

The **SCRIPTURE STANDARD**

*Pleading for a complete return to Christianity
as it was in the beginning.*

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LATTER-DAY REVELATIONS?

Last month I wrote about the refusal on the part of the Mormons to answer, in writing, my questions relating to their Book Of Mormon. Readers will no doubt be thinking that surely the *most relevant* question likely to be asked of Mormons is "Who needs the Book of Mormon" while the New Testament is in the world? 'The question has, of course, been asked and the only justification that Mormons can produce is to quote the Book of Mormon itself where it says, "Thou fool that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible and we need no more Bible.." (II Nephi Chap 29). Thus, to the Mormons, anyone who says, "We already have a Bible and need no more Bible" is "A fool". The mormons are, however, not the only religious body to teach continuous, progressive revelations - the Roman Catholic Church has been claiming it for centuries and the Seventh-Day Adventists have been teaching it for about as long as the Mormons. It would surely be interesting to 'listen-in' to a discussion between a Catholic; a Seventh-Day Adventist and a Mormon on the subject. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the New Testament, although God's inspired word, is not by any means complete or finally authoritative and that it can be over-ruled either by Catholic Tradition or, of course, by the Pope himself. In short the New Testament may be accepted as authoritative by Catholics only where it has not been altered or amended by an encyclical of the Pope. The 'reasons' given by the Roman Catholics and Mormons for not believing that the New Testament is final and authoritative are extremely lame. For instance they point out the evidences of great religious division amongst all those claiming to be guided solely by the New Testament and that, in any case, half the world's population is illiterate and can't read the New Testament; and until the fairly recent invention of the printing press very few in the world ever saw a New Testament. Thus the need for the New Testament to be propped up and supplemented by 'the voice of the living Church', and for it to be interpreted and explained by the present-day 'apostles'. Papal encyclicals and the Book of Mormon are, of course, committed to print just as much as the New Testament is, and must present just as big a problem to those illiterate in the world. As far as religious division goes, there is probably just as much of it (if not more) within the Roman Catholic Church as there is within Protestantism. The coming of the modern printing press certainly has resulted in masses of printed matter (perhaps far too much) but I'm sure mankind managed to communicate quite successfully prior to the printing press - certainly more value would be placed on books and written

matter in those days. Paul and the other apostles seemed to manage to get written instructions to the early Christians in spite of division, illiteracy and lack of a printing press. But does the New Testament itself give us any indication that God intended to add to it? The Mormons say that just because God forbids *man* to 'add' to His word, that does not mean to say that *God*, Himself, will not add to His word in the process of time. Does the New Testament give any support to such an opinion? Does the New Testament make any (even veiled) hint that such a thing would ever come to pass? Was the New Testament a closed and final revelation from God or did God declare that He had much more to add to it?

All-sufficiency of the New Testament

(1) First of all, we should notice that Jesus, Himself, asserted that *He would reveal all truth to His apostles*. He said, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I said unto you." (John 14:26). Again, (two chapters later - John 16:13) "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come." The Holy Spirit did come and as Jesus predicted, he taught them all things, and revealed to them all truth. Not just *some things* and *some truth* but *all truth*. The Holy Spirit did not do this on his own authority but spoke only that which God revealed - that which he heard from God. Paul, although himself a belated apostle, claimed to have received this all-comprehensive truth because he could, later, assure the Ephesians that he had "not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God". (Acts 20:27). He also said that he had "Kept back nothing that was profitable" to them (v 20). Paul's oral teaching was eventually committed to print in the fourteen epistles written by Paul. If God revealed *all truth* to Christ's apostles, 2,000 years ago, what truth can man possibly add today, or any other time?

(2) Roman Catholics claim that because Christians lived and died before the New Testament was completed, (when teaching was entirely oral), then the same can surely be done today (i.e. we can manage without the N.T.). Certainly the completion of the New Testament was a very gradual process, line upon line, which began about 42 AD and was not completed until about 98 AD. During this time more and more of the oral teaching was being committed to print. How else were succeeding generations to know the teachings of Christ and His apostles? Jesus said, "He that rejecteth Me and receiveth not My words hath one that judgeth him, the words that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." The words of Jesus will judge us in the last day - but how can we, today, 'know' the words of Jesus except they had been written down for us by those who heard them. Thus John could say, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus in the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." Thus, says John, the things concerning Jesus *written in the N.T.* are capable of making us believe on Jesus and thereby receiving life everlasting. Who needs more than that - what can the Book of Mormon add to that?

(3) Paul says to Timothy (II Tim. 3:16) "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The Revised Version confines it to 'all scripture inspired of God' but this surely includes the New Testament. Thus the New Testament is profitable

for teaching (doctrine); for correction; for instruction in righteousness; to what end? - that man of God may be perfect (complete) thoroughly furnished unto every good work. Who, then, needs any advice or encyclical from the Pope; who needs the ravings of Ellen G. White; who needs the latter-day lies of the Book of Mormon? The New Testament is fully and comprehensively adequate in giving us all necessary teaching, correction, instruction in righteousness and *every good work*. Who, or what, could give us any more?

