

Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No. 196

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Editorial

Dear Sisters, Brothers and Friends, Loving Greetings

Elijah the Tishbite is described in the Concordance as the grandest and most romantic character that Israel ever produced. He is described as appearing mysteriously from an unknown background, fighting as a soldier of the Lord against heathen gods, championing the downtrodden, performing miracles and vanishing up to heaven in a blazing chariot.

The first mention of Elijah is in about the year 864 BC, half way through the reign of Ahab, surely the wickedest of the Hebrew kings. Ahab became lax in his religious observances under the dominance of his wife Jezebel who as part of her household maintained four hundred and fifty priests of Baal as well as four hundred prophets of Asherah. The Israelite priests and prophets who protested at these pagan ways were suppressed or driven out. Elijah foretold a drought of three years as a punishment. He then sought refuge near Sidon. There a poor widow with a son took him in and by a miracle the three of them survived on her meagre supply of flour and oil until the drought ended but the boy fell ill and died and the bereft widow blamed Elijah for this. Three times Elijah stretched out on the small inert form, praying to God to restore it to life and the child revived.

Elijah was told by the Lord to present himself again to King Ahab, who said to him "is it you, you troubler of Israel?" Elijah flung back that it was not he but Ahab and his household that troubled Israel for they had forsaken the Lord and worshipped Baal.

The King acceded to Elijah's demand that an assembly be arranged on top of Mount Carmel, in order to witness a trial of strength between the prophet and the priests of Baal. Elijah said to the crowd, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him," Elijah proposed that the prophets of Baal should cut up a bullock and lay the pieces on firewood. He would do likewise, and they would see which divinity would send down fire to consume the sacrifice.

From morning till noon the priests leapt around their altar crying out to Baal, but there was no answer. Elijah taunted them; "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is musing, or he has gone aside, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." As the afternoon wore on, the priests worked themselves into a frenzy slashing themselves with knives and spears until their blood flowed. But there was "no voice, no one answered, no one heeded." Towards evening Elijah stepped forward and using twelve

stones, one for each of the tribes of Israel he rebuilt an old altar to the Lord that had fallen to pieces. He cut up his bullock, laid the pieces on the firewood and dug a trench round the altar. He had some of the bystanders bring buckets of water which they poured over the altar, the meat and the wood and filling the trench. Then Elijah called, "Answer me O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that thou, O Lord art God, and that thou turned their hearts back." At that cry, fire came down on to the altar, consumed the sacrifices and the wood and even licked up the water in the trench. The crowd shouted; "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God," and they fell on their faces in awe. Elijah took full advantage of the situation to have the priests of Baal seized and dragged down to the Kishon River in the valley below, where they were all slain. This confrontation on Mount Carmel ranks as the most dramatic moment in the centuries of struggle between Hebrew monotheism and the seductive pagan cults that constantly eroded it.

When the formidable Jezebel heard her priests had been put to death she demanded the same for Elijah and so he had to flee for his life. This time to Beersheba and there he left his servant and went, alone and depressed, into the wilderness. After walking all day he sank down exhausted under a bush of desert gorse and gave way to despair begging God to let him die. While he slept he dreamt an angel tapped him on the shoulder and when he awoke he found food and water to hand. This happened twice and on the strength of these two little meals Elijah started off on a remarkable forty day trek across broken desert terrain until he reached Mount Sinai, where Moses had first received the Law from the hand of God.

While spending a night in a cave God spoke to Elijah and asked what he was doing there. Sorrowfully he replied that the children of Israel had deserted the Lord, his prophets were being put to death and only Elijah was left clinging to his faith and for that they wanted to kill him. Outside the cave the landscape was convulsed by gale, earthquake and fire. Elijah stood at the mouth of the cave covering his face with his robe and as a "still small voice" God came to him and told him to retrace his steps to the wilderness of Damascus. Hazael would become king in Damascus and Jehu in Israel. Their people would destroy each other except for seven thousand faithful Israelites,... "all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

Elisha would continue Elijah's work. And so it came to pass and when Elijah was going through the Jordan valley on his way back he came upon the young Elisha ploughing on his father's land and Elijah threw his cloak over the young man who at once accepted his calling and remained a faithful disciple until the end of the great prophet's life on earth. Elijah was to have one final encounter with his old adversary Ahab. The king wanted Naboth's vineyard and went to bed in a sulk when Naboth refused to part with it. So the vile Jezebel arranged for Naboth to be falsely convicted of blasphemy and stoned to death. Then his property went to the king. Ahab visited his ill-begotten gain and Elijah appeared before him and fiercely denounced him, "Have you killed and also taken possession?" Elijah told of the doom awaiting Ahab and his whole household and that the dogs would eat Jezebel. At this Ahab rent his clothes and repented and the Lord deferred the fulfilment of Elijah's curse. But in due time it all came to pass as he had said.

Elijah was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire when walking with Elisha who picked up the fallen mantle of Elijah.

I read that according to Jewish tradition at the Brith Milan or circumcision of a Jewish child it is the custom to place a chair for Elijah in the hope that he will protect the baby. Also at the Passover meal an extra cup of wine is poured for Elijah and some families draw up an empty chair at the table for him. During the service the door is flung open to let him in. One of the favourite songs of the Passover evening is:

Elijah the Prophet
Elijah the Tishbite
Elijah the Gileadite
May he come quickly to us
with the Messiah.

Amen to that,

Love to all. Helen Brady

Following on the subject of Gnosticism which was raised in our last Circular Letter we are grateful for the following information taken from the NIV Study Bible and sent to us by a reader: -

One of the most dangerous heresies of the first two centuries of the church was Gnosticism. Its central teaching was that spirit is entirely good and matter is entirely evil. From this unbiblical dualism flowed five important errors.

1. Man's body, which is matter, is therefore evil. It is to be contrasted with God, who is wholly spirit and therefore good.

2. Salvation is the escape from the body, achieved not by faith in Christ but by special knowledge {the Greek word for "knowledge" is *gnosis*, hence Gnosticism}.

3. Christ's true humanity was denied in two ways: (1) Some said that Christ only seemed to have a body; a view called Docetism, from the Greek *dokeo* ("to seem"), and (2) others said that the divine Christ joined the man Jesus at baptism and left him before he died, a view called Cerinthianism, after its most prominent spokesman, Cerinthus. This view is the background of much of 1 John (see 1:1; 2:22; 4:2-3).

4. Since the body was considered evil, it was to be treated harshly. This ascetic form of Gnosticism is the background to part of the letter to the Colossians (2:21-23).

5. Paradoxically, this dualism also led to licentiousness. The reasoning was that, since matter - and not the breaking of God's law (1 John 3:4) was considered evil, breaking His law was of no moral consequence.

The Gnosticism addressed in the N.T. was an early form of the heresy, not the intricately developed system of the second and third centuries. In addition to that seen in Colossians and in John's letters, acquaintance with early Gnosticism is reflected in 1,2 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Peter and perhaps 1 Corinthians.

John's readers were confronted with an early form of Gnostic teaching of the Cerinthian variety. This heresy was also libertine, throwing off all moral restraints. Consequently, John wrote this letter with two basic purposes in mind: (1) to expose false teachers (2:26) and (2) to give believers assurance of salvation (5:13).

The following article, by F.J.Pearce, is reproduced from our Circular Letter No. 94 for September 1987, having been written many years before that:-

Flesh - Literal and Spiritual

It is a true saying that the best way to understand what the other fellow means is by hearing him out. That attitude the writer recommends to be adopted because, if adopted, one cannot then be accused of condemning unheard any theory.

"Doth our law judge any man before it hear him and know what he doeth?" (John 7:51).

"Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it." (Deuteronomy 1:17).

It can be undisputedly proved from the Scriptures that the term flesh does not always mean the literal flesh, and must therefore always be understood by its context. The following are examples of the term flesh meaning the literal flesh: -

“And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20).

