

Christ's Death and Your Salvation

PREFACE

The following critique is in response to a pamphlet published by **THE LOGOS** under the name of H.P.Mansfield in Australia in the 1960's.

It will be obvious to those who agree or who are familiar with Nazarene Fellowship views that although we believe many of the things that Christadelphians believe our different views about the nature of man and the meaning of the Atonement places between us a gulf wider by far than separates Christadelphians from Roman Catholics. This difference is plainly set out in the following pages.

One thing we have in common with Christadelphians and also some other Christian denominations is the expectation of the return to this earth of Jesus Christ to set up His eternal Kingdom then we shall know as also we are known.

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The above named pamphlet is issued by Logos Publications in Australia and as it bears only the name of H.P.Mansfield, I assume he is the author, but its pages being numbered 65 to 80 suggests that it is a reprint from the Herald and may have been written by someone else. ^{*(see note below).} I am cautious on this point because a year or two ago I mentioned in a pamphlet that a correspondent in Australia had told me about an article in The Logos in which sin-in-the-flesh was likened to "the loathsome disease of leprosy" and it was stated or implied that because Jesus had human flesh He was in that sense a leper; His last words from the Cross when He felt Himself forsaken by God were "the leper's wail." Mr. Mansfield took me severely to task for criticising him over the matter and claimed that he was travelling in U.S.A. when it was published and he knew nothing of it. He denied that my impression of the article represented his own belief, but I thought and still think that as Editor he was responsible for it and was cowardly to shelter behind an excuse. This booklet bearing his name says some even more objectionable things and clearly proves that he does in fact believe and teach the very thing he denied.

* The Author of the pamphlet is now known to be John Ullman, NOT H.P.Mansfield.

On page 73, under the heading "Why man sins" he says:-

"It (sin) can be considered as an incurable disease with which all are invariably affected."

In view of this it is difficult to understand his indignant reaction to what I wrote. He calls sin an incurable disease; the Logos writer likened it to the loathsome disease of leprosy – a little more specific but I see no great difference. The truth is that "sin" is not a disease of any kind but simply a state of wickedness. The cure for it is to stop being wicked. "A sin" is an act of disobedience or any transgression of law. It can only be committed by someone who has freewill and who is under law. The sacrificial ritual under the Mosaic Law whereby a sin could be remitted is described in Leviticus 6:2-7. The bondage or reign of sin (Romans 5:21,

6:14, 8:2) is a completely different thing. It is purely legal and can best be understood as defining a state of alienation or estrangement from God. This came into effect when Adam disobeyed and forfeited his right to life, and although it hangs over the whole family of those whose life descends from him, it only becomes operative upon those whose mental capacity and knowledge constitutes them responsible before God. "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin" (John 15:22). But never in Scripture and in none of the senses in which the term sin is used is it a physical thing, a quality of human flesh or a disease.

I have no quarrel with what Mr Mansfield has to say regarding man's need for salvation or the necessity for faith and baptism. On these subjects he is quite scriptural and one only wishes he was as sound when he is dealing with the circumstances which put mankind in need of salvation and, more important still, the principles upon which it has been made possible. In both of these respects he is completely wrong, and as they are to believers the essential part of what God has revealed this is a tragedy. It may not seriously matter if we have, let us say, only a sketchy knowledge of Jewish history and very little understanding of prophecy; or if our ideas about resurrection and judgment and the Kingdom are a little hazy. If we are amongst the elect these are deficiencies which may be made good; but if our understanding of how and why the sacrifice of Christ is able to save us is not merely deficient but totally wrong, then we may not be amongst the elect and everything else we may know, even if it were the whole three volumes of "Eureka," would be valueless. We are not to judge, but we have seen and experienced a few things during the past 40 years and would be failing in our responsibility if we did not make it quite clear that in our opinion those who believe like Mr. Mansfield regarding the purpose of The Atonement are in a most unhappy position. Their view so completely misrepresents the purpose of God and the way He has revealed Himself in His Son, that if they are really responsible for what they are teaching it seems almost inconceivable that they can be justified when they meet Jesus face to face.