(4) Jude wrote towards the end of the period occupied in compiling the New Testament and he said, "Beloved when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Jude's *written* exhortation forms a part of the New Testament *scriptures*, just as Peter describes Paul's writings as '*scripture*' (see II Peter 3:16). Jude exhorts that men should earnestly contend for 'the faith - i.e. the truth in organised form. When Christ trod the earth men actually saw him and literally heard him. After Jesus returned to heaven the only way that men may 'see' him and 'hear' him is through the *testimony* of chosen witnesses. That body of testimony has been written down and placed in men's hands - 'the faith' which Jude says *was once* (or once for all - Revised Version) delivered to the saints. 'The Faith' was once for all delivered - not thrice or even twice, and certainly not continuously. This word 'once' is from the Greek *hapax* which means 'once for all' and is the same word as used in Heb. 9:26, 27 & 28 where Jesus appeared *once* (v 26) where man dies only *once* (v 27) and where Jesus was offered *once* for sins (v 28). Just as often (once) was 'the faith' delivered to the custodians of it (the saints) and these custodians must contend for it - not for something yet to be revealed (by the Pope or Mormon 'apostles') but for 'the faith' *once and for all* delivered to the saints. It was '*delivered*' (past tense) almost 2,000 years ago.

Why written?

(a) Luke says, "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth, in order, a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us. Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus. That thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed." So Luke, like the 'many' others wrote 'that thou mightest know *the certainty* of these things.

(b) We noted earlier why John wrote. He said that there were many wonderful things which Jesus did which have no mention in the book, "but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His name." John is talking here of oral teaching now committed to paper (scripture). John says (I John 1:3,4) "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things *write we* unto you, that your joy may be full." Thus John wrote that we might have fellowship with him and with God (not strictly in that order) and also that our joy might be full. Also we know that he was later commanded to *write* (Revelation 1:10) (*in a book*) all the things he saw and heard.

(c) Peter wrote knowing that "shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover, I will endeavour that ye may be able, after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance." (II Peter

1:14). Peter's purpose in writing was that after his decease we might all have a *permanent record* of these truths and thus have them "always in remembrance."

(d) Paul wrote much of the N.T., and claimed that his writings 'were the Lord's commandments'. In 1 Cor. 14:37 he says, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant." Paul says that only the ignorant would disclaim that his writings were the Lord's commandments. Now if they are the Lord's commandments they have some authority, and more than that, if they are the commandments of the Lord they carry supreme authority. To the Ephesians Paul explained, "How that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery, as I wrote afore in few words: Whereby when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ." (Eph. 3:3,4). Paul here declares that he wrote about the mystery (of grace to Gentiles) God revealed to him so that *'when we read'* his writings we also might understand this knowledge. Who, today or tomorrow, can add to that knowledge?

(e) Jude, as already noted, found *it necessary to write* of the 'common salvation' and to exhort his brethren to contend (in earnest) for 'the faith' which was once for all deposited with the saints.

Conclusion

Unfortunately my space has more than gone, and we have done little more than scratch the surface of this subject. Perhaps, however, from these few scriptures alone (briefly quoted as they were) we can see the falacy of believing that any man, or woman, has the slightest authority to add to, or subtract from, "that which is written." Surely Paul puts the curse of God on any man who would become the author of any 'later revelations' when (in Gal. 1) he said that any man (or, indeed, any angel) would be cursed of God if they added to, or subtracted from, Paul's preaching and teaching in New Testament times. In spite of such a curse there seems no shortage of men, and women, prepared to try to do that very thing. We should, therefore, endeavour to recognise any travesty of the truth and be ever ready to contend earnestly for that faith once for all delivered to the saints.

EDITOR

TOTAL HEREDITARY DEPRAVITY:

(Part 2)

Is the Doctrine Scriptural?

IN the last issue of "THE STANDARD" we traced the history of the doctrine of total depravity. That study revealed that the idea has been around a long time. Different facets of the doctrine were articulated by Jewish writers long before the birth of Jesus. Augustine, however, is credited with organizing the doctrine much into its present form in the latter part of the fourth century. He and a disciple named Pelagius led a long-running debate on the issue that had far-reaching effects on the church.

As a matter of historical accuracy, it should be noted that this doctrine did not arise from the Catholic Church, although one sometimes hears it credited to that source. One will have no doubt of this fact if he will make a rather simple connection. Augustine died approximately 200 years before the Catholic Church was set up. Catholic historians claim Augustine, of course, and because of the effects of his doctrine, most of us would be willing to give him to them. But then they also claim the apostle Peter, whom we are not willing to deliver to them.

Erroneously attributing this doctrine to the Catholic Church lends weight to their false claim of being the church of antiquity. Augustine was simply a disciple who, on this point at least, went astray and convinced many others of his folly.

