

# Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No. 172

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## Note regarding the booklet of Eight Bible Essays which were sent out with the last Circular Letter:

With the last Circular Letter we sent out our booklet containing "Eight Bible Essays." Some readers have questioned Essay No. 4, "Ye Must Be born Again," pointing out that there are not four births mentioned in the New Testament but two. We agree. Some readers we have discussed this with have suggested the essay be replaced, while others are of the mind to leave the essay as it is but add a note before the essay pointing out that the view expressed in the essay - "is not the generally held belief of the Nazarene Fellowship, for we do not recognize 4 "births" but 2 - our natural birth of flesh and blood, and our spiritual birth following knowledge, understanding and belief of the Gospel which we ratify by Baptism into Jesus Christ as the answer of a good conscience toward God."

It is felt that the resurrection or change to spirit nature cannot really be considered a new birth, which idea I am told, comes from Dr. Thomas' writings and is current amongst some Christadelphians today.

However that may be, we would very much like readers to write to us with their thoughts as to whether the essay should be replaced by another or a note such as suggested above be put in either before the essay or perhaps as a footnote at the bottom of page 12. Please do write and let us know.

Brother Russell Gregory

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## Editorial

Dear Brothers and Sisters and Friends, Loving Greetings.

As we grow older into middle age and onwards, many of us feel a sense of disappointment with our lives. We have not achieved as much as we had hoped and intended. Things have not turned out the way we wished and we feel disillusionment with the way we ourselves, and the things we looked for, have fallen short of our hopes. Perhaps there are some people who are entirely satisfied with their progress in life. Probably those whose aims have been centred on this world and all it has to offer. But even these so called fortunate few can find life empty and meaningless as they reach the end of their span, and say to themselves and others "is this all there is?" and "what is the point of it?"

Carl Jung, the psychiatrist, wrote "Amongst my patients in the second half of life, that is to say, over 35, there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. People cannot be truly at peace with themselves without a sense of being part of something greater.

You need some sort of meaning in life, a map of some sort, some sense of direction or purpose. Otherwise in the second half of life you run out of things that have preoccupied you when you were younger and you feel totally lost.”

Even with a religious outlook that does indeed give a true sense of purpose, a sense of direction and a meaning to life, these feelings of disillusionment and disappointment surface from time to time. Perhaps when we are at a low ebb, because of the thousand shocks the flesh is heir to, as Shakespeare succinctly put it, or because of illness or bereavement. Also the continuing fact that very few people want to hear what we believe to be the wondrous truth about God, His Son and the plan so lovingly devised and so agonizingly carried out for our salvation, is always a great cause for sadness. Religion is of marginal interest now. Belief in God is regarded as something for the slightly crazed or weak minded in society. The established Church is keen to be seen as fashionable and trendy in preference to purveyors of Scriptural truth and what we believe to be the vital truth about God and His vast eternal plan is difficult, if not impossible, to impart to persons completely unfamiliar with the Bible and its contents. Standards of behaviour as set out in the ten commandments are thought by most to be outdated and intolerant, but we are all witness to the chaos and unhappiness that has been brought about by their abandonment.

Principles and ideals are not valued in this society because they get in the way of always having what you want when you want it regardless of who it may hurt. Older people are not revered and respected, it is the young, with their immature opinions who hold sway, so that the experience that comes with years is seldom passed on to the young anymore. This is not to say that all old people are wise and worth listening to, but some certainly are.

But if we try to please God and make our Saviour our pattern so that whatever path our lives take, whatever we learn in this life we can be sure God will use in His Kingdom. Our experiences and labours in what area they may fall will make us into a person who is ready and capable of service when Jesus returns to us. Our different gifts, like our differing degrees of virtues and failings are all valuable now and will be even more so in the time to come, for God calls all sorts of people to His Kingdom. God uses us as we are and when Jesus reigns supreme our virtues will be properly directed, just as our sins, as soon as they are acknowledged are forgiven here and now every day.

We bring suffering upon ourselves when we trust our own evaluation of our worth. We are the threads in a magnificent tapestry; each thread is vital in its own way and adds to the beauty of the whole picture. “We shall one day experience an unutterable bliss magnified by association,” as Edward Turney wrote “The many friends and loved ones whose companionship we valued, and whom we laid with bitter tears in the ground, shall we once more behold, with the grand historic characters of antiquity, the sojourners and pilgrims of the same faith and hope, the first martyrs, and amongst them all the great martyr Jesus. These like bright groups of stars encircling the moon, or diamond dew sparkling on the grass and herbs, will fill our wondering sight and make us feel ashamed of our past troubles as altogether unworthy to be named in view of our “great and exceeding reward.” Let these joyous thoughts quicken our flagging pace. As we near the prize the eye should grow brighter, the fire glow more ardently, so that we may not seem to be expecting that for which we do not strive.”

Russell, Eileen and I send our love to all far and near with thanks for kind letters received in the past two months. At the time of writing, unfortunately here in England, as the poet said “Summer has set in with its usual severity.”

Sister Helen Brady.

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**In our last Circular Letter we published three replies to the article by Brother A.D.Norris entitled “Christ Died For Ours Sins”. These replies all showed great disapproval of his dishonourable beliefs and repeatedly illustrated where he was at variance with Scripture, and while it is our hope that Brother Alfred will in some way respond by endeavouring to justify himself he wrote prior to sending the article for publication that he did not wish to be involved with ongoing correspondence regarding it. We can understand why.**

The following letter, from Brother Allon Maxwell, arrived too late to be included with the other three but is well worth reading as a further criticism of the beliefs of A.D.Norris.

## A FEW COMMENTS ON THE ARTICLE BY ALFRED NORRIS

### “CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS”

First, I take notice of Alfred’s qualification as a “card-carrying member of the Central Christadelphian Fellowship.”

For the first 40 years of my life, I also was a “card-carrying Christadelphian” (although, due to the complexities of Christadelphian “fellowship arrangements” between England and Australia, only the latter part of that time was in “Unity” with the “Central Fellowship”). I remember with pleasure, meeting him in person, briefly, in Newcastle, NSW, and hearing him speak at a Christadelphian conference in Brisbane, Queensland, some time around 1970. He impressed me then as an “intellectual giant”, and to this day, he still has my deepest respect.

However, some 26 years ago now, my own “Christadelphian card” was cancelled, due to my inability to accept Central Fellowship teaching on the Atonement. On this subject, while respect and love both remain intact, there is fundamental disagreement, especially about the reason for the death of Jesus proposed in Alfred’s article.

May I respectfully suggest that the title for his article, “Christ Died For Our Sins” should probably be viewed as a misnomer! Reading carefully behind the maze of words, the real emphasis appears to be something more like “Christ Died To Save Himself From Potential Sin”!

The following three brief excerpts pin-point the source of my concern:-

“...by allowing His body to be done to death on the Cross, the Lord had removed from His mortal body all that could have resisted the will of God, and made possible His exaltation.”

And:-

“The Lord had pin-pointed the source from which men’s sins sprang and had removed it.”

And:-

“To lay down His life while still sinless was the Lord Jesus’ only way to final and unchallengeable victory, a victory which was achieved when He “became obedient to death, even the death of the cross.” The subsequent high exaltation of the Lord Jesus, now for ever freed from the impulses which characterize our flesh, qualifies Him in every regard to be Priest for His own people, conqueror of the nations when He returns, and purging the world of all unrighteousness and its consequences before He presents the entirely perfected work to His Father. Only in this way was His perfection to be attained, as all four uses of the word “to perfect” about Him in the New Testament convincingly show.”

Have I understood him correctly? Does he really mean that for Jesus, the Cross was the only available means of escape from inherent temptations that might otherwise (inevitably?) lead Him to sin? Does he really mean that this was THE REASON for His sacrificial death?

Actually, I would hope that he might recoil in horror at that condensed “reader’s summary” of the meaning which I take from his words. But since it is what I have heard many other Christadelphians say, and since he does represent himself as presenting “common Christadelphian belief,” it does seem logical to conclude that he did mean to say this.

I invite him to correct me if it does not do justice to his intended meaning.

## **1. THE CROSS - DEFEAT OR VICTORY**

Jesus claimed that He had overcome the world before He died, (John 16:33). The speculative invention of a theory that requires the death of Jesus because of personal need to save Himself from further temptation and potential failure, detracts from the strength of that claim! To retire from the battle in that way, for that reason, would sound much more like a concession to defeat by the flesh rather than victory over the flesh!

## **2 DID JESUS DIE FOR HIS OWN NEED - OR FOR OURS?**

I suppose that if one totally ignores the real emphasis of Scripture, and delves into the non-existent realm of “what if”, it could be construed that there might have been some sort of failure on the part of Jesus, if He had not loved us enough to die for us. But alas... digging into the “what ifs” in that way, is both speculative and pointless in the light of the realities of “what is.”

Let us stay with the realities of the reasons for what actually did happen.

The reality is that we sinned... we incurred a justly deserved penalty... God did love us... Jesus did love us... and the two of them worked together to rescue us, both from the penalty of our sins, and also from the guilt, and the self-imposed slavery resulting from the continuing practice of sin.

Thus it happened that “Christ died for our sins... in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:5).

To quote another “card-carrying member of the Central Christadelphian Fellowship”:- “The confusion arises when we separate him from his work. He was there to be our Saviour, and but for our needs we may reverently say he would not have been there.” (John Carter, in “Christadelphian Unity in Australia - The Accepted Basis”),

## **3. RANSOM AND REDEMPTION**

It is disappointing to notice that, while Alfred did mention the word “ransom,” he did so once only, and then only to dismiss it without exploring its relevance to our need for a ransom to be paid.

“Redemption” was not mentioned at all.

That is a pity. Certainly those two words are not the whole picture. But they are unquestionably central to any Biblical understanding of Just what was done for us on the Cross. They should not be ignored or dismissed in favour of speculation about “what might have happened” to Jesus if He had not “loved us and given himself for us” (Galatians 2:20).

Of course, the whole of the life of Jesus was a “sacrifice of praise” (Hebrews 13:15). Without that He would not have been uniquely qualified to “die for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3) as “a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Peter 1:19).

But it is “Ransom” which is the word employed by Jesus to describe the purpose for the surrender of His life on the Cross (Mark 10:45). Certainly His death was a part of His total obedience to the constraints of love for God, and love for His neighbour. But it was for our need, not His own, that the ransom was necessary.

The use of that word implies that the surrender of His life in the awful suffering of the Cross, has paid in full, all that was necessary to release us from our own fearful expectation of future judgment, condemnation, and death for our sins (1 John 4:18,19). Of course, (addressing a common evangelical misconception) this does not mean that “Christ has done it all, and there is nothing left for us to do.” But it certainly does mean that we are now free to repent of our sins, be forgiven, and then “by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality” (Romans 2:7).

“Redeem” is another word used by Paul to describe the price paid to purchase our release (Galatians 4:5 and Titus 2:14) from slavery to another master (Romans 6:16-18) in order to become adopted sons of God. The effective connotations of “redemption” are very similar to those of “ransom.” A price was paid, and that price was the sacrificial surrender of the life of Jesus on the Cross. Peter emphasizes this by pointing us to the blood that was shed in the process (1 Peter 1:18).

