

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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"Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith"

Editorial **Christian practice in the face of personal tragedy**

I think that a little bit of background information to this month's editorial is relevant for those of our readers who are based outside of the United Kingdom and/or do not have access to the UK's media reports.

Through the early part of this calendar year there has been a spate of knife-related violent crimes in the UK carried out by individuals or gangs, some of them resulting in the deaths of

the victims of such attacks. A number of these assaults seem to have been unprovoked in any meaningful sense of the word and there is even some speculation that some of them are deliberately orchestrated so that the attacks can be videoed on mobile phones and put up for public consumption on internet sites such as YouTube. Quite what kind of warped mind conceives of this kind of brutal and sick behaviour is extremely difficult to fathom, but the reality is that these things are happening within our society. I don't intend to attempt any kind of deep sociological explanation of this type of behaviour here, though I do have my own pet theories, except to say that it is evidence of a serious breakdown of moral values amongst those who perpetrate such crimes. Violence in all of its many guises has been a persistent feature of human behaviour since the beginning of time, and I suspect that it will always remain so, but sometimes the gratuitous nature of criminal violence still has the capacity to shock, despite the fact that, appalling as it is to say so, we inevitably become de-sensitised to the more common occurrences (anyone over the age of, say, 45 will remember the time when **any** kind of murder would be headline national news). Now it is the only the more extreme cases that generate national publicity.

COMPASSION IN GRIEF

A few weeks ago, a young man by the name of Jimmy Mizzen went to his local shop in a part of London to buy a take away. It's a common scene that is repeated thousands of times in our towns and cities. Whilst in the shop 16 year-old Jimmy was confronted by a youth (or youths), and, it is reported, was challenged to a

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fight. Jimmy, a regular churchgoer and apparently a peaceable and likeable young man from a loving family, refused and for that refusal was attacked with a piece of glass with such force that his throat was slashed and he bled to death in the arms of one of his brothers who had accompanied him to the shop. Those appear to be the stark facts surrounding the loss of life of a young man with a tremendous amount to live for. It seems that he did not know his attacker but was the victim of another young man who, for whatever reason, flew into a violent temper with the tragic consequences stated above.

Jimmy apparently came from a large, loving family that was thoroughly well respected within their community. Apart from the tragic nature of this murder, the compelling feature of this incident was of Jimmy's family, and in particular his mother, displaying a dignity and lack of bitterness that is unusual in such circumstances and shows the remarkable capacity for compassion that those who love God can bring to bear in the most terrible of circumstances. This is what Jimmy's mother had to say on national television a short time after her son's death:

"I just want to say to the parents of this other boy", she said, "I just want to say I feel so, so sorry for them. I don't feel anger, I feel sorry for the parents. We've got such lovely memories of Jimmy and they will have such sorrow for their son. I feel for them, I really do." She also went on to say: "Anger breeds anger, and bitterness will destroy my family if I'm not careful – and I won't allow that to happen."

Every now and again, someone comes along who expresses the Christian message far more eloquently in a real life situation than many hours of 'preaching' will ever achieve. The adage that it's not what we say but what we do that still holds true. Mrs Gee Walker whose teenage son was murdered in Liverpool in 2005 did it when she said: "Unforgiveness makes you a victim and why should I be a victim? Anthony (her murdered son) spent his life forgiving. His life stood for peace, love and forgiveness and I brought them up that way. I have to practise what I preach. I don't feel any bitterness towards them (his killers) really, truly, all I feel ... I feel sad for the family." Twelve months later she reiterated those sentiments, so her words were clearly not a short-term, unguarded reaction that didn't stand the test of time.

Mr. Gordon Wilson whose daughter was murdered by an IRA bomb in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland in 1987 expressed similar sentiments. In the aftermath of that brutal attack Mr Wilson told the BBC: "I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge. Dirty sort of talk is not going to bring her back to life." Mr Colin Parry, whose son was killed by an IRA bomb in Warrington, Lancashire in 1993 established a Foundation of Peace, and a few years ago met with Mr Gerry Adams the leader of Sinn Fein, often described as the 'political wing' of the IRA at that time. Many believe that the dignified, public responses of these last two people were instrumental in starting the long process of changing attitudes that ultimately resulted in a large measure of peace being restored to Northern Ireland via the Good Friday Agreement.

CHRISTIAN PRACTICE IN FOCUS

It would of course be very easy at this point in this article to go down the route of trying to argue whether it was doctrinally or even morally correct, in a Christian context, for these people to extend forgiveness without the previous repentance of the perpetrators of these acts. Many would argue that neither the perpetrators, nor their families, are totally undeserving of any shred of compassion, or any statement that gives them any comfort whatsoever – and even a cursory glance at the internet blogs that refer to the Jimmy Mizzen case demonstrates that a fair proportion of

people feel insulted that the Mizzen family should feel or offer any kind of solace to the family of the attacker and most certainly not to the attacker himself. It's a tough world when you can't even respond to a deep, personal tragedy without being criticised by other people.

The real purpose of this article is to remind us that the real power of the Christian message lies in the practical expression of that message in the lives of Christian men and women. The chickens come home to roost when we are called to 'practise what we preach' - when all the theological, doctrinal discussions and studies come down to 'What would Jesus do!'