The purpose of this article is to examine the scriptural texts that proponents of the doctrine commonly use to prove it. For true disciples, it does not matter who is for or against a doctrine, only whether or not the scriptures teach it.

For the benefit of readers who do not have access to the article in last month's STANDARD, perhaps we should restate briefly that the doctrine under consideration teaches that when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, he not only became guilty for his transgression, his whole nature was changed. He became so thoroughly corrupt that he was capable of no good impulse toward God. Furthermore, the doctrine asserts, Adam passed that depraved nature on to his descendants. Thus all humans are lost and can do nothing to save themselves. Only by God's choice and His use of "irresistible grace" are souls redeemed. For practical purposes the doctrines of original sin and total depravity are synonymous.

The plan of the following paragraphs is to consider, in the order that they appear in the Bible, the five passages most frequently cited in support of total depravity. Following this, we will note some positive arguments that show the ways Christians are accountable to God for sins.

Job 14:4

The passage noted above reads, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." The question and Job's answer are interpreted to mean that humans, who have sinful natures, could not possibly produce anything except children with sinful natures. Although the statement by all accounts is rather general, that seems a plausible application of the verse.

But is the interpretation given above what the passage really means? The answer is no. When taken in context, the prophet makes a strong statement against total depravity. Look at the first two verses of the chapter. "Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower and is cut down." Flowers in the scriptures are always symbols of purity. Jesus was called the rose of Sharon and lily of the valley (Song of Solomon 2:1).

Imagine how these passages would sound if we plugged in the ideas of total depravity. "Man is born like a totally polluted rose of Sharon, then he is cut down into further pollution." No, the prophet is talking about the corrupting effects of the sinful world in which we live. This world can not produce redeemed souls. Even though we are born pure like flowers, we all sin and thus need the purifying effects of the blood of Jesus.

Psalms 51:5

This passage is probably the single most frequently used proof text for total depravity. It says, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." These statements come from one who, on the surface, certainly sounds like he believes himself to be totally depraved. But again, the context must be considered.

Most scholars believe this Psalm was written when David first became fully convicted of his sin with Bathsheba. If this is true, it should probably be taken symbolically, as an expression of his feelings of guilt and repentance. For example, I have worked with many depressed persons and such individuals

commonly say "My life is a total failure." Most of them would be quick to point out that their statement, while a true reflection of their feelings, should not be taken literally.

But even if taken literally, David's statement does not teach total depravity. As other preachers (i.e. V.E. Howard, in "Hereditary Total Depravity") have pointed out, the psalmist makes two statements: One about himself and one about his mother. "I was shapen in iniquity," means I was born in sin. "Shapen" means born or brought forth. But being born in sin does not mean that David was sinful at the time of his birth. This passage is comparable to Acts 2:8 which talks about people being born in a language or tongue. As everyone knows, this does not mean that children can speak the language when they are born. It means that enough stimulation is present in their environment so that if they follow a natural course, they will speak the language eventually. No one was ever born into an English culture and "naturally" spoke French.

The situation with language illustrates the way a sinful world acts upon humans. Even though one is born pure, the natural course is that all men are tempted and eventually speak the language of sin. The more sinful the world they live in, the more pressure there is on them and the quicker they are likely to be overcome.

"In sin", David said, "did my mother conceive me." In this statement, David simply acknowledges that his own mother was victim of the very effect of a sinful world that he is describing. More specifically, he suggests that the act of his conception was sinful in itself. The Hebrew word for "conceive" is not the ordinary word used for conception and usually denotes animal desire.

Psalms 58:3

This passage states, "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies." Even a casual reading should enable one to see that this passage does not teach total depravity. Children do not literally speak lies as soon as they are born for a very good reason. They do not speak anything at all at birth or for many months afterward.

The prophet's point is that the sinful world begins to act upon a child as soon as he is born. The more advanced in sin a child's environment, the earlier it acts upon him. One can be sure that the children of ancient Sodom got instilled with ideas of homosexuality at a very early age. By contrast, I did not even know there was such a practice until I was grown. Some children literally get exposed to treatment in the cradle, i.e. neglect or abuse, that makes it easy for them to follow a life of sin.

Several years ago I went into a Nashville ghetto to look for a mother whose son needed treatment. When I parked my car at the curb and got out, a little boy of about five said something to me that I did not understand. Assuming him to be merely chattering, I responded with an absent-minded greeting. But as I walked away, he made the same statement repeatedly, each time a little more firmly. Then it hit me that what this lad was saying in his childish lisp was "Give me that new car or I will beat you up!" When I turned and started toward him, he ran away. That was twelve years ago. He probably would beat me up now.

The little boy described above had acquired the habits of his sinful environment even before he could talk plainly. But he was not born that way. This kind of effect of a sinful world is what David is talking about.

