

Christadelphians - Their Dilemma Exposed

A few cool thoughts on “The Believer” Magazine and the “Spongberg” Controversy in Australia

“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”

All Christians believe at least as much about Jesus as Nicodemus, that He was a teacher sent by God. Many believe much more and think that Jesus was God and there are almost as many different ideas between these two extremes as there are different sects. If however one asks almost any Christian what it is that constitutes a person a Christian, the answer would be that he is one who obeys the example of Christ and lives a good Christian life. Yet, in the conversation which followed there is no more than an indirect mention of deeds and almost the whole of a long discourse is concerned with a spiritual relationship, so much so that Nicodemus was completely out of his depth. As a leading Jew, the works and ceremonial of the Law meant everything to him, yet Jesus said “Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?” What things? The things which the Mosaic Law was designed to teach and of which the Prophets had spoken; principles and promises, more important than the day to day ordinances and offerings which bear upon the relationship between man and his Creator. Broken by sin and only to be restored on terms and conditions laid down by God.

Speaking of Himself Jesus said, “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already.” Condemned already? Before he has had a chance to put into practice the good deeds which the Christian life demands? You must be joking! That is the kind of reaction one could expect from a modern Christian who believes that Christianity is first and foremost to live a good moral life and love your neighbour. But that is what Jesus said to Nicodemus, one who does not believe on Him is condemned already. And not only Jesus; some of those who found Jesus' doctrine a bit different from what they expected went and asked John the Baptist what he thought about it and his reply was quite as devastating. He said that “he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” Nothing about works of righteousness making anyone acceptable – but the bald fact that unless a man believes, God's wrath abideth on him, not cometh on him, but abideth on him. So the wrath was there before the belief or unbelief, as was the condemnation spoken of by Jesus; he that believeth not is condemned already.

It does not need a degree in Theology to see that there is something here very different from what is commonly understood as the Christian religion and while this is not surprising in the case of most of the sects it is very remarkable that it applies today just as much to the Christadelphians. It is a shocking and shameful thing that today they are almost as ignorant and mistaken as the Church. In some respects they are worse and they have less excuse, for it is true to say that by their errant doctrine of the Atonement they have made themselves the enemies of the Cross of Christ.

I will show in these pages, in relation particularly to the Truth in Australia how this has come about, in the hope that someone will read it and reverse their ill-begotten views.

Graham Bacon is a good example of a contemporary Christadelphian. He is deeply concerned about the dissention troubling his community and is sincerely seeking a means to end it. He is one of the Australian Committee who publish “The Believer,” commenced a couple of years ago when it was evidently felt that between the feeble “Shield” and the poisonous “Logos” there was a need for a magazine which could express the views of reasonable brethren who value the truth for its own sake and who think that it should be possible to defend the true Gospel and at the same time manifest that

Christian spirit which is so often lacking in religious controversy. They are clearly beginning to realise that this is more difficult than they at first thought.

The intention was to make a fresh start and face the issues honestly and fearlessly on a scriptural basis but avoiding the inherited divisions and personalities which have been the curse of the Christadelphians throughout their history. Unfortunately this commendable intention was doomed to failure, because it was based upon a declared acceptance of the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith. Those who have read this know that although it contains many references, and much truth in regard to the things concerning the Kingdom of God, it is not so much a statement of Scripture teaching where the things concerning the Name of Jesus are involved, as a statement of what its author, Robert Roberts thought was Scripture teaching. But “The Believer” Committee made an even worse initial mistake, in endorsing the Carter-Cooper Addendum, because this not only requires acceptance of the B.A.S.F. itself, but carries doctrinal interpretation a step further into human theorising by offering an explanation of what those two brethren thought, that Robert Roberts meant by certain of his definitions and explanations of what he thought the Scriptures teach. So, in fact, “The Believer” started life burdened by an incubus of interpretation twice removed from the Word of God, with the result that they have been unable either to go to the Scripture and look at it afresh and unbiased nor have they been able to be entirely frank in their approach, except in trivial matters, since they have committed themselves to defend that very basis which has been the root cause of all their trouble and have necessarily been constantly looking over their shoulders and measuring their words to avoid the charge of heresy which the die-hard Robertsites will not be slow to bring. It has to be recognised that his view, that human nature was physically changed by The Fall, a theory which he derived from Dr. Thomas, is still the accepted basis of Christadelphianism and cannot be changed so long as the B.A.S.F. is upheld.