Christianity doesn't 'happen' in its real sense within the four walls of our church buildings when our Christian communities meet together; its best expression doesn't happen in study groups or on those special occasions when we meet together for fellowship. Of course all those occasions are important and we might describe that as our training school where we put in place the foundation stones of our Christian lives. But training is only a preparation for making us 'fit for purpose'. If I can use a simple analogy, those times are like going to the service station to refuel or service our cars - absolutely essential to ensuring that we can continue our journey in the harsh and frenetic environment of our public highways but can hardly be described as 'driving'. Our gatherings for fellowship and remembrance are essential to our Christian well being, but are not the essence of Christianity. Jesus took time out during his earthly ministry to commune with the Father, but he did his 'driving' in the harsh environment of the world around him. He met and ate with the tax collectors and sinners, to the horror of his enemies, because they were the people who needed him most; he healed the lepers because in most people's eyes they were the untouchables; he showed compassion to the woman taken in adultery because he wanted to show that throwing the rule book - and as many stones as could be found - was not the way to turn that woman's life around; he fed 5000 or more people simply because they were physically hungry (and turned the situation to advantage by delivering an astonishing spiritual lesson). However much good he did he was criticised for it, his motives were challenged and his integrity questioned.

I don't know whether Margaret Mizzen and her family, Gee Walker and her family, Gordon Wilson and others fit the bill of 'New Testament Christians' as we would define that. I do know though, that they have all demonstrated remarkable Christian characteristics and expressed the Christian principles of mercy and compassion in their response to unspeakable tragedy and grief. I'm also sure that there is a perfectly valid theological argument that says that you can't truly forgive someone unless and until they have repented but I'm so glad that the people mentioned above didn't stop on the brink of that debate before they made their public statements in the raw emotion of their loss (and stood by them after more considered reflection). I'm glad that they have been able to say what is in their hearts rather than hesitate about what might be doctrinally pure or weigh what the reaction of their brethren or church leaders might be before saying what they did. If all of this sounds a bit harsh and a bit raw it's because that's how Christianity is sometimes - lived in the world outside the walls of our church buildings, physically isolated from our brethren, instinctive and emotional.

Christianity is about "repenting and being baptised for the forgiveness of sins" and then getting on and **living** a life that is filled with that which flows from our training - a knowledge of the love of Jesus - and the vast majority of that living takes place in alien environment. Thank you Mrs Mizzen, because in your own and your families grief you showed us something of the grace and compassion of Jesus.

INFLUENCES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE FIRST CENTURY

(John H Diggle (Nottingham))

STUDY 11 – what happened after A.D.100?

The end of the 1st century saw the death of the last of the apostles, probably John, and with it of course, their contribution to the written record of scripture.

Very quickly the burning issue became that of sufficient authority for all that was now taught. There was strong oral tradition, but for those disposed to do so, this was more open to challenge than the written word, and since increasing numbers of Gentiles were being added to the Church, this was not a format as familiar to them as their formerly Jewish brethren.

The impression is sometimes left that, without the apostles to restrain them, the faithless and feckless took early advantage of an opportunity to 'kick over the traces', and that things went down hill very rapidly in terms of apostolic orthodoxy. Of course there were, as there always have been, those who looked to personal ambition and advantage, as the motivation for their self-promotion, at the gospel's expense. But at the same time I think we ought to show better sympathy and understanding of the predicament of the faithful and nobly motivated, than is sometimes the case. They had human failings and made all too human mistakes, but so did the apostles if it comes to that, and so do we all. Lack of a collected New Testament like ours must have proved a significant difficulty and it would be some time before such a thing became anything like widely available. Copies of the letters of Paul and the gospels increased rapidly in number, but circulation of them was far from wide.

Very often it would prove to be the case that it was disputes over doctrine and the requirements of answers to blatant heresies, both from within and without the Church, that concentrated minds on what apostolic authority amounted to. There were undoubtedly some who considered it unacceptable that anyone at all should ever present their teaching as having definite authority, even where it conformed very well indeed with what had been passed down from the apostles as the true gospel.

Initially, such disputes as did arise were more concerned with Church government and practices rather than central issues to do with salvation and again these were largely such as arose out of issues relating to questions of authority. Direct contact with the apostles was a persuasive argument in favour of an individual's right to be heard as speaking with authority, but increasingly this came to be suspected, and we can be sure that some with personally ambitious motives were rather free with their assertions that 'this was what Peter/Paul/John used to say on the matter'. Though it did not always turn out that way, we have little reason to doubt a general strength of commitment to doing God's will in God's way.

Since there are obvious limitations on the space that can be given to our study of this vast field of Church history, this present article will offer a very general sketch of the period between 100 and 460 AD, to be followed by a closer look at some of the more important issues, like the major heresies and the way in which they were handled, in subsequent studies. If my own experience as a member of the Lord's Church is anything to go by, I am inclined to think that this is a rather neglected field amongst us, and it is not necessarily the dry, academic and fruitless area of study it is often

taken to be. I will have to ask for your patience in this section whilst we look at some of the necessary factual background material, but I hope to be able to indicate in later studies that there are some helpful lessons to be learned both from the mistakes that were made, and the wisdom that was shown, as it was delivered through the apostles' teaching, in combating false teaching, false beliefs and deviations from God's will.