Romans 5:12-19

This set of verses is extensive, so only the key passage, verse 12, will be reproduced here. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Paul's discussion of law and grace in this book is admitted by all scholars to be some of the most profound literature in existence. Despite that fact, there is a simple way of demonstrating that the text does not teach hereditary depravity. It teaches that whatever was done by Adam was reversed by Jesus. Notice verse 19 from the Amplified Version. "For just as by one man's disobedience the many were constituted sinners, so by one Man's obedience the many will be constituted righteous." Thus, if Adam gave all men depraved natures, Jesus took it away, so that we do not have to worry about that anymore.

I believe Paul is discussing the consequences of Adam's sin and of Jesus' sacrifice. Those two acts were the reverse of each other. Adam gave the world the opportunity to sin and Jesus gave it the opportunity to be forgiven. Adam led mankind into sin; Jesus leads them out.

Ephesians 2:3

This passage was directed by Paul to the Gentile Christians. It says, "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." The argument on this verse goes like this. Paul said you Gentiles who are now saved "were by nature the children of wrath." "We all," meaning all Jewish Christians and others, had our conversation with you (Gentiles) in times past. Thus, all men were evil by nature and are only saved by God's choice and grace. Sounds strong, doesn't it?

But one has to be careful. If we insist that "nature" in this verse means an inherited disposition, which in them was depraved, then we make the Bible to contradict itself. In Rom. 2:14 Paul said that some Gentiles "do by nature the things contained in the law." He also said (Rom. 7:12) that the law was "holy, just, and good." Thus, some Gentiles had natures that produced holy, just and good behaviour. Obviously, not all men are by nature depraved. Hence, the doctrine of total depravity is wrong.

Actually, the word nature in both of these passages means simply "the regular law or order" of a group or society. It has nothing to do with genetic inheritance, good or bad. The word was used in the same way in 1 Cor. 11:14 when Paul said, "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?" In this case the regular customs of the people agreed with the law of God on men having long hair.

Human laws, customs, and environments are different. Some of them have supported Godly behaviour to an appreciable extent. Others have been so wicked that they promoted very evil behaviour. In no case can the societies of men produce forgiveness of sins.

Two principles

The preceding discussion should have demonstrated that the doctrine of total depravity is without scriptural support. In addition to the fact that it is not taught, it violates two basic principles laid down in the word of God. The first of these is that one is responsible to God only for his own behaviour. He will be rewarded only for his own good works and held accountable only for his own sins. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the

father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him" (Ezk. 18:20).

The principle of individual responsibility is as clearly taught in the New Testament as the Old. Paul said, "So then everyone of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12). The doctrine of inherited sin clearly violates this principle.

The second principle is the innocence of childhood. The Bible teaches that God does not impute sins to those who are not capable of being responsible for their actions. Jesus acknowledged the innocence of children on several occasions, and declared, "of such is the kingdom of heaven." See Matt. 18:3 and 19:4. Surely for the open-minded student no further proof is needed that God does not continue to impute Adam's sin to little children.

In the next article, we will discuss the age of accountability and other factors included in becoming accountable to God.

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GLEANINGS

"Let her glean even among the sheaves." Ruth 2:15

PREACHER'S PLEASE NOTE

"Principal Wheeler Robinson has defined a good sermon as that which utters the personal conviction of a great truth intelligibly expressed and applied, and imparted with the dignity of the Word of God, it must deal with great truths and not with trivialities; it must sound the note of conviction, it must belong to the unity we call worship, or worthship."

THE PREACHER'S WORDS

"The preacher's words, Dr Hutton has said, "may be supported by the display of learning, by appeals to history, or by argument with men on their own ground. I make bold to say they are never really quickened and made powerful by such things. Preaching at its best does not argue; it merely arrests, declares, reveals. It holds up a light by which you see for the first time what all the time was there."

HAVE NO ANXIETY ABOUT THE MORROW

"One of the most appalling comments on our present way of life is that half of all the beds in our hospitals are reserved for patients with nervous and mental troubles, patients who have collapsed under the crushing burden of accumulated yesterdays and fearful tomorrows. Yet a vast majority of those people would be walking the streets to-day, leading happy, useful lives, if they had only heeded the words of Jesus: "Have no anxiety about the morrow"."

Dale Carnegie.

SO NEAR HOME AND THIS HAPPENS!

"The sound of grinding metal drew a crowd to the scene of the collision. Slowly the man emerged from his battered car. Pointing to a house nearby, he cried, "That's my home. I've just driven across the continent without trouble. So near home and this happens!" Bunyan said, "I perceived that there was a way to hell from the very door of heaven. How tragic to be so near and miss it."

H. G. Mackay.

LIKE PETER

"Our dear Redeemer, had not where to lay His head. I have never yet been placed in that extremity. One who is really leaning on the Beloved finds it always possible to say, 'I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me'. But I am so apt, like Peter, to take my eyes off the one Object and look at the waves and winds...Oh, for more stability!"

Hudson Taylor.

WHO SAID IT?

"I thought fit to scrutinize and ascertain for myself the several points of my religious belief, by the most careful perusal and meditation of the Holy Scriptures themselves." "For my own part, I adhere to the Holy Scriptures alone - I follow no heresy or sect."