Paul builds on this concept of “ransom” or “redemption” to say that since we were “bought with a price” our primary responsibility to the one who has purchased us, is to “glorify God in our body” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

#### **4. SUBSTITUTION?**

This is another word which Alfred summarily dismissed in the same inadequate few words as he used for “ransom.” Of course the word itself is not in the Bible. Nevertheless, it is certainly implied in the concepts of “Ransom” and “Redemption,” both of which tell us that a price was paid in exchange for our release. Both words mean that one thing was exchanged for something else, from which it is easy to infer substitution.

Further, it is difficult to see how a “substitutionary metaphor” (Alfred’s words) can be avoided in such passages as:-

“Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). And, “So shall He, my servant, vindicate many, Himself bearing the penalty of our guilt” (Isaiah 53:11. NEB.).

Did Jesus deserve that awful death? By no means! God declared Him innocent by raising Him from the dead.

Then who did deserve such a death? For all of the rest of us, it would have been no more than “the due reward for our deeds” (Luke 23:41),

From this “due reward for our deeds” we have been saved - by the ransom paid by Jesus. For all who have thus been ransomed, and who share in the first resurrection, the second death will have no power.

Our salvation from the penalty which we truly deserved was achieved by Jesus suffering a penalty which He did not deserve. But of course, before it can be personally effective we must first believe the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and then “repent and turn to God, and perform deeds worthy of our repentance” (Acts 26:20).

For those who walk this narrow road, there is this assurance, not to be held in presumption, but accepted in simple faith:-

“What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn: Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Romans 8:32-35).

Then, when on the day of Resurrection and Judgment, our names are found written in the Book of Life, the second death will have no power over us (Revelation 20:6) and Death will be swallowed up in victory, as mortality gives place to immortality (1 Corinthians 15:51- 54).

Brother Allon Maxwell

Note: Unless otherwise stated, all quotes are from the Revised Standard Version.

**We have been asked to reproduce the following article, previously published in C. L. for July/August 1991, because it has a bearing upon the “Eight Bible Essays,” especially Essay No.4 about which we have asked for comments from readers.**

## THE HOLY SPIRIT

Many strange concepts have accumulated on this subject over the centuries. The object of this article is to get down to what the Scriptures do and do not teach on the subject.

The holy spirit is not a person. On this we are all agreed. The idea of the holy spirit being a person stems largely from the doctrine of the Trinity. Now we notice that the terms “Holy Spirit” and “Holy Ghost” are used interchangeably, and in some modern versions the latter has often been replaced by the former, and one feature stands out at a glance. While God’s spirit is mentioned countless times in the New Testament, the term “holy spirit” occurs twice only in the Old Testament, close together in Isaiah 63:10 and 11 - “But they rebelled and vexed his holy spirit... Where is he that put his Holy Spirit within him?”

Now a look at the Authorized Version shows that “Spirit” is spelt with a capital “S” but you may be interested to know that the Hebrew has no capital letters. It has only one set of 22 letters. So those who edited the Authorized Version took the liberty to spell “Spirit” with a capital, obviously biased with the Trinitarian idea of the “Holy Spirit” being a person.

Another point worth noting is that in all languages other than English, a noun has not necessarily its natural gender. For example the Hebrew word for “wisdom” is “*chokmah*,” feminine gender. This is why wisdom in the Bible, especially in the Book of Proverbs, is spoken of as “she.” As a further two illustrations, the Latin word for “moon” is “*luna*,” feminine gender, so spoken of as “she.” The German language is the most peculiar in this respect. The German word for “girl” is “*Maedchen*,” and surprise, surprise, its gender is not feminine but neuter and therefore a girl in German is referred to by the pronoun “it.” To the writer’s knowledge, English is the only language where a noun representing a male is masculine, a female, feminine and any object or abstract concept is neuter, with the exception of a ship or an engine which are spoken of as “she,” as in “start her up.” So when we read a text in a foreign language we must be careful of how to interpret a pronoun.

Coming back to the holy spirit, the word “spirit” is masculine gender in Latin. It is “*spiritus*,” and it was the Latin Vulgate which was used at the time when the doctrine of the Trinity got its first foothold. So this is why the holy spirit came to be referred to as “He.”

For the same reason, by the way, the word, “logos” also masculine gender in Greek is referred to as “He.” If this was understood properly, many Trinitarian misconceptions could be cleared up. (John 1:1-18).

Now let us get down to what the holy spirit is. It is the influence or force emanating from God and pervading all space. By it God controls everything. By it He created the universe, made the earth habitable for life as we know it, including mankind. He set in motion the laws of nature including Physics, Chemistry, Biology, etc. On the spiritual level God gave man laws to keep, inspired the prophets, caused Mary to conceive and later raised Jesus from the dead, to mention only a few examples.

The Spirit of God is first mentioned in Genesis 1:2 - “And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” And again in Genesis 6:3 - “And the Lord said, my spirit shall not always strive with man...”

God, through His spirit or force, directed history from creation onwards. But His spirit was manifested in various modes. First, there was the patriarchal period from Noah through Abraham to Moses. During this age God, through angels, spoke to chosen men such as Noah, Abraham, etc. They were always faithful individuals who carried God’s message. Then beginning with Moses the age of the prophets began which lasted up to the time just after the Jews’ return from the Babylonian captivity, coming to its end with Malachi. During this age God again through the holy spirit manifested Himself much more openly. Prophets were commissioned to demonstrate publicly through signs and wonders that they were appointed by God. It was God, by means of the holy spirit that enabled the prophets to perform miracles and so

identify themselves as God's envoys. Very different from the patriarchal age where God dealt with single persons. Now the prophets showed themselves to the public at large by signs and wonders.

Then comes the greatest of all signs of the action of God's holy spirit, as foretold in Isaiah 7:14 - the miraculous conception in Mary through the holy spirit, of the Saviour Jesus. Enough has been said of the reason for the necessity of this birth, God having given His Son with a life free to buy us back from bondage to sin. The fact that God has had mercy on us to give us this understanding is alone an example of the holy spirit working on our intellect. Jesus of course had more of the Holy Spirit than anyone else "for he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God; for God giveth not the spirit by measure unto him" John 3:34. And for this reason He did more miracles than any before Him, so many that they won't go into a book if all were mentioned (John 21:25). He was the truest ever replica of the Father, and a further most powerful manifestation of the working of the holy spirit occurred at His resurrection.

We now come to the apostolic period which began with the outpouring of the holy spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Nothing like this ever happened before or after. It was however, another sign which God gave. It was a momentous occasion from the then Jewish point of view, for it was the first time that salvation was to be extended to the Gentiles, an extremely hard pill to swallow for the apostles' contemporaries. The Jews nurtured a pride in being children of Abraham. They thought of themselves as having the monopoly in access to God and His promises while the Gentiles were disdained as dogs. An attitude prevailing among some Jews to this day. The Gentiles having a part in God's blessings was a great sensation and so required an unusual sign.

But apart from this, the apostles, like the prophets, were God's ministers endowed with a limited power to work wondrously with the sole object of demonstrating publicly their divine authority. After the deaths of the apostles there is no further record of any miracles performed openly and publicly, but the holy spirit never ceased to work in some form or another.

So what about this age? Well, the last apostle, John, died after about 96 AD. But thanks to the action of the holy spirit the Scriptures have been preserved, and does not God, through His Spirit guide us in every decision, if we earnestly pray to Him? And was it not through God's guidance that the knowledge of the truth has come to us? And does not God's spirit control world history? How many battles have been won or lost through weather conditions? And what power controls the weather? To mention only Joshua chapter 10 verse 11 when the Lord sent great hailstones upon His enemies.

It was quite recently that I visited a Bible exhibition showing replicas of the Dead Sea Scrolls where we find that their contents agree nearly word for word with our Bible. So how can we say that the holy spirit was withdrawn? The power to do miracles, yes, but the power of the holy spirit, no, only it now takes a different form.

However, it certainly will manifest itself in its most powerful aspect on that blessed day when the Lord returns and those who sleep come forth, and those alive and worthy will experience that sudden change to immortality. Let us all endeavour to be among them.

I will conclude with two examples of our time that demonstrate how God's spirit intervenes in history. End of June 1940 France had fallen. Why did Hitler not invade us then? He missed his best chance from the human point of view - one of those great mysteries of history. But we know why - Hitler was destined to lose the war. What better example of the unnoticed, unobtrusive working of the holy spirit. Then a little later in September the same year, battle of Britain. Hitler assembled his invasion fleet. All was poised ready. Then severe gales dispersed the boats, but the weather did not stop the RAF from finishing what the gales had started. I still vividly remember the announcer reading this, from the loudspeaker inside the internment camp where I was at the time. Similarly, favourable weather conditions helped the allies on D-day in June 1944.

Brother Leo Dreifuss-

P.S. My attention has been drawn by Brother Russell Gregory to John the Baptist who was filled with the holy spirit from birth, but did no miracles. Yet Jesus said of him (Luke 7:28) "...among them that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist." So possession of the holy spirit

does not necessarily imply the working of miracles but it is evident that this work was imparted by God as and when the necessity arose.

L.D.

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**Brother Ron Coleman writes for “The Endeavour” magazine presenting his views on:-**

## **THE MOST IMPORTANT DOCTRINE OF ALL**

### **Part One**

The Atonement has been described in a striking but chilling sentence, “When Jesus hung upon the Cross, it was then that the devil was destroyed: that is, that the devil hung there dead.” Ron Coleman asks whether this adequately reflects New Testament teaching.

Probably few of us if asked suddenly what was the most important doctrine would reply immediately “The Atonement.” The word itself does not appear in the Statement of Faith and only once in the Authorized Version of the New Testament. But there are good reasons for so choosing it. The death of Jesus lies at the heart of the Gospels and the New Testament as a whole, and it is obviously important to understand what was accomplished by that death.

“For brethren in Christ the Atonement is a vital doctrine, fundamental as it is to the relationship between God and man and the basis upon which alone God will realize His great purpose in the earth. All other “first principles” are bound up in it... It is that teaching which distinguishes us from all other religious communities...” (“The Christadelphian” for November 1985, page 402).

It is ironical therefore that the Atonement should also have been the subject of the longest-lasting division in the community.

“The most distressing aspect of all this, as far as we are concerned, is the fact that the most deep-seated controversies have centred round the means of our reconciliation to God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (“The Christadelphian” February 1984, page 42).

What is the reason for this? Not least because both parties have tended to ignore the principle that one writer with experience of doctrinal disputes said should be observed - “To earnestly draw out the best in your opponent’s case, rather than to wrest a victory from exploiting its weakness, is the only principle that advances thought.” (George McLeod, - I owe this to John Maycock).

### **The Atonement in Christadelphian Thought**

To understand what the dispute was about we have first to describe the Christadelphian doctrine of the Atonement. The single occurrence of the word in the New Testament (Romans 5:11) is actually a mistranslation since elsewhere it and its cognate verb are translated “reconciliation” and “reconcile” which is better because in ordinary use the word “atone” is one-sided - it relates only to what the wrongdoer does in order to restore a broken relationship, such as repentance, apology and reparation.

