

*THE STRANGER IN THE CEMETERY* might well have been called *The Sixth Smorgasbord* because it follows five books of a unique kind of writing, containing poetry, essays and stories. Commencing with the well-known *Angel Wings* and *The Concentration Camp*, it follows on the heels of *The Vandal* recently published.

It is a smorgasbord. Here and there a story appears, now and then a poem, and often essays form themselves on subjects close to the author's heart. That heart has a great enthusiasm for humanity—for men and women—all of whom are miracles of creation to him. Sometimes they are miracles of great grace. Because he knows God he also knows humanity—that living and dynamic race which loves and hates, which is sometimes in anger, and sometimes in great tranquillity. It is his joy and passion to trace out the theology of God and humanity which has kept Geoffrey Bingham writing for over fifty years.

It is the human response which many readers have which has also helped him prepare a table for this further smorgasbord.

*Geoffrey Bingham was born on 6 January 1919 at Goulburn, NSW. By his early teens Geoffrey was writing poetry and short stories and editing small magazines. Within a few years some of his work was being published.*

*In 1939 he entered Moore Theological College. His studies were put in abeyance after his enlistment in the AIF in 1940. He became a sergeant in 8th Division Signal Unit.*

*Geoffrey's experience of war was life-changing. He was decorated with the Military Medal and also mentioned in despatches. He was badly wounded in action on Singapore Island, hospitalized and taken to Changi POW Camp.*

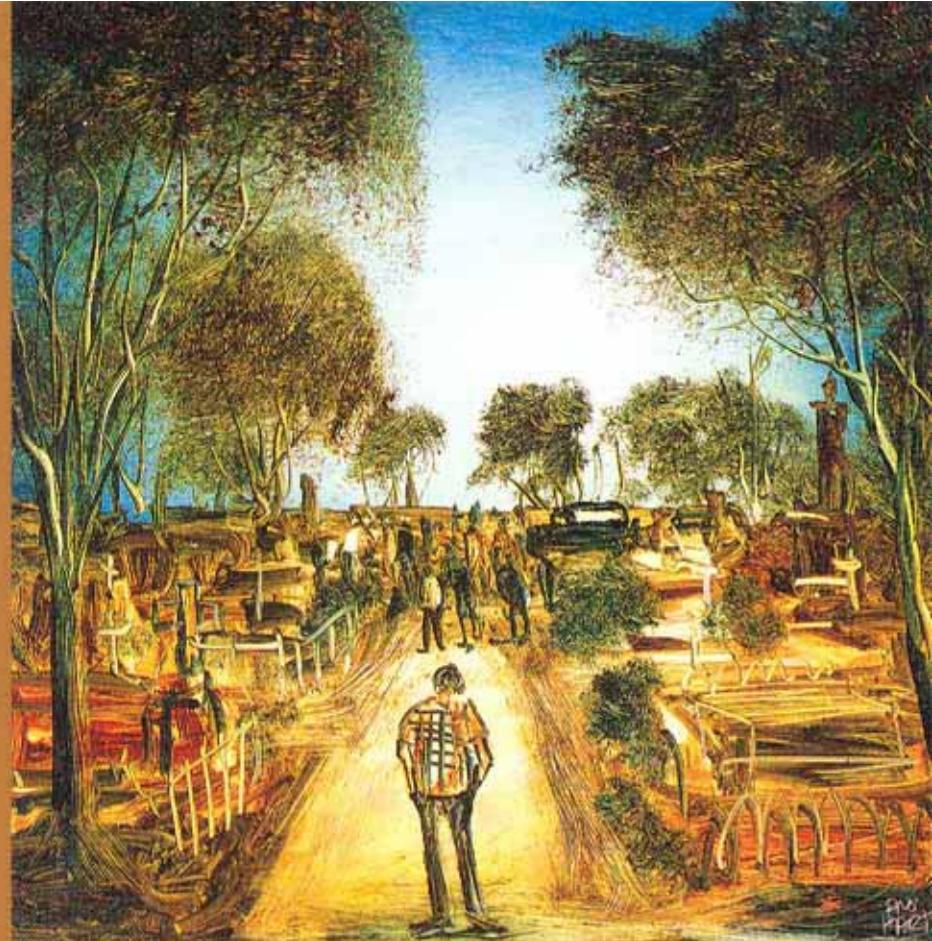
*He returned to Australia in 1946 and was suddenly hailed as one of the new generation of short story writers. In a few years the Bulletin had published 34 of his stories and he had won a prize in the Sydney Morning Herald literary competition. He was also published in other journals and the ABC broadcast many of his stories.*