John Milton

Isaiah 59:1 **THE LORD'S EAR IS NOT HEAVY, THAT IT CANNOT HEAR**

"God hath something to say to us as a Friend every day, by the written Word, in which we must hear His voice, by His providences, and by our own consciences, and He hearkens and hears whether we have anything to say to Him by way of reply.

Matthew Henry

HE MUST INCREASE, BUT I MUST DECREASE John 3:30

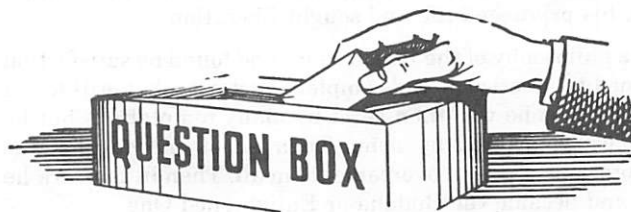
"There was no part of creature holiness that I had so great a sense of its loveliness as humility, brokenness of heart and poverty of spirit. My heart panted after this, that I might be nothing, and that God might be ALL."

Jonathan Edwards

WE QUOTE - ARTHUR T. PIERSON

"It is true that many an ignorant disciple has been both firm in faith and rich in service. But, even he has studied one kind of evidences, and it is his knowledge of them that makes him strong. The evidences he has mastered are those which are understood by experience rather than argument. God has made it possible for even the most unlearned to know that the Bible is His Word, by finding it the power of God to their salvation and sanctification. There are simple-minded believers who know nothing of the proofs from prophecy and miracle, who do know that God is faithful to his promises, and see the miracle of the new heart and changed life actually wrought in themselves. Christ is a living Saviour by that most infallible proof - what He has done and is doing for them. He opened their blind eyes to see their sin and need, and his beauty and love; he cleansed the leprosy of their guilt, cured the palsy of their helplessness, and the fever of their raging passion, and cast out the demon from their hearts."

Selected by LEONARD MORGAN



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"We hear a lot today about Hindus, Moslems, and Buddhists. Can you briefly tell us something about their religions?"

These, of course, are three of the major religions in the world, and detailed information concerning them is available in most libraries. However, I have been asked the question, and I think the best way to answer it so that it will be of maximum benefit to the reader is to give a brief survey of the religions

mentioned, and then to indicate the important differences between those religions and the Christian religion. First of all, I think, we must enquire as to what we mean by religion.

Religion

When we mention the word 'religion' most people automatically assume that we are talking about the *Christian* religion; I suppose this is because most religions rest on the belief that there is a supernatural power or powers which govern the universe. In point of fact, however, not all religions relate that power to the God of Heaven, as we shall see.

One notorious definition is attributed to Karl Marx and it is almost always quoted out of context. Part of that definition says, "It (religion) is the opium of the people". On the face of it, this part of the statement seems to be extremely cynical, but we have to understand that Marx was speaking about down-trodden and oppressed peoples, and his comments on religion must be viewed in context, "Religion is the sigh of the hard-pressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, as it is the soul of soulless circumstances. It is the opium of the people." Who would be bold enough to say that religions, including the Christian religion, have not flourished among the oppressed peoples of the world? Oppression has made them seek the sanctuary of religion diligently, and having found it, they, the poor and the illiterate, have found more hope and comfort than the brilliant Marx who pinned *his* hopes on universal socialism and political theory.

The search of man for religion, then, is his quest to gain contact with some supernatural power, to elevate his spirit, to gain relief from oppression (and here we must think also of the oppression of sin), and finally to reach that sublime experience which Christians call Heaven, and some call Nirvana. So let us examine the religious groups mentioned in the question in somewhat greater detail.

Buddhism

Gautama Siddhartha, the Founder of Buddhism, was born in the north-eastern part of India about 560 B.C. He was a member of one of the ruling families, and Gautama was the family name. It is said that certain magical signs attended his birth, and that the sages depicted him as a future world leader. It was also said that if he saw certain signs then he would become a homeless wanderer. His father tried to protect him from seeing the signs, but see them he evidently did, and it is further said that from them he learned the lesson of the vanity of earthly things, and that feminine beauty was transient. Having learned these lessons, he forsook his privileged life and sought liberation.

He turned first to the philosophy of the Hindu sages and found no satisfaction from them. He then turned to asceticism and complete austerity, but still found no peace of mind. It is said that he was then beset by many temptations but he overcame them all and was mastered by none. Then all of one day he was subjected to further temptations and still overcame them all. Then in the dark he received enlightenment and became the Buddha or Enlightened One.

The main thrust of his teaching was that attachment to the world, with its roots in desire and possessions, was the cause of all suffering. Also fundamental to his teaching are the Four Noble Truths. These are : The Noble Truth about suffering. The Noble Truth about the origin of suffering. The Noble Truth about the destruction of suffering. The Noble Truth about the Eightfold Path. Roughly translated into English this Eightfold Path is said to be: right understanding;

right thought; right speech; right action; right vocation; right effort; right awareness of the mind; right concentration.