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh.” (Paul was the same flesh after as before conversion, (2 Corinthians 10:3).

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” (John 3:6).

“All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men...” 1 Cor. 15:39).

Let us take the opposite meaning of the term flesh:-

“For when we were in the flesh...” (Romans 7:5).

“But ye are not in the flesh...,” (Romans 8:9).

There are more than 250 references to the word flesh, and if we accept them all as meaning the literal flesh, then Romans 7:5 and 8:9 mean that Paul and his brethren were not in the literal flesh after conversion. It needs discrimination in the application of the Word, or otherwise confusion will set in. When Paul says, “for I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing” (Romans 7:18), he does not mean that his literal flesh was sinful of itself, because he was “sold under sin” (Romans 7:14); it is a matter of the person having either the mind of the “spirit” or “flesh;” it is a matter of the person’s status under law.

Note: “For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” (Romans 7:7-10) (Genesis 2:7; Luke 9:60).

In Galatians chapter 5 verses 16-26 we have a list of the works of the flesh, and the fruits of the spirit. There is not one item in either that cannot be accomplished if so desired. It is obviously a matter of the mind of the flesh lusting against the mind of the Spirit, and the mind of the Spirit lusting against the mind of the flesh. If we do the one we shall not inherit the Kingdom (verse 21) and if the other we shall reap life everlasting. (Galatians 6:8). If Paul meant that there was no good thing dwelling in his literal flesh, how are we to understand the following: -

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” (Philippians 4:13).

“but I keep under my body... bring it into subjection.” (1 Corinthians 9:27).

“I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel.” (Acts 20:33).

“A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things.” (Matthew 12:35).

What huge mountains of obstacles are created by applying the word flesh to mean that the literal flesh is no good! Cannot one person do evil and another person with the same flesh do good? Cain and Abel prove the point. Again, if Paul meant the literal flesh, what does he mean when he tells his brethren “Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit”? Did he mean that they were not literal flesh and blood? Absurd. If the flesh is clean, what is wrong with being in it? Paul meant they were not in Adam when not in the flesh, but in Christ.

Dear Reader, the blunder is obvious. The very words, “who walk... after the Spirit,” are enough to prove that Paul’s expression relate to the mental sphere of application, though both mental states are manifested in the same flesh and blood bodies – mind of the flesh and mind of the Spirit. Again if Paul meant that in the literal flesh dwelleth no good thing, how could he say, “every sin that a man doeth is without the body” (1 Corinthians 6:18)? Paul referred to the time when he was an unregenerated Jew under the Law (Dr Thomas Witness), and had Paul the mind of the Spirit then, he would most certainly have refrained from persecuting the sect of the Nazarenes, thinking that he was doing God’s service. Paul’s simple teaching is that in the mind of the flesh dwelleth no good thing, being carnal. When Paul was in the flesh he did not recognize love to be the fulfilling of the Law as he did when he was in the Spirit, and penned the words under consideration. In his spiritual relations he was no longer in the flesh.

Let us take another quotation from Paul’s use of the term “flesh.” - “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Romans 8:8).

If Paul meant that no natural man could possibly please God because of his literal sinful flesh, then the Scriptures are entirely misleading and contradictory. But we thank God that Paul meant no such thing, as the

list of worthies in Hebrews 11 testify. They were men of like passions as ourselves. Enoch had this testimony that he pleased God (V.5). Did not Paul know that there was laid up for him a crown of Righteousness? Did he keep the Faith? (2 Timothy 4). Again, was not the Lord Jesus Christ in the literal flesh? Did He please God? He said, “the flesh profiteth nothing,” and He knew that “all flesh is as grass.” Yet He said, “I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you” (John 6:58).

How are we to harmonize these passages? Simply by discriminating between things that differ. First that which is natural, and then Spiritual. There is profit in the flesh, because it is out of the literal man that the Spiritual man must be manifested. Jesus told the Jews that they were Abraham’s seed, and then proceeded to show that they were NOT Abraham’s seed. They were Abraham’s seed by fleshly descent, but not the Spiritual seed, because they did not do the works of Abraham (John 8:37-39). The teaching of Jesus and Paul were especially directed against any fleshly descent inheriting the Kingdom - it must be by faith. Paul said, “that is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God.” (Romans 9:8). There was profit in being Jew (Romans 3:1); salvation is of the Jews. They received the oracles of God, yet they neglected the weightier matters of the Law; but though they were eternal and spiritual sores from the foot even unto the head, His hand was stretched out still, if they would “wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes (Isaiah chapter 1).

“God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation He that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him.” (Acts 10:34,35). According to some the literal flesh is so sinful and unclean that we should always put one of the words before it; this is how Scripture reads thus added to:- ‘Except ye eat the sinful flesh of the Son of man, and drink his sin-defiled blood, ye have no life in you.’ (John 6:53). What blasphemy! Jesus was the manifestation of God in flesh and blood - “But a body hast thou prepared me” Hebrews 10:5. And He could say, “for a Spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.” (Luke 24:39). This was after His resurrection. This flesh was Divine nature. The natural flesh with the present life will avail nothing if that relationship to the Spirit which giveth life eternal be absent - the one is the natural production, the other, the Spiritual, arising out of the natural, through faith, without which it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6).

We read of Holy flesh in Haggai 2:11. So who would say that the same literal flesh of one beast was Holy and the same quality of flesh of another, unclean? It was the Law that made the difference between the clean and the unclean. This was written for our learning, as Jesus said, “Purging all meats” (Mark 7:19). Paul, “I know that nothing is unclean of itself” (Romans 14). Peter, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.” (Acts 10:15). Here we are reminded not only of beasts but of men. “But God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.” (Acts 10:28). Therefore it is the legal and moral aspect that must govern our understanding. The flesh was nothing of itself, nor the works of offering beasts, if faith was not associated with it. “Because they sought it not by faith” (Romans 9:2). “Not being mixed with (or united by) faith” (Hebrews 4:2). We also read of “strange flesh” and likewise of those who defile the flesh (Jude, verses 8,9). But we never read of condemned, carnal, clean, unclean, nor sinful flesh, in connection with the literal flesh of men. It is all a matter of Law. “But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” (Isaiah 66:2).

But the Jew is hidden within, even circumcision of the heart - Spiritual, not literal; whose praise comes not from men but from God. (Romans 2:29). Then we have what is known as a Synecdoche, which means, when a part of a thing is used to represent the whole, or the whole is used to represent a part. Examples:-

“I will not fear what flesh can do unto me,” and “I will not fear what man can do unto me” (Psalm 56:4,11).

“All flesh had corrupted his way: and the end of all flesh is come.” (Genesis 6:12,13).

Remember Noah, verse 9, and that “an animal man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God... But the spiritual man examines, indeed, all things.” (1 Corinthians 2:14,15 - Emphatic Diaglott).

Dear Reader, let us take the advice to “reason together” without any preconceived ideas which we have imbibed by parroting supposed teachers, then we shall be upon the right road toward uniting brethren who

have separated because they, conscientiously, cannot accept a laid down basis of Fellowship which is not in harmony with the just attributes of a just God. Think on these things, be open minded, don't be afraid to cast old ideas on one side when the entrance of the Word giveth light. And always remember the words: "For who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? (1 Corinthians 4:7).

'As freely as ye have received, freely give.'" (Matthew 10:8).

F.J.Pearce.

We wish to thank a reader for sending us the following letter which we understand was sent to all Christadelphian ecclesias during May this year:

FROM BELFAST (BALMORAL) CHRISTAPELPHIAN ECCLESIA:-

Dear Recording Brother,

FELLOWSHIP

It is widely acknowledged within the Christadelphian community that liberal attitudes are increasingly undermining the beliefs and standards held and practiced by former generations of Christadelphians.