Those who assumed the apostles' mantle of leadership are often referred to as the Fathers and are sub-divided into four categories, roughly as follows:

- ❑ The Apostolic or Post-Apostolic Fathers: AD 95 – 150
- ❑ The Apologists: AD 140 – 200
- ❑ The Polemicists: AD 180 – 225
- ❑ The Systematic Theologians: Ad 225 – 460

THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS

Generally speaking, as no major controversy had as yet taken hold, these were men who took on the responsibility of building up the Church. The majority of their teaching was to do with matters like unity, fellowship, Christian growth and the practical dimension's of expressing one's faith in religious lifestyle. For the most part they had little to say about salvation related questions, although **BARNABAS** forcefully revisited the relationship between Christian faith and Jewish Law-keeping in what some regard as almost anti-Semitic fashion.

CLEMENT wrote a letter in response to a request for advice similar to that received much earlier by Paul, asking for guidance on how to restore unity in the face of intensifying divisions amongst the church at Corinth. It seems that division was a perennial problem there, and such was the regard in which this letter was held that, when the time came, there were many who believed that 1 Clement should be included within the canon of scripture.

POLYCARP was a direct disciple of the apostle John who served in Smyrna and concentrated on teaching and writing about the necessity for making faith a living reality in obedience to God's will. Of that which he wrote, the only remaining item is a letter to the Philippians, which contains extensive references to the majority of Paul's letters. He was martyred in AD156 and on being asked to denounce Christ, replied that he was not prepared to be unfaithful to the One who had been faithful to him for 86 years.

IGNATIUS is often the one who is criticised as having instigated the concept of bishops presiding over the affairs of more than one congregation, thus paving the way for the pre-eminence of the bishopric of Rome. Whilst his own step was one too far removed from apostolic teaching on the role and position of elders, it would be unfair to saddle him with responsibility for those excesses to which later leaders went. Nor were his motives necessarily sinister; remember that authority and submission to Godly leadership were the big problems of the day.

Works by the names of **THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS** and **THE DIDACHE** belong to this period also. The latter is known as **THE TEACHINGS OF THE TWELVE** and is still available in Penguin paperback classics today. It is divided into four sections that deal respectively with Christian ethics and morality, baptism, fasting and the Lord's Supper, Church government and the end of the world. The work has acquired a certain notoriety as that which first offered threefold pouring as an alternative to total immersion, but it should be noted that this instruction emphasises the fact that pouring is only to be used where immersion is not practical.

As remains the case today, prominence is not necessarily a guarantee that the views expressed by those who possess them are held by the general mass of Christians, nor for that matter that where certain views are not held by the many, they are

inevitably divergent from divine truth. Unfortunately the numbers stacked up behind any given position have regularly proved to be a poor guide to its reliability.

THE APOLOGISTS

Increasingly the Church was troubled by attacks upon its teachings, for the most part from those outside, and in philosophical terms. These attacks could not be left unanswered and it is perhaps a little disingenuous of those who criticise the apologists for succumbing to the temptation to answer them in similar terms.

JUSTIN MARTYR, TERTULLIAN and **TATIAN** are the three most renowned names amongst the early Apologists. Justin was put to death by the emperor Marcus Aurelius, to whom he had written one of his major defences of Christian teaching, although the best known of these was a dialogue with Trypho the Jew. Although he was widely known as a Christian who had come to faith as a philosopher, he demonstrates a consistent focus on Jesus and on scripture as the final authority being the very Word of God.

Tatian's renown is as the author of a work known as the **DIATESSERON**, the first harmony of the gospels, published between 150 and 160 AD.

Of these three, the most eminent was Tertullian, largely because of the sheer volume of his written work in apologetics and theology and because, as a lawyer and one with diplomatic skills, he played a significant part in pleading the case that being a Christian did not make one a disloyal citizen of the Roman Empire. He also had a great deal to do with the controversy raised by the **MONTANISTS**, to whom we shall return in a later piece on the major heresies.

THE POLEMICISTS

Mainly the Apologists set out to answer the attacks of those who raised them from outside the Church, whereas in the case of the Polemicists, their efforts were directed to the refutation of heresies that developed within for the most part.

These false teachings were many, varied and persistent. Indeed some of them have more than a little to do with some of the major sects, and their beliefs, to this day. One of these heresies, Gnosticism, proved to be so virulent and far-reaching and has such close connections with the New Testament text, that it is intended to devote an entire article to this subject, whilst others will be looked at more briefly.

IRENAEUS devoted much of his life's work to the defence of the one true gospel against the dangerous persuasion and speculative philosophies of the Gnostics, who frequently gained a sympathetic audience amongst some of the churches. As a further dimension to this same concern though, Irenaeus also set down one of the earliest formulations of what he regarded as sound doctrine in an effort to combat error, through plain and positive statement of fact and truth; in this respect at least, it was rather like the method adopted by Paul in the letter to the Colossians, a letter largely concerned with the early and incipient stages of this same Gnostic heresy.

The question of the forgiveness of post-baptism sin was the dispute with which the name of **HIPPOLYTUS** is associated; Tertullian weighed into the Gnostic controversy too, along with further contributions to those over the nature of the soul and the trinity of the Godhead.

THE SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGIAN

The names of **OREGEN, ATHANASIUS, JEROME, AMBROSE, AUGUSTINE** and **JOHN CHRYSOSTOM** are the best known in this period and category, but considerations of space mean that we must leave fuller reference to them until we come to deal with the heresies and other teaching requirements to which they responded.