Impudent Deceit

It was therefore surprising that in one of the earliest issues, an article by E.J.Russell tried to show that Christadelphians have never really believed that human nature was changed as a result of Adam's Sin and that those who thought so were confused in their understanding of mortality. This effort clearly marked the end of any claim to honest intentions or original thinking and proved that one writer at least was prepared to twist and deceive in order to reject what Robert Roberts really believed while professing to uphold the B.A.S.F. Thus the decline of the magazine was inevitable, into a hash of charge and counter-charge about fellowship and “who said what,” with articles which are a contradictory confusion of quotations which worsen the problems rather than solve them. One thing is certain; it may be that today there are some Christadelphians who do not believe that Adam's disobedience took effect in human nature, changing it from very good to very bad and sinful and bringing about natural death (and it may be there are some of “The Believer” Committee amongst them) but anyone who suggests that this was not until very recent times their basic belief can only expect ridicule.

If they had ever hoped to make The Believer a credible magazine, they would have needed to begin with a frank admission on these lines – “Look brethren, the B.A.S.F. clause which states that sin became implanted in the flesh, defiling it and giving human beings a bias towards sin (or as the Addendum says “prone to sin”) is unmitigated drivel and we had better face it.” Only so could they have made a fresh and useful start with the hope of getting their own feet on a good foundation and of carrying some conviction with others. They would have been in trouble of course with people like H.P.Mansfield, but this is by no means the worst thing that could befall anyone; and they are in trouble anyway and it is getting worse not better.

In the May/June issue Graham Bacon comes right up against it, in an article entitled “Withdrawal over pioneer teaching,” and he barely conceals his despair at the wickedness revealed by the expulsion of a certain brother Spongberg from the Riverwood Ecclesia. This brother has apparently said that he does not believe that it was because of Jesus' divine begettal that He was enabled to be

sinless. Graham Bacon comments "It is enough to make Australian Christadelphians weep." It is indeed, but they should weep not so much for Brother Spongberg as for themselves! He is undoubtedly correct, and it does not need to be the subject of a debate with H.P.M. in "The Logos" to decide the issue. The Scripture proves him right in one familiar text; "Tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin." You cannot tempt anyone as we are tempted if His divine begettal endowed Him with "latent capabilities impossible for others to emulate." ("The Logos"). Therefore, while we can commend Graham Bacon for coming out into the open and defending an ill-used brother, it is sad to have to say of him "Thou also art the man! For you yourself profess to uphold the constitution upon which Riverwood Ecclesia is acting." It is hypocritical to blame Spongberg's ecclesia for withdrawing from him because he rejects the B.A.S.F., as long as you profess to uphold it yourself. If you are really going to take Scripture for your guide, as you say, what about starting here?

It is all very well to say that both sides should behave themselves and cease from agitation. Who can conscientiously cease from agitating when the immediate issue involves the Justice of the Creator Himself and the character of His Son? Who can be silent when he realises that he is required to assent to a proposition against which reason revolts? Graham Bacon should be asking himself how he is behaving viz-a-viz the Lord Jesus, and why he is not out in the open, not only in condemnation of unjust disfellowshipping but also in condemnation and rectification of the horrible mistake made by "the pioneers." It is not good enough to say "We do not intend to analyse the doctrinal issues." This is exactly what he ought to be doing and thus justifying to some extent the claims of "The Believer." Pontius Pilate washed his hands, but this did not absolve his guilt!

He excuses himself for not entering into the doctrinal issue by saying it is "a complex non-fundamental argument." This is not true - it is NOT complex and IT IS fundamental.

Can Man Obey?

It does not appear that Brother Spongberg is by any means an intellectual giant, but he has been able to grasp the simple truth that Jesus was a real man who suffered, being tempted, thus proving that if other men who are tempted had tried hard enough and prayed earnestly enough they too might have kept the Commandments of God. This is not complex - this is elementary scriptural reasoning which you could make plain to any Sunday School scholar! What is more fundamental than the question of Jesus' birth?, and whether it was this that enabled Him to be obedient; or whether it was really that He simply used the same powers as we could use if we would, and that, for instance in Gethsemane, "Being in an agony he prayed the more earnestly and his sweat poured down as it were great drops of blood." If this is a non-fundamental argument, words have lost all meaning.