Let it be said here again, with no other feeling for the personalities concerned than the earnest desire to help them as we have been helped; the case against Mr. Mansfield and The Logos Group which is amply documented in the pamphlet under scrutiny, is that their belief that sin became a fixed principle in human flesh, which is almost identical with the orthodox doctrine of Original Sin, represents the Creator as a monster of injustice, not only in His treatment of mankind in general, but in particular in His treatment of His Own Son. The same applies to all Christadelphians who reaffirmed and accepted reunion under the B.A.S.F. and whose views are represented by the published work of A. D. Norris and W.F. Barling. Their view robs Christ of the honour due to Him; it reduces Him to little more than a puppet and makes His death a meaningless murder chargeable against Almighty God, who is supposed to have required it. Furthermore, the stratagem developed in recent years, initiated with the Carter-Cooper Addendum, whereby the traditional doctrine of sin-in-the-flesh is being concealed behind the term "inherited mortality" makes their guilt greater, for it seems to show that in their hearts they know that their theory of the death of Christ as a ritual destruction of sinful flesh, upheld as a basic Christadelphian first principle for more than a century, is a complete misconception which ought to be renounced.

FALSE PREMISES

Under the heading "How can Jesus Save?" Mr. Mansfield writes two short sentences, both having an element of truth but both when critically examined manifestly false. These lay the basis for the errors which follow. Start with a false premise you will finish with a false conclusion.

"All mankind without exception, are under sentence of death because of inherited mortality.
Through weakness of the flesh, all sin, and the sentence is justified."

In both these statements there is a confusion of a legal position with a physical condition. The first implies that sentence of death is the same as inherited mortality. It most certainly is not. For example, a sentence of death can be rescinded, whereas inherited mortality cannot. A man may come under sentence of death and he may be executed, but also he may be reprieved, in which case he would continue to live; but he is nevertheless mortal, or as we ought to say, corruptible and will probably eventually die. We say probably, because there have been mortals who have not died and of those who are alive at a certain day there will be others. So it is not correct to equate the state of being a living creature having a limited span of life with living under a sentence of death. All members of the animal kingdom are corruptible and dying, but no sensible person would affirm that cats and dogs are under sentence of death. One may say "what does it matter whether we call it a sentence of death or mortality – it simply means we are all destined to die." It matters because in religion we are dealing

with very far-reaching principles which have been revealed by God and which affect our spiritual and eternal life and no-one is entitled to make a hotch-potch of things which are entirely different. We have been given a certain capacity to reason and we are expected to discriminate. The question of whether mortality is a sentence or a natural condition is of vital importance in dealing with the subject of salvation. Because Christadelphians, like Christians in general, fell into the error of believing that the reason all creatures die is because Adam ate the forbidden fruit, they have made God's plan an incomprehensible mystery.

Mr. Mansfield's second false statement says that,

“this sentence of death is justified because through the weakness of the flesh, all sin.”

Now, if this statement were true it should follow that the sentence of death would be unjustified if it fell upon anyone who did not sin. This would be the logical deduction from his premise. We should therefore expect that when he comes to consider the case of Jesus he would follow the logic of his own reasoning and recognize that since Jesus did not commit any sin therefore his death was unjustified. This is the inference we ourselves draw; we conclude that Jesus could not have been under sentence of death because He was sinless. We know of course that He was capable of dying, because in fact He died, but it is therefore obvious to us that it is necessary to distinguish between being corruptible and being under sentence of death. But what is still more important, we see that there was no just reason for Jesus to die and therefore - and this is the value of a careful examination of the facts - we look for the true explanation; which is that He gave His life voluntarily as a sacrifice. Unhappily for him. Mr. Mansfield dare not draw this logical conclusion but is obliged, being a Christadelphian and committed to the view that the Crucifixion was a ritual destruction of sinful flesh, to turn himself inside out and try to put together a plausible explanation of why God determined to put to death His own Son even though he was sinless. Listen!

“There is only one man who never sinned; he is the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet he died, and by Divine appointment (Acts 2:23). Was his death justified?”

As we have said, on his own reasoning he ought to answer with an emphatic “No, His death was not justified, because He was perfectly sinless.” This is the answer we give. We say that His murder was the most heinous crime in history. We believe this is the answer which every unbiased reader of the Gospels must give, even though they may be unable to explain why He did die. Even Pilate, who reluctantly gave sentence against Jesus recognized its injustice. “Behold I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man. No, nor yet Herod; for I sent you to him, and nothing worthy of death is proved against him.” But Mr. Mansfield thinks he knows better and has no hesitation in contradicting not only the recorded testimony of those who tried him and delivered him up because they feared a Jewish uprising, but he also ignores the implications of his own reasoning and affirms that the sentence on Jesus was just- Consider what he writes and it will surely be agreed that there was never a more extraordinary and complete exposure of false reasoning by the very man who is advancing it:

“Was his death Justified? It was, because the righteousness that he exhibited in life came not from flesh but in spite of it.”