QUESTION:
Can you please give some background
to apparent contradictions in the Scriptures



The question with which I have been asked to deal concerns those verses in the Scriptures that present us with what appear to be plain contradictions.

Here is an example of what I mean. Recording the wickedness of the earth's early population, the Authorized Version of Gen.6: 6 states: **"It repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth and it grieved him at his heart."**

But in 1st Samuel 15:29 of the same version, the prophet Samuel is recorded as saying, **"The Strength of Israel will not repent, for he is not a man that he should repent"**, whilst the later 'Revised Standard Version' of the same verse reads, **"The Glory of Israel will not recant, for he is not a mortal that he should change his mind."**

Furthermore, in the A.V. of Mal.3: 6, God Himself says, **"I am the LORD, I change not"**, which, in the R.S.V, remains virtually unchanged, as, **"I, the LORD, do not change."** This statement is crystal clear, because the Hebrew word 'change' in this verse is 'shanan', which, in other verses, is rendered 'alter' or 'repent'.

1. How, then, do we reconcile these verses?

How can God be said to 'repent', when to 'repent' literally means 'to change one's mind'? I ask this because, in the New Testament, the verb 'repent' is the English translation of the Greek word 'metanoeo'.

Well, the first part of that word is 'meta', which means 'after', and the second part is 'noeo', which means 'to perceive'. Put the two parts together and 'metanoeo' - 'repent' - means 'to perceive after', and implies 'a change of mind'.

But, is not one of the characteristics of Deity *omniscience*? God is 'all-knowing', and because He knows everything He never learns anything new, and therefore never needs to change His opinion, and, therefore, can never be said to 'repent'. Psalm 55:8-9 reminds us that He says: **"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts, than your thoughts."**

This statement reminds me of another fact, namely, that whilst the evidence of order and design that we observe in the natural world around us and the laws that operate with such regularity in our universe, surely must convince a thoughtful person that an intelligent Mind has worked - (and still is at work) - and that God *exists*, the natural world *itself* - alone- does not reveal God's *character*, or His *will*, or the *purpose* He has planned for His creation. This means that we may only understand God's *Mind*, or come to know His *will*, when He chooses to reveal Himself to us.

If we ask the familiar question, "What is God like?" we are compelled to recognize that we have no way of finding out. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" is the challenge issued in Job 11:7.

As Christians, we believe that God has revealed both His character and His will in the Bible, which we rightly call 'the Word of God'.

2. But, since God tells us that His ways are 'not your ways', how can we understand His actions?

In other words, what terms or expressions must God use, to enable us to understand His nature and His mind, at least *partially*? I say, 'partially', because it is utterly impossible for us to understand Him completely. Indeed, if we *could* understand God completely, we would not need Him, because, in that respect, we would be His equals.

God helps us to reach this partial understanding of His nature, His mind and His will, by using language which tells us that, just as *we* are *hurt* when those whom we love are hurt, and are *sad*, when those whom we have tried to help disappoint us, and are *pleased* when our loved ones do well, God Himself is capable of these and all other emotions.

3. This should not surprise us.

After all, God created us *'in His own likeness'*; He made us like Himself. The Mormons teach that He has a body like ourselves and has arms and legs, but our likeness to God is not *physical*, but *spiritual*. He created us moral and intelligent beings, and if you read James 3:9, you will notice the use of the present tense. James says that we *'are made'* in the likeness of God. Although Man is marred by sin, he remains a moral and intelligent being, and, in that sense, retains his likeness to God.

This means that the emotions you and I feel are emotions which God Himself has made us capable of feeling, and – (dare I say it?) – *they are emotions which God Himself also feels*. He is not a cold, insensitive, distant Being who, as some so-called scientists suppose, in the beginning, *wound up* the Universe like a gigantic clock, and then left it to run down, until it stops. On the contrary, He has revealed Himself as a caring Father who remains involved with both His creation and His creatures.

Incidentally, this is one reason why I am not greatly concerned about the depletion of the ozone layer or global warming, matters about which godless and unbelieving men are so greatly concerned in these days. They leave God out of their calculations, and ignore the fact that it was God who created the 'ozone layer', and who is in control of 'global warming'! Therefore nothing will happen to our planet, or our universe, until He calls 'Time'!

4. We should listen to Peter!

In fact, if our fellow-men would read the scriptures they would see that, almost 2000 years ago, through Peter, God gave clear warning about the destiny in store for the Earth, and what might well be called *'real'* global warming! Read 2nd Pet.3.

I repeat; what Peter describes does not worry me, because before that which he so graphically describes takes place, God's children will have been removed from the Earth. We should be re-assured by the knowledge that our Heavenly Father is still in control!

5. The use of anthropomorphic expressions does not deny God's omniscience or influence His actions

Nor, when the Bible tells us that God *'repents'*, does it mean that He repents as we ourselves repent. Because our knowledge is limited, we naturally change our minds when we learn something that we did not previously know. But, because God knows everything there is to be known, or that can be known, the same can never be said of Him.

When we read that His behaviour changes in a way that the Bible describes as *'repenting'*, it merely means that Man's repentance and change of conduct, has made it possible for God to change His attitude towards Man, and enables Him to treat Man in a different way.