Graham Bacon says he "observes" that he has yet to find a Scripture that clearly shows it is impossible for others to withstand sin! Hurrah! But why then does he "creep" before "The Logos" and allow H.P.Mansfield to get away with his insensate idolizing of his "pioneers" who taught this view? It is popery! The sad fact is that with all his courage and good intentions Graham Bacon is not only in too vulnerable a position to fight the good fight, but as I will show, his own committee members are themselves undermining his efforts. As fast as he would throw out the antique Victorian monstrosities of early Christadelphianism from the front door, his colleagues are busily dusting them off and carrying them in again at the back!

On page three he warns his readers that the Truth is not the Bible as interpreted by Bro. Roberts, and that his writings ought not to be given precedence over Scripture. He says:

"It becomes apparent that Scripture is not the basis of these developments, but that they arise out of an argument centering on the interpretation of the writings of Bro. Roberts."

This is a serious charge for any brother to make, but it is certainly true and timely. But in the very same issue, twelve pages later H.J.Finch has written “An appeal to “Watchman”” and in it he quotes extensively from Robert Roberts in order to prove that Cliff Pryde (who does not believe in sin-in-the-flesh) is mistaken in his criticism of the Christadelphian position. Finch has this to say:

“He (R.R.) clearly showed it (i.e. Adamic Condemnation) to be a physical principle in Adam's body... Bro. Roberts taught that we physically die as the result of our inheritance in Adam due to the original transgression, but we remain in the grave only because of our own sins.”

Finch then goes on to quote from “The Slain Lamb” some of the most preposterous things ever said on the subject. This pamphlet has long since been dropped by the “Christadelphian Publishing Co.” and responsible Christadelphians have recognized that it is indefensible. Thus in the same issue, readers of “The Believer” are advised and encouraged by Graham Bacon to use discrimination and not follow Robert Roberts blindly into error, while H.J.Finch quotes him as if his words were inspired proof of his theory! Appropriate advice to these co-members of “The Believer” Committee would be that they should have a little committee meeting and really decide once and for all what they stand for. Are they committed beyond reason to Robert Roberts' teaching that the sin of Adam made us all sinful creatures by nature and causes us all eventually to die? Or dare they really break out of their doctrinal imprisonment and recognise that the purpose of the example of Christ is to prove to us that God has not created us evil and unclean and that we are constitutionally capable of complete obedience? When we recognise this and then have to confess that we often offend, we can approach that state of mind in which we can be truly repentant, blaming ourselves for our weakness and not the nature in which we are created. It is only then that we can properly realise that we owe everything to the mercy of God through The Atonement offered for us by our Saviour. If these committeemen ever do get together (provided they do not instantly discover that they are out of fellowship with each other already), Graham Bacon ought to point out to H.J.Finch that in his present attitude he is playing H.P.Mansfield's game and doing more damage by his stupidity than The Logos will ever do by its idolatry of Robert Roberts.

A Good Question

Graham Bacon asks, “Are ecclesias prepared to split over an interpretation of Bro. Roberts... and have we reached the point where a particular view of the pioneers is equally required with that of Scripture?” The answer to both questions is, Yes. Christadelphians reached that point when Robert Roberts was suffered to act dictatorially and to use his powerful influence to smother the truth about the Atonement advanced by Edward Turney and others. He (R.R.) had great qualities but it has to be recognised that much, perhaps most, of the strife and division which has been the curse of the community is traceable to character defects which were confirmed to us recently by one of his own family.

But again, we can let his own fellow committeemen answer his question whether the teaching of the pioneers is equally required with that of Scripture.

H. J. Finch (“The Believer” May/June 1973, page 15) makes this astonishing statement:

“Both Bro. Roberts and Paul the Apostle attest that death as a physically-operating law is our natural inheritance as a result of Adam's transgression.”