“Reconciliation” on the other hand does not rule out action taken by the wronged one to the same end. As for The Statement of Faith, what it has to say is relatively brief and infers, rather than states, what the doctrine is, in particular the most crucial phrase which comes from Romans 8:3 (“to condemn sin in the flesh”) is quoted without explanation. For such explanation it is necessary to turn to expositions of the doctrine.

The Christadelphian doctrine rejects all substitutionary explanations as immoral. (Substitutionary explanations are those which say that Jesus offered himself as a substitute on our behalf and endured the punishment which should have fallen on us. We deserve punishment because sin is the breaking of God’s

law and the result is to leave man under judgment, with no hope of anything except condemnation and punishment). Instead it maintains that because of Adam and Eve's sin their nature was changed from an original perfection and became defiled and abhorrent to God because of its proneness to sin. The only remedy is the condemnation of that fallen human nature. Jesus endured that condemnation as a representative of mankind, not as a substitute-

“The crucifixion of Christ as a “declaration of the righteousness of God” and a “condemnation of sin in the flesh,” exhibited to the world the righteous treatment of sin. It was as though it was proclaimed to all the world, when the body was nailed to the Cross; “This is how condemned human nature should be treated according to the righteousness of God; it is fit only for destruction” (Robert Roberts - “The Blood of Christ,” page 21).

But, it is further explained, it would not have been clear that it was the sinful nature that was being condemned if the death were to be that of a sinner for it would be impossible to distinguish between the actual sin that had been committed and the underlying proneness to sin. So, in order to make the distinction clear it had to be the crucifixion of a man, who had inherited sinful human nature but had not yielded to its propensity to sin,

“It pleased God to require the ceremonial (sic) condemnation of this sin-nature in crucifixion in the person of a righteous possessor of it, as the basis of our forgiveness... The man produced through Mary, by the Spirit of God, combined the two essential qualities for a sacrifice; He was the very nature condemned in Eden, and therefore wrong was not done when He was impaled upon the Cross. “It pleased the Lord to bruise him.” (“The Blood of Christ” pages 26,27).

How does this reconcile the sinner to God? The answer is that it teaches him the true nature of sin.

“The Son of God came in human form. In character He was perfect, yet He inherited from Adam a “serpent” nature which could be tempted to sin. This nature was the cause of the trouble. It had to be cursed and crucified.” (Peter Watkins, “The Cross Of Christ.” page 18).

### **Inherent Difficulties**

The immediate and obvious difficulty of this explanation is that it is unjust for an innocent man to be condemned to judicial execution because of an inherited taint, above all when He has resisted and overcome at great cost the effects of that taint. Today, while we restrain those who do wrong because of an inherited disability, such as schizophrenia, we do not punish them. Autistic children are no longer treated as being “naughty.” It is inconsistent to condemn substitutionary explanations of the Atonement while embracing an explanation which appears to have the same defect. This can be demonstrated by quoting a condemnation of substitutionary beliefs by William Barclay and asking ourselves whether it does not apply equally if the sufferer is a representative, not a substitute, and his suffering “ceremonial condemnation” rather than punishment.

When (substitutionary beliefs) are stated in their crudest way, when the implication is that God laid on Jesus Christ the punishment which should have been laid on men in order that divine justice might be maintained, then these interpretations do something even worse. They represent God as protecting His justice by the most monstrous act of injustice the world has ever seen or can ever see; for He laid on the sinless One the punishment of sin.” (William Barclay, “Crucified and Crowned.” 1961 page 124).

A further but related difficulty is that if men are born with this proneness to sin, why are they culpable? Why should they be punished for that which they cannot help?

### **An Alternative Explanation**

It was the inadequacy of this explanation of the Atonement which led to the alternative view which Edward Turney put forward in 1873 and which has lived on fitfully as a minority, though vociferous, view

until the present day and which heresy-hunters still find the smell of in ecclesias which had former associations with it. Edward Turney and his followers denied that men were born with a disposition towards sin. All had the same free choice as Adam was given but had unfortunately exercised it in the same way as Adam did. Therefore Jesus too was not born with an inherited disposition towards sin and His divine parentage on His Father's side enabled Him, the Second Adam, to reject consistently and completely the temptations to sin. Edward Turney's explanation of the Atonement was that Adam and Eve ought to have died because of their disobedience, but the penalty was remitted by God when He clothed them with the skins of animals which had been sacrificed for this purpose and thereby provided "a covering for sin." They were spared because they recognized the sacrificial principle so demonstrated. The physical nature of man was not changed; eventual death was due to the natural physical corruptibility which man shared with the rest of creation. The real result of Adam and Eve's sin was alienation from God. That alienation could not be repaired until the sacrifice of an innocent life was voluntarily made which Jesus did on the Cross. (It is interesting that precisely the same arguments took place in the early Church. Augustine taught the doctrine of original guilt while the heretic Pelagius maintained "We are... born... with a capacity for good and evil; we are begotten as well without virtue as without vice." (De peccato originali. Pelagius. 14. Documents of the Christian Church. OUP. page 53).

### **New Difficulties**

This explanation avoids the main difficulty of the first but at the cost of new ones of its own. Why cannot God simply forgive sins which are genuinely repented of without it being necessary for an innocent life to be sacrificed? Were sins before the time of Christ only forgiven provisionally? The answer that is given is that it would be contrary to God's principles of law and Justice if sins were forgiven without the shedding of blood. But this is contrary to the teaching of both Old and New Testaments. As regards the Old, we have only to think of God's declaration to Isaiah (55:7), "let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." In the New, the parable of the Prodigal son provides a complete refutation. (Numerous other texts could be quoted in support of these two).

But the chief difficulty is that it is a universal experience that man "is of his own nature inclined to evil" ("Thirty Nine Articles" - No IX) and if, as Edward Turney accepted, there is no external evil principle (Satan) which induces temptation, surely its only source must be inside ourselves? If Jesus shared our human nature, and was tempted, that lower nature must have been present in him also.

At the time of the original division understanding of the physical basis of personality had advanced very little beyond that which formed the background to the argument between Augustine and Pelagius. Dr. Thomas maintained that sin was due to "the principle of decay and reproduction from the blood" ("Elpis Israel" page 127). Today the situation is different. The psychologist H.J.Eysenck, for example, has shown that a predisposition to criminality can be and is inherited ("Crime and Personality" H.J.Eysenck, 1970. Revised 1977, pages 75,76). Very recent work is on the point of proving that a tendency to alcoholism is genetically conveyed.

But Eysenck has also shown that because defects of this kind are inherited it does not follow that "free-will flies out of the window." In fact discoveries about the nature of heredity itself have taught us much about ways of controlling its effects. Even if it is doubted that Eysenck's work provides conclusive proof it is scientific evidence in support of a feeling which we (or most of us) have in our bones.

### **Something Which Has Been Overlooked**

There is a further fact which neither side in the controversy seems to have paid much, if any, attention to and is valid whichever of the two views is taken about human nature. None of us live in a vacuum; we are all conditioned by our environment. Even if it should be the case that we are born with a *tabula rasa* it is not long before writing appears on it.

"We are all born into an inheritance in which to do good is harder than to do evil. Moreover we have to live in situations which may be the results of error or false choices by millions of unknown people in the past and in which the bias seems to be against us..."

None of us lives or dies unto himself. We are all bound up in the bundle of life together.” (F.R.Barry, “The Atonement,” 1968, page 55).

So even if it be granted for the sake of argument that Adam did not: bequeath a genetic taint to his posterity, he did bequeath something else - the beginnings of a society which is corrupt and alienated from God. Whether it be due to nature or nurture, or both together, we are the victims of “original sin.” But we are not entirely in chains, we are still free beings within limits.

It is this total complex of facts which is covered by the phrase, original sin. What seems to follow is that, while nobody may be allowed the plea “I couldn’t help it” - for we are free agents, not determined mechanisms - yet there are degrees of responsibility which no spectator can ever rightly estimate; it is God, not man, who pronounces the last judgment...” (F.R.Barry, “The Atonement” 1968, page 55).

Putting this another way, while it is easy to think of sin as being a single unitary entity that became part of the human make-up at the fall, it is more subtle and complex than that. Take selfishness, for example. Unselfishness is usually regarded as being a supreme virtue and some unselfishness is an essential quality for living within a group. Without a group, be it family, church, clan or nation, the individual cannot survive and grow. A child brought up without human company could never develop into a full person. But on the other hand, room for self-assertion is also necessary so that individuality can develop - bees in a hive are not a model for human society. Righteousness involves holding a balance between the two. Because of our nature, error-prone and distorted by alienation from God, this is something we always find difficult and often impossible. But how difficult depends on our heredity and the example that has been set us by parents and the society in which we live.

\* George McHafie was an exception. An article by him “What Makes People Bad” appeared in “Endeavour” Magazine No, 51 Summer/Autumn 1976,

## **Historical Beliefs**

At this point it may be instructive to consider the history of beliefs about the Atonement in order to profit from the mistakes of the past. The first explanation which lasted from early post-apostolic times until the eleventh century, concentrated on “ransom,” Through sin mankind had sold itself to the devil and this brought death. God wished to free men from subservience but could not do it by force because the devil’s claim was just. Therefore a ransom had to be paid and the devil agreed to take Christ in exchange for mankind’s release. But when he was in the devil’s possession Christ’s righteousness tortured him and he had to release Him. So the devil lost both mankind and Christ.

Even more fantastic variations of this were advanced until Anselm. Archbishop of Canterbury challenged it. He argued that all men owed obedience to God so that sin is cheating God out of His rights. This creates a debt which cannot be paid off by repentance and subsequent obedience. God, in His justice, cannot simply remit the debt - He must have “satisfaction” for the loss of honour He has suffered. God’s remedy was to send His Son who gave the satisfaction necessary in His sacrificial death and in doing so built up an infinite credit of favour which could be diverted to believers through baptism and “good works.” The essential difference in this case was that the ransom was paid to God, not the devil,

The Reformation brought about another development. The Reformers used Anselm’s basic principle but changed “satisfaction” to punishment. Man, through his rebellion, has incurred the penalty of death. Christ by His sacrifice on the Cross legally took the place of guilty man and averted the wrath of God. This wrath arises because Adam’s sin is imputed to all his descendants; it is averted because, through faith in the atoning work of Jesus, His righteousness is imputed to the believer.

All three beliefs have one thing in common. They start from biblical metaphors - ransom, redemption, sacrifice and acquittal in a court of law - but then regard them as literal truth. Sacrifice may be thought to be an exception - was not the death of Christ literally a sacrifice? We feel this way because, in our ordinary speech today, “sacrifice” has become a dead metaphor. A dead metaphor is a comparison that has been used so often that neither speaker nor hearer realize that it is not literal. When we speak of a bottle-neck in a road we are not conscious of the fact that bottles do not have literal necks and that “bottlenecks” have no connection with bottles. “Sacrifice” today is a dead metaphor and means little more than giving something

up. “She sacrificed her job in order to help her husband in his career.” But in New Testament days real sacrifices were being offered in Jerusalem and nobody would think of the judicial execution of Jesus as a literal sacrifice. No worshipper provided the victim, no priest offered it up. In the same way when Jesus said “This is my body,” holding the bread in His hands, he was speaking metaphorically as the literal hands holding the bread testified.