In an attempt to awaken the brotherhood to the dangers of doctrinal laxity, an appeal was made to all ecclesias some years ago but the response was disappointing. Since then the situation has deteriorated and supporters of 'Endeavour', to mention one source of false teaching, have made significant advances within our community with their unscriptural views on God's purpose with Israel, the present kingship/kingdom of Christ, the role of sisters in the ecclesia... As one prominent brother stated recently, "'Endeavour' views are more openly propounded than ever and the 'Endeavour' publishers go on their way rejoicing because they are satisfied that no ecclesial action is going to be taken against them." This is an appalling admission and results from not "contending earnestly for the faith."

If we are God-fearing people then godly behaviour ought to go hand in hand with God's Truth, but sadly this is no longer the norm and the teachings of evangelicals and humanists are gaining acceptance within our community.

The ever increasing divorce and remarriage is Just one example of how the moral standards of the world are given precedence over the Word of God. The Holy One of Israel "hates putting away" (Mal 2:16) but many Christadelphians don't!

In this ecclesia we view this unhappy situation with dismay. Our position is quite simply that we will not deviate from the beliefs and standards of our brethren and sisters, now asleep, who left the Truth in our care. Furthermore we believe that we must heed the Apostle John's warning not to bid God speed to any who do not hold the doctrine of Christ. (2 John 9-11).

Accordingly we wish to make known that the Belfast Balmoral Ecclesia meets on the basis of the BASF without reservation or qualification and rejects as unscriptural -

- i) the teachings of Endeavour which are an affront to God's Truth;
- ii) divorce and remarriage which contravenes the commandment of Jesus and the law of God;
- iii) evangelical teaching on the activity of the Holy Spirit and the alleged indwelling of the Spirit in the believer.

We further believe that the correct understanding of the nature and sacrifice of the Anointed Son of God is a fundamental doctrine and we reject any teaching that is not in harmony with the BASF clauses 5,8,9,10 and 12 and the Doctrines to be Rejected No's 4 and 25.

Visiting brethren and Sister are invited to fellowship ONLY ON THIS BASIS and therefore we will welcome those who accept and agree with our position.

Please bring this letter to the attention of the members of your ecclesia. Sincerely your brother in the Hope of Israel.

Brian Bloomfield.

* * *

In response to the above letter I wrote to Brian Bloomfield on July 15th as follows:

Dear Mr Bloomfield, I was recently given a copy of your letter on "Fellowship" sent to ail Ecclesias in May and wish to respond to two points.

I have great sympathy with much of your letter for it is most certain that God requires us to worship Him in spirit and in truth, and liberal attitudes undermine and compromise our efforts to serve our Creator as we ought. As Jesus said, "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." With God-fearing people, godly behaviour goes hand in hand with God's Truth. Again, it is not only high standards of behaviour that are required of us but doctrinal laxity is an affront to our loving Father who spared not His only begotten Son but gave Him for our salvation. In the discourse between Jesus and Nicodemus there is almost no mention of behaviour but it centred on belief and faith. Nicodemus, a teacher in Israel, had failed to understand the message of the law but when he left Jesus he was, I'm sure, a much wiser man.

The enquiring mind of Dr Thomas led him to write that he was prepared to change his views every day if need be until he had got it right, rather than hold fast to a view just for the sake of consistency. Do you not feel even a little sympathy for the enquiring approach of the Endeavour group, and would it not perhaps be better to provide help and enlightenment through contact and discussion, rather than ostracism? (I do not belong to the Endeavour group).

There is a second matter on which I would also appreciate your opinion. When David caused the death of Uriah the Hittite through leaving him stranded in battle, God charged David with his murder, because it was David's wish that he die. Although David did not kill Uriah directly but used others as his instruments for the purpose. In Clause 12 of the BASF Robert Roberts said "That for delivering this message, He (Jesus) was put to death by the Jews and Romans, who were, however, but instruments in the hands of God..." Surely Robert Roberts did not wish us to understand that God murdered His own Son for us. If we were not sinners then there would have been no need for Jesus death, therefore it is we sinners who are responsible for the crucifixion, not God?

I'm sure you are a very busy man but I do hope you will find the time to write a short note on these two matters.

Yours sincerely in seeking Truth,

Russell Gregory

Note. At the time of publishing this C.L. we have received no response but remain hopeful.

WHAT IS FLESH?

Dr Thomas died on the 5th March 1871, at which time he was in the midst of writing an article for the Christadelphian entitled "What is Flesh?" It appears to be in the form of a letter to some mi-named correspondent. Although this is an unfinished letter, it is worth reading through two or three times in order to fully appreciate Dr. Thomas's understanding:-

WHAT IS FLESH?

“I would suggest, that discussion of the very knotty and intricate subject of the *quo modo* of the manifestation of Deity in flesh be suspended among you, till each member of the ecclesia be furnished with a copy of my forthcoming *Pictorial Illustration* and explanatory *Key*. In the meantime, it may not be amiss for our metaphysical friends to see if they can agree among themselves with regard to the more simple, proximate, and primary question, What is flesh? before they undertake to speculate dogmatically concerning the manifestation of Deity in flesh, who is spirit.

You will excuse me, perhaps, just reminding you here that metaphysics are of a very unsubstantial and shadowy nature. As a system, it is a science so-called that treats of things immaterial, and, therefore, intangible and ethereal, or visionary; and which may be considered quite beyond the sphere of all profitable enquiry by plain, unphilosophical men, whose faith is based upon the revealed testimony of God, and not upon the *modus in quo*, or manner in which essences are generated; and how entities and quiddities* are induced. We can believe the testimony of John, that Deity can of stones raise up children to Abraham, with a true and valid faith, which is not at all impaired by our metaphysical inability to explain the process by which he is able to arrive at such a result; for the faith which saves men is the belief of testimony divinely given, not a metaphysical or scientific comprehension of processes. Metaphysics are capital things for ‘doubtful disputation,’ and admirably adapted to the development of ‘sounding brass and tinkling cymbals.’ Let our friends, therefore, who would grow in the knowledge of God and in His favour, eschew metaphysics, by which they can be neither enlightened nor improved; for, as they say in Scotland, which has been befuddled and befooled by the science falsely so-called: “*Metaphysics, is when twa men talk thegither, and the ane who hears dinna ken what the ither says; and the ane who speaks dinna ken what he says himsel.*”

To give our friends a start then, towards the solution of the primary and proximate question of *What is flesh?* they will, perhaps, allow me to direct their attention to what He who made all flesh says it is. The spirit in David testifies, in Psalm lxxviii, 39, that *‘flesh is spirit that passeth away, and cometh not again.’* The common version says ‘flesh’ is ‘a wind;’ but in the Hebrew, the word is ruach, which in Genesis 1:2 is translated *spirit*, as also in a multitude of other places. Flesh then, is spirit, if we are to believe the word. Hence, Peter, all of whose ideas that were really good, came from the spirit, styles the dead antediluvians, who were flesh in common with ourselves, ‘spirits in prison.’ But if you and I, and all mankind, and other beasts in general, be spirit, what is the most obvious difference in view of the divine testimony, between men and angels, who are incorruptible and deathless? Men and angels are both spirit in a certain sense; for in Scripture they are both styled spirits; only the one class *a little lower than* the other: what, then, is the most obvious or striking difference between the two kinds of spirit, or nature, the human and angelic? It is this: human nature in general, is *spirit that passeth away, and cometh not again;* while angelic, or divine nature, or substance, is *spirit that doth not pass away,* ‘and is therefore incorruptible and immortal.

There is, of necessity, an essential difference between these two kinds of spirits, which constitute the one kind transitory, and the other permanent. This difference is not obvious. It is beyond the ken of the generality. There is a constitutional difference made between them by the Creator, and upon such a basis that the one can readily and instantaneously be transformed or made to pass into the other. This is a question not of essence, but of *organization*, which metaphysicians and theosophists have not been able to expound.