Buddhism differs from Christianity in that even though there is a general belief in gods, the Buddha is said to have denied that he was a god, and certainly there is no belief in a creator-god. There is no belief in a Saviour. Buddha is venerated in Buddhist temples by the size and the number of his images, to which numerous flower-offerings are made. I remember well entering a Buddhist temple in Burma and being overwhelmed by the sheer size of an image of the Buddha standing at the far side of the temple. All around the inside of the temple there were literally hundreds of smaller images so that one seemed to be submerged in the all-pervading presence of the Buddha. The beautiful posture into which the image is cast is supposed to represent the Buddhist Nirvana, the utter and complete dissolution of all wordly vices such as greed, hate, desire, and all such.

Hinduism

Hinduism emerged from the ancient traditional literature of India known as the Vedic literature (Veda means 'knowledge'). Hence, religious writings, mysticism, sacrifices, philosophical knowledge, and what was known as the Royal Knowledge. Vedic religion had many festivals, and also there was a belief in many gods (polytheism). It also had a rigid caste system, at the top of which were the Brahmins, the priest-rulers.

Hinduism retained the caste system. It also retained the belief in many gods, but three leading gods emerged; Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the kindly sustainer; and Siva, the destroyer, who rather paradoxically is also the power of fertility.

Religious festivals also pay a prominent part, the chief festival being the Festival of Lights. Animal sacrifices have, in the main, been replaced by offerings of flowers and fruits. The life of devotion lies in the important Yoga schools. The doctrine of reincarnation is taught, and this is regulated by the law of Karma (as a man sows so shall he reap). The cow is a sacred animal and may not be killed. The Yoga schools teach personal discipline, insight and knowledge, personal devotion, good works, and contemplative and intellectual discipline. It is said that Hindu philosophers see the many gods as the manifestations of the Eternal Spirit Brahman. Thus we have the rather strange combination of polytheism and monotheism.

Hindu ethics seem to be governed by Karma (as a man sows so shall he reap). This must not be looked upon as punishment or reward as in the Christian religion, but rather as the harvest of actions of different kinds. This harvest will be reaped relative to the new incarnation. Hell is looked upon as boiling hot or icy cold, while heaven is bedecked with flowers and music and sensual pleasures. Hell and heaven are intermediate stages between subsequent incarnations.

Christian ethics is dominated by love. Hindu ethics seeks to obtain for oneself a state of bliss and happiness in a world of moral order. According to the Hindu there are four roads to this. The lowest road lies through sensual pleasure, while the highest lies in the abandonment of all worldly ties. Through this road, it is said, lies the escape from death and rebirth; no further incarnations would be necessary.

One can see in all this the all-embracing nature of Hinduism when contrasted with the rather specific Christian ethic of the One True God, and a Saviour Christ.

Islam

The Founder of Islam, Muhammad, was born in Mecca about the year 570. His youth is obscure, but at the age of 40 it is said that he had a religious experience which convinced him that he was to be the Apostle of the One and only God, Allah. The Koran records that he had a vision of the archangel Gabriel carrying a piece of silk on which was the word 'recite', and ostensibly he was told by Gabriel what to recite. He moved from Mecca to Medina, and there, by his wisdom and statesmanship he was able to bring together conflicting Arab factions, and weld them into one community. He established the Constitution of Medina, which was a charter claiming that the community 'was a community over against mankind'.

Muhammed was both a religious and a political leader. The shrine to turn to in worship for the community was Mecca, and his work among the Arabs in uniting them against inter-tribal wars, culminated in the accession of Mecca into the new community. This was in 1630, and two years later he died, but by this time the community was a living reality and spread rapidly.

He accepted much of Judaism and Christianity (but not the divinity of Jesus). He saw Moses and Jesus as prophets, with he himself as the culmination of the line of prophets. His message was that God is One, and He calls the believer to obedience, to resignation and to be His slave. This led to the Five Pillars of Islam, which are:

- 1 The Confession of Faith. 'There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Apostle of God'.
- 2 Prayer, at five set times each day, with congregational prayer on Friday.
- 3 Almsgiving.
- 4 Fasting.
- 5 Pilgrimage to Mecca.

To these five must be added the Jihad or Holy War. This 'effort for God' could be by preaching or military power.

The ethics of Islam involve a responsible attitude towards possessions, and a real concern for the under-privileged (sentiments with which Christians would not disagree). The one mortal sin was to deny the One God.

Obviously, the Christian ethic could not tolerate Jesus as a down-graded prophet. Furthermore, it would have to eschew war for the achievement of God's aims. And even though Islam is a 'book' religion (the Koran), Christians could not substitute it for the Bible.

Well, this is only a brief survey, but I trust it will have whetted the reader's appetite to study further these great world religions (but not, I might add, to the detriment of studying the Bible).