## Figures of Speech

It is important to understand that in figures of speech things that are being compared are never absolutely identical. They correspond only to a limited extent. When words such as “like” and “as if” warn us that a comparison is coming we understand this fact automatically. When we read “I saw three unclean spirits like frogs” we know that the unclean spirits are not literal frogs but only like frogs. Metaphors however are comparisons which are made without any warning and we have to be able to recognize that they are comparisons, not statements of identity, if we are to understand the meaning. Usually there is little difficulty because the differences between the things being compared are such that we recognize that they are metaphors, as for example “Ye are the salt of the earth,” “he is a chosen vessel,” “the tongue is a fire.”

However, if we do not understand the context or there is a very close resemblance between the things being compared, misunderstanding may arise. While no-one would think that Jesus was speaking literally when He said “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man...” many may not have realized that He was not speaking of the literal manna when He said “What Moses gave you was not the bread from heaven.” Reflection will show however that Jesus was using manna as a metaphor for the law, the Torah, for He goes on to say that He Himself was the true bread from heaven, which is undeniably figurative. The disciples made a similar mistake when Jesus warned them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. So taking a metaphor literally can lead us astray, sometimes badly.

This, I believe, is the fundamental error in the historical explanations of the meaning of the Atonement. Metaphors were taken literally and expressed in terms which reflected the thought and the social milieu of the times - ransom when brigandage was rife and the devil a looming reality; satisfaction when penance was a daily experience in the Roman Catholic Church and men fought duels to avenge their tarnished honour; acquittal in the intensely legal world of Reformation theology.

The question that we can no longer delay putting is therefore whether those crucial five last words in Romans 8:3 are literal or metaphorical. “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, condemned sin in the flesh.” I believe that it is taking them literally that has produced the same difficulty as is found in substitutionary Atonements.

Even on the face of things it seems that “condemn” is metaphorical for it is a forensic word and we usually use it in connection with events or objects involving human responsibility. We do not “condemn” natural happenings like earthquakes, hurricanes or epidemics or (more relevantly) the cystic fibrosis or cerebral palsy that afflict a child. We may be frightened by them, we may regret them, we may grieve over them, but we do not condemn them. Why then should the human nature of Jesus be condemned if it was due to a genetic defect like cystic fibrosis or haemophilia? And in what way did the law fail to condemn literal sin? Surely its whole thrust and purpose was to do precisely that? What else did God do through Nathan’s parable but condemn David’s sin and open his eyes to the enormity of what he had done?

## What Commentators Say

Quite independently of any consideration of the Atonement, commentators do see a metaphor in the five words in question. John Robinson, in his commentary on Romans says:

“Paul draws out his meaning in his preferred categories of the law-courts: “He condemned sin in the flesh.” It is the same juridical metaphor that he used in 6:7 “The dead man has his quittance from anything sin can bring against him.” Sin is regarded as the prosecution, man as the defendant, in God’s court. Anyone who is “in the flesh” comes within the province of sin. Sin puts in its regular claim against him, requesting the sentence of death which is the ‘end’ of sin- In every other human instance sin has won its case - the death penalty has been granted universally (c-f. 5:12). But now Jesus, the

Judge's own son appears "in the flesh." Sin stakes its usual claim for him. But he has given sin no handle or foothold, and in this unique case it is the defendant who is acquitted and sin who is condemned. (J.A.T.Robinson, "Wrestling With Romans" 1979, page 94).

Robinson is not alone in this view. C.H.Dodd agrees:

"God, then condemned sin in the flesh. Once again the metaphor is from the law court... Sin is now a litigant at law, and the case goes against him; he is condemned. His claim has failed and his adversary gets the verdict." (C.H.Dodd, "The Epistle To The Romans," page 119- 1931).

So too John Murray:

"Did Christ in the work once for all accomplished do something decisively to the power of sin which can be construed as God's condemning sin in the flesh? The answer will have to be in the affirmative... And this is clearly the teaching of our Lord and of the Scriptures elsewhere. Jesus said with reference to his death, Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. John 12:31. Here the victory over the world and Satan is represented as a judgment executed, and judicial language is used to express it. (John Murray. "The Epistle To The Romans" page 278. 1967).

Surely this last reference puts the issue beyond doubt? There is in John's Gospel a continuing use of a judicial metaphor in which John weaves the Old Testament figure of God's lawsuit into its fabric. The first witness in the case is John the Baptist (1:6,7). Jesus Himself is the second witness, of whom John says "And what he hath seen and heard that he testifieth." Then Jesus testifies on His own behalf (5:31-37). The Scriptures next give evidence (5:39). The Jews attached great importance to two witnesses being necessary in a lawsuit, Jesus names Himself and His Father (8:17,18). The climax comes with the verse initially cited (12:31) when Satan, the prince of this world, loses his case because he has no hold over Jesus, "...for the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me." (14:30). In face of this it is not so much that a case has to be made for regarding the condemning of sin in Romans 8:3 to be figurative; it is those who claim that it is literal who have to show cause.

It is sometimes felt that metaphor is inferior to literal statement in its capacity to convey truth. Certainly there are some areas in which literality is obligatory, such as science and law. But when dealing with the ultimate realities it is literal language that fails. Metaphor, imagery and symbol are the only possible ways of expression, as the Bible from cover to cover takes for granted.

The meaning of Paul's metaphor and its effect on our understanding of the Atonement must be the subject of another article, but in the meantime let us ask ourselves one question, Is a belief that when Jesus hung upon the Cross the devil hung there dead a sufficient basis for the feelings of love and gratitude that countless believers have felt when contemplating the Cross? Or is it something deeper that Isaac Watts is trying to convey?

"Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were an offering far too small!  
Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all."

## Part Two

*In his first article on the Atonement Ron Coleman argued that Paul's statement that God condemned sin in the flesh when Jesus was crucified could not mean that God punished Jesus because of the human nature he inherited. Paul must be speaking metaphorically. Ron Coleman continues:*

When we seek to understand the meaning of a passage that contains a metaphor the most important thing is of course to recognize that there is a metaphor there. It is nearly as important however to be familiar with the world or culture from which the metaphor comes. When a translation of Mark 1:16-18

into an African language was being checked the translator was asked why he had not used the same word for catching men as for catching fish, the play on words being pointed out. “No” said the translator, “we couldn’t use that word. It would mean catching men to eat them.”

There is something similar in our own language about the word “condemn.” It has a much more restricted meaning than it had in the original. Its literal meaning for us is a judicial sentence pronounced in a criminal court. When we use it figuratively it has the same connotations and its primary meaning then is “to express strong disapproval.” But we would not use the word to describe the outcome of a civil action. If a plaintiff in a civil court had sued for, say, breach of contract, and the verdict had gone against him we would not say he had been “condemned.” We would merely say that he had lost his case or that the court had found against him. In the Bible however the word translated “condemned” is used in such a situation and it is often overlooked that in the majority of instances in the Bible the legal cases are civil, not criminal.

This explains why God Himself can appear in figure not just as the Judge in a court, but as an advocate. One example is Proverbs 23:10,11; “Never move an old boundary mark or take over land owned by an orphan. The Lord is their powerful defender, and he will argue their case against you.” (Good News Bible. With one exception, quotations not from the A.V. are in this translation). Sometimes God is pictured as an actual litigant, as in Isaiah 41:21, “The Lord, the King of Israel, has this to say: You gods of the nations, present your case. Bring the best arguments you have.”

Similarly, it is a civil case in Matthew 12:41,42, when the men of Nineveh and the queen of the south “will rise up in the judgment with this generation and will condemn it.” The picture is of “this generation” as the defendant - not a prisoner in the dock - who has lost his case. Obviously the men of Nineveh and the queen of Sheba could not have any *locus standi* either as prosecutor or judge in such an action. They are the plaintiffs. Many more such instances could be given, (e.g. Job ,10:2, 23:3-6, 31:35, Isaiah 50:8,9, Jeremiah 31:35). The evidence therefore is quite clear that the metaphor in Romans 8:3 is based on a civil action. God has sent His Representative His Son, to the court and He has won His case against Sin. Sin is therefore condemned. The illustration is not one of God arraigning His Son, and finding Him guilty because of the sinful human nature He inherited (but which He overcame), and passing sentence. As was shown in the first part of this article, such an explanation runs into exactly the same difficulties as do substitutionary theories of the Atonement - they are unjust. Once this meaning of “condemn” is understood we are delivered from all the strained arguments seeking to show that what is patently unjust is not so, as for example in “The Blood of Christ” -

“Jesus was the very nature condemned in Eden and therefore wrong was not done when he was impaled upon the cross. “It pleased the Lord to bruise him.” Would it please the Lord to do iniquity? Nay. Therefore it was right.”

A circular argument if ever there was one! “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree”

Before we go on to explore the positive meaning of Paul’s metaphor we must first deal with another passage which is frequently quoted in support of the interpretation which has just been rejected -Galatians 3:13, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.”

The traditional understanding of this is that since Jesus was born under the Mosaic dispensation He was required to keep the law. He did this perfectly. But because He submitted to God’s command and went to the Cross He came under the curse of the Law. This showed that the Law was imperfect and therefore it had to be ended. The difficulty about this is that it was not necessary for a perfectly sinless man to die to reveal this fault in the Law. All that was necessary was an innocent man who had been wrongly convicted. Such a man would suffer a double injustice. Not only would he be executed unjustly, but in addition he would be cursed unjustly by God because of the exposure of his body after execution. Such a law is clearly wrong from the start.

We have got into this difficulty partly because of a desperate search to find something to confirm a literal reading of Romans 8:3, and partly because we have not read Deuteronomy with sufficient care. When we examine it we can see that it doesn’t say what we might think it does. Paul actually quotes twice

from Deuteronomy, first from chapter 27 verse 26 to show that anybody who doesn't keep the whole law is cursed, and then from chapter 21 verses 22,23 to prove that a dead body hung on a tree brings a curse.

“If a man is guilty of a capital offence and is put to death, and you impale him on a stake, you must not let his corpse remain on the stake overnight, but must bury him on the same day. For an impaled body is an affront to God: you shall not defile the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess.” (Tanakh - Jewish Publication Society translation)

The situation is that a man is executed, by stoning according to verse 21, and his body is then put on a stake. This was a common practice at the time, particularly among the Assyrians and the Philistines. The Law controls this barbaric custom by limiting it to one day. There is no command that a corpse should be so treated; it was something that the people did of their own volition.

The text goes on to give a reason why the body should not be exposed for more than a day - “an impaled body is an affront to God.” This shows that the practice was something that God permitted but did not approve of. It wasn't the execution that defiled the land but the exposure of the body. The same conclusion must be reached from the text of the Authorized Version although the wording is more obscure. While it says “He that is hanged is accursed of God” it doesn't say that the man is accursed of God because he is hanged. The curse must obviously be on account of the crime that produced the situation.