Before proceeding to test the truth of this incredible reason, for saying that His death was justified, let us digress a moment and imagine that Jesus Christ was living here in the world at this point in time. We will suppose that He has incurred the animosity of important religious leaders by denouncing their hypocritical love of power. That He has been charged with blasphemy and treason and put on trial. I ask, what would be the attitude of Mr. Mansfield and his fellow-believers? Would they be leading the demonstrators in a march demanding justice, insisting that a perfectly innocent and good man should be delivered by the Civil Authorities from the malevolence of these fanatical religious leaders? Would they? Not on your life! They would be coolly arguing that He ought to be put to death, not mark you because He had committed any crime but “because the righteousness he exhibited came not from flesh but in spite of it.” What a marvel! What a staggering, amazing position for a community claiming to be the brethren of Christ to find themselves in. What a damning indictment of their doctrine. Whatever might be imagined to be in favour of the reason adduced, the cold fact is that their theory has driven them into the position that if the circumstances of A.D.30 or whatever the date was, were re-enacted in our day, Christadelphians would be amongst the mob of theologians screaming “Crucify him,” “Let him be put to death,” not, admittedly for exactly the same reasons but because they think it was just and right that He should die because He was born with human flesh. I repeat, what an incredible situation for Christians of any denomination! The Jews cried, “We have a law and by our law he ought to die,

because he made himself the Son of God.” Christadelphians do not make this mistake; they recognize that He really was the Son of God, but they reach the same fatal conclusion by reversing the argument “We have Clause VI which says that flesh is sinful and therefore, although he is the Son of God and sinless he ought to die because this is the just desert of sinful flesh.”

It happens that we are dealing with Mr. Mansfield’s pamphlet but it should not be thought that he is alone in his argument that Jesus was justly put to death because He was a man of flesh and blood. Other eminent Christadelphians have advanced the same doctrine in different words but with the same deadly earnestness - W.F.Barling in “Redemption in Christ” wrote:-

“There was no injustice in his death. For Christadelphians human flesh is wholly evil. It was not wrong for him to die.”

Imagine that!

Also A.D.Norris in “Understanding the Bible” says:-

“When Jesus died upon the Cross, the devil hung there dead.”

By any reasoning, if the devil died with Jesus, it was a very desirable thing that He should be put to death as soon as possible. But in fact (and do not misunderstand me, we do not believe in a personal devil - I am speaking scripturally) the devil is not dead. When Jesus died He destroyed the power of the devil over those whom He died to redeem. If A.D.Norris was right, who was it who rose the third day? These leaders are the latter day Jewry; they have a law and a system to defend and it seems they will defend it to the grave - it is expedient that one man should die and they will insist on the justice and the rightness of His death while they have breath. But the Apostle said a very different thing. “A man approved of God among you - ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. Ye denied the Holy One and the just, desired a murderer, and killed the Prince of Life.” Does anyone require to see a clearer contrast between the truths of scripture and the lies of foolish teachers? We think it very improbable that many ordinary Christadelphians realize the position into which they have been led but nothing is better calculated to open their eyes than these writers, if they are read critically and compared with the Bible. They live in fear of our literature and advise that it should not be read; we are not afraid of theirs - we could never expose the badness of their teaching better than they have done themselves.

We will now examine Mr. Mansfield’s disputable reasoning in a little more detail. We remember what he said earlier; “through weakness of the flesh, all sin, and the sentence is justified.” Now here is a man, Jesus, a man of flesh and blood, subject to the weakness of the flesh, declared to have been made in all points like we are, suffering temptations like other men, who did not sin. Does he ask himself whether he might not be mistaken in his assertion that through weakness of the flesh all sin? Indeed he did not. Does he stay to ask himself the question whether it might not be possible for another man, who tried as hard as Jesus also to be sinless? Certainly not. He takes the scripture testimony that all have sinned as proof that because of their sinful nature no-one could possibly be other than a sinner. Yet no-one can point to an example of any single commandment which we are incapable of obeying if we choose. Instead of thinking over these obvious points and adjusting his theory to accommodate them, he prefers to rob Jesus of all credit for having overcome temptation by the exercise of the same powers as are available to us if we used them. Thus he turns His probation into a mere make-believe.

“From whence did Jesus derive the strength to accomplish that which no other person has done; render perfect obedience to God? He received it from God.”