Now in illustration of this, let us consider the relations of steam-power and the metal, iron. Look abroad and behold the almost infinite diversity of results, operated by steam-power through iron. If the iron be in the state simply of ore, bar, or pig, steam power develops nothing; and for the obvious reason, that the iron is in a raw, crude and unorganized condition. But suppose that by the wisdom and science of the artificer, the iron is made to assume the form of the machinery of an ocean steamer, and steam power be applied, what then? The iron fabric is set in motion, and the vessel is propelled by the steam-power through the deep. Now, the same steam-power will spin and weave cotton, print newspapers and grind corn; but will the steam-power spin, weave, print and grind, by setting in motion the machinery of a steam-ship? Why not; it is iron machinery and steam-power? True; but the artistic organization of the metal is not adapted to such results. Steam-power and iron will spin, weave, print, grind and do anything else, if the power be applied to iron properly and scientifically organized.

Thus much by way of illustration. Now, for steam-power, let us substitute divine creative-power; and for iron ore, the dust of the ground. This abstract relation of elements develops no spiritual or mental and physical phenomena. Why? There is the wisdom and power that can do all things, and there is the material for developments? True; but the dust of the ground is not organized. It must be artistically developed into diversities of machinery, that each diversity may give development to diversity of results. If the creative power, which is spirit, organize the dust of the ground into different kinds of living machines or organisms, these are *spirit-forms*, which become capable of giving expression to an almost infinite variety of operations. These spirit-forms are styled by Moses, “the spirits of all flesh,” to which Adam gave appropriate names, when the Creating-Power, ‘in whom they lived and moved and had their being,’ caused them to pass in review before him. One of these spirits was a lion, another an elephant, a third a horse, and so forth. We all know what sort of spirit-manifestation can be displayed through the high mettled spirit-form conventionally termed horse; why cannot the same results be operated through a sloth or an elephant? It is the same power that works in them all to do or act? Because the animal-machine termed elephant, is a dust-of-the-ground organization of a peculiar contrivance designed for elephantine and not equine manifestations. It is the Creator’s artistic organization of the dust of the ground that gives diversity of expression or manifestation to His power, on which account He is styled by Moses, ‘the Elohim of the Spirits of all Flesh.’

According to the constitution of the organism, so is the manifestation of results. Divine Power has made spirit out of the dust of the ground, and called it Man. He has so made or organized it that if not further interfered with by His power, it may pass away. This is called flesh, or spirit that passeth away; and, under ordinary conditions, cometh not again. The human organism is the most perfect of all animal-machines; hence its mental or spiritual manifestations are of a higher and more perfect order than all the rest. His more perfect cerebral organization is the long sort for, but hitherto never found boundary line between instinct and reason. The transforming energy of divine power will convert spirit that passeth away into spirit that passeth not away. They who may be the subject of this operation will be exalted to equality with the angels, whose substance doth not waste nor pass away....”

In reporting the above letter, Dr Thomas’s daughter wrote: -

“And with this sentence, appropriate to the last, the Dr. laid down his pen, to lift it no more in the arduous work in which he had spent his life; and spent it not in vain... The foregoing article shows that the Dr’s marvellous intellect remained vigorous to the last. The reading of it naturally leads to the thought expressed by a dear friend who, on finishing the perusal of it, said, “What a pity so great a mind should cease to work,” at a time too when it is so much needed!...”

*Quiddity = inherent nature.

* * *

Comment on the foregoing:-

We must not be intimidated by Dr. Thomas’s language; his title “What is flesh?” leaves us in no doubt that he was answering this very question. Meta is a Greek word with a wide meaning to be understood according to how and where it is used. As an example it is found in such words as *metamorphoo* meaning meta - “changed” – *morphoo* - “form” and translated “transfigured” in Matthew 17:2, where Jesus was transfigured on the mount before three of His disciples. We use the same Greek word in metamorphosis today when describing such processes as that which takes place when a caterpillar changes into a butterfly. In his argument, Dr. Thomas is rejecting any change (meta) in Adam’s physical nature at the Fall and states that he was created so that natural death was to be the end of him unless God chose to interfere with the natural process of ageing which results in natural death. This is seen most clearly towards -the end of the article when Dr Thomas writes:-

“Divine Power made spirit out of the dust of the ground, and called it Man. He has so made or organized it that if not further interfered with by His power, it may pass away. This is called flesh, or spirit that passeth away; and under ordinary conditions, cometh not again.”

We do not know to which ecclesia or ecclesias this letter was primarily addressed, indeed, the view he was opposing may have been widespread, but it is very clear that there were quite a number who were doubting Dr Thomas's teaching and were arguing for belief in the changed flesh of Adam at the Fall, a belief common and widespread in the 19th century, at a time when so many new sects were starting up. Most of these newly formed sects embraced this belief but Dr Thomas is here rejecting it outright, reminding them

“that metaphysics are of a very unsubstantial and shadowy nature. As a system, it is a science so-called that treats of things immaterial, and, therefore, intangible and ethereal, or visionary and which may be considered quite beyond the sphere of all profitable enquiry by plain, unphilosophical men, whose faith is based upon the revealed testimony...”

It was Dr. Thomas's intention to address this discontent and not allow false teaching to take hold and one can only speculate that had he lived a few more years that he, along with Edward Turney, who believed the same, (both also believed in 'Substitution') would have settled the matter once and for all, and Robert Roberts could never have turned the whole Christadelphian body upside down by his brilliant but misguided rhetoric in choosing rather, to adopt the view Dr. Thomas had opposed.

Indeed, what a great pity Dr Thomas was not allowed to continue his work for a few more years just when it was so much needed. The Lord works in mysterious ways'

What now? The Christadelphian Establishment knows it is facing a growing challenge. The whole body is in crisis. There is more unrest than ever before. There are more divisions than ever. They are at a cross-roads. Letters such as that from the Belfast (Balmoral) ecclesia (reported elsewhere in this Circular Letter) are proof of growing discontent and dissatisfaction throughout the body. The Testimony magazine for May this year is another attempt to stem the tide. In it we read such things as, “Why is it that we appear to be losing our edge, our sharpness, our vitality... there is a blandness about us... The forgiveness of our sins, and our salvation in Christ, no longer humble us and bring us to our knees... The uncomfortable truth we have to face is that we lack the faith and the conviction that our beliefs demand of us...”

Dr. Thomas set an example to us all in doing his utmost to get as close to the true understanding of the Scriptures as he possibly could, yet from the foregoing article it is abundantly clear he would not have approved of the B.A.S.F. and would indeed have vigorously opposed it; it could never have been formulated while he was alive. Some of the elements of the Statement of Faith were not preached by the apostles, and other churches are found to be just as close to the Scriptures as are Christadelphians but they too, have faulty doctrines which originated in the Roman Catholic system.

Perhaps one day there may arise ecclesias which claim to be Non-BASF but it is my opinion that if such should happen then it would involve only a small number. For over 125 years there have been a handful of so-called Clean-flesh heretics proclaiming the Truth. It would indeed be an encouragement to us to see this number grow, but the Lord knows who are His, and knowing this, we are content to cast our bread upon the waters to the honour and glory of God.

Yet there have always been Christadelphians who have known these things. Why haven't they been heard? Because they have not been allowed to speak what they know; they have been told 'not to rock the boat;' they have been intimidated and silenced by 'those who know better,' though we have heard occasionally -that these things have been spoken of from the platform, and no one seems to have noticed, but some have been cast out as Clean-flesh heretics.

It is imperative every Christadelphian seriously considers where this present situation leaves him or her. The challenge facing the Christadelphian establishment has never been greater.

How can they change their Statement of Faith to embrace the teachings of Dr. Thomas. How can they turn around and tell the rank and file

- that natural death is not the result of, nor punishment for, sin;

- that flesh did not change at the fall and is not therefore full of sin due to the Fall;
- that there is no such thing as sinful flesh;
- that Jesus Christ did not have sinful flesh, and therefore He did not have to die because of it; and
- that it is now necessary to find another reason for the crucifixion and explain the Atonement in quite different terms than hitherto.