6. "Anthropomorphism"

The great problem that we have to deal with is the fact that, as human beings, we can only explain God's actions in human terms, and his means that anything we say about God can never be wholly accurate.

Please remember that because the Bible is His Word, what we read in it is His own revelation of Himself, and, when He wants us to understand how He feels in any particular situation, He uses words and expressions that lead us to think about Him as though He were a human being. Indeed, we can only understand God and relate to His feelings and emotions, when we think about His actions in a human way and *describe* them in a human way.

These words and phrases that speak of God as though He is a human being are known as '*anthropomorphisms*'

For instance, God conveys His feeling about evil by saying that He '*hates*' sin. He expresses the fact that He is involved with the world which He has created when He tells us, through Jesus, that '*God so loved*' the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). And, when we read in Genesis 6:6 that God '*repented*' that he had made man, we are meant to understand something of the *pain* He feels when men turn away from Him.

7. An Error of Modern Theology.

Some modern theologians reject the notion of a 'personal God', and prefer to describe God using such expressions as '*the essence of being*', '*primeval force or energy*', etc.

I remember that about 60 years ago, the Bishop of Birmingham at the time, Dr. John Robinson, produced a book entitled, "*The Honest to God Controversy*", in which he described God in such meaningless, abstract terms, that the well-known C.S. Lewis, devastatingly said that all that Dr. Robinson's book did for him, was to conjure up "*a picture of a gigantic tapioca pudding!*"

Such terms, '*God loves*', '*God hates*', '*God repented*', etc., are '*anthropomorphisms*', and their great importance lies in the fact that they reveal that God is not a hard, cold, unfeeling, implacable, distant Being, but a Creator, who cares about His creation and His creatures. He is a *personal* Being, who possesses all the attributes of personality.

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COURAGE TO SPEAK AND ACCEPT MISTAKES

(By V.Sujatha)

People love other people for a reason, often for their selfishness. If someone does something wrong and the other always supports him rather than helping him realise his mistake, the wrongdoer will like him. Maybe they know they are wrong but are not worried about it. One should speak if the other is wrong irrespective of who he is and what the consequences will be. By not correcting him, we are taking part in his fault. James 4:17 says: "To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin."

Our age difference can be another hindrance to acknowledging our fault. Older people are reluctant to accept correction from younger people and vice versa. Ego comes in the way of accepting we have made mistakes. Age, experience and knowledge do not guarantee that one is wise. One grows in wisdom by reading the Bible, understanding it correctly and applying it to oneself, prayerfully. Even if scriptural teaching comes from a younger person, it should not be despised (1 Timothy 4:11, 12). Paul told Timothy to reprove and rebuke (1 Timothy 4:2).

Who should reprove and rebuke? The Bible says all brethren should reprove and rebuke (James 5:19,20). However we should strive to be good examples. (1 Timothy 4:12) Even so we all make mistakes but as Christians, it is our duty to correct and accept correction. James 5:16 says: "Confess* *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

It needs courage to admit our faults. Let us try to improve our lives and of others. Let us open our hearts to people when it is our fault. Let us have the courage to accept our faults and learn to improve.

*Greek: exomologeio = acknowledge openly and joyfully.

Thinking Out Loud

1950's - AND BACK

Ian S. Davidson: Motherwell

I was born in 1949. I first went to school in 1954 and left my third primary school in January 1960 for secondary school. My primary school days were some of the happiest days of my life.

Britain in the 1950's was, I think, a better country than it is today. True, there was not the same wealth, but people seemed to be happier and more relaxed. I was out and about a lot playing football with my pals and exploring the countryside around the growing new town of East Kilbride. The summer nights, especially, seemed to go on forever. Our parents had no worries in our being attacked or abducted or anything like that. We were all over the place and it was altogether a wonderful, peaceful time.

Every Sunday we attended three church meetings, including afternoon Sunday school. My father was the Sunday school superintendent. We all learnt a lot from him. The highlights of the year were the Wee Social in February and the Sunday school trip in early June. At the former, we all had to do our individual party piece, which was quite nerve-wracking, and, in addition, sing a number of choir pieces under the direction of "Uncle Willie", who was very talented musically. These days are not forgotten. They helped mould and shape many of us into what we are today.

But the world was changing in the 1950's to explode in the 1960's. I need but mention space exploration, rock 'n roll, the cold war, the birth of the European Common Market, the first parking meters, the contraceptive pill, the hydrogen bomb, atomic power stations, antibiotics, the growth of television, tensions in the Middle East, Suez crisis, Soviet troops in Hungary, Castro in Cuba, desegregation in schools in the southern states of the USA, film - "On the Waterfront", air travel, etc.

950's

But I like to look back and, first, to the 950's AD, a thousand years earlier. What was going on then?

Europe, of course, was in the "Dark Ages". Otto I was the king of the Franks and the Lombards. The Pope from 955 was John X11. He succeeded Agapetus II and reigned until 964. Indulf was king of Scotland. Edwy, son of Edmund became king of England. He succeeded King Edred. In 957 the Mercians and Northumbrians rebelled against Edwy. In 959 Edgar the Peaceful became king of England and reigned until 975. Romanus II became Byzantine Emperor in the same year. In 954, the expulsion of Eric Blodaxe took place. He was the last Danish king of York. Within 50 years of 950, there was a German Empire, the Umayyad Caliphate in Spain, the Fatimid Caliphate in north Africa and the western Middle East, the Byzantine Empire in the eastern Mediterranean, the Principality of Russia, the Duchy of Hungary, the Bulgarian Empire, to name but a few. The history of Europe is long and fascinating.