He received the strength from God! When in previous writing we have made the charge against Christadelphians that their theory of the Atonement takes from Christ all honour due to Him and makes His claim to have overcome the world into a deception, they have indignantly denied it. Yet here it is in black and white in a pamphlet offered to the public as an exposition of their teaching. If Jesus received from God by any means whatsoever strength to resist sin which none of us have, let Mr. Mansfield say how much credit was due to Him personally for being sinless and how much blame is due to us for being sinners. Let him also say how he thinks it could have been possible for Jesus to have learned obedience by the things which He suffered if He had strength given to Him by God. Let him explain how Jesus could be an example to us if it was because of divine strength that He was enabled to be obedient. I dare say that if any other human being had received

strength from God he would have been able to keep the Commandments and live a sinless life. But would there be any credit due to that person?

But we find ourselves asking how Jesus is supposed to have received this special strength. Was He born with it? Did it come to Him gradually or occasionally as it was required? What does Mr. Mansfield have to tell us?

“He received it from God, who tabernacled in him by His spirit. He was ‘born from above,’ was anointed with Holy Spirit without measure and was thus strengthened to conquer the flesh.”

This is quite explicit - but is it true? Notice how he uses the archaic word “tabernacled” to define how he thinks the divine spirit invested Christ. Why does he use an expression like this instead of putting his explanation in plain current English? One wonders what the man in the street could make of it. He would be hardly likely to know that a tabernacle is a kind of tent and that the Apostles used it: as a term for the human body. Why does he say that God “tabernacled” in Him instead of saying that God lived inside Jesus like a man lives in a tent and it was this presence within Him which made it possible for Him to live free from sin? The simple reason is that if he said this plainly he would be laughed at. Lots of his own brethren would repudiate the idea and point out, quite correctly, that this is a form of Trinitarianism - just a backhanded way of investing Jesus with a dual nature. By choosing an unusual word like “tabernacled” he not only makes it plausible but many Christadelphians will think he is actually quoting scripture. No-one will ask him where in scripture it says that God tabernacled in Jesus by His Spirit and will never discover that it is not the Bible he is quoting but Dr. Thomas.

I said earlier that I thought that any human being who received the necessary strength direct from God could be sinless. This was not irreverent, although it will seem so to some people. I will go so far as to say that if God tabernacled by His spirit in the feeblest creature who ever trod this earth he would not only be sinless, he would be incapable of sin. And this is what this awful doctrine made of Jesus. If this is what is meant to be “born from above” Jesus was not a man in any true sense but a phantom operated by the Holy Spirit. Is this what Christadelphians are content to believe or to have published in their name? They ought to tell us. It is certainly what Mr. Mansfield believes for we have his words to prove it.

Let us go back in our minds to the beginning - it is always a good place to start. Adam was tempted and he disobeyed. He had been created very good, placed in ideal surroundings and doubtless it was possible for him to have been obedient. What a pity it was that God did not think of this “tabernacling” idea there in Eden and strengthen Adam to resist temptation. How much trouble it might have saved. No implantation of a physical law of decay, working out dissolution and death; no giving to man a basis on the direction of evil and making obedience impossible. There would have been no need for a second Adam, not made like unto his brethren, who could experience temptation like they do but who, in spite of sinlessness deserved to be put to death because his flesh was defiled by what Adam did. But we forbear.

In a chapter in my book “The Truth about Clean Flesh” I analysed the Christadelphian doctrine about Jesus and in particular that aspect of it known as God-Manifestation and showed how it really meant that they believe that Jesus had a dual nature. I recently received a very indignant letter affirming that Christadelphians have never believed that Jesus was a being whose nature was a mixture of human and divine. I should have thought that anyone who has read what Dr. Thomas says referring to the Virgin Birth would have recognized that this always has been their true belief and what Mr. Mansfield says confirms this. Dr. Thomas wrote:-

“Was the product therefore not Deity? Did the union of spirit with flesh annihilate that spirit and leave only flesh? Was the Holy thing born a mere Son of Adam or the fellow and equal of the Deity? The latter unquestionably.”

We have great respect for the work of Dr. Thomas; he did not make many mistakes but when he did it was apt to be a big one. There is not a shred of evidence in the records that there was ever a union of spirit with flesh, except at Jesus resurrection. The Doctor’s rhetorical question about whether the union of spirit with flesh annihilated the spirit sounds profound but it is nonsense. As if anything could annihilate the spirit of God! The simple truth of scripture is that the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary, causing her to conceive a son who was exactly the same in nature and flesh as all other men, but who had a relationship to His Father similar to that which Adam had by creation until he forfeited it, but which no other man has ever had. His was a new life

direct from the Giver of all life; it did not come to Him from a human parent and this is what constitutes a legal, not a physical difference, between Jesus and other men which qualified Him to give His life as a sacrifice.