Just consider the mentality of a brother who could write that sentence! “Both Bro. Roberts and Paul the Apostle.” It passes belief. I doubt if “The Logos” itself could ever equal this for presumptuous ascription of authority to a fallible man. Does he distinguish at all between the inspiration of the Apostle and the arrogance of the dogmatist? Imagine the indignation of the Christadelphian community if they saw any other sect have the effrontery to conjoin the name of a fallible leader with the great apostle in this fashion! “Both Mrs Eddy and Paul the Apostle attest that

pain is purely imagination and that all disease is evidence of the devil within.” They would explode! There are certainly some very strange Australian birds but none more extraordinary than this Finch. In an earlier Circular Letter I reproduced a fantastic paragraph of his work dealing with the views of the Nazarene Fellowship and invited him, in his next article to explain it. He has not done so, nor has the promised continuation appeared, so one assumes he had had enough. In his present article he has written another paragraph, this one intended to be an explanation of the text "The wages of sin is death." He says:

“Herein death is viewed as that which we earn as wages. Note that it is expressed here, not in its outworking as a physical law of the body (as in Adamic Condemnation) but as the opposite of life itself. It is the complete cessation of all functioning of the body. It is used here in a sense of finality and is more permanent in its application than is Romans 5:12, which concerns itself more with death as a physically-inherited law of our natures.”

Now I defy anyone to explain what this means. I challenge the writer and I challenge the Committee of “The Believer” or any other Christadelphian to tell us. Let some one of them say what death is not the opposite of life itself, or not the cessation of all functioning of the body. Let them tell us what death does not have a sense of finality or is less “permanent” than that which came into the world by sin. No doubt he has in mind that some will be raised from death, but this does not change the state of death itself. This is where the confusion of physical condemnation leads.

In Romans 5:19 we have a clear and precise statement from the pen of the Apostle Paul, which brings Adam and Christ together and summarises his argument about the principles of the Atonement. Here it is:-

“For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”

The great question is, How can many have been made sinners by one man's disobedience? There are three possible alternatives:-

1) Many were made sinners by becoming sinful flesh. This is the physical interpretation, held by Dr. Thomas and most Christadelphians until recent times.

2) Many were made sinners by the guilt of their own sins. This is the moral interpretation, accepted by most Christian sects and also now by many Christadelphians.

3) Many were made sinners because, under the Curse all Adam's descendants are under the Law of Sin. This is the legal interpretation by which Edward Turney was able to explain The Atonement in 1873. It was bitterly opposed by R. Roberts; and yet it is defined in the clearest terms by Dr. Thomas in Elpis Israel. On page 115 he says:-

“The Apostle says, “Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes in Abraham.” Upon the same federal principle, all mankind ate of the forbidden fruit, being in the loins of Adam when he transgressed... mankind being born of the flesh and of the will of man, re born into the world under the Constitution of Sin. That is, they are the natural born citizens of Satan's Kingdom... hence, by Adam's disobedience the many were made sinners.”

This is how Dr. Thomas expounded Paul's statement. It will read strangely to most Christadelphians today, since they know nothing about the federal principle and the Constitution of Sin and show no sign of wishing to know; but it is undoubtedly correct and is a vital truth - it is in fact the vital truth which must be understood and believed before anyone can claim to be enlightened, and since it was written by no less a man than the founder of their community, it is remarkable that they now ignore it. This paragraph from Elpis Israel shows that for salvation we need deliverance primarily from a state of legal bondage under Sin. With Adam, a legal Condemnation passed upon the

race, under which an unredeemed man will inevitably perish whatever his moral character may be. Dr. Thomas wrote this and although Christadelphians still revere him and claim to follow his teaching, where or when do we ever see or hear a Christadelphian referring to it? The explanation is, that in the same work Dr. Thomas elaborated his understanding of The Fall, that sin henceforth became a physical principle in the flesh. It is our personal conviction that had Dr. Thomas ever been shown the error in this he would have renounced it, but it was not to be, and it is Robert Roberts whom Christadelphians have to thank for riveting the erroneous doctrine of sinful flesh on to their ship for all time, and, in the process, losing the true doctrine of alienation. In recent years many Christadelphians have realised that sin-in-the-flesh is an unscriptural error, but their leaders could never bring themselves to admit they had been wrong and have rather chosen to try to show that all they meant by sinful flesh was mortality and a proneness to sin and, so far as the truth about man's natural state of alienation from God is concerned, they have emptied the baby out with the bathwater.

How Sin Reigns

We will now discuss in more detail the three possible alternative meanings of Paul's statement that by one man's disobedience the many were made sinners.