*He married Laurel Chapman in 1946 and they moved to a farm on the north coast of NSW. Eventually he returned to his theological studies and was ordained into the Anglican Church. He served as rector at the Garrison Church, Miller's Point until 1957 and then became a missionary in West Pakistan. He returned to Australia in 1966 and was appointed Principal of the Bible College of South Australia. In the early 1970s he founded New Creation Publications and Teaching Ministry and returned to writing with great enthusiasm.*

*He has published numerous volumes of short stories and has seen his work published in some fine journals and compilations.*

*Geoffrey and Laurel Bingham live in the Adelaide Hills. He is currently writing with that immense vigour which has so characterized his previous work.*

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# *The Stranger in the Cemetery*

*by Geoffrey Bingham*

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# The Stranger in the Cemetery

by Geoffrey Bingham

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This is the sixth book I have written which contains stories, essays and poems. It has, of course, been an experiment, and it seems to have been one which is justified. So far as I know, it is a new pattern of writing. The reason for doing it seems obvious enough. Some folk like stories but not poems and essays, and some like essays rather than poems and stories and so on. It means that most types of readers derive some sort of satisfaction from such volumes. Of course, there are those who would prefer just one form of writing, and possibly feel cheated to have a book which has material they do not wish to read.

The purpose of such books is to help folk who are not readers of poetry to get a taste for it. Probably very few folk have had much contact with the essay form. It, too, can be a most enriching genre for reading. It is generally discursive in style, building up a theme or an idea, but-I trust-builds into a useful piece of thinking and reasoning. Most folk like stories-it seems to be part of our human way of learning. Some folk are wary of fiction-even short fiction thinking it is not true. All fiction is to some degree or

another true. Authors of stories bring their experiences to the fore in building up incidents or character sketches, and generally tales are woven about something that has happened, or someone who has lived.

I trust that such books as *The Stranger in the Cemetery* may encourage us to drop our dislikes of such forms as poetry or essays, and begin to explore the riches of these genres. With just a little persistence, these forms of writing can open a new world for us. We are not encouraged by the easily read, easily heard, and easily viewed media to think very deeply. Wisdom certainly lies in contemplating as deeply as possible those things which are presented to us. I certainly seek to think deeply about life, and I am grateful for the grand inheritance which has come to me-to us over the centuries of human art, music, painting, sculpturing and writing. I know how much of my life has been shaped by the good things I have read and heard and seen. These treasures belong to the whole human race, and should be used by all.

I am most grateful to our dear friend Pro Hart for the paintings he does to fit some of my books. Like all true artists he has inner discernment of life and the creation, and conveys in his unique way the things some try to depict in music or writing. Our land owes a great debt to him. Certainly, as a person, I owe much to him. It is wonderful that our gifts-his and mine-can come together so naturally.

I write most of the Forewords to my books a bit self-consciously, mainly because one talks about what one has written. I think it is fitting in this Foreword to say two things: the first being that whatever art springs from a person—whether good or indifferent-is the result of procreation. No one creates out of nothing. He-or she-has

been given gifts, intuitions, discernments and skills, and these combine together to enable the procreation of some work of art. Behind it all is the Creator Who has liberally handed out gifts to us humans. There is incredible joy in procreation, i.e. creating, along with Him, the things we do. By 'the things we do'] do not mean 'religious things'. Artists may be self-professed atheists-though I am convinced there are none such-but God is no less with them in procreation than with others. It is true that something of us comes through in all such works, but that, too, is a confirmation of the freedom of the human spirit at such times.

The second thing I feel bound to say regards the large debt we all owe to one another-especially to those closest to us-who encourage us in our production of art. I am grateful to my wife, Laurel, and to my children-to say nothing of the grandchildren-who have encouraged me over the years. Those nearest to us are not always the best critics of what we are doing, but their encouragement is helpful. Much time may have to pass for many before they even begin to understand what we are about: no matter! There are, however, some who do seem to understand what we are about, even down to the last full stop. Their understanding is the fellowship of life to writers and other artists, and to them I am most grateful.

I have many times acknowledged my debt to those who have been mentors, and many of these do not even know of my existence. So much does the human race contribute to the ongoing stream which flows from it. So little is any one of us aware of the influences of others upon our lives. So we utter a full doxology to Him Who created us all.

Apologies and gratitude now voiced, I would like to add one other thought. I hope this book will also confront

readers with its contents, its substance, and that many may be stimulated to respond to the elements of truth it presents. Any book which is riot prophetic-which does riot personally confront the reader-can end up by simply being entertainment.

I trust, then, that this volume will add its due portion to the rich streams and rivers which flow through our lives. I am sure that if we drink of these **poems, essays and stories** we will be none the worse, and, perhaps, even the richer.