Mr. Mansfield makes a small concession to Jesus' own part in the matter of His soullessness but he has already taken away with the other hand what he is giving with this – having stated that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit without measure and divinely strengthened to overcome all temptations he now tells us:-

“This of course was not sufficient in itself, there had to be also a desire in Jesus to perform the Will of God.”

This is really astounding. The Holy Spirit he says was “of course” not sufficient in itself! “For who hath resisted His will?” Is it suggested that Jesus or anyone could act contrary to the Holy Spirit if it was there for the special purpose of ensuring that he did not fail? The writer has either destroyed the validity of his own explanation or he has set a limit to the power of the Holy Spirit which is an affront to God. Any intelligent person who wished to poke fun at our religion and to denigrate the work of Christ could very reasonably retort to Mr. Mansfield, “There is also a desire in me to perform the Will of God. And if I had been the son of God and specially strengthened I am sure I could have done what Jesus did and hope that God will bear this in mind.” This is the sort of blasphemous nonsense into which people are led by a determination to defend at all costs a preconceived theory. We would remind him that at one moment there was a conflict between what Jesus desired and what the Will of God required. Does he suggest that this conflict was resolved by the Holy Spirit imposing upon the will of Jesus? If he says yes, where was the virtue of our Saviour’s resignation; “not my will but thine be done”? If he says no, he has made himself ridiculous.

He now goes on to deal with the general question of how the justice of God is revealed in The Atonement. He writes as follows:-

“In proclaiming the doctrine of the Atonement, Paul taught that God is revealed therein as both ‘Just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus’ (Romans 5:26). “We respectfully suggest” he goes on “that the common doctrine of the Atonement, which sets forth Jesus as a substitute sacrifice does not reveal God as just. This doctrine suggests that Jesus died instead of others; that he paid a debt of death that they had incurred but to which he was not associated. Does this set forth God as just? We suggest that it does not.”

What he describes here is roughly the view we of the Nazarene Fellowship hold; it is not, as he says, the common doctrine of the Atonement. The common doctrine is that the anger of God against sinners was appeased by the infliction of punishment upon Jesus in their stead. We do not hold this view and we think it would indeed be unjust to punish the innocent instead of the guilty. Nevertheless we do believe that Jesus was a sacrifice, and what is a sacrifice but a substitute, if you accept the principle in the divinely given laws concerning sin-offering in Moses?

Before going on to explain why Mr. Mansfield is mistaken in thinking that this view shows God as unjust while his own view shows Him to be just, we would say that primarily what matters is not our own opinion of what is just or unjust for God to do, but what He has actually revealed. We may not happen to like the idea when we first meet it that Jesus in some sense died instead of others but if that is the teaching of scripture, that is how it is and the sooner we look at it from the scripture point of view and discard what is in fact a mistaken prejudice the better for us.

We say therefore with no hesitation, it is not our doctrine, or theory, our invention which defines the death of Christ as a sacrifice made on behalf of others, but scripture - not an odd doubtful text here and there, but the whole body of scripture teaching from Genesis to Revelation. To cite every passage and in particular, to trace the evidence deriving from the laws concerning sin offerings from Eden onwards would take too long here but is available in “The Sacrifice of Christ” by Edward Turney; so here a few will suffice. We read He died for our sins (Galatians 1:4), for our transgressions and iniquities (Isaiah 53; 5), that He bore the sins of many, with His stripes we are healed; that He gave His life for His sheep (John 10:15), that He was delivered for our offences (Romans 4:25), was sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7), that He purged our sins (Hebrews 2:3), that He tasted death for every man (Hebrews 2:9), that He suffered for us, the just for the unjust (1 Peter 3:18). Nor is it simply in our theory that Jesus paid for us a debt which He Himself did not owe. His own claim is clear, “The son of man came to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45), “Who gave himself a ransom for all” (1

Timothy 2:5), “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Any person who can read these passages and deny that the teaching of scripture is that Jesus died instead of others and that His death was in some way the payment of a debt which He did not owe, cannot expect to be listened to with any respect. He may be unable to accept the idea of a substitutionary sacrifice or see how Jesus’ own volition made it possible, but to deny that this is how it is presented by the inspired writers is too much. In spite of Mr. Mansfield’s “respectful suggestion” and in spite of what his followers are supposed to believe, we have no hesitation in saying that when they need to remember Him and eat and drink the emblems of His body and His blood, they think of Him as suffering for their sakes, paying with His own life the price of their redemption and inevitably, even while opposing it in words, they are in fact obliged to believe that Jesus was in some way their substitute.