(All questions please, to Alf Marsden, 377 Billinge Road, Hayfield, Wigan, Lancs.)

SCRIPTURE READINGS

OCTOBER 1983

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| 2—Job 1:5-22 | Luke 22:54-71 |
| 9—Isaiah 50 | Luke 23:1-25 |
| 16—Psa. 22:1-21 | Luke 23:26-43 |
| 23—Job 19:7-29 | Luke 23:44 - 24:12 |
| 30—Zech 13 | Luke 24:13-35 |

THE TRIAL

The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jews. It consisted of seventy members. Jesus was brought before it following his arrest. The whole proceedings were a mockery. They were also unlawful. False witnesses were brought in to testify against Jesus. The commandment says: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour" (Exodus 20:16). Of

course, there was no charge to answer, but they had it in for Jesus and nothing was going to thwart their evil plans.

We are saddened to read here of Peter's denial. But we recall the confession that the apostle was later to make in the presence of this same council following the resurrection of his Master from the dead (Read Acts 4). By then, what a change had come over Cephas!

Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate because as the procurator he had the power of life and death. In the end Pilate yielded to the pressure exerted by the Jewish leaders and condemned Jesus. He did the wrong thing because he was afraid to do the right thing. He sacrificed Jesus in order to keep his position and to further his ambition.

If you have time, dear reader, study the encounter between Jesus and Pilate as recorded in John's Gospel. At one point Jesus said: "Everyone that is of the truth hears my voice". Pilate said unto him: "What is truth? and did not wait for a reply. The great tragedy is that The Truth was standing right in front of him — for truth, in the final analysis, is a person. Jesus Himself stated on one occasion: "I am The Way, The Truth, and The Life: no man comes unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6).

The Crucifixion

Crucifixion must be the worst form of capital punishment ever devised by man. It was borrowed by the Greeks and the Romans from the Phoenicians. Normally, in Roman times, only slaves, provincials, and the lowest types of criminals were crucified, but rarely Roman citizens. Death by this method was cruel, horrible and tortuous.

Paul wrote to the saints at Philippi... "Jesus humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, EVEN the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). That the Son of God was willing to go so far for the sins of the world is a fact that staggers the mind and stirs the heart.

The ignominy of it all! Carl Ketcherside has written: "The cross was a symbol of ignominy and a badge of shame. One who was hung upon a tree was deemed to be under the curse of God. No greater disgrace could come to one than to have his naked body nailed to a cross, exposed in all the weakness of the flesh, twisting, writhing, sweating, bleeding and expiring in full view of the sceptical population."

Dear reader, please take time to examine the numerous passages of scripture which deal with the cross and the crucifixion of Jesus. For example, Paul to the Galatians: "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Galatians 6:14).

Satan so worked it that he placed two malefactors between Jesus. But it is great to read that he lost one of them to the Master. "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

We might well ask: "Why did Jesus endure such a death?" The Hebrew writer has said: "...Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

The Burial

Joseph of Arimathaea saw to the burial of Jesus. He was a secret disciple (John 19:38). He received help from Nicodemus who was the one who had that famous discussion with Jesus about the new birth (John 19:39 and John 3).

The scriptures say that the body of Jesus was laid in a sepulchre hewn in stone, "wherein never man before was laid" Luke 23:53). What is the significance of this? The answer is found in the Old Testament scriptures. Once a body of a man was cast into the sepulchre of Elisha; and when the man was let down and touched the bones of

Elisha he revived and stood on his feet (2 Kings 13:20,21). If the same thing had happened to Jesus then the Jews could have said that this was not a new event, that it had already occurred in history. Where was the uniqueness in that? God, of course, had foreseen all things, and had made the necessary preparations.

The Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead is the most momentous fact in history. Dying on the cross proved Jesus was the Son of man. Rising from the dead proved He was the Son of God. The apostle Paul (who saw the risen Lord) has written: "...Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead..." (Romans 1:3).

Christ's resurrection was the subject of prophecy during Old Testament times. For example, David declared: "For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hades, neither wilt Thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption" (Psalm 16:10). Paul therefore wrote: "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) In that same chapter he went on to say to the saints that if Christ was not raised the Christian message is empty and there is no content to faith. If Christ was not raised the apostles are liars. If Christ was not raised those who died in Him are gone. They have perished. If Christ was not raised all hope is limited to this life and we are miserable above all men.

Recently, in London, the followers of Karl Marx met to commemorate the centenary of his death. They gathered in Highgate Cemetery where the body of Marx is buried. It struck me as I

watched them on television: how incomparable in every respect Marxism is with Christianity! Above all: to the Marxist, his leader is a dead hero; to the Christian, his leader is a LIVING Lord. What a difference!