There is no real parallel between this and Jesus. He had committed no crime, indeed He had not sinned in any way. He was not executed and then impaled and His dead body was only exposed for a brief period. Why then did Paul quote Deuteronomy? We have to bear in mind that he is in the middle of a strongly emotional argument with the Galatians who had said that the Gentiles could only come to God through the Law. “Nonsense” says Paul, Scripture showed that the true way to God was the way that Abraham came to Him, through faith. The Law came later than Abraham and was no more than a pedagogue, the slave whose job it was to take the children to school. Although Paul doesn't use the comparison himself, we can see that he saw that the Law was intended to be a crutch to help those who couldn't make the leap of faith that Abraham had made. But Christ and His death had made it possible for everybody to do what Abraham had done. Paul knew this from his own experience: “This life that I live now, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me.” (Galatians 2:20).

But the way that Jesus created that faith was immensely costly to Him. It was not just the terrible physical suffering but the degradation. Crucifixion was a punishment for slaves; no Roman citizen could be crucified. This dominated Paul's thought. We can see it coming out in 1 Corinthians 1:28 where he says that God had chosen base things, things which were despised, to effect His purpose, and Philippians 2:7 where he says that Jesus took on the form of a slave. This reference in Galatians is the equivalent of these passages.

### **How Quotations Are Used**

Paul has been arguing that the law can't save. It doesn't generate faith. It doesn't bring the gift of the Spirit. And then, for good measure, not only does it not bring the blessings of Abraham, it brings a curse. For if you fail in any way you are under a curse, as it says in Deuteronomy 27. And then the other reference to a curse would come into his mind and the similarity of being crucified to being impaled on a stake. The similarity is not the anger of God, the affront of God, but the shame, the undeserved shame, the degradation - degradation so great that Deuteronomy strictly limited exposure of the corpse even of a man who had been justly executed. The proof of this comes from something that always seems to be overlooked. Paul doesn't quote Deuteronomy exactly. He misses out two crucial words which are there both in the Septuagint and in the Hebrew text; “He that is hanged is accursed of God.” Paul doesn't say “of God” in Galatians.

Paul is quoting as Matthew did when he described Herod's murder of the babies in Bethlehem in the words of Jeremiah 31:15, “A sound is heard in Ramah, the sound of bitter weeping. Rachel is crying for her children; they are gone, and she refuses to be comforted.” Matthew cuts short the quotation at this point and omits the comforting promise in verses 16 and 17 that the children will come back from the land of the enemy to their own country. This is something that is often done. A striking phrase is lifted from its past context and given a new application. “To the manner born” today always means a superior station in life.

In Shakespeare's play all that Hamlet means by it is that he is used to ordinary Danish life and customs. What Paul is doing is seeking to move his readers by reminding them of the cost of their redemption. This he does by likening crucifixion to the grim penalty which was controlled in Deuteronomy. He is no more saying the two are identical than he meant that Jesus was literally a slave. He is not explaining the Atonement in a legal way.

He is seeking to move the Galatians to gratitude for what has been done for them and at such cost. No explanation of the Atonement is satisfactory that does not move believers to love and adoration.

His dying crimson, like a robe,  
spreads o'er His body on the Tree;  
then I am dead to all the globe.  
and all the globe is dead to me.

Brother Ron Coleman.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **The next four letters are correspondence between Brother Ron Coleman and Brother John Stevenson which centres round the above articles.**

Dear John, The Nazarene Fellowship has been the subject of articles in "Endeavour". Eight years ago I wrote a couple of articles on the Atonement in which I examined Edward Turney's differences with the Robertsian view at length. Briefly, I regard his criticisms of the "orthodox" view as completely justified. On the other hand I think the alternative he urges also has faults. I have a copy of "The Two Sons of God" and of most of Ernest Brady's pamphlets. Andrew Wilson (Christadelphian) deals with the history of the dispute in his "History of the Christadelphians 1864-1885" and Bryan Wilson (no relation) in "Sects and Society."

I enclose a copy of my two articles; there was to have been a third but I didn't receive a single comment, either pro or anti. As space was short in the next issue initially I postponed the final article, but eventually came to the conclusion that there was little point in continuing.

The whole dispute centres on the interpretation of a single verse, Romans 8:3. The interpretation that I put forward is supported by commentators generally. In the years since I wrote, several excellent new works on the Atonement have appeared and are compatible with my views. One recent example is "Past Event and Present Salvation," by Paul Fiddes, who confirms the central point of my argument:

"To see how the metaphor works... it is essential to recognize that it is not borrowed from a Roman law court but from a Hebrew one where all procedure was civil. There was no public prosecutor for any case, and the scene is thus of two litigants going to court, one accused of a crime by the other. The judge puts the accused either in the right ('justifies him') or in the wrong ('condemns him')..." Page 67.

Five years ago I had a long correspondence with Paul Danks but he is completely impervious to facts. One of the "heresies" I was accused of was denying that Britain was Tarshish. There is conclusive proof of my view in Stuart Piggot's "Ancient Britons and the Antiquarian Imagination." Professor Piggot, one of the most distinguished British antiquarians, gives chapter and verse for the origin of the idea. It was first put forward by John Twyne in 1590 and was taken up and popularized by Aylett Sammes "whose Phoenicians were to become part of British archaeological folklore almost until today" (Page 101). Danks refused to accept this and argued that Britain was the heir of the Phoenicians, giving completely spurious figures as to the involvement of Britain in international shipping. I proved my point by quoting the official statistics showing that Britain had only a relatively minor part in international shipping, but to no effect. Incidentally, he is a practising lawyer (that figures) which some Christadelphians of his kind would say was incompatible with Christadelphian belief.

I think you are under a misapprehension as to Andrew Wilson and the late Fred Pearce. They are (or were) both (Central Fellowship) Christadelphians, Fred Pearce especially being associated with "The Christadelphian Magazine."

With all best wishes, Ron Coleman 5th February 1998.

\* \* \*

## John Stevenson replies:

Dear Brother Ron, Thank you for your letter of the 5th February and your two articles on the subject of the Atonement, which I found interesting and thought-provoking. I would like to comment on several points you have made. But first, regarding the reference at the end of your letter to Andrew Wilson and Fred Pearce being both active members of the Christadelphian Central Fellowship. When I was at school in the thirties, my best school-mate was Fred Smith. In the forties I read about a convention of Fred Smiths in New York - over 200 hundred attended. I am confident that our Andrew Wilson and Fred Pearce were no relation to the two you mentioned. Incidentally we also had a member named John Carter. I think all three would have several namesakes around England.

In your first article on "The Most Important Doctrine Of All" you say that Christadelphian doctrine rejects all substitutionary explanations as immoral. That is because Christadelphians regard all substitutionary explanations as depicting a wrathful God venting His anger by punishing the innocent Saviour instead of the guilty sinners, and we agree that such concepts are immoral. But that is not our belief. Unfortunately Christadelphians misrepresent us by stating that it is our belief. You then say "Substitutionary explanations are those which say that Jesus offered Himself as a substitute on our behalf, and endured the punishment which should have fallen on us." We agree with that provided you understand that the punishment (or better, the consequence of Sin) was not from God. In fact the situation is quite the reverse. God offered His beloved only-begotten Son as a sacrifice to King Sin (or *diabolos*) that we might be spared. It was the servants of *diabolos* who imposed the death penalty on Jesus. I hope you will agree that our substitutionary explanation is not immoral, and also that it is consistent with Scripture. I wish Christadelphians could see that their representative theory is equally immoral as their concept of substitution. Besides which, it fails to explain how the condemnation of the innocent bearer of a serpent-nature could save sinners. As you well say, "It is inconsistent to condemn substitutionary explanations of the Atonement while embracing an explanation which appears to have the same defects."

Further on you quote or paraphrase Edward Turney thus: "Therefore Jesus too was not born with an inherited disposition towards sin, and His divine parentage on His Father's side enabled Him, the second Adam, to reject consistently and completely the temptations to sin." I think you may be mistaken here; I have not seen such a statement in Edward Turney's writings, and the Nazarene Fellowship has consistently rejected and objected to the Christadelphian theory that Jesus' divine parentage on His Father's side enabled Him to overcome sin. I would suggest that His recognition at an early age of His mission as Saviour and Redeemer motivated Him to overcome sin consistently. It could be argued that in a sense this recognition of His mission was due to God being His Father, but we have always opposed the concept that Jesus was specially strengthened by God to overcome sin.

At this point I would like to discuss some personal thoughts on the meaning of sin, misunderstanding of which can have important connotations. First let me make an analogy with the word "world," which strictly speaking means total human society. By careless misuse or by poetic licence, it has often been used as a synonym for planet Earth, so that nowadays most people would say that the word world means planet Earth. An example of careless misuse or poetic licence is seen in a popular song; "The world is like an apple spinning silently in space," where planet Earth is meant; and likewise the hymn "Praise the Lord! Let the earth hear His voice" where obviously the world of mankind is meant. The distinction is important in the New Testament, for example in John 1, Trinitarians interpret thus; "Christ created all the planets."

Coming back to the word "sin" which is a negative word, it seems to me that the primary and strictly literal meaning is failure and negligence. In contrast, evil-doing means a consciously deliberate

transgression. Nowadays the two meanings are confused in the mind of the public, as witnessed by the substitution of the word “sin” for “trespasses” in the World Council of Church’s copyrighted version of the Lord’s Prayer, which I would categorize as careless misuse rather than poetic licence. A true story from a magazine years ago will clarify my contention: A young woman was walking home from her office on a very hot summer afternoon, and passed a tenement block where about a hundred people were sitting on balconies and windowsills trying to get cool. A lout grabbed the woman’s handbag, but she hung onto it and would not let go, so the lout produced a knife and stabbed her, then ran off with the handbag. As the woman lay dying on the footpath, not one of the spectators moved to help her, or even to ring the police. I would argue that in that scenario we have one evildoer and a hundred sinners. The Mosaic Law prescribes two separate sacrifices, one for a sin-offering and another for a guilt-offering. So much for the theory; in practice it can be difficult to distinguish between sin and evil-doing. When a policeman stops a speeding motorist, I reckon the most common excuse he hears is “I forgot to watch my speedometer.” In proffering that excuse, the motorist is asserting that his misdemeanour was not a crime, but more forgivably just a sin. The policeman however would act on the basis that every motorist should know that there are legal speed limits, and should accept the obligation to keep an eye on the speedometer. An absent-minded driver who genuinely forgets to watch the speedometer can cause as much mayhem as an irresponsible speedster. I remember a line from “Skippy-rope,” a hit song of the sixties, about the appalling things grown-ups say, “Never mind the rules, we’re playing to win.” Of course we are all playing to win, but as soon as we say “Never mind the rules” we are sinners, and as soon as we knowingly contravene a rule, we are evildoers. Because there is no clear demarcation between sin and evil-doing, most people would think the distinction is not important, but I want to suggest that it may be very important in the study of Scripture. James did not say “sin is law-breaking” but “sin is lawlessness.” The man who stabbed the office girl was a criminal, guilty of murder. The hundred onlookers who watched her die without lifting a finger to help were sinners, but were just as guilty, although they would have denied any responsibility, because they did not commit any crime and didn’t want to get involved. Jesus did not say much about evil-doing being wrong because it is axiomatic; no-one needs be told. But He said a great deal about sin because its danger is not so obvious, especially in one’s own actions. The temptation to short-change our neighbours is rampant and incessant.