“Jesus did not die instead of others, he died as a representative, as one in need of redemption from that death-doomed state as much as anyone else.”

This is of course the doctrine of the B.A.S.F. which declares that Jesus died for himself. Jesus was never death-doomed. It is true that He needed deliverance from corruption if He was to live eternally, but perfect obedience during His probation entitled Him to this. There is no law which says that the only way to eternal life is through death. If Jesus’ eternal existence depended upon His crucifixion then it is a complete fraud that the prophets and apostles speak of it as a sacrifice. If it were in any sense for Himself, then it cannot have been in any true sense for others - they slip through - He was the saved, not the Saviour. If Jesus needed redemption He could not have made Himself an offering for us; it would have been as if an Israelite had brought as a Sin-offering a lamb that was imperfect or which belonged to someone else. If His death was required for Himself, any sacrificial significance is completely obliterated, leaving the Atonement as nothing but the universal funeral procession headed by Jesus to which it was reduced by A.D.Norris in his new Confession of Faith.

“Would anybody suggest that a Government was just that put to death an innocent man instead of a guilty one? By no means. There would be an outcry against any Government that did such a thing.”

We fully agree. But Mr. Mansfield has declared his own belief that Jesus, whom he admits was an innocent man, was put to death by Divine appointment! According to him therefore, God treated Jesus exactly as he says would raise an outcry against any human government who so acted. It would certainly be unjust to put to death an innocent man instead of a guilty one but it would be equally unjust to put to death an innocent man because he had human flesh. Justice does not change. Whatever the reason it would be as unjust for God to require the death of an innocent man as it would be for any human government. Could Jesus help it if He was born with human flesh? In that flesh, could He have done anything more than exhibit perfect obedience? What sort of perverse mind is it that dares to write that His death was just because His righteousness came not from flesh but in spite of it? We reject such a stupid suggestion completely but even if it were so, whatever it was that enabled Him to be righteous, He was righteous, He was innocent, and there is no justice, human or divine which can find Him deserving of punishment. Does not the record of His temptations prove that He had to overcome them by the exercise of his own effort? The statement that He suffered, being tempted (Hebrews 2:18) proves that He needed to exercise over His natural inclinations, in other words over His flesh, the same kind of control or will as does any other person who chooses to deny himself and consciously determines to do what he knows to be right even when it would be easier to follow his own desires? We do it sometimes; Jesus did it at all times.

It is therefore not only completely rubbish but also a blasphemy against God and a denigration of Jesus for Mr. Mansfield to write:-

“At the end of a life of perfect obedience, his flesh was crucified and publicly exhibited as a final demonstration that ‘the flesh profiteth nothing.’”

Not only is it blasphemy and a denigration but it is a travesty of The Atonement. There is neither reason, nor sense, nor justice to be found in it. At the risk of being misunderstood we want to cry out “It was not flesh which was crucified - it was Jesus Christ, a man who had done nothing worthy of death either in sight of man or of God.” To talk about crucifying flesh and pulling out of context the statement “the flesh profiteth nothing,” as if he were dealing with a side of beef is the negation of everything we ought to have learned from

the life of Jesus. He went about doing good, He was the living example of love and self-abnegation, He made it His meat and drink to do His Father's will - and yet he says, this man - this flesh he calls Him, at the end of a life of perfect obedience had to be crucified and publicly exhibited as a demonstration of ...what? He should stop talking about justice and join in the public outcry which he has said would greet any human government who acted so. Even the thief who died beside our Saviour had a better understanding; "And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss."

Pursuing his search for justice he next asks, "Was God just in placing man under law?" We reply that we think He was, for unless man had been placed under law his willingness to obey could not have been put to the test. He then asks, "Was God just in punishing sin with death?" And we reply that we think He would have been; but we believe that what actually followed (see Genesis 3) shows that He did not. If He had, Adam should have been put to death and would have perished. We believe in fact that salvation started with Adam; that he was not only the first sinner but also the first to whom God showed mercy. He incurred death but was delivered from it following a sacrifice, which pointed forward to the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the Sin of the world. This is an aspect of The Atonement which finds no place in Mr. Mansfield's exposition.

He now asks a very reasonable question but supplies a most unreasonable answer:-

"Was God just in so punishing Adam that the effect of the punishment rested upon his posterity? Certainly, for that was the inevitable consequence of a physical state of mortality."