1). The Physical Interpretation. This is really the same as the doctrine of The Fall, or of Original Sin, though Christadelphians claim to distinguish their view of it from that held by the Church. But Dr. Thomas is quite clear - he says:

“The law of sin pervades every particle of the flesh; but in the thinking flesh, it reigns especially in the propensities.” (Elpis Israel page 123).

It is strange and sad that a man of such intellect did not perceive that a “law” could not possibly pervade flesh; nor could sin reign, especially or even at all, in the propensities. Adam had all the propensities before he sinned. We also have all the propensities but we are not obliged to exercise any of them unlawfully. Jesus had all the propensities, otherwise He would not have been a man, but He was sinless. So how can sin be said to reign and pervade every particle? Sin does reign, but only in the legal sense defined by Dr. Thomas's first extract. When he said it pervades every particle of the flesh he was carried away by his theory of The Fall and a misunderstanding of Romans 7 (which in another context he correctly explained). We can well excuse him in his day and generation but it is impossible to exonerate those Christadelphians today who profess to reject physical condemnation and yet constantly reaffirm it in other words and who also profess to follow Dr. Thomas and yet reject, or disregard, his correct teaching regarding the federal implication of the law of sin.

In the July issue of “The Believer,” H.J. Finch writes;-

“Fallen human nature is a reality and not a myth, nor a dogma of the apostasy. It is the plain teaching of Scripture. We inherit a proneness to sin that was not manifest in blissful Edenic conditions.”

But it happens to be a fact that the first sin was committed in the very blissful Edenic conditions where he says there was no proneness to sin! He passes over this on the evidence of his assertion that “original sin is a root cause contributing to the continuance of sin; otherwise God is a liar.” It is a rash man indeed who dares to affirm that either his view is correct or God is a liar. It is always possible to be mistaken; even in our most cherished beliefs and a man who is foolish enough to say that a proneness to sin was not manifest in Eden is ignorant enough to be mistaken also about the root cause of sin. If he had paid a little more heed to Dr. Thomas he might have noticed where he wrote “Wrong consists not in any particular act of which we are capable, but in that act being contrary to the letter and spirit of the divine testimony.” It was no sin to desire the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, it was a sin to eat of it after it had been forbidden. Where there is no law there is no transgression.

Finch is conscious of the problem of how, if we inherit a physical proneness to sin, it was possible for Jesus to be sinless, having the same nature. This is how he deals with it:

“He was a body specially prepared... He was made strong for God Himself... God ensured this strength of will in His Son and equipped Him with a quick, even mind, able to perceive the right from the wrong... God did not leave this ability to chance, but supervised the mental development of His miraculously conceived Son. As to how this was achieved we will not venture to dogmatise; but we know that this divine Sonship in some way, not altogether scientifically explicable to our limited mind, contributed to His desire, will and ability to overcome that which overcomes us. Yet in all this it did not elevate Him to a nature superhuman or demigod. He was a sharer in the flesh and blood that we all alike have in common,”

If the last two sentences of this extract do not contradict all that precedes them, words have lost their meaning. It is not altogether scientifically explicable and he will not venture to dogmatise but if what he says is true there was no personal merit due to Jesus and there can in justice be no personal blame to us. If God ensured strength of will in His Son why did He not ensure it also in us? If He was equipped to perceive right from wrong are not we also? How and where did God supervise His mental development? The Gospels tell us that this parental guidance was given by Mary and Joseph.

This passage exposes the fundamental contradiction in Christadelphian doctrine. It will be of great comfort in Logos circles but will give little satisfaction, if they are aware of it, to Graham Bacon and those of his Committee who have sufficient character and capacity for independent reasoning to be able to see where Christadelphians were wrong.

In the note at the head of this article they say that the Christadelphian body in Australia has just passed through a traumatic experience on which they will look back with shame. This is possibly true - but the trauma was the discovery that they can never break the fetters of sinful flesh that Robert Roberts forged and are as much the slaves of man made creed as any priest-ridden Roman Catholic. There used to be a rhyme which exposed the foolishness of Trinitarianism:

“Oh what does Silly Billy see,
Three in one and One in Three,
And one of these has died for me.”