*Geoffrey Bingham,  
Coromandel East, 1991*

***The Stranger  
in the Cemetery***

It wasn't until about the fifth funeral that I woke up to Red Polyp. You may think the name unusual, but that is what he called himself. 'Polyp' was actually his surname, but the 'Red' was what he had always been known by since he was a kid. He was far from a kid when I first met him. A full-grown man in fact, and getting into later years of life, although he looked young enough.

That was what puzzled me. Why was he so young-looking when he wouldn't have been a day under sixty and maybe was much older? It was his agelessness rather than anything of perpetual youth that puzzled me. His red thatch of hair had some white in it, and there was a line or two on his face, but the eyes-intensely blue-were without a touch of age. They stared at you so clearly, yet without that kind of passionate intensity which gets you wondering, and perhaps a bit worried also.

He was taller: certainly taller than I. He even seemed somewhat 'up there', as though on another plane, and yet

there was nothing haughty or elitist about him. To the contrary. It was just that lie seemed to live to himself, although he took deep and obvious interest in everything about him. He did this, too, without being intimate or personal. I had observed his fine figure-aristocratic you might call it-moving around at the funerals. Certainly he was a commanding type of person. You know, the strange thing is that even though I can see him clearly in my mind's eye, I find it difficult to describe him fully. I suppose I could say that, although as plain to everyone as the daylight around them, there was something elusive about him. Elusive: yes, that is the word. Elusive Red Polyp.

You could wonder what I was doing around funerals. It might be because I am a retired cleric, but that was not all the reason. I have a dread of ever being asked to take a funeral because someone knows me, and I am an obliging sort of person. I have known clerics who take funerals and cremations for a living. I guess they have their own good reasons for doing so, but none of them is mine. I will be frank and tell you I like funerals, but I will only take one when the person who has died was a close friend of mine, or has requested it before his-or her-decease. In fact, quite a number have made that request, and they are enough.

The main reason for often being at funerals is my age. Having long ago retired-though I am still very active -my friends are dying one by one, mostly from old age. Since some of them are close friends I naturally wish to honour their lives and the persons close to them by attending the funeral. I can assure you there is nothing ghoulish about funerals once you realize how right and useful they are. The kind thing about a funeral is the finality it spells out, especially to those who are relationally close to the dead

person. It says in a kindly way, 'This is it! This is the finish! The earthly relationship is broken. Come to terms with it. Grieve, and then let that be that!'

Of course, not everyone sees it this way. It takes some persons a long time to adapt. But if there had not been a burial service to look back to, then there would have been no definite break. The day may come when undertakers-or their future equivalent-will simply spirit away the body and dispose of it without a funeral service. Then some folk will think the death never really happened. It would all be very confusing.

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My subject in this story is Red Polyp, and not, primarily, funerals. As I was saying, I had seen him at funerals I had attended-about five in all. On the fifth occasion I noticed that he was first to the burial site. I remembered he had been first to arrive at the previous four internments. It struck me that he was quite keen about all that was going on. He quietly awaited the arrivals of the solemn cortéges, but meantime was missing nothing. His eyes roved to and fro. His gaze took in everything, yet not one element of sorrow or gravity was on his face.

When I went across to talk to him he scarcely seemed to see or hear me. His gaze was on the freshly dug grave, the surround of green nylon carpet that was supposed to represent grass, and the casket itself—a thing of polished wood, chromed handles and ornamentation, with an appropriate large setting of gladioli and greenery.

'We must have some mutual friends,' I said.

He looked at me, neutral, yet slightly mystified. 'Friends?' he asked politely. He thought about it and then said, 'Not

that I know.'

His voice was pleasing. His look was gracious. Yet I scarcely seemed to matter to him.

'We have both been at the same five funerals,' I said. 'Rather remarkable, eh?'

He pondered the remark a little, smiled quietly, and then said, 'No, not remarkable at all. I attend lots of funerals. Far more than just five.'

He smiled at me, offered his hand, and said, 'The name is Polyp. Red Polyp, they call me. On account of the colour of my hair, of course.'

I guess he knew his hair was somewhat less than red, but the name must have been with him for a long time.

I told him my name. 'Johnny Hargreaves,' I said. He nodded graciously. He knew what was on my mind-the strangeness of him being at many funerals.

He looked down at the fresh green turf, toeing it slightly with a polished shoe. 'A kind of hobby,' he said. 'I find death, graves, cremations and burials quite fascinating.'

'I guess you must be in the game,' I suggested.

'Not a bit,' he said. 'I have nothing to do with that side of things. I was school teaching before I retired. No, I just like coming to the place, and watching what takes place.'

I said, 'Not at all morbid?'

He smiled his gentle smile again. 'How could it be?' he asked. 'There is nothing morbid about death. Quite a wonderful thing indeed.'