Our observation upon this is that God might perhaps justly have punished Adam for sin by causing him to be changed from whatever he was into a condition of mortality (though we do not think he did), but it would most certainly not have been Just to have caused such punishment to fall upon his posterity, some of whom (e.g. infants) have not been sinners. Mr. Mansfield refers to the events in Eden, reminding us that man was made "very good" but succumbed to temptation and, he says:-

"Brought upon himself the fruit of sin; a nature that strives against its maker and inevitably terminates in death."

Several points arise here. First, it was while he was in the "very good" state that Adam succumbed to temptation - or if you like - started to strive against his Maker; so why should it be assumed that Adam "brought upon himself" what Mr Mansfield calls the fruit of sin, or a physical change, which rested as a punishment upon his posterity causing them also to succumb to temptation and strive against their Maker? There is just no logic or sense in it. If Adam could rebel and sin in his "very good" state why imagine that we are not still in the same very good state today? The fact that men sin only proves the same as it proved in Adam's case - that human beings were created capable of either disobedience or obedience. Which is exactly what the parallel between Adam and Jesus confirms and which we know by our own personal experience to be a fact - we can be obedient if we choose and if we try hard enough, or we can be disobedient. Adam did not need to "bring" any change upon himself or us to make us sinners - there was never any change of nature. Second, it is also absurd to suppose that any act of disobedience by Adam, any fruit that he ate or any sentence that he incurred could change human nature. God made us as we are and He alone could make any such change. We cannot change even the colour of a hair of our head.

So what are we to say to Mr. Mansfield's reasoning?

"We conclude therefore that God is not responsible for the weakness of flesh, but that man brought this upon himself by his disobedience."

He may so conclude, but we do not think it is a conclusion which will commend itself to people who take the trouble to think about it. If Adam had a free-will, he could reasonably be held responsible for his own disobedience, but if he was so created by God that an act of disobedience would be followed by a change of nature from very good to a condition of defilement or weakness which we all inherit, then it is certainly God alone who is responsible. To attempt to argue otherwise is just stupid. There might be some semblance of justice if it was held that the sin of Adam brought about a physical change in him personally, but to suggest that this was a punishment which could be incurred and passed on to all his posterity and to defend it a justice is too outrageous and absurd. It is small wonder that Christianity has lost its appeal for ordinary intelligent people when this stuff is advanced in its defence. It was a principle of the Law which God gave through Moses that

the children should not be punished for the crimes of their parents, a principle which we recognize as natural justice, yet here it is affirmed that God Himself has violated His own principle and caused all Adam's posterity to suffer for his sin.

Two questions only need to be asked to expose the complete falsity of the whole theory. If sin results from a weakness of the flesh which man brought upon himself by his disobedience,

- 1) How was it that Adam succumbed to temptation before he brought this weakness upon himself?
- 2) How was it that Jesus succeeded in resisting temptation when he inherited the supposed changed nature?

An honest answer to these two questions will open the eyes of the blind. The sin of Adam was the same as any other; he could have obeyed but he chose to disobey. There was no change in his nature. He was "very good" as a creation both before and after, but afterwards he was a very good creation who had become a sinner. There is no contradiction. "Very good" relates to natural condition not to morality. The change was in his relationship to his Creator. When formed from the dust and given life he was a son by creation and in a living relationship with God. When he sinned he cut himself off, became an outcast and nothing he could do for himself could restore him. He had sold himself into the bondage of sin and death and only someone, a kinsman, who had the price, would be able to ransom him. This was a procedure laid down in the Mosaic Law, in Leviticus 26. How does this affect us? As human beings like Adam, we are natural creatures with a natural span of life and we have the same capacity as he had to do good or evil as we choose. But we are not placed individually under a specific law as he was. He is our federal head and his experience stands for us. As the family of Adam, scripturally or religiously, we are required to recognize that we come into a state of alienation from God. This does not mean that we are physically evil or morally weak; it simply means that if we want to recover for ourselves the relationship which was lost, we have to find the way and follow the instructions which are laid down for the purpose. This way is through Jesus Christ and it involves transferring ourselves to him as our new federal head, recognizing that in His sacrifice He paid a price to redeem us.

Finally, Mr. Mansfield returns to the question he started with, asking again how it could be just for God to demand the death of Jesus when He was innocent of all guilt. His preoccupation with the problem suggests that he is more conscious than he admits of the fact that his theory is really indefensible and cannot be made to appear just from any point of view:-

"Was God just in demanding the death of a righteous man, even Jesus? He was, for Jesus Christ, son of Adam was of the same flesh and blood nature and as such under the same sentence, and the righteousness he manifested came from denying the flesh, not obeying it."