“The Believer” could do with a Silly Billy on its Committee, to point out that if Jesus had the same nature as other men he was not specially equipped or prepared by His birth. If He was tempted as we are then His divine origin did not contribute to His ability to overcome that which overcomes us. The Trinitarian contradiction of three in one is no greater than the contradiction in saying that Jesus was the same as us but He was specially strengthened by His birth.

The greatest objection to the physical interpretation is that if men are made sinners by having become sinful in their very nature, then no man can help being sinful. This would make God responsible for sin, for we cannot possibly help being what we are or change our nature. But beyond the problem of how it could be consistent with any kind of justice to cause one man's action to make all men sinners by nature, there is the far deeper objection to the view in regard to Christ, for if flesh is sinful of itself, then inescapably, in the same sense Christ was sinful, for He was flesh the same as us. And this is the reasoning which has led to foolish brethren speaking of “a condemned Christ;” “Christ as unclean as those He came to save;” “Christ dying for Himself” and similar blasphemous utterances which have made The Cross a stumbling block to so many, rather than the power and wisdom of God. Once grasp the fact that all Adam's offspring are “constituted” sinners by Divine ordinance, only so that they could be covered by one righteous act of redemption and the whole plan of God is a flood of light. We do not blame Finch for being unable to give a scientific explanation of his view. We ourselves cannot give a scientific explanation of the virgin birth but we accept it as a fact because the Bible tells it and because we see its purpose, that Jesus needed to derive His life from the Creator direct so that He should not be constituted a sinner as a child of Adam and be in the same

lost, bankrupt, helpless position as all we whose life came via the flesh. But we do blame Finch for affirming that he “knows” that Jesus had to be specially helped and equipped when both the facts of Scripture and its plain statements prove him to be wrong. He is the typical bone-headed creed worshipper who will believe that black is white rather than be mistaken. One need not be ashamed to be unscientific; one should be ashamed to be both illogical and credulous.

2). The Moral Interpretation. There is no ethical objection to this view. The only objection, and it is devastating, is that it cannot be the Apostle’s teaching. It would be manifestly just for men to be held to be sinners because they commit sins, but this cannot be the implication of Paul’s statement, for there is then no evident connection in cause and effect between the disobedience of the one and the fact that many are made sinners. That is to say, if men only become sinners because they personally commit sins, which is what the moral interpretation implies, then what Adam did has no relevance. There is absolutely no point in the Apostle’s argument. If words have any meaning, there must be some direct causal connection between the sin of Adam and the fact that the Scripture says all are made sinners, and if the physical interpretation is rejected, as it must be, and we are not born with an inherited defilement which makes us commit sin the only possible explanation is the one quoted by Dr. Thomas, the federal principle by which, for the purpose of salvation, the one sin of Adam is the sin of the world under which all other sins and sinners are included.

So although many professing Christians adopt the view that personal moral guilt is all that stands in the way of salvation, one cannot do so and claim to believe what the Apostle Paul, or even Jesus Himself, said.

Many Christadelphians now do not believe in sin in the flesh; at least not with any great conviction, but their trouble is that they do not yet understand the truth which must take its place before they can properly understand what Jesus was saying to Nicodemus about being born again. Cliff Pryde is one who is doing a good job of writing against the old Christadelphian theory of original sin and the literal physical fall of man, and he recognises that there is nothing in our human nature which makes it impossible to obey God and he makes the point that Jesus did so and we ought to do so. Where he goes wrong is in believing that our salvation will be accomplished by our own success in living after the example of Christ. All he can see in the sacrifice of Christ is a perfect example of obedience unto death; His sacrifice was the devotion of His life to God and all its value to us was the demonstration that this was and is possible to a good man. This is true as far as it goes; he is a good example of a Christian who accepts the moral view. It is true that in the life He lived He was our Exemplar, but it was not this, His living, which He sacrificed for us, it was His life. There is a vast difference. He did not need to die to prove that He was obedient to God, He needed to live and this He did. For 33 years He lived as our example, but He did not die as our example, He died as our Sin-offering. By His perfect life He had proved Himself a spotless Lamb; he was given by and belonged to God, but it was not His perfect life which redeemed us, it was His dying, the shedding of His life’s blood, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. This is the true principle of The Atonement and the insurmountable obstacle to the view of Cliff Pryde and indeed of all who adopt the moral view is that the one thing which the example of Christ proves above all others is that if we examine ourselves we shall see that we fall so far short of what we could and ought to be that if our salvation depends on what kind of life we live we are doomed.