I am supported by Harry Emmerson Fosdick on pages 99 and 100 of his book “The Man From Nazareth” and I quote; “None could follow him without accepting as the essential constituent of discipleship a positive sacrificial loyalty that burned all bridges behind it. As for self-righteousness based on the observance of prohibitions, that seemed to Jesus the caricature of goodness. The morally self-satisfied, therefore, content in their respectability, found him an annoying person. Some of his sternest condemnations fell on people, not who did something wrong, but who did nothing. The priest and the Levite who went by on the other side and left the victim of the robbers unhelped, fell under his censure. What had they done? Nothing whatever. The condemned in the judgement to whom the Lord said “I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me,” faced doom because they had done nothing. The rich man who had fared sumptuously every day while Lazarus lay starving at his door, was condemned not for doing, but for not doing. The son who roughly answered his father’s command to work in the vineyard by saying, “I will not” but who “then went,” was praised by Jesus rather than the son who answered “I go sir” but who did not go. Negativeness was the disdain of Jesus. Once he told a parable, alike whimsical and urgently serious, about an unclean spirit, which having left a man to roam abroad, came back to find the house empty, swept and put in order, then into this vacant decent respectable habitation that unclean spirit brought seven others, and the last state of the man becomes worse than the first.

The importance of this is how it affects our behaviour. If I am pulled up for speeding, it is because I accidentally forgot to watch the speedometer. If my neighbour is similarly pulled up, it is because he was deliberately defying the law. This attitude is at its worst during wartime, when the public are persuaded that the enemy are all vicious dastardly criminals, while our side is bravely and unselfishly fighting for freedom and civilized values. But it pervades every part of our lives, when through laziness we prefer to sidestep rules, regulations, and laws, providing we can dodge the consequences. If I am correct about sin being a negative word, it is an insidious, duplicitous, seditious enemy.

The reason I have discussed this matter in depth is because I want to contest your contention that “the chief difficulty is that it is a universal experience that man is of his own nature inclined to evil... There is evidence of a feeling which we (or most of us) have in our bones.” Firstly I am always sceptical of so-

called scientific evidence from psychologists or psychiatrists. I would allow that some of us (but not most of us) have an overdose of guilty conscience built into our nature, and those people feel that our natures are inclined to evil. Secondly I think it is a fact that infants are sinful in the strictly negative sense (but not evil) in that they lack a sense of responsibility, compassion, co-operation, unselfishness, and respect, because all those values are learned in later childhood and youth. Obviously some of them never adequately learn social values, so that they may become compulsively lawless criminals, but most people develop a conscience which teaches them to discriminate between good and evil. How far we develop that is a matter for each individual according to his moral ability. Your suggestion that "Adam did not bequeath a genetic taint to his posterity, but he did bequeath something else, the beginnings of a society which is corrupt and alienated from God" sounds valid enough, but the reason I would never call it original sin is because that term is associated with the corrupt and unscriptural doctrine of the Roman Catholic and Christadelphian bodies that sin is ingrained in our flesh, making it impossible for us to be righteous. I strongly agree with the comment "There are degrees of responsibility which no human spectator can ever rightly estimate; it is God, not man who pronounces the last Judgment." Young people are dominated by self-preservation instincts and a bias to selfishness, which as adults we should tame and control. Laziness, tiredness, physical or mental exhaustion incline us to unethical short-cuts which are sin, and the path of sin leads to evil-doing. Enlightened believers are commanded to practice and live by righteousness; not to pass Judgment, but to respect and honour others as made in the image of God and to hope that they will some day recognize the Gospel Light that has come into the world.

Your concluding paragraphs to both articles are seemly and apt in indicating our best response to the crucifixion. I wish you had written a third article, to know what other thoughts you have on the subject. I do not dispute your contention that "God is able to simply forgive sins which are genuinely repented of, without the necessity for an innocent life to be sacrificed" and the Scripture references you support it with. However, on the other hand, God must have had very good reason to send His greatly beloved Son to be our Saviour and Redeemer by confronting the prince of this world and sacrificing His life for our sins. A contrary case could be made by referring to "No man cometh to the Father but by me" and other Scriptures. Your articles have gone a good way towards indicating the reason, and our literature should clinch it.

You mention in your letter that you have a copy of "The Two Sons of God" and most of Ernest Brady's pamphlets. May I counsel you to treasure them, they are worth their weight in gold, because they clearly set forth a reasonable, consistent, and scriptural explanation of the Atonement and of the relevance of the fall and the virgin birth, such as I have not seen anywhere else. At the same time you should take careful note of the comprehensive answers to the false accusations against our thesis. You will find that those booklets contain a great deal of valuable information and guidance, so I hope you can make time to examine them anew.

John Stevenson, 6.5.98

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### **Ron Coleman replies:**

Dear Brother John, Thank you for your letter of May 2nd and for your appreciation of my articles, I wish I could react similarly to the thoughts you advance in your letter but I have to say that your exposition seems to me to be flawed, not necessarily because of the theology, but because of a serious misunderstanding as to the nature of language and how it works. I say this because you adopt what is known as the "word-concept fallacy." This regards each word as having a "proper" meaning so that to use it in any other way is an error. Such a view is as fundamentally wrong, in its own way, as it would be to confuse "elements" and "compounds" in chemistry. A glance at any dictionary should demonstrate that it is wrong. As an example, the Collins dictionary lists (with examples of use) no fewer than 30 meanings of "world," all equally legitimate. My "Shorter Oxford English Dictionary" (2,600 pages!) includes many more.

Although "world" came originally from the Old English "wereold" in which its meaning was 'age' or 'life of man,' alternative meanings arose before even Middle English. By Milton's time "world" had

acquired the meaning which you deprecate as a current innovation (“planet earth”), Milton pictures Adam and Eve leaving Eden:

Some natural tears they dropped but wiped them soon;  
The world was all before them, where to choose  
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.  
They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow,  
Through Eden took their solitary way.  
[To an uninhabited world]

Polysemy (“many meanings”) is a fact about words in many languages, particularly English. The principle is that “words mean what their users intend them to mean.” Of course if a new usage is introduced it will not be understood at first but it soon catches on. “Gay” meaning “homosexual” is a case in point. In the same field “gender,” actually a grammatical word which has no necessary connection with sex, has (in this country at any rate) supplanted “sex,” now considered too “steamy” (another neologism).

There is confirmation of what I am arguing for in the Lord’s Prayer itself, for it is quite clear that Jesus regarded “debts” (Matthew 6:12) as having the same meaning as “trespasses” (v.15); the difference is not just a quirk of translation for there are two different Greek words. In verse 12 it is “*opheilema*” “which expresses sin metaphorically as a debt because it demands expiation.” In verse 15 it is “*paraptoma*” which means “A false step, a blunder, a deviation from uprightness and truth.” (Vine: “Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words”). The reason why the translation you mention (in common with every one of the 15 modern translations that I have) has dropped “trespasses” is because its meaning has changed since Tyndale’s time. It now has a much more restricted meaning than in the 16th century viz. “Unlawful encroachment on to some other person’s property.”

As regards the word “world” you have been misled by confining your study to English versions. It is necessary to know first of all how the Greek word (“*cosmos*”) is used in the New Testament. I enclose a short extract from G.B.Caird’s “Language and Imagery of the Bible” which shows how necessary it is to go to the Greek, (I do not claim to be a Greek scholar; it is only that I refer to lexicons and concordances). I would recommend Caird’s book as the most valuable I have encountered on the use of language in the Bible. It is still in print (publisher Duckworth), costs about £12 here and should be obtainable in Australia.

James indeed didn’t say “sin is lawbreaking;” however neither did he say “sin is lawlessness” but if he had it would not necessarily have meant anything different.

Once again if you consult a dictionary you will see that “lawless” has a series of meanings such as (1) without law, (2) disobedient to the law; (3) contrary to or heedless of the law; (4) unbridled (e.g. rage). James did say however (4:18) “Therefore that to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him that is sin.” However in your illustration I do not think it is right to say that the spectators who did not intervene “were just as guilty” as the criminal. They were guilty (collectively) but of a much less heinous sin than the murderer.

Although, as I have mentioned, I have a wide range of translations I have never encountered one by the World Council of Churches. I am however very familiar with the United Bible Societies translation into English. This is only one of a large family of “Common Language Translations” into hundreds of languages throughout the world. I mention the UBS particularly because it also publishes an extensive literature on the methods and science of translation which is informed by the wide variation of languages they deal with, all of which have individual peculiarities that have to be catered for. For example, how do you translate from English into a language that has no passive voice? A translator into an African language was criticized for not translating literally “I will make you fishers of men.” He retorted that the only word for fishing in his language meant to catch fish and eat them. The UBS have published “Translator’s Guides” to nearly all the books of the Bible, of which I have thirty or so. I have also subscribed for more than twenty years to their quarterly publication “The Bible Translator.”

I write this way because I feel it was unfortunate of you to refer to the translation you mention as showing “careless misuse.” You, an amateur, are suggesting that dedicated professionals are not up to the

job. Incidentally, although copyright subsists in any original work without need for a formal claim being made, one can't copyright the translation of any individual word, for obvious reasons.

Sincerely yours, Ron Coleman.

\* \* \*

### **John Stevenson's second reply:**

Dear Brother Ron, Thank you for your letter of the 15th May and your comments on my previous letter which I obviously failed to formulate with sufficient clarity and coherence. I will try again more carefully.

I was interested that you have a wide range of translations of the Bible. I also have been collecting various English translations for the past fifty years. I sometimes wonder whether my collection is the most comprehensive in Australia, and perhaps in the southern hemisphere, although I have no way of knowing. Your range would surely be wider because in your part of the world you would have better access to the various translations. I did not mean to imply that the World Council of Churches had done a translation of the Bible; I am sure they have not. But I thought it was common knowledge that they had the nerve to formally copyright their version of the Lord's Prayer, which they allow member churches (whose membership is based on the simple affirmation that "Jesus Christ is God"), to use it with due acknowledgement. If they are "dedicated professionals" then I am more than happy to remain in the amateur category,

I also have a large collection of various dictionaries, because I have always been interested in the precise meaning of words and their changes over time. I have two copies of the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, a 1985 edition which was presented to me by a daughter, and a first edition (1933). It is rare nowadays for a word to radically change its meaning. A few can be found by comparing last century's dictionaries with modern ones. But I would argue that only a very small fraction of words have changed or even reversed their meanings, and in most cases it happened when the English language was young, centuries ago. To me it seems that the authentic function of a dictionary is to define the precise standard meaning of a word in its general usage, as a reference for people who use English. I notice that old dictionaries, published last century or early this century, appear to conform well to that function. But modern dictionaries, compiled in the post-war period, seem to have almost forgotten that primary function, and go for profusion and confusion in order to aim at ultimate comprehensiveness, listing as many variations and deviations as they can find in the modern usage of words.