If Jesus was not compelled to die for his sinful flesh then why did God require the death of an innocent man?

There is no stopping place along the road to a true understanding of the Atonement once belief in a changed quality of the flesh is forsaken. A logical explanation of why Christ gave His life for our redemption can be clearly seen by those who have travelled that road, but for some it is a big task, because it means accepting 'substitution' which, for so long, has been a blackened word in Christadelphia. However, it is not widely recognized that there are two types of 'Substitution;' one evil and the other righteous. To punish an innocent man in order to let the guilty go free, is indeed an evil, but if a good and kindly man pays off a debt owed by a poor man who is unable to pay it himself, then, this is Christian teaching - "Bear ye one another's' burdens." This is what Jesus did in giving His life for ours.

But one thing is certain - there is no halfway house, or to change the metaphor, one cannot jump over a gate and stop halfway. I am convinced there are many good people in the Christadelphian community. May God give them the courage of their convictions to do what they know should be done - Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. The reward is unspeakable joy!

Russell Gregory

The following letter from J. Stevenson was sent to A.D.Norris on June 12th last:

Dear Mr Norris, A Christadelphian friend lent me your book "Acts & Epistles" and I was impressed by the scholarship invested in it. My reason for writing to you is the concluding paragraph of your preface - "We are much blessed to belong to a community which is traditionally and rightly insistent on its first principles, and generous to serious attempts to understand Scripture which do not undermine those principles."

That is a laudable statement for a loyal Christadelphian, but as I am not one of those, I take the liberty of questioning it. Since those "first principles" are defined in a man-made Statement of Faith, and not by an apostle, I feel that I have every right to question it. Furthermore, since they are the pretext for disfellowshipping anyone who challenges Robert Roberts' change of mind regarding the Fall, I strongly feel an obligation to question it very seriously.

In your long life you must surely have had occasion to wonder whether those disfellowshipped doubters, now members of the Nazarene Fellowship, unkindly labelled by Robert Roberts "clean flesh heretics," just might be right about the Fall. We say that Adam's disobedience simply caused a fall from Grace, out of favour with God, nothing more. Not a fall from physically superior righteous flesh to physically degraded sinful flesh where sin ingrained in the physical flesh makes righteousness impossible. The whole of Scripture declares that righteousness is not only possible but furthermore is obligatory for believers. You said in your Personal Confession of Faith: "I acknowledge myself to be a sinner, owing to the sin of my fleshly father Adam, a disposition which I am unable to resist or conquer." Such belief makes true repentance and conversion impossible, the slave of an evil nature. You sound as though you detest yourself. May I show you the fallacy of this attitude? How can you love your neighbour as yourself if you so ardently abhor your own nature? It is a recognized fact of life that everyone naturally loves himself; we are commanded to learn to love our neighbour equally. I hope you will pardon my saying that your statement reeks somewhat of false humility.

The key to this problem is that the scriptural word for “sin” is a negative word, as contrasted with “trespasses” which means evil-doing. Four hundred years ago when the Bible was translated into English, the word “sin” had that negative meaning; it meant failure, ignorance of law, nonchalance about our neighbour’s wishes or needs. But since then it has changed in popular usage to mean evil-doing. The words are related in that complacent sinfulness leads easily and automatically to evil-doing, trespasses, envy, covetousness, greed, malice, strife. In contrast, righteousness has to be learned by study, meditation, prayer, and practice.

A newborn baby knows nothing of righteousness; therefore it is sinful in the negative sense, NOT because it has sinful nature or sin in the flesh. Physically it is “very good” as every mother knows, and because it has the potential to become a true child of God. The first thing an infant learns about law is that its parents must be respected and pleased with its behaviour; later it will learn the same about siblings and neighbours, and later still about the state. Some do that easily, some with difficulty, and some grudgingly.

When the Gospel is heard, we learn about the Law of Righteousness, and the commandment to love others as ourselves. We soon encounter the difficulties of loving our enemies, and find that learning righteousness is a life-long commitment. Your “Confession” is defeatist, an attitude not countenanced anywhere in Scripture. I would prefer the idea of Negro Minstrels that we have an invisible devil sitting on our shoulder whispering evil thoughts and evil deeds into our ear. But we all know that is nonsense. The truth is that our selfish instincts prompt us to value people who are generous to us, or are otherwise useful to us, and to ignore those who make demands of us, and to oppose and fight those who cause us inconvenience or difficulty. God has promised us life if we overcome our selfish (negatively sinful) natures, and learn and practice respect, love, and helpfulness to everyone we encounter. All this is absolutely contrary to the theory that sin is a physical contaminant ingrained in the substance of our flesh, which is an absurd fantasy, besides being an abominable iniquitous concept because it leads to your “Confession” of being helpless to resist or conquer what you imagine to be your insuperably sinful nature.

On page 736 of your book you say “Ail who believe in the divine begettal of Jesus are persuaded that He revealed His Father in a way which no mere man could have done. (ref. John 14:9-10).” We emphatically disagree. Jesus was a “mere man” (But of divine status - not nature - because His Father was God). Any man chosen by God and tutored in the way Jesus was, might have revealed God in the same way. But the essential fact is that only Jesus, whose life came from God, outside the lineage of Adam, was qualified to offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins.

You say elsewhere in your book that everyone is “free to search and learn from Scripture within the constraints of the First Principles of Faith.” Surely that takes the prize for hypocrisy. Suppose I put you in jail and said “You are free to explore anywhere you wish to, within the constraints of the prison walls,” would you feel free? We feel that Christadelphians have put Robert Roberts on such a high pedestal that he is ranked (in practice if not in theory) with the Apostles. I put it to you that Robert Roberts solidified his sinful-flesh theory and drew up the Birmingham Statement of Faith purely because he was Jealous that Edward Turney had discovered new truth about the Atonement and failed to ask Roberts for his blessing. We have sometimes been told by Christadelphians who have spoken to us, “Well anyway, Robert Roberts did a lot of good things,” and we have no argument with that. But no matter how much good he did, excommunication of sincere believers for disagreeing with Clause five is arrogantly sinful. Doesn’t it worry you that some day you (amongst others) might be called to account for that? I hope you will consider the forgoing matter with the same thoroughness that you put into your writings.

Sincerely yours in the hope of Israel,

J. Stevenson.

Editor’s note: No acknowledgement of this letter has been received and we understand A.D.Norris, who is 88 years of age, to be in a very frail condition. We do not expect a reply but should we hear further it will be reported in a future Circular Letter.

In May this year “The Testimony” magazine published a Special Issue under the general heading “Be worthy of your calling.” This Issue contains much exhortation and sound teaching based on Scripture. Nevertheless, we feel it very necessary to yet again take one writer to task for not keeping to Scripture but following the line of A.D.Norris when he says,

“We are blessed to belong to a community which is traditionally and rightly insistent on its first principles, and generous to serious attempts to understand Scripture which do not undermine those principles.”

Is it really a blessing to belong to a community which believes only those Scriptures which do not undermine their first principles? Surely not, but one who follows the same line as A.D.Norris is Tony Benson who writes in “The Testimony” under the heading “Made nigh by the blood of Christ” -

Tony Benson, in introducing his essay, writes: “This article seeks to show that the saving work of Jesus Christ is based on the fact that, as one bearing our nature, he was our representative, not our substitute” In this he is following Christadelphian first principles and not Scripture. In his opening paragraphs he writes:

“One of the vital issues which separate Christadelphians from those of Christendom is the atonement, a word which has become a kind of Christadelphian shorthand to indicate God’s work of saving men and women from sin through the Lord Jesus Christ. The atonement is in turn closely linked with another such doctrine, the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ.

...The Christadelphian understanding of Bible teaching about the matter is that Jesus Christ was truly of our nature, though (and essential to the success of his work) truly Son of God also by the circumstance of his birth. His work of salvation consisted in being perfectly obedient to the will of God, even to the extent of giving himself up to a cruel death upon the cross, where he was our representative, not our substitute. His resurrection to immortality was the result of the foregoing, and was a vital element of his work of salvation; others too could now be raised from the dead and made immortal.”