Our opinion of this reasoning has already been made sufficiently clear but will bear repetition. First we take him back to his own question, "Would anybody suggest that a Government was just that put to death an innocent man... by no means." Very well then; how could God be just in demanding the death of Jesus on any reasoning whatsoever? As we have shown, to be flesh and blood is not to be under sentence, and no man can be responsible for his flesh anyway; while if to be righteous Jesus had to deny His flesh - well, He denied it. So how could a just God demand his death?

The answer is simple - God did not demand His death. His death was demanded by the Jews who delivered Him up for envy and hatred. God indeed allowed it to happen because in so doing He was giving His only begotten Son as a ransom, His life for the life of the world. This is the sense in which Acts 2:23 applies; He was delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God not because God required His death or because He deserved to die because by giving His Son, God was coming to the rescue of perishing humanity. He delivered Him up to the Sin power and "Him" said the apostle Peter, "ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." God did not demand His death, He allowed it to happen because our Salvation depended upon it. To place the onus upon God for a wicked and unjustifiable death is to make God a murderer. The forgotten element in the situation is the willingness of Jesus to allow himself to be taken and to suffer for our sakes. All the same, from every point of view it was a crime. It is true that God could have prevented it, as He could if He chose prevent all the evils that men do, but no-one surely is so irrational as to blame the almost incalculable wickedness say of Hitler, upon God because He did not intervene. Why cannot Christadelphians recognize that God Himself suffered in seeing the anguish of His own Son, delivered into the hands of evil men to suffer an unjust and undeserved death? If it is true that Jesus could have called upon legions of angels to

deliver him had he weakened, how can it at the same time be true that God demanded His death? Such blindness is almost beyond belief.

“Was God just in demanding his death? Yes,” says Mr. Mansfield, “For Jesus Christ, son of Adam was of the same flesh and blood and as such under the same sentence.”

As we have showed at the beginning of this criticism, to be flesh and blood is not a crime. There is nothing wrong with flesh. Adam was flesh and blood before he came under sentence of death. Similarly, those in Christ whose sins have been forgiven and who are no more under condemnation (Romans 8:1) are still flesh and blood but in the sight of God they have passed, as Jesus said (John 5:24), from death into life and shall not come into condemnation. It is perhaps Mr. Mansfield’s greatest blunder that he speaks of Jesus here as son of Adam. Jesus was not a son of Adam, unless a man can have two fathers.

The greatest truth is that Jesus was the Son of God and this must not be compromised. He was the same nature as Adam, flesh and blood, because He was Mary’s child, and was therefore related to Adam and the human race by descent, as He acknowledged by referring to Himself as the son of man, but He was not the son or even a son of Adam, for the unanswerable reason that He was the Son of God.

CHRIST’S DEATH and YOUR SALVATION

No one who has read Mr. Mansfield’s pamphlet will need to be told that it fails completely to show a causal connection between the death of Christ and man’s salvation. We have quoted him fully and fairly and if it is not abundantly clear that nothing he has produced comes anywhere near to explaining why a just God should, as he declares, demand His death, or show how there was any reason for it or purpose in it, the book should be obtained and read. When the end is reached the question “Why did Christ die?” will still be unanswered. We therefore conclude by giving as briefly as we can, in a summary of what has already been written in reply to specific points, what we believe to be the Bible’s answer.

The purpose of Christ’s death was to destroy the Devil (Hebrews 2:14), “Him that had the power of death,” and as we learn from such passages as Genesis 3, Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, the Devil is that first sin personified, into whose power Adam sold himself and all his family (John 8:34, Romans 6:16). The Devil was destroyed and his power over the race terminated by the payment of the debt incurred. This debt was the life of Adam, and since we all descend from Adam, it was the life of the human race. If the life of Jesus had been part of that life He would have been Himself in bondage and without anything to pay with.

That is why Jesus derived His life direct from God and not from Adam via a human father. Thus Jesus belonged to God. Adam and all his belonged to Sin (John 8:35,36), and when in due time Jesus was delivered into the hands of the rulers of this world, the Sin Power, to suffer death on the Cross, it was God giving His own Son to buy us back from Sin, to ransom us from bondage. And when Jesus voluntarily submitted to His Father’s will, it was because He knew that it was only by the discharge of the claim of Sin, vested in Supreme Law, that His fellowmen could be saved. He was the only one of the human race who could redeem His brother by giving a life for a life because He was born free and by perfect obedience retained His right to life until He gave it up to purchase us back to God.

Ernest Brady
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