I argue very strongly that the vast majority of words have a single, standard, clearly defined meaning; and that words with more than one unrelated meaning are distinctly in a very small minority. Consequently I must take issue with you on the matter of the "word-concept fallacy." Disregarding for the moment the words I discussed in my previous letter ("world" and "sin"), I would argue that the vast majority of words do have a proper, standard, generally accepted meaning, and that a glance at any dictionary would NOT show that this is wrong, but would clearly demonstrate that for the vast majority of words it is correct. You say that "polysemy" is a feature of many languages, particularly English, and that the principle is that words mean what their users intend them to mean. You give as an example "gay" meaning homosexual. As a matter of fact and of principle, I will not use the word gay in its non-dictionary sense, and I am sure I'm not the only one. Probably the best-known quotation from Lewis Carrol is Humpty Dumpty's assertion "When I use a word, it means exactly what I want it to mean, neither more nor less," and the reason for the notoriety of that quotation is its manifest absurdity. If words mean whatever you want them to mean, what is the purpose of dictionaries? So, if I had to choose between the "word-concept fallacy" and Polysemy, I would unhesitatingly and categorically prefer the former. This does not mean that I would argue semantics several times a day, because it is generally easy to perceive when a word is used (or misused) in a sense different to its primary meaning by the general public. For example, if someone said to me "stealing is a sin," I would accept that without dispute or comment; but if I were to make the statement, I would use the word "crime." Manifestly, sin has been in use in the positive sense of evildoing as well as the primitive negative sense for generations. In fact going right back to the translators of the Authorized Version. The old Anglican general confession includes "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done"

- those are labelled sins of omission, - “and we have done those things which we ought not to have done” - these are labelled sins of commission.

For another example, I have an interesting book entitled “The Traveller’s guide to the Solar System,” in which the authors describe numerous celestial bodies which they call “worlds,” which they define as any celestial body more than a thousand kilometres in diameter. This is obviously a very artificial definition, but it serves their purpose, because in addition to the planets, they include many of the larger satellites, and even Ceres, the largest asteroid. At the end of the book they describe some smaller bodies, pointing out that these are not “worlds” in the scope of their arbitrary definition. I do not complain about their use of the word “world,” although if I had been commissioned to write the book, I would have simply used “celestial bodies.” But there is no point in entering into argument in this particular case; and again the popular concept that world can sometimes mean Planet Earth goes right back to the translators of the Authorized Version. However when you or I do some serious Bible study, we need to know that the Greek word “*cosmos*” which is legitimately translated “world” in the sense of human society, does definitely NOT mean planet earth. For instance take the word “*cosmos*” used in John chapter one, verses 9 and 10. Trinitarians would insist that these verses prove that the pre-existent Christ created the planets. And Humpty Dumpty, together with some other polysemists, would emphatically agree that it is a legitimate interpretation.

Apart from the Word-concept Fallacy on the one hand, and polysemy on the other, there is a third and far better alternative, and that is that when a subject is to be discussed in which a certain word could be understood in various ways (such as the word “soul”), then before commencing the discussion, that word should be very clearly and carefully defined, and the reasons stated for the limiting of its meaning for the purpose of the proposed discussion. That is what I should have done, and will try to do more carefully this time. Now, down to business.

I have to contest your contention that it is a universal experience that man is of his own nature inclined to evil; that it is easier to do evil than to do good; that although Adam did not bequeath a genetic taint to his posterity, he did bequeath the beginnings of a society which is corrupt and alienated from God. Before commencing this deliberation I must make a restricted definition of the word “sin” because it is vitally important, as you will see, to my analysis of the issues involved. Long ago, in various religious studies, I learned that sin is a negative word, and strictly means failure. This is unsupported by dictionaries, although “the etymology is much disputed.” But for the purpose of this present discussion I define sin in what I believe to be its primitive negative sense, that is, sins of omission, in order to distinguish it from the positive expression evil-doing, because the distinction is vital to my thesis. I have not been able to find another word that would do as well. Perhaps negligence and nonchalance could stand in for my restricted negative definition of sin; other words are irresponsibility, evasion, failure, dereliction, but none of these quite fits my meaning, and all are offensive to God and therefore included under sin.

A youth signed an apprenticeship with a master carpenter, who instructed him “One of the most important things to learn is to avoid mistakes, like cutting a beam too short, or boring a hole in the wrong place. If you learn well to avoid mistakes, you will be well on the way to becoming a good carpenter.” That evening the apprentice was anxious and disturbed regarding the problem of mistakes. He then decided on a plan; he locked his toolbox and hid it in the attic, and threw away the key. Thus he made sure that he would never make mistakes. But he also made sure, like a monk in a monastery, that he would never learn how to do things the right way. There is a Jewish mitzvah which says “Thou shall not stand idle whilst thy neighbour bleeds.” Why not? I like standing idle. I didn’t make my neighbour bleed; that’s his problem. I am not doing anything wrong. And if I did go to help, I might be sued later on for applying the tourniquet wrongly. So I would rather be a sinner and stay out of trouble. But Jesus taught that refraining from evil-doing, though important, is not enough, it is just a first step. If I were in an accident and haemorrhaging dangerously, I would be yelling for help. So when my neighbour bleeds I should jump to it and not wait to be called. Please refer again to Matthew 25:41 to 46. Those cursed people were condemned not for doing anything wrong, but for not loving their neighbours. If you equate “sin” with “evil-doing” you could easily miss the point. While acknowledging that in modern English, sin and evil-doing are synonymous, we must nevertheless find a way of comprehending that a self-righteous observance of prohibitions is a shabby caricature of righteousness.

Is human nature intrinsically evil? As an earthy animal, humans are very successful, being more cunning than any other animal. As an image of God we are mostly far short of His likeness. I believe that

seeds of good as well as seeds of evil are implanted in our natures. Most people want to be respected and accepted, and as social animals we are motivated to respect and improve civilized society and to help our neighbours. Many of us want to do good, and find it easy to do good, and enjoy doing good. But what we must understand and learn to cope with is that it is too easy to fail to do good when we feel tired or lazy or anxious, and it is also too easy to do evil if we think the consequences can be dodged. I agree that the world (i.e. human society) is corrupt and alienated from God, but that is a generalization. Many individuals in society are not corrupt; many (especially women) show kindness and helpfulness to others habitually.

Some years ago I had to take some furniture to an empty shop premises, and I was unloading bookshelves which were almost too heavy to handle. An Asian man in a neat business suit came out of the adjacent shop, and I asked him if he could spare a minute to help me lift it over to the doorway. He replied “no” and walked away. I thought to myself that it was sad that Asian people were often callous and selfish. Next day I was unloading a desk, which was lighter so that I could manage it. An Asian woman, wheeling her baby in a pram, was approaching; she parked the pram against the wall and walked over to me and said “Can I help?” Besides feeling grateful for her kindness, I also felt a shock of guilt that I had presumed to tar all Asians with the same black brush. The smart Asian business man might have had good reason for refusing to help (though I would have expected him to mention it). There is infinite wisdom in the policy of the three wise monkeys; always give the benefit of any doubt, do not take any scandal seriously until you have heard the other side, and if you have a low opinion of anyone, keep it to yourself until you are facing that person.

A minority of people do believe that our basic human nature is thoroughly evil and nothing much can be done about it. One of my sisters is convinced of that, although I have not been able to pursue the subject far with her, because logic is not one of her strengths. Yet, despite her belief, she is notably kind, helpful, generous, and pleasant. I feel that people who embrace that belief are afflicted with a sense of insecurity and a lack of trust in their own competence. Learning what constitutes evil and how to subdue and control it, is no easy task, and can take a lifetime for some of us. Understanding that, explains why God, who is good, allows rampant evil in this world. There is no doubt that many people are deliberate compulsive evil-doers. It seems that they are mentally and emotionally diseased, and we do not understand the reasoning defects and the adverse social environment factors that led to their warped characters. Some Bible texts seem to indicate that humanity is rankly evil, but I think these are generalizations implying that the people have strayed, not that human nature is basically evil. Otherwise how could God ask us to choose between good and evil; between life and death? Society is corrupt and alienated from God because the most extrovert opportunistic selfish people covet positions of power, from which they can exploit and mislead the masses. God is well aware of that and in His wisdom allows it to continue. The righteousness He asks of us is perfect righteousness. Not being good when we feel like it, or when convenient, or when it is profitable, but all the time, when it is difficult, when it is costly, when we would prefer to thump someone. In the Kingdom, nobody will step out of line. Probably the most insidious temptation is “You must look after number one, because nobody else will.” That can be rebuked by a little real faith in God.

I now turn to the question of substitution. If Christadelphians reject all substitutionary explanations of the Atonement as immoral, it is because they mistakenly believe that all substitutionary explanations declare that an angry vengeful God is punishing the innocent Saviour in order to let guilty sinners go free. We agree that such explanations are utterly immoral and also contrary to Scripture. But when you say that “substitutionary explanations are those which say that Jesus offered Himself as a substitute on our behalf, and endured the punishment which should have fallen on us,” we agree with that absolutely, and it is supported by all Scripture, so long as you do not bring into the picture a wrathful vengeful God who needs to pay someone out; which concept is of course opposed to all Scripture. You might well ask who then did punish Jesus? I can give a fair answer borrowing from your own words; He was executed by a corrupt and evil society alienated from God, bequeathed by Adam. He was murdered by the servants of *diabolos*. He was done to death by the highest religious authority, the Sanhedrin, and the highest civil authority, the Roman governor representing the Emperor. It would be very wrong to blame the Jews for killing Jesus, because the common people heard Him gladly. The temple guards were unable to arrest Him because no man ever spoke like this man speaks. Jesus was dispatched by the respectable authorities, who happened to be Jewish because His mission was to God’s chosen people. (See end note 1). To assume that, because God sent His Son to save us by dying for us, that therefore God was punishing Jesus instead of us, is a slipshod, desultory, shallow notion, which is rightly repudiated. So where does God fit into this scenario? The answer is simple and clear. God greatly loved His Son, He said so repeatedly. He also loved us

descendants of Adam, despite our waywardness. (see end note). He sent His beloved Son to us to call us to repent and be saved, despite knowing what we would do to Him. And Jesus consented to go on that mission, despite knowing the appalling outcome, because He loved His Father, and also loved us while we were yet sinners. And God decreed that the public bloodshedding which we inflicted on His innocent Son would be a formal sacrifice to King Sin (or *diabolos*) to redeem those of us who repent, from the wages of The Sin of the world, of Eden.

Many might understandably wonder why should that formality be declared, when, as you said, “Why cannot God simply forgive sins which are genuinely repented of, without it being necessary for an innocent life to be sacrificed?” and you quote from Scripture in support of that. I would never dispute that God is KING OF THE UNIVERSE, and the King can do no wrong. But the inescapable fact remains that God ordained an explicit, lucid, ceremonial formality, to send His beloved Son as a substitutionary sacrifice, to redeem mankind from bondage to the metaphorical Devil, so that we might be forgiven and saved. I re-iterate here that the Nazarene Fellowship understanding of the Atonement is unique in being thoroughly consistent, complete, comprehensible, logical, completely consistent with Scripture, integrating a clear understanding of the fall and of the virgin birth, and leaving no problem questions unanswered, but shows the surpassing love of God for His creatures.