If Christ has only lived for us as our example and died to show His own obedience to God, we are of all men the most miserable, for we do not follow His example, not by miles; we shall never be obedient unto death, and if we were it would profit us nothing. Why? Because by the Divine decree we are born outside Eden, outcasts and alienated, and there is only one way back, through the door of the sheepfold.

The Federal Principle

So, if we hope for salvation we have got to come back to the basic truths of the Gospel that only faith will save. This is inevitably the legal interpretation, being concerned with things not seen. On the federal principle, all enlightened people are Constituted Sinners by law, being related to Adam who put himself into bondage by Sin. Galatians 3:22 – “But the scripture hath concluded all under sin.” Thus the many were made sinners by one man's disobedience. They were not made physically sinful nor morally weak, but they were alienated from God as the offspring and descendants of a sinner. We do not need to defend the justice of God by saying that it is right because we all commit sins ourselves, since even if some people were sinless there is no moral obligation on Him to reward them. “When ye have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants, we have done that it was our duty to do.”

What God wants from us above any works of righteousness is that we should believe Him and follow His way. This is the vital facet of the Gospel now lost to most Christians.

In Romans 4, the Apostle quotes the words of David and shows how Abraham was justified by faith:-

“Blessed is the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.”

This is what we need, for we have no works which can be sufficient to save us. It is the precise converse of the decree by which the many were made legally the subjects of sin without having necessarily personally sinned. This does not mean that people are held guilty on account of a sin committed by someone else, which would be unjust; but it does mean that the human race comes under the law brought into operation by Adam under which he was expelled from Eden and cut off from God and thus from any hope beyond this natural life. This is the law of The sin and The death of Romans 8:2 and it passes upon an individual when he has sufficient understanding to be responsible. If he dies under it he may remain in the grave for ever, or he may be raised to a judgment and receive the wages of sin, a judicial death which will be the fate of those who reject the offer of salvation on the scriptural terms.

So the truth is, we are not made incapable of obedience, either by creation or by the imputation of Adam's sin, but we are by Divine law made incapable of delivering ourselves, by our own good works from the alien status in which we were born. Remember Cornelius! The purpose in this is that we shall realise that salvation is by grace, through faith; that we should recognise that we are dependent completely upon God's mercy and can only have hope through Christ. Christadelphians appear to appreciate this when they are talking about the necessity for obedience in baptism as the evidence of faith, but they forget it when they deny the reality of Christ's death as the sacrifice which alone will cover our sins, and make His death no more than the culmination of a life of obedience, a martyrdom, or the destruction of His flesh which they say could have led Him into sin. No man has ever done a greater disservice to his brethren nor a greater wrong to the Saviour he thinks he serves, than A.D.Norris, in promulgating his blasphemous theory of the devil hanging dead upon the Cross. It was not Jesus who needed to be humiliated and destroyed; the true purpose of His life and death was to bring home to us a proper appreciation of our own unworthiness; to a true repentance and acknowledgement of the mercy of God in His willingness to receive back those who accept that He gave His own Son, who voluntarily surrendered Himself to lay down His life as the ransom price to redeem us.

The commonest objection to the legal interpretation is that it would be unjust to impute the Sin of Adam to his descendants. If the imputation carried guilt, this would be valid, but since it is no more than a legal disability, which we can change by one simple act, analogous, as Dr. Thomas showed, to that of nationality which can be renounced by the individual at will, the objection is invalid. There would be injustice if the Sin of Adam had changed our nature, because nothing we can do could alter

that; we are stuck with it. But we can change a relationship, and one which only becomes significant when we are enlightened. "This is the condemnation, that light is come unto the world."