This brings us to another vital doctrine that separates Christadelphians from Christendom: baptism. In order for Jesus’ work of salvation to be effective for a person, that person must first believe and then identify him or herself with Jesus Christ by immersion in water, the burial in water signifying the death of Christ, the coming out of the water the resurrection of Christ...

But the Atonement is not linked with the nature of Christ and sinful nature is most certainly not essential to the success of His work. Far from it; if we have sinful flesh as a result of being in Adam, what advantage is baptism into Christ if He also had sinful flesh? Nothing at all. The link between God, Jesus Christ and ourselves is one of relationship, and the purpose of baptism is to bring us out of our relationship with Adam and into relationship with Christ. This is done in baptism which cleanses us from sin - “Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). The quality of the flesh does not change at baptism.

The reason it is necessary for us to come out of Adam and into Christ is because the whole human race was estranged from God and sold under sin when Adam transgressed the law in Eden. Everyone coming into the world since has been born into that estranged position, being born as a descendant of Adam and of the will of the flesh. However, Jesus Christ was the exception, born of the will of God, He derived His life direct from the source of all life, even the Father (as had Adam), and was not a descendant of Adam but related to Adam’s race through being born of Mary. Jesus was never estranged from His Father, doing always those things that pleased Him. By the grace of God we can, by baptism into Jesus Christ, be born again - as sons of God and not continue as sons of Adam. No longer are we estranged from God but, by grace, are now in a new covenant relationship with Him. This new covenant is a legal transaction, which is shown by the fact that sin is transgression of law which makes the sinner liable to the penalty decreed by that law. In Adam’s case the penalty was to be death in the day he sinned. His sin, however, was covered over when the animal was slain for his covering and he never suffered the penalty himself. Jesus took Adam’s

penalty upon Himself at Calvary. All who wish to transfer their allegiance to Jesus by faith and become sons of God are required to be baptized into Him as the answer of a good conscience toward God. At baptism we pass from a relationship with Adam and death into a relationship with Jesus Christ and life.

On the second page of his article, Tony Benson continues:

“One of the characteristics of the New Testament teaching that strongly supports our theme so far is the number of different metaphors which speak of Christ and the saints as a unity. These could only be applicable if he was truly of our nature, suffering upon the cross as our representative. - - Three such metaphors are used in Ephesians, and we will look at them in turn...”

While Tony Benson boldly makes the claim that these three metaphors from Ephesians show Jesus must therefore have had sinful flesh and have been our Representative, nowhere in his article dealing with these metaphors does he make even the slightest attempt to explain why he thinks such should be the case.

The metaphors he deals with are that of

- (a) “Christ as the head with the saints as the rest of the body,”
- (b) “Christ and the saints as a temple for God’s glory, with Christ as the chief corner stone,” and
- (c) Christ as the bridegroom and the saints as the bride, who become ‘one flesh’ (Ephesians 5:31) in the spiritual marriage to come, according to the pattern laid down in Genesis 2:24.”

Regarding (a), we agree they both had corruptible nature even though Jesus body was not allowed to corrupt in the grave. But in dealing with the aspect of Jesus being the Head of the body, Tony Benson starts by saying, “The emphasis here is on the exalted position of Christ now...” and continues to develop the thought of Jesus as our Head from this starting point. But Jesus is not of corruptible nature now, and this is hardly the way to show Jesus had sinful nature before crucifixion, or that He died as our representative! He never mentions the matter again.

Regarding (b) “Christ and the saints as the temple for God’s glory...” Is it conceivable that God would dwell in a temple made of sinful flesh? I like a person who speaks their mind but really, Tony, you should think first! God was in Jesus reconciling the world unto Himself and many of your colleagues know full well that Jesus’ flesh was not full of sin!

Regarding (c), this proves ‘substitution’ not ‘representation.’ The custom in Israel at the time of Christ was that the Groom drew up a contract and bought his Bride with a price as agreed between himself and the Bride’s father, and the price was usually very high, (This was brought out wonderfully in our last Circular Letter). The important point here is that Jesus paid a very high price for His Bride, even his life in the blood. The Bride is “the purchased possession” (Ephesians 1:14). “What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things... but with the precious blood of Christ...” (1 Peter 1:18,19). Purchase is substitution. There is no escaping the fact. It is the exchange of one thing for another. Redemption is the same. It is an equivalent price. Ransom is the price paid. Jesus’ life (*psuche*) was the ransom price paid for our redemption. This teaches us that Jesus died as our Substitute, and not as our Representative, and we thank God with all our heart it was so.

Russell Gregory

The following document was prepared at the meeting of the Amended Continental Reunion Committee of North America on May 31st 1980 as a statement of their understanding of the Atonement. The original bears the signature of all the Continental and Regional Delegates present:-

“The sin of Adam brought consequences for the whole of the human race, every member of which inherited a proneness to sin and the certainty of death.

Men are in no way responsible for Adam’s sin nor is there any guilt attaching to them on account of the nature which they bear, even though it is unclean and tends only to sin. Man’s guilt is for his own sin, actual transgression of God’s law, and not for the natural state in which he finds himself.

Man’s plight was such that there was no remedy and no hope of life eternal except by the grace of God. The weakness of man’s flesh meant that men not only have the tendency to sin, they all become actual sinners. None can redeem himself, still less his brother.

The Scriptures describe two kinds of sin in relation to man. The first is the personal sins which we have committed, the sins which can be forgiven in Christ. The second relates to the law of sin and death at work in our members which, because it is the root cause of sin, is described as sin, although it is not attributed to us as guilt before God.

Redemption was wrought by the love and grace of God, and provides deliverance from both kinds of sin, the sins we have committed and the body in which they were done. The means of our redemption was by God’s provision of a righteous man who fully bore our nature with its mortality and proneness to sin.

The process, described in Psalm 40, was the raising of a man prepared by God who would delight to do God’s will and wholly uphold his law and righteousness.

But, the Bible makes it plain that living righteousness was not sufficient; the redeemer had to suffer death and taste it for every man. This perfection was achieved through suffering and his Sonship was crowned by complete obedience, obedience unto death. He loved the Lord his God with ail his heart and soul and mind. This he achieved by overcoming completely and actually the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life which, though active in his very nature, were never allowed to conceive and bring forth sin.

This sinlessness was the first and marvellous step in the redemptive process by which we can be brought unto God. The Lord Jesus Christ did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth, despite the flesh he bore in which by nature dwelt no good thing. Sin was conquered in its own stronghold and all unrighteousness was condemned in the sanctuary of his body.

But this was not enough. Not only was sin to be destroyed by righteousness, its very roots were to be destroyed by repudiation of the actual flesh in which it had hitherto been victorious. He whom God set forth as the mercy seat was also to be bloodsprinkled to demonstrate the righteousness of God in a sinless life and to show forth openly the condemnation of sin by crucifying the flesh which gives rise to sin.

Still there was more. All this was done of the Lord’s free will and love. He brought himself as an offering to his Father in order to restore what Adam had stolen. No one took away the Lord’s life, he laid it down of himself. As others in time past brought an animal offering for their sins, so Christ freely brought himself as an offering to God on our behalf. By Christ’s carrying his flesh right up to the tree, the possibility of the victory of sin was finally defeated, since it was the last act of self-denial and self- repudiation. His life blood shed was the outpouring of himself, the accomplishment of emptying himself, that no flesh should glory in God’s presence.