50's

We now go back nine hundred years to the "genuine" 50's. Now we are not far off the ministry of Jesus and are into the very early days of Christianity. The Roman Empire was, of course, to the fore. The 50's saw two emperors, Claudius, who died in 54 and Nero, who turned out to be unstable and cruel. The apostle Paul probably wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans in the 50's. Mark and

James may also have composed their works in this decade. Paul undertook his second and third missionary journeys in the 50's and was arrested in 56. He probably travelled to Rome in 60 AD. The Roman Procurators of Judea in this decade were Ventidius Cumanus (48-52), M. Antonius Felix (52-59), before whom Paul was tried, and Porcius Festus (59-61), before whom Paul was again tried, which led to his appeal to Caesar. The Jewish high priests at the time were Ananias, son of Nebedaius (c. 47-58) and Ishmael, son of Phiabi II (c. 58-60). The 50's also saw the rise of the Zealots, although they had been around for years. In fact, the Zealot party was founded by Judas the Galilean, who had led a revolt against Rome as far back as 6 AD. They were called Zealots because they followed the example of one Mattathias and his sons and followers, who manifested zeal for the law of God when Antiochus IV tried to suppress the Jewish religion.

REFLECTION

The thing that strikes me about all this is that the Roman Empire is long gone, but the kingdom of Christ is still with us. What pagan Roman back then could have predicted this outcome? Later on, John the apostle saw the decline and fall of the fourth, and last, of the four great world empires in the book of Revelation. His writings should be read in conjunction with those of an unbeliever, Edward Gibbon, who penned the massive work *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. History took its course and God, I believe, had a hand in it. God is always interested in His people, His "faithful remnant". They overcame ten major persecutions from the time of Nero (54 – 68 AD) to Diocletian (284 – 305 AD), many of them resisting unto blood.

So in the 50's, the apostles were at work, spreading forth the good news of Jesus and His love. They were, of course, without James, who had been killed around 40 AD. The book of Acts concentrates on the labours of Paul. His second missionary journey took him to places such as Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth and Ephesus. The third missionary journey saw him in Antioch, Galatia, Phrygia, Ephesus, Macedonia, Greece, Troas, Miletus, from where he journeyed to Jerusalem. He, of course, was not always welcomed where he went. For example, he was beaten and thrown into prison in Philippi and faced riots in Thessalonica and Ephesus. His bravery is legendary.

The gospel of Christ was bringing Jew and Gentile together and was having an impact everywhere. The followers of Jesus were telling others that their "religion" was not a way of life, but life in the Way. Jesus was the Way, the Truth and the Life. He brought love, joy and hope to all, including the countless slaves within the Empire. Jesus was not only the promised Messiah of the Jews, but also the Saviour of the world. The man from Nazareth was that big! He had shown by what He had said and done that he was Immanuel, God with us. He had even risen from the dead and there were many witnesses to prove this wonderful fact. He was now back in heaven reigning over a spiritual kingdom that would last forever. Jesus was the real Lord and Master and Saviour. No one, not even Caesar, could compare with Jesus of Nazareth.

The "Nazarene sect" had taken off and there was no stopping its impact and influence. Congregations were springing up all over the place and there were even some in Rome itself. Disciples of Jesus were here to stay, no matter what men would say or do to them. Their faith was strong and uncompromising. Their faith was real and lasting. Their faith was a saving faith from the pollution, power and penalties of sin. The faith would last generations even to the generation of the 1950's. Still people believe in Jesus. Still people trust and obey Him. Still people preach His gospel. If the Lord tarries, I believe they will still be around in 2950, and beyond.

WHY DO WE HAVE PREACHING?

(Ian Grant, Corby)

SUBJECT: THE Holiness of God

When the good news about Jesus is taught, and the result is that the message is believed by individuals, then those who choose to obey the gospel by being baptised for the forgiveness of sin, God adds to the Church (Acts 2:47). Those whose sins are not forgiven will experience the wrath of God (Rom 2:6-11). Christians who have been forgiven by the grace of God, and have placed themselves under the kingship of Christ, will obtain mercy and receive eternal life.

A CALL TO WORSHIP

God calls individuals, but having been called through the word, God adds those who answer the call to the Christian community; they become a part of the people of God, the Church. The basic meaning of the word church is "assembly". The use of the word church shows the importance of God's children assembling together. In particular, Christians assemble to worship God on every first day of the week for Jesus taught that God must be worshipped in spirit and in truth (Jon 4:21-24). Jesus explained that the time was coming when worship would no longer to be tied to a specific location but rather would be spiritual in nature. Genuine worshippers would worship God in spirit, which is in sincerity in contrast to pretence. Truth is that which conforms to reality, and is that which is genuine as opposed to what is false. Worship that is in truth is worship that is as directed by the word of God.