We who are British subjects by birth have by law certain rights (or perhaps it should be now said - until a shameful British Parliament started tampering with the Constitution in a mistaken attempt to cope with the disgusting racial prejudices - that we had certain rights) and responsibilities, and so long as we hold our citizenship we are under the laws of the Commonwealth. If we decided we preferred the American system, we could renounce our native allegiance, become naturalised U.S.A. citizens and enjoy all the benefits of Mr. Nixon's administration! This is as good a parallel as one needs to illustrate the scriptural truth of how we are born under Sin, and you can read all about it in Elpis Israel. Sin is the ruler and the realm into which we come as natural descendants of Adam and if we remain in it we shall perish irrespective of any goodness we might think we have. As Jesus said to Nicodemus, "He that believeth not is condemned already." So, if we become enlightened by contact with The Word of God or with those who understand it, we learn that we are in an alienated state, without hope beyond the present life irrespective of our moral worth, and death, when it occurs, not as a punishment but as a law of nature, will be the end of us. Nothing we can do in the way of good works will avail to change the status; even complete perfection of character would still leave a person with no hope beyond the grave. Only by following the legal process of belief and baptism, a new birth, to reverse the situation revealed by the Symbolism of Genesis, the Mosaic Law and the witness of the Prophets and Apostles can we cease to be aliens without hope and become the adopted Children of God and heirs of the Promises to Abraham. This is the vital element of what the Bible reveals of the human condition. Beside it, our physical corruptibility and the moral weaknesses we have to confess, are of small importance; the former will be remedied by resurrection or change at the return of Christ; the second by forgiveness if we ask, and a measure of improvement if we make the effort. But so long as we remain the children of the Devil we are perishing. I do not bother to explain to Christadelphians that we do not believe in a personal devil, they can understand us as they wish. The infinite tragedy of their community is that in the early days, as shown by what we have quoted from Dr. Thomas, they had a reasonable grasp of this truth. Unfortunately, mixed up with it was the apostate doctrine of The Fall and implantation of Sin in the flesh, and because some realised that this was wrong, it became a bone of contention. In defending it so stubbornly Robert Roberts was practically forced by his own logic to insist that it was physical defilement which separates men from God and not the ejection from Eden upon which alone the Atonement can be understood.

And so today we see the heart-breaking spectacle of a writer in a Christadelphian publication tearing the truth to shreds, denying what is published in black and white in their own literature, wearing himself out to try to prove that they have never believed what alone distinguishes a true scriptural faith from the pap which passes for Christianity. Finch says:

"So Bro. Roberts did not believe that we are alienated by means of racial birth, but the race is alienated by its transgressions."

If he did not believe in alienation as taught by Dr. Thomas, so much the worse for him, but it would be easy to prove a dozen times over by quotations from his own works, that he did recognise once upon a time, a condemnation which comes upon us legally irrespective of our sins. Here is one from his pamphlet "A Word in Season," which was reprinted as a reply to our work, by J.B.Handley, with, it says, the kind permission of C.C. Walker. On page 5 he wrote :-

"The position of men was that they were under condemnation to die because of sin, and that not their own sin, in the first instance, but ancestral sin at the beginning."

It would be impossible for an honest man to deny that this is clear proof to the contrary of what Finch says. It is appropriate to add, for the information of those who are being deliberately misled by Christadelphian writers both here and in Australia, that in the same publication, page 6, R. Roberts says of Jesus:-

“He was an Adamic body of death, corruptible and unclean.”

And on page 9:

“Christ did no sin, but he inherited the condemnation of sin in deriving his nature from a daughter of Adam, the condemned.”

What could be more clearly demonstrated that R.Roberts did indeed believe in a racial (we do not use the term) alienation, than the declaration that Christ, who did no sin, inherited condemnation from his mother? Finch has the impudence to plead “Brethren, let us be reasonable.” The Appropriate answer to such a plea would be “Yea indeed, let us be reasonable - but let us be also candid, let us be at least truthful.”

It is surely high time for Christadelphians to ask themselves, not the question Graham Bacon asks, but this one, “Has the point been reached where Christadelphianism can only be defended by deceit and double-talk? Where the writings of the pioneers are twisted and falsified to make them agreeable to present-day thought?” It certainly appears to be so on the evidence of the contents of “The Believer.” Only “The Logos” now has the temerity to profess to defend the worst extravagancies in R.Roberts, and one doubts if even H.P. Mansfield would today risk printing and trying to justify the last quotation. After all, he must have some intelligent readers, who would be capable of asking him where the Scripture says that Jesus was unclean, or how He could have been holy if He inherited the Condemnation of Sin. Perhaps he could only do the same as H.J.Finch and say “We believe he was right, but we wouldn't use the same words to define it.”

Ernest Brady.