The death of Jesus demonstrated that death is the wages of sin and God was justified in requiring that flesh be crucified. The uniqueness of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ lay in the fact of his righteousness, and he offered himself in love to provide the means whereby God could righteously forgive our sins. In the nature which he had, the Lord bore our sins representatively and bore them away in the shedding of his blood. Our personal sins are removed by forgiveness through the grace of God when we have faith in God

according to his word and make full confession of our sinfulness before him. In baptism, we identify ourselves with his death and we draw nigh to God in Christ by the new and living way, sanctified by his shed blood. Thenceforth, we are committed to putting to death the old man of the sins of the flesh and to live according to the new man in Christ.

So, Christ entered into death itself in order that he might abolish it in himself. For he too needed redemption from death and was saved in that he feared God. The weakness of our flesh will be removed in the day when mortality is swallowed up of life.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ to receive immortality and eternal joy was the divine evidence of his holiness and of God's righteousness; it is the key to our justification by faith when we are baptized, believing the things concerning the kingdom and the name of Jesus Christ, and are sanctified by the blood of the everlasting covenant whereby we receive forgiveness of sins and are granted hope of the redemption of the body at Christ's return. Covered by his mighty atoning work, we long for the day when he shall fashion this body of our humiliation and make it like unto his glorious body. Meanwhile, we mortify our members upon earth and seek to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. As the captain of our salvation was perfected by suffering unto death and has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, so we have fled to him for refuge and have renounced the hidden works of darkness, being cleansed by faith in his blood whereby we have our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Thus the one sacrifice will bring many sons to glory even as it has already made their captain perfect through his suffering and death."

Signed by all committee members present

* * *

Comments on the above by Brother Phil Parry:

If this continental reunion committee of North America had lived at the time of Christ, the rulers would not have needed false witnesses to testify against Him; they would have shown the Jewish priests and Pontius Pilate that they were not wrong in putting Jesus to death. They would have stated, 'The death of Jesus demonstrated that death is the wages of sin and God was justified in requiring that flesh be crucified. Despite what his disciples might say at a later date by the power of the Holy Spirit, it is not wrong for you to put him to death; you Jews and Romans are the instruments in the hands of God, for the doing of that which He had determined before to be done - viz, the condemnation of sin in the flesh through the offering of the body of Jesus once for all...' -BASF Clause XII;

It is difficult to remain passive when reading this blasphemous document with its unscripturally coined phrases and misunderstood passages on account of superficial reading and wrongly dividing of the word of God. It is all 'flesh' - a 'proneness to sin,' 'the flesh is the vehicle of sin - the flesh is to blame'! this committee should state categorically that the Creator was wrong when He created the flesh of Adam and pronounced it very good. How could it be 'very good' if it was 'prone to sin'? There is not a whisper by them about 'Law.' Yet was it not the entrance of the Law in Eden that brought sin into the world? Adam was quite capable of keeping that Law and the propensities in his make up were for obedience or disobedience, and could never by any stretch of the imagination be termed sin, but the contrary, 'very good' as the Creator said. The Apostle Paul (whom this committee quotes but does not understand) says, "By the law is the knowledge of sin." "where there is no law, there is no transgression." "Sin is transgressions of law." I would like this committee to tell me how sin exists in the flesh without mentioning Law. Or how the body of Jesus could have been the stronghold of sin when nothing resembling sin emerged from it, but only words and acts of righteousness. How can a polluted fountain send forth pure water? The fact that Jesus showed in His righteous conduct that obedience was possible in the nature in which Adam was created, is not enough for this committee in declaring the righteousness of God. It knows better than God, and declares 'But this was not enough; not only was sin to be destroyed (the word should be condemned - P.P.) by righteousness, its very roots were to be destroyed by repudiation of the actual flesh in which it had hitherto been victorious. He whom God set forth as the mercy seat was also to be blood-sprinkled to demonstrate the righteousness of God in a sinless life and to show forth openly the condemnation of sin by crucifying the

flesh which gives rise to sin.’ In other words (and this gives the lie to the committee), if there had been no flesh there had been no sin.

But Paul declares in Romans 4:15, “For where no law is, there is no transgression.” Adam, a natural body of life, very good in kind and condition, was alive in Eden without law, but when God gave him a law which was possible to keep or disobey according to his propensities of freewill, he violated that law and by so doing, forfeited his right to natural life. But God did not condemn Adam’s flesh; this flesh was very good and had not changed one bit in quality. God condemned Adam’s action as a man who was intelligent enough to know what the imposition of the law meant. In the case of Jesus, He showed and demonstrated the righteousness of God in condemning Adam’s sin by exhibiting a righteous and sinless character throughout His whole life in the same nature, in the possession of which, like ourselves, He had no choice. But note the audacity of the members of this committee! In the first paragraph they state, ‘Men are in no way responsible for Adam’s sin nor is there any guilt attaching to them on account of the nature they bear, even though it is unclean and tends only to sin. Man’s guilt is for his own sin, actual transgression of God’s law, and not for the natural state in which he finds himself

Paragraph 2. Man’s plight was such that there was no remedy and no hope of life eternal except by the grace of God. The weakness of man’s flesh meant that men not only have the tendency to sin, they all become actual sinners. None can redeem himself, still less his brother.’

Their very testimony of the reason Christ had to die makes a blasphemous mockery of both these paragraphs as per Clause XII of the BASF and paragraph 11 of this extract.

Jesus could not help or prevent His birth as a man, but you blame Him for having our nature and tendency to sin. None can redeem himself.

You must therefore admit in accordance with paragraph 1 that Jesus did not have to die for Himself, as there is no guilt attached in possessing Adamic nature. If Jesus had the same nature as us, and we believe He did, how, on the strength of such a foolish and unscriptural statement as paragraph 2, could Jesus remain sinless and be able also to redeem Himself and His brother, for it is obvious that this paragraph must refer to Jesus as a possessor also of the weakness of man’s flesh?

How on earth can these people make such absurd statements, that the ‘free thinking’ of Adam and Eve was styled ‘sin’ and the law of sin and death at work in their members? It is unscriptural to think or believe that “the law of sin and death” is a physical fixation in the flesh, because Paul declares that he had been freed from it through another law - “The law of the spirit of life in Christ” - and Paul could say that he was using the members of his body as instruments of righteousness and holiness, and exhorted all in Christ to do the same, that is, those who have been made free from the law of sin and death. The explanation of the Atonement by this committee remains unaltered from that which has pervaded Christadelphia for years, i.e. ‘He who knew no sin God made to be sin for us,’ that is (according to them), ‘sinful flesh,’ by being born of Mary and this is how the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all, for on the cross He bore our ‘sinful flesh though a righteous bearer thereof.’ This explanation bears no relation or comparison to the animal sacrifices under the law and prior to it, and taking into consideration the statement in Paragraph 1 that there is no guilt attaching to man on account of his inherent nature, Christ died for nothing and no one, and only put away ‘sin,’ that is ‘sinful flesh’ by the sacrifice of Himself; He allowed therefore to be put to death on the cross, that which had no guilt or blame attached in the sight of God. It appears to me from this document that the committee’s understanding of Redemption really amounts to resurrection, judgment and a change of nature; in other words, or rather in their words, ‘deliverance from death.’ It appears that we are not, nor can be, the subjects of redemption until Christ returns, raises the faithful and bestows on them eternal life. Their explanation of Christ’s redemption as they term it, from death, is to say the least, pathetic. They say, ‘He entered into death itself in order that he might abolish it in himself. For he too needed redemption from death, and was saved in that he feared God.’ This is the most ludicrous wresting of Scripture relating to our Lord’s experience in the garden of Gethsemane that I have ever come across. Jesus in actual fact prayed to His Father that if it were possible to let the cup of crucifixion pass from Him - it was indeed possible if the will of God had been the non-redemption of Adam and those whom Adam had sold under sin into bondage - Jesus need not have died for Himself; there was no blame or guilt attached in His birth of Mary. Like us, He had no choice in the matter. God could have, would have, spared Him the death of the cross if Jesus had

prayed for legions of angels to deliver Him from the Romans, but He chose His Father's will, because His Father's will concerned our salvation, our redemption, from the bondage to 'Sin' as personified as a master, and not 'sinful flesh.' Though Dr Thomas is reputed to be the founder of the Christadelphian Body, the title of this document "Redemption in Christ" and the explanation under it, bears no resemblance to Dr Thomas's exposition of it, which we regard as the true one and the scriptural one, and we therefore give him more credit than do his professed followers. Dr Thomas wrote as follows: "Redemption is release for a ransom, all who are God's servants have been released from a former Lord by purchase, the purchaser is God, and the price paid, the precious blood wherein was the life of Christ as of a lamb without spot and without blemish."