So why was this necessary if God could just forgive us? You will agree that repentance is necessary. Where would you and I be if Jesus had not gone to His death to call us to repentance? We would be as the Philistines, the Greeks, and Egyptians of old. This redeeming sacrifice was enacted in a small Roman province in Palestine, but it has echoed to the ends of the earth; everyone has heard of Jesus the Son of God and Saviour and Redeemer of men. A perfectly good, righteous, and innocent man was condemned to death by the world’s highest authorities, showing that this world is totally out of step with righteousness and justice. No-one in the world who hears the Gospel can remain sitting on the fence; he must either accept it or reject it. He who claims to be agnostic has already rejected it. The Atonement has demonstrated the ultimate authority of divine law. God has shown that He loves us and desires us to turn about and be saved. But it is necessary for us to acknowledge our failings, and accept that Jesus’ death in our stead was His suffering the penalty due to us all.

I hope I have been able to bring some clarity to the problem of the Atonement. But if, as a Christadelphian, you are bound to the doctrine that all substitutionary explanations are immoral, then we will have to agree to differ. We can continue to study and look forward to the day when the Lord returns and will reveal all secrets. May it be soon!

Yours sincerely, John Stevenson.

\* The two sentences thus marked have been slightly amended from the original letter in order to avoid any possible ambiguity. J.S.

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## **Further comments on Brother Ron Coleman’s articles by Brother Russell Gregory:**

We published some correspondence between Brother Ron Coleman and Sister Helen Brady in our Circular Letter No 169 for Jan/Feb 1998 in which Helen referred to these articles and she points out that Ron Coleman misquotes Edward Turney when he writes that

“Therefore Jesus’... divine parentage on His Father’s side enabled Him, the second Adam, to reject consistently and completely the temptation to sin.”

This was not Edward Turney’s belief and teaching but that of Robert Roberts and it is incorporated in the B.A.S.F. in Clause IX where it states that “It was this mission which necessitated the miraculous

begetting of Christ... enabling Him to bear our condemnation, and, at the same time, to be a sinless bearer thereof..." This is a Christadelphian doctrine which is opposed by us as being a lie and therefore inconsistent with Bible teaching, for "Jesus was tempted in all points as we are yet without sin."

It is obvious from this error that Ron Coleman cannot claim to understand the teaching of Edward Turney and what is even more surprising is that he does not know what he as a Christadelphian is supposed to believe though parading under the banner of the B.A.S.F.

I must comment on some strange reasoning where Ron Coleman says in reply to the question he himself poses,

"Were sins before the time of Christ only forgiven provisionally? The answer that is given is that it would be contrary to God's principles of law and justice if sins were forgiven without the shedding of blood. But this is contrary to the teaching of both Old and New Testaments..."

And the illustrations he gives are supposed to show that sins are forgiven without the shedding of blood. Thus the message of the Gospel that Salvation came by Jesus Christ by forgiveness available only through Him means nothing to Ron Coleman. Where the need for the crucifixion if God was prepared to forgive sins without the shedding of Christ's blood? Ron Coleman would make the word of God of non effect.

Another question posed is

"If there is no external evil principle which induces temptation (Satan), surely its only source must be inside ourselves?"

As if to attempt to show a parallel to some sort of genetically transmitted taint in our bodies prompting us to do wrong he says, "Very recent work is on the point of proving that a tendency to alcoholism is genetically conveyed." It may come as a surprise to Ron Coleman but one cannot know that one is on the point of proving anything. Not until a matter is proven can one say with hindsight that they were on the point of it. As far as a genetically transmitted taint is concerned which is supposed to be in our bodies making us inclined to sin is something which has never been on the point of being proved.

The source of temptation is indeed inside us, as James tells us - "every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust" (James 1:14), and it is called free will or choice. It is our God given opportunity and it came with Law. With law comes choice and law without freewill is useless. You cannot give a moral law to any of the lower animals. Because God loved mankind He gave us law in order to help us build good characters. Temptation to go against God's law is not wrong for it gives us the opportunity to resist it and do what is right and good, and show God we love Him in return. Transgression of God's law is sin and if we choose that path we cannot be pleasing to our Creator.

Yet another point Ron Coleman would have us believe is that

"Because of our natures, error-prone and distorted by alienation from God, this (righteousness) is something we always find difficult and often impossible. But how difficult depends on our heredity and the example that has been set us by parents and the society in which we live."

Alienation from God is a fact of life before baptism into the death of Jesus Christ, but it is quite wrong to suppose that alienation has made our natures error-prone and distorted, while to say that righteousness is often impossible is an affront to our Maker who asks this very thing of us. How much more difficult it is for some than others is not our place to judge, of course, but God gives us the strength we need if we ask Him. There is no point in having Jesus Christ as our example and then denying that we can receive the same strength from the same source.

There are two matters of particular concern which I want to deal with in more depth. Firstly, the supposed metaphor in the last five words of Romans 8:3, and secondly, wherein lies the immorality in most

views of the Atonement. A matter overlooked by Ron Coleman and which undoes most of what he has written

The five words with which we are concerned in Romans 8:3 are "... condemned sin in the flesh" which Ron Coleman makes out to be a metaphor but this is not a metaphor and its meaning is understood and all confusion disappears once we realize and appreciate that the context of this verse is how, why and when Jesus Christ condemned sin. To help see this we ask the questions:-

Question. When did Jesus Christ suffer?

Answer: When He was in the flesh. (1 Peter 4:1).

Question: What does it mean to be "in the flesh"?

Answer: In this case it means to be in a natural body, that is, before His resurrection.

Question: How did Jesus condemn sin?

Answer: By proving that law can and should be kept which He did perfectly. He even went beyond the requirements of law and asks us to do the same. This proves that there is nothing wrong with the way God made us and we cannot blame anyone but ourselves for doing wrong. God has never given man a law he cannot keep, and sin, which is transgression of law, is rightly condemned by Jesus Christ.

Question: When did Jesus condemn sin?

Answer: When He was in the flesh. That is, while He was in a natural body.

In this part of his letter to the Romans Paul is dealing with the condemnation of sin and shows how we can escape the consequence of sin through Jesus Christ. He does not talk of condemnation of our flesh. Once we see this fact then the idea of sin being an element in the flesh is seen to be foolishness. It is adding to Scripture a doctrine foreign to the Gospel. Indeed, the notion that sin can dwell in our literal flesh is as stupid as to imagine that there are microbe sized men dwelling in our flesh and swimming about in every drop of blood in our veins just because we read in 1 Peter 4:6 of "men in the flesh." If there is "sin-in-the-flesh" then why not "men-in-the-flesh"? This is obviously silly but no more so than sin, which is abstract, dwelling in our flesh and blood, according to Clause V of the B.A.S.F. - "which defiled and became a physical law of his being, and was transmitted to all his posterity."

Turning now to the doctrine of the Atonement, or Reconciliation (a better word), Christadelphians state that all substitutionary explanations of the Atonement are immoral. Wherein are such explanations immoral? We are told that it would be wrong to punish an innocent man in order to let the guilty go free. Agreed, so wherein is it wrong to punish one instead of the other? Such a view means that God punished Jesus Christ by crucifixion, the innocent man died, in order that we, the sinners, might not die. This line of reasoning states that God killed His own Son instead of putting us sinners to death. But how can any one believe that God would be guilty of murdering His Own well-beloved Son? We condemn any explanation of the Atonement which embraces such an awful belief and the very thought of it ought to make us shudder; it is so obviously and horribly wrong.

However, it is the Christadelphian view which is also, and rightly, condemned by Ron Coleman when he says that it is "unjust for an innocent man to be condemned to judicial execution because of an inherited taint, above all when He has resisted and overcome at great cost the effects of that taint." The Christadelphians, then, are guilty of the very same immoral teaching for which they condemn Edward Turney and the Nazarene Fellowship. If it was so wrong for God to have killed His own Son why do the Christadelphians falsely charge us with such a belief yet boast of this immoral doctrine in Clause 12 of the B.A.S.F. where it is categorically stated that Jesus Christ was murdered by God - "He was put to death by the Jews and Romans, who were however, but instruments in the hands of God..."? It is useless trying to excuse this Clause by saying it doesn't mean what it says. If a murderer stabs someone in the heart it is no use saying he is innocent as it was, after all, the knife in his hand which killed the victim. This Clause 12 states categorically that the Jews and Romans were but instruments in God's hands. Therefore, according to this Clause, it was God who was responsible for killing His own beloved Son. If Christadelphians say it was immoral for Jesus to die as a substitute because it means that God killed Him in place of us, how can they say that there was no wrong done for God to kill Jesus Christ as our representative?

Furthermore, Clause 12 goes on to say that Jesus Christ was put to death by instruments in the hands of God “for delivering this (Gospel) message.”! How can anyone in their right mind believe Clause 12?

We thank God that there is a true substitutionary explanation of the Atonement which does not commit us to believing in the immoral doctrines of men and it is this:-

In God’s foreknowledge He knew what would happen to His Son if He was left in the hands of wicked men and so was able to tell the serpent in the Garden of Eden that “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel” referring of course to the crucifixion.

This tragic event has been turned into a blessing for those with faith such as Abraham’s by making it the means of their salvation. God did not punish Adam for his sin and neither did He punish Jesus Christ for it instead. It was not a matter of punishment but of saving mankind through love, mercy, compassion and forgiveness shown by both God and Jesus Christ- In this the Father and the Son are one.

Was it wrong for God to leave His Son in the hands of evil men to die in this way? Not necessarily. It would have been wrong if Jesus Christ had been unwilling, but Jesus knew the reason for His sacrifice was for the salvation of the faithful and for this cause He willingly gave His life. When Jesus Christ asked “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me” it was left for us to find the answer.

What Jesus Christ did was the greatest act of self-sacrifice of all time. A true sacrifice indeed and not a metaphor as Ron Coleman would have us believe. A sacrifice foreshadowed in Eden and in the Law of Moses. God did not want Adam to die and He does not want us to die; as we read, “The Lord... is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Forgiveness is possible only through Jesus Christ after He had shed His blood.

God provided the sacrifice (as Abraham saw He would) by begetting Jesus Christ of Mary, and Jesus Christ offered Himself up willingly; it was not God who killed Him but wicked men. Consequently, the fact that Jesus Christ died in place of Adam and all in him is the substitutionary explanation that is in keeping with all Scripture, and while we rejoice in the prospect of eternal life brought about by such unselfish love we are very mindful of the price paid, even the shedding of the precious blood of God’s only begotten Son.

When it comes to things of the spirit it is surely much safer to be amateurs, dependent on prayer and taught of God than to be dependent on scholarly learning. There is a saying which is most apt in this regard and it is that “Amateurs built the Ark, professionals built the Titanic.” We all know which we would have chosen to sail in.

Jesus Christ did not choose His twelve disciples from the educated circles of the Sadducees and Pharisees but of more humble men. Scholarly achievement may have its place as with the most dedicated of professionals, Saul of Tarsus - “but what things were gain to me,” wrote Paul to the Philippians, chapter 3 verses 7 and 8, “those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him...”

Brother Russell Gregory.