Thus, the worship of God is no light matter. Worship is not something that can be done with varying degrees of enthusiasm depending upon one's mood and the side of the bed we got out of that morning, and whether what is being done in worship is appealing or not. Neither is it something that we do when we can squeeze in the time; or something we do in part because of time pressures. Genuine worship is the proper response of Christians to God's gracious gift of his Son; it is a recognition of our complete dependence upon God for all that we have and are. God does not need anything, including our worship. But worship is something that God requires of his children; that is genuine and appropriate worship.

A LOVING GOD; A HOLY GOD

In order for sinners to be forgiven, and the Church to become a reality, it took the love of God. God took the initiative, and in His love he did for mankind what man could not do for himself. God acted in history, in that He sent his only son to live in this world. When Jesus, with God's foreknowledge, was put to death on a cross, God raised Him from the dead, proving who Jesus was (Rom. 1:4). While we may have difficulty over some of the specifics, it is clear that God planned that Jesus' death would make possible sinful man's reconciliation with God (Rom. 5:19). Also it brought about the establishment of the Church (Acts 20:28), and made available the gift of eternal life to those who obey (John 3:15-16; Heb 5:9).

When we understand that the love of God has reached out to rebellious mankind, our response to such an expression of love should be one of gratitude and obedience to His commands, and to express such gratitude in worship.

We recognise that the love of God was not the only attribute of God that was at work in the reconciling of mankind to God. Of course, grace was also involved for what mankind needed he did not deserve. It is through God's grace that individuals find forgiveness and the people of God came into being (Titus 2:11-15).

Further, a little thought should reveal that there is more to God's character than love and grace, as great and important as they are. A fundamental fact about God is that God is holy (1 Pet. 1:16; Acts 3:14). The basic meaning of the word is "separation," and so God is totally separate from evil. The holiness of God must come into the picture as well as his love and grace. We make a serious mistake when we see God only as a God of love extending his grace to mankind, and we fail to take account of his holiness. They must not be divorced from each other. That love and holiness are inter-related is to be seen in the need for the atoning work of Jesus in the first place. God stands in opposition to sin and because of sin God is in conflict with the world. The holiness of God will not allow him to look the other way, or simply to wink at sin, shrug his shoulders with some comment like, "What can you do with them?" The need for Jesus to shed his blood for our past sins to be forgiven, before we can be reconciled to God, speaks of the holiness of God. That God in his love sent Jesus to die for us, should declare to us that the holiness of God did not allow him simply to overlook sin.

WRITTEN FOR OUR LEARNING

Moses had hastily fled Egypt after discovering that it was public knowledge that he had killed an Egyptian. After living in the wilderness for some 40 years he was looking after the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, when he came to Horeb the mountain of God. Immediately, we are informed that the Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses, alerting us to the importance of what was about to happen. Moses simply saw a bush burning, but a bush that was not consumed by the fire. Intrigued, Moses checked it out only to hear God speaking to him from the bush. God told him to come no closer and instead to take off his sandals "for the place where you stand is holy ground" (Ex. 3:1-6 NKJV.) Moses' reaction was one of fear. Do you think that he kicked off his sandals so that they flew anywhere, like some petulant teenager objecting to such a demand? Or did he do it rather deliberately, like a husband doing it under protest? How do you think that Moses took off his sandals?

Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10) burnt incense to God as commanded. They were the right people, in the right place, with the right censors. But, they had the wrong fire. The fire they used is described as profane; we are not told why God considered it that. We are told though that it was not what God had commanded. We are also told that Nadab and Abihu failed to treat God as holy and paid the price.

As we try to understand what they did, we know that it was not the first time for Nadab and Abihu to be in God's presence (Ex 24:1, 9-11). They had eaten and drunk in presence of God. We have a saying: "familiarity breeds contempt." Perhaps they got used to the glory and so it was no big deal, and so they got sloppy. Perhaps they had been drinking (Lev 10:9-10). It seems that near enough was good enough, in their eyes; but not in the eyes of a holy God.

SOCIETY TODAY

Here in the 21st century, it would be fair to say that God has little relevance in the lives of most people. It is not that people see themselves as rebelling against God; rather it is that they see him as lacking any importance, and so people do not bother

to enquire about him. Even worse, the righteousness that God calls Christians to is not just ignored, it is disparaged and treated with disdain, with no thought given to its origin. As Christians we live in this world and spend a lot of our time amongst people for whom God is irrelevant and who ridicule his righteousness. In an environment like this, while we might well be believers, it is rather easy to be influenced by those around us, and to think of God as being rather distant and remote. Just as God appears to have no part to play in daily life in this society, so too it is rather easy for us to give God no place in our daily lives either. Also, this society has much to say about personal relationships as it struggles to help people sort them out, but finds talk of morality as abhorrent (conveniently overlooking the fact that a lack of morality is what destroys relationships). In this situation it can be more comfortable for Christians to focus on the love of God and a bit embarrassing to speak of the holiness of God and his righteousness. While God's holiness can prove to be a real inconvenience, God's love can be a whole lot more comfortable.

Where God is predominantly love, not falling foul of the ever increasing multitude of rules and regulations foisted on us by the Government, appears to be more of an immediate cause of unease than failing to keep the commandments of God. The fear of being mugged today can be more of a pressing concern than the fear of being lost in eternity. In this society God can quite easily be pushed in our minds to the periphery of life instead of being the centre of life. In a culture that appears to be running quite well without God it is rather easy to forget that God is running this world. While the majority ignore God, and a few are openly hostile to God because of their sin, we must not forget that God is against this world because of its sin (Rom. 2:6-11), and is involved in and dealing with our society (Rom. 1:16-32; Acts 17:26), regardless of how it looks.