Paul also made similar statements - "Ye have been bought with a price, even the precious blood of Christ, and therefore ye are not your own." "For ye have not been redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without spot and blemish."

Purchased with an unforfeited life! This committee mentions nothing about purchase nor the lord to whom the 'life' or purchasing price was paid. It does not understand the subject and on account of a false premise as per Clauses 4,5,6,7, and 8 of the BASF has to add to the word of God and consequently find themselves reprov'd liars. How could Jesus enter into death in order to abolish it in Himself and obtain redemption from death? Did Jesus abolish death in Himself? Was Jesus able to change His corruptible nature to incorruptible? Was He redeemed from death? The answer to these three questions is NO. Jesus, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man willingly, and thereby He abolished 'death,' not natural death, for we still die naturally, but the death by sin which Adam merited, which was judicial inflicted death. Jesus suffered the agony of this death for us and we only have to identify ourselves with this death in symbolic burial in water, thereby dying unto 'Sin' as a master; for he that is dead is freed from 'sin' and by faith, risen to newness of life in Christ; thus Christ abolished death and brought 'life' and immortality to light through the gospel.

So, my misguided friends of the committee, you must admit that your first paragraph has destroyed all your so-called exposition of Redemption in Christ; you have forgotten that a late Editor of your magazine, John Carter, as far back as 1958, wrote to certain members of your community in that magazine, that to talk of sin in the flesh was to talk jargon. He also said several other things which were in opposition to your basis of fellowship (Christadelphian 1958, page 372 is one which you have used, namely paragraph 1). Why did you not take issue with him on this matter while he was alive? If you had, things might have emerged which would have brought you to a closer understanding of what Edward Turney contended in regard to the Sacrifice of Christ and Dr Thomas's definition of Redemption, and that of Jesus Himself recorded in John chapters 5 and 6. The booklets "Too True To Be New" and "Outrage On Justice" have dealt flawlessly with all this matter, and it is only their suppression, or the lack of interest in the most important event of the world's history by professing lovers of Truth that has kept that Truth from them. The Pope of the Apostasy did his work on Pelagius and his mark has been ever since on Christendom, including Christadelphianism. We have done, and are doing our best to enlighten, but are hated for His name's sake, more so by those who profess to be guardians of the Truth and respecters of the Bible than those who accept without question the paid clergy.

What a wonderful theme of Redemption, to be associated with a jigsaw puzzle of the apostasy - 'Mystery. Babylon the Great, etc.' Wherefore should you wonder and marvel with great admiration? Consider while there is time. Revelation 3:14-20.

Phil Parry
(August 1980)

It seems appropriate that we should conclude this Circular Letter by reprinting a letter addressed to the late Ernest Brady : -

Dear Ernest, As it is now several years since I wrote to express my appreciation of the circular letters, I thought I had better do so again, if only to let you know I am still here, and still receiving and reading them.

It was my father's discovery of your literature which was subsequently responsible for my own enlightenment in the truth of the substitutionary sacrifice of the Son of God to redeem me from the penalty and power of sin.

I am not sure whether I have ever told you that my wife and I were disfellowshipped by the Christadelphians in 1972 over our beliefs on the atonement, and also on the subject of our belief in the present reality of the Holy Spirit indwelling the children of God to produce fruit and empower to bear witness to Jesus.

Since that time I have been pastor (unpaid, I work as an engineer to earn my living) of a small fellowship which meets in our home. (The title of 'Pastor' is used in the biblical sense, to describe an elder who shepherds and feeds the flock placed in his care by God).

I am still grateful to the Lord that I was raised in a Christadelphian family and community, and for the Bible education He gave me there.

And even when they finally threw me out, that too was good for us since it then became necessary to learn to love those who did it and those who stood by and let them do it. It wasn't always easy at first, but by the grace of God and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, it did eventually become a reality.

It was good for us in other ways. Once outside the fence, away from the safety and security of the community and with no freedom to join another church, the Lord has led us to new security and dependence on him alone which we now wouldn't exchange for anything. Over and over again we have found the reality - the present reality - of all His promises. It has been an exciting and wonderful experience to find that Jesus can be as real today as He was in the first century church, and that He continues to reveal Himself in a personal way as He promised, to those who will truly allow Him to be their Lord.

The thing I would like to share in this letter (which you may publish if you wish) is to do with the reality of life "after the atonement."

For the atonement is not just a theory to which one must simply give intellectual assent.

What our understanding of the atonement does to us (rather than simply what it did for us) is the real heart of the matter.

The words "ransom" and "redemption" are meant to lead us on far beyond the mere legalism of the price that was paid for our release from the slave-master who formerly was our owner. They are meant to lead us to the place of freedom where we give ourselves to live as God wants us to, under the rulership of His Son.

A man can have all the scriptural verses at his fingertips, know all the theory perfectly, but if he doesn't then live as a free man lives - as the free man Jesus has shown us that a free man lives - then he has not been redeemed after all.

It is the same with the word "substitute." The word itself is meant to convey to us the reality of our forgiveness, for if Christ has already paid the penalty, then we will not be asked to pay the penalty (provided of course we meet the conditions for that to be truly a sacrifice for us).

But again, more than a theory is required. For Christ bore our penalty to give us life - New Life in Him. If a man is not living a New Life, but continues to live the old life - he has not really understood the meaning of substitution at all. "New Life" is life lived, as Christ Himself lives, in living relationship with God, because we too love Him and want to obey Him.

That brings me to the final point. "Ransom," "Redemption" and "Substitution" are not simply legal transactions (however true that may be in its own right). They are demonstrations of the Love of God for us, and they are love displayed in a way that is meant to gain our affection, turning us from enmity to friendship, and providing the motivation to obey that was missing from our former sinful lives.

The love of God is unconquerable, for as it was revealed in Jesus (who is the express image of our Father) love simply could not be defeated.

There is nothing man can do. There is no point where the love of Jesus is not greater than man's enmity. Crown him with thorns, spit in his face, buffet and bruise him, ridicule and blaspheme him, tell lies about him, flog the skin from his back, even crucify him - and still he loves, still he offers friendship and reconciliation, still he forgives.

A love like that conquers even death.

The cross of Jesus is meant to teach us to love like that, so that we will live like that, and even die like that; for no man is truly a disciple until he takes up his own cross to follow Jesus in the way of life that is willing to spend itself utterly for love of God and love of neighbour.

It is that sort of commitment to Jesus, as Lord of our lives that brings power and reality into Christian experience. It brings the very same power that we see at work in the first century church. It brings that power into the 20th century church, so that the love of God clearly seen in 20th century adopted sons, bears witness to the reality of the power and love of the only begotten Son to enter and change human life in Just the same way as revealed in the New Testament.

Until the atonement means that to us we have not really understood it at all.

The purpose of the atonement is life - abundant life - eternal life - beginning now, enduring beyond the grave through the promise of the resurrection.

Yours in the service of Jesus,

Allon Maxwell.

The facts of creation are basic from the beginning and founded on adamant principles. The first and foremost being light. The earth was without form and void, and darkness covered the face of the deep. And God said, "Let there be light, and there was light." There we have the very first essential, because without light there is no life, and surely life is what the gospel of God is all about, and if we are taught of God, we shall have learned that He is the only one that has the power and authority to cause the light to shine; just to add a quote from the Lord Jesus in support, "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Our own Apostle writes, "For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

T.E Allen