The Ascension

The period between the resurrection of Jesus and His ascension was forty days (Acts 1:3). As ever, Jesus did not idle away his time during these days but performed many wonderful works and taught much concerning the kingdom of God. The apostles were instructed to wait in Jerusalem "to be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). This was fulfilled (See Acts 2). In the power of the Spirit, these apostles were to become "witnesses to Jesus in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Notice that Jesus was carried "up into heaven" (Luke 24:51). It is natural to think of one who departs to God as going up than as going down or going across. Of course, to the Jews there were three heavens. The first is where the birds and the bees fly; the second one is where the sun, moon and stars are placed; and the third is the dwelling place of God. When Jesus departed he went to the third heaven and there he was crowned KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS, and glorified.

Dear reader, (I must add this) He is coming again. "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, and they also who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, amen" (Revelation 1:7). On a day unknown, He is coming to judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31).

The question is: are you ready for that day? Is it heaven or hell for you?

IAN S. DAVIDSON, Motherwell.

BELIEF : (13) The Remedy for Sin

Can the tragic results of sin be remedied? We are speaking of the personal results of sin upon the individual rather than upon the victims of sin, where the results are sometimes irrevocable.

Sin a Disease

The importance of getting rid of bodily disease is recognised. First because of the pain and discomfort it causes, sometimes even leading to death. Second, in order that the mind, being dependent upon a healthy body, may function to its full capacity.

Similarly the objects of repentance are twofold. First, that the soul may be relieved of its defilement; second, that as a direct result of such freedom from sin, it may be relieved of its more tragic result, the death of the soul, or, *the second death*.

Summary

We have considered sin and its tragic results, both mental and spiritual. Our chief concern was the awful results of unrepented sin, which leads, as the Scripture clearly reveals, to the ultimate death of the soul.

This, in fact, is why Jesus came. "His name shall be called JESUS, because he shall save his people *from their sins*" (Matthew 1:21). "He came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

It is significant that our Lord never argues about the serious consequences of sin. He speaks with authority from his knowledge about the aspects of human behaviour - a knowledge no ordinary human being possessed. He speaks with certainty too. "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

The Importance of Repentance

We make no apologies for re-introducing this subject. It is very

important in the solution of the problems we are studying. Its importance is not based on any human assessment, but upon that placed on it by our Lord himself.

Examples

His assessment of repentance is clearly shown in two examples (Luke 13:1-5). He indicates its importance by placing it before human suffering. In the one case, some Galileans had been slain by order of Pontius Pilate, even as they engaged in sacrificial devotions. In the other, a tower in Siloam had fallen, killing eighteen people. Yet Jesus, by way of contrast to these disasters says, "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish."

Worldly and Heavenly Evaluation

How many of us would consider the need for repentance of greater importance than some of the disasters which occur even in our brief lifetime? What prominence would newspapers give to the account of an earthquake, compared with one who, in remorse, could only smite his breast and cry, "God, be merciful to me a sinner?" (Luke 18:13).

In the one case, the newspapers would have it headlined on their front pages. In the other case, only God would think of recording a humble sinner's repentance. This he has done, not only in the Bible, but in the records of heaven.

Jesus said, "I say unto you that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance" (Luke 15:7).

What then is repentance? We shall explain this much misunderstood subject in our next article, the Lord willing.

Exercises in Belief

Matthew 3:1-2; 9:13; Mark 1:15; 2:17; 6:12; Luke 5:31-32; 16:30; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 11:18; 17:30; 20:21; Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9.

W. BROWN

(To be continued)

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Dennyloanhead, Scotland: The church at Dennyloanhead rejoice in reporting another addition to the Lord's body on Monday 11th July, 1983. On that evening Alexander Malcolm confessed his faith in Jesus, as his personal Saviour, and was baptised into the ever blessed name of Christ for the remission of sins. May our Lord bless him to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. We can but echo the words brother Alex used after his immersion, "To God be the glory".

Joseph M. Malcolm

Kentish Town, London: We greatly rejoice to record the baptism of CHRIS KANDEL, ALEC BALFOUR and PAUL STUBBS. We thank God for these lives surrendered to Jesus.

R.B. Scott

COMING EVENTS

Kentish Town, London: God willing we hope to hold the 112th Anniversary Meeting (of the opening of Hope Chapel

in October, 1871). Meetings on Saturday and Sunday 1st & 2nd October - brother Geoffrey and Leonard Daniell (Bristol).

Saturday — 3 p.m. and 6.30 p.m.
(Tea 5 p.m.)

Sunday — 11 a.m. and 6.30 p.m.
Visitors Welcome

Dennyloanhead, Scotland: We intend, God willing, holding Saturday evening gospel meetings each month, beginning 24th September. Meetings on October 22nd: November 26th and December 17th. All these meetings will commence at 6 p.m. We extend a warm welcome to all who may be able to be with us.

J. M. Malcolm (Sec.)

The church at Newtongrange intend, God willing, to hold its Annual Social gathering on:

Saturday, 8th October, 1983
4 p.m.

Speakers: Leslie Purcell, Motherwell,
Jack Nisbet, Ulverston.

The venue, as always, will be the Newtongrange Meetinghouse. All welcome.
A. P. Sharp, Sec.

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