WORSHIP TODAY

In such an environment, it is no wonder that it is much easier to take a relaxed view of God and focus on his love and grace, than to think about his holiness and what that demands from us. It is far easier to take the world's influence with us into worship than it is for us to take God's influence into everyday life.

Nonetheless, the reality is that when we enter into God's presence through prayer or worship we enter into the Holy Place (Heb 10:19-25). The Holy Place is no longer a building (Acts 7:48; 17:24-25) but a place not made with hands (Heb. 9:24), but it is still holy. However, we can enter with confidence and without fear through the blood of Jesus.

However, as with Moses and Nadab and Abihu we can respond to being in God's presence in a number of different ways. We can choose to worship in a lackadaisical, casual, laid back way that takes little account of the awesomeness and holiness of God. We can regularly turn up late, or chat to each other, or play with our children, or daydream during worship. We can choose to worship by simply going through the motions; a little like paying ones dues. Having fulfilled our obligation we can expect a return for having done our duty. In the place of the holiness of God, something else like human need can become the focus. Similarly, we can worship looking to get something out of worship immediately, such as an emotional uplift. I expect that in the main it is not thought through carefully, but when someone complains that they got nothing out of worship, they have shifted the focus from the worship of God to therapy for the self. Today, God does not strike us down when we worship in a way that fails to treat him with due respect, but he must still be regarded as holy.

Having written about the confidence that is the Christians in approaching God through Jesus' shed blood, the writer of Hebrews balanced that with the warning

against sinning wilfully in an ongoing way (Heb. 10:19-30). He also reminds us that in gratitude for receiving the kingdom Christians should "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire." (Heb. 12:28-29). If we allow our confidence to become carelessness our worship can easily become vacuous.

A DOWNWARD SPIRAL

It is probably fair to say that the easy familiarity with God and the lack of awe that we see at times in worship, particularly during the sermon, may well reflect a lack of learning from the word of God about his holiness. That can put us in a downward spiral. Because we fail to study we can lack a real appreciation of the holiness of God. Lacking that appreciation it is easy to slip into not paying that much attention to what he says to us through his holy word (Rom.1:2), especially what is said in the sermon. The less we listen to Scripture then the less we understand about God's holiness. Add to that, the failure to attend Bible classes, and the resulting lack of the knowledge of God, and a lack of awe in worship should be no surprise to us.

God's holy word must be central in our lives if God's holiness is to be central in our thinking. Listening to God's word being preached is a part of our public service to God. When we comprehend the holiness of God it should help engender in us an awe that promotes true worship. Knowledge of God's holiness should bring a desire to learn more about him from his holy word, and encourage us to work at worship.

New and Information

Ghana Appeal

For nineteen years the Ghana Appeal has been assisting our brethren to extend God's Kingdom there, as well as providing medical treatment for brethren in need. Through it brethren have survived to continue their service to our Lord. It is important for this to continue into the years to come, but that depends on much needed donations continuing.

The communal commercial venture that sisters in neighbouring churches inaugurated with initial funding from the Appeal continues to do well. Unfortunately one of these sisters now requires a hysterectomy and we will be helping with her hospital fees. Another medical case is a brother whose efforts have brought many to Christ over many years. He has an ulcer requiring attention and this may require an operation. This is another case we are glad to be able to help.

We have just heard of another gospel campaign where brethren from various congregations gather to declare the Gospel in all its truth. This has had considerable success in establishing new churches, but it does involve some expense, including transport, electric light and food for those taking part. If they do not have a public address system, this would need to be hired.

The nursery school that we helped to establish in a remote village continues to provide basic education and a meal for the children. It also gives them good spiritual training that should stand them in good stead in the future.

Having seen how difficult it is to conduct an evening meeting in darkness with only four or five small paraffin lamps among those present, it is good to hear mains electricity has reached another village where a church has been meeting since before the Appeal started. Your donations will make it possible to meet the costs of connection to the meeting house, as well as internal wiring and fittings. What a difference this will make.

Those wishing to help, please make cheques payable to:
Dennyloanhead Church of Christ Ghana Fund and send to treasurer:

**Mrs. Janet Macdonald,
12 Charles Drive, Larbert,
Falkirk, Stirlingshire. FK5 3HB
Tel: 01324 562480**

Coming Events

EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WORKSHOP

**Lancaster University
Thursday 28th August
to Saturday 30th August 2008**

REACHING OUT TO TODAY'S WORLD

Confirmed Speakers

Tony Coffey (Ireland) – Keynote
Bob Eckman (England)
Mike Moss (USA)
Ian Cameron (Scotland)
Vladimir Psenko (Croatia)
Gary Holloway (USA)
Eleni Mellirrytos (Greece)

More speakers from the UK to be confirmed.

Song Leader:

Jason Snethen (England)

Early Bird Fee: £99

(before 30th April, 2008)

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www.europeanchristianworkshop.com

NEWTONGRANGE, SCOTLAND

Our **ANNUAL SOCIAL** will be held as follows:

Date:

Saturday 11th October 2008
at 1.00pm

Speaker:

Bro. Ian Davidson, Motherwell.

A warm welcome is extended to all.

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