At that moment the officiating cleric arrived, dressed in his robes, and with quiet gravity. We had come from a church service, and I had watched him there. He certainly knew how to conduct funerals. Now it would be the committal, and soon all would be over. I had watched the

occasion many times. By now you could type the different ones: those moved quickly to tears, those easily caught up in the emotion of the moment, but who would forget almost immediately, and those who watched with expressionless faces-maybe to remain stolidly unaffected, whatever may have been their inner thoughts.

The retired schoolmaster seemed to draw life from the event. I knew he was appraising people, but discerningly and not critically. He seemed to be penetrating their minds.

He looked at me. 'You know all about death, eh?' It was not a conspiratorial statement. It was as though we were both knowing the same thing. He was not against the people, demeaning them because they lacked this knowledge that we both had.

'I have seen you in clericals,' he said, 'and I know you know death, but many clerics do not know death. They are talking about something they do not know. They have read about it.' He smiled gently. 'Perhaps you have to die before you know fully, but when you have been near it you know something.'

We moved together towards the graveside. The clergyman seemed to be sympathetic, and was trying to make the event one of a family matter. Some seemed a little grateful. Others were shivering, though with fear of death or just the city coldness I could not know. Red Polyp was nodding gently, as though conferring with himself, and getting some agreement on his own thoughts.

The idea came to me at that funeral which had come many times before, that a cemetery is the most peaceful place in the world. The evidences of death are all about one, yet it is life that one thinks about. The retired schoolmaster's head was still nodding. I think the minister felt this

onlooker was approving, and he seemed to summon up some courage. He told them that every one has to face death, and that it comes either as a friend or foe. It is a friend in God, but an enemy outside of Him.

I had the feeling that it was not often he said such things. I thought Red Polyp would do well to attend many funerals, and make his quiet nodding whilst the committal was taking place. The oration had been back in the church, and the deceased—I imagine—had been worthy of what was said. Anything mediocre, superficial or banal seems rightfully enough empty before death.

I noticed no one threw the soft dirt on the coffin. The undertaker's men had kept the coffin suspended in the grave almost at ground level. I wondered what people would think if it had been lowered, and dirt-soft, crumbled and in clods—had been thrown on it. It almost seemed that the person in the coffin was politely suspended above death. In the old days they not only lowered the coffin, but they threw in dirt until it was in a high heap above the ground level. But in those days there had been no artificial grass, no apparatus for slowly lowering the casket. In those days they called the box 'a coffin'.

Folk were asked to come forward and meditate over the departed. What struck me was how silent it all was, with scarcely a place for tears and grief—even for expressing outrage. It was almost as though we were drugged. The cleric was merely a figure. A new ritual had grown, and it had replaced the old one—as though the old were shabby and uncouth, not for these new death-effacing times. The directors of funerals had everything organized, even to leading away the main actors—the close relatives—so that they could congregate at a distance and talk with the other

mourners. When I thought about it, there were no mourners. Here and there a tear-dewed face, but these days even tears were more rare. Maybe the films and plays and novels had immured us against much display of emotion. We saw more of war, violence and death than had any other audience in history. What, then, was another death? 'After all'—it seemed to be reasoned—'we have to get on with life.'

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At the undertaker's invitation, we all moved towards the crematorium complex to have refreshments. I still find it strange that refreshments should be served in a cemetery, but then the funeral industry has its wits about it. In a way death seemed to belong to the new polished industry. The old wake has all but disappeared. Time and opportunity for family grief seems to be discounted. A lot of work was always demanded by the wake—what with preparations for food and drink, just at the time when one had been suddenly caught with death! This cemetery-crematorium had a magnificent set of chapels, all in tasteful architecture so that any one of our ethnic groups would not find it strange or overly European.

Red Polyp walked with me. Generally my wife was with me at funerals, and I always appreciated her good sense about things. Now I was liking the retired schoolmaster in his sensible silence. He was thoughtful enough as we crossed the thick turf, passing by rose gardens where the people's ashes were interred in small bronze caskets. When we came into the large refreshment lounge, he drew me to one side, to a corner where folk had not gathered. They were around the tables, being served with hot drinks, sandwiches and small cakes.

When we had procured tea and sandwiches he drew me aside, into a corner. He looked around to make sure no one was within hearing distance.

‘Was she a close friend—a relative?’ he asked.

I shook my head. ‘Not really. A fine person, but not very close. I came for her family’s sake. You know how it is.’

He nodded. ‘Yes, I do. I come now even if I don’t know the dead person. I am doing a bit of personal research on the matter of dying and death.’

He interested me. ‘Theologically, or something like “the psychology of death”?’

He thought about that. ‘Hadn’t really tried to put it into a category. Your question intrigues me. Yes, there would have to be the psychological and theological approach, wouldn’t there? I suppose I was thinking about the personal angle. I-ike, what does death mean, what does it mean to us, and what does it mean today as against the ideas of the past