers.com 416-284-0290

29-August 4 Western Bible School Menucha Conference Center, Corbett, OR. Bro. Simon Dean (Bishop's Stortford, UK): "Power in Weakness (2 Corinthians)"; Bro. Duncan Kenzie (North Saanich, BC): "Forgiveness and Reconciliation"; Bro. Kyle Tucker (Midlothian, VA): "Fasting". Contact Sis. Jane Szabo szabojj@peak.org

AUGUST

11-17 Niagara Falls Bible School St. Catherines, ON. Bre. John Roberts (UK), Mick Roberts (UK), Mike LeDuke (Ontario). For information please contact Bro. David Brierley 416-236-5295 David.Brierley@sympatico.ca

12-18 Ojai, CA Kids Camp, Camp Arnaz for Christadelphian children ages 9-16. Bre. Jim Cowie (Australia) and David Wisnieswski (Ontario, Canada). kidscampcalifornia.com or Bro. Tom Graham tom@bigbrand.com

25-31 Vancouver Island Bible Camp Camp Pringle, Shawnigan Lake, Vancouver Island, BC. Bro. Peter King (Worcester, UK): "Studies in John's Gospel"; Bro. John Launchbury (Portland, OR): "Principles of Salvation"; Bro. John Pople (San Francisco Peninsula, CA): "In the Beginning"; Bro. Peter Niven: "Singing and Praise". Contact Sis. Wendy Johnsen 250-724-0501 wendyjohansen@yahoo.ca

SEPTEMBER

1,2 Victoria (BC) Fraternal gathering. Bro. Peter King (Worcester, UK): "Isaiah — Prince of Prophets". Contact Sis. Pat Williamson 250-721-4938 pwilliamson@telus.net

8 Hamilton (Greenaway) Fraternal gathering, Wildwood, Georgetown, ON. Bro. Ken Curry (Toronto East, ON): "The Challenge of Holiness — What Does God Require?" Starting at 2 pm; bring your own picnic meal for supper at 4:30 pm.

9-14 Adult Study Week. The Bible school with a difference! Wildwood Manor, Ballinafad, ON. Topic: Zechariah 1 — 7. For information about the workbook or to register please

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contact Bro. Bob and Sis. Joy Jennings bobnjoy@vif.com 519-754-0902 or Bro. Martin and Sis. Lois Webster mjwebster@vif.com 519-442-0544

12-16 London (West), ON Fraternal gathering week. Bro. Nigel Patterson (Newquay, UK): "Ecclesiastes — Wisdom for Today". Programs will follow. For further information contact bro. Dave Birchall 519-668-7081 dalefinancial@rogers.com

28-30 Bozeman, MT Study weekend. Bro. Dennis Paggi (Verdugo Hills, CA): "The Potter and the Clay: God's Hand in the Lives of Believers". Contact Bro. Steve Faver 406-388-3314 sfaver@unitedagencies.com

OCTOBER

6 Brantford, ON Thanksgiving Fraternal Gathering, Copetown Community Centre. Bro. Brian Luke (Brighton, Australia): "The Last Days of the Apostle Paul". 12:30 to 5 pm, three talks and dinner. Contact Bro. Mike Moore 519-756-0175 michael.l.moore@rogers.com

NOVEMBER

13-18 Galilee Bible School Kibbutz Ma'agan, Israel. Bre. David Lloyd (Simi Hills, CA) and Don Pearce (Rugby, UK): "Walking in the Footsteps of the Master". Contact Sis. Betty Lou Lewis Liat727@aol.com 727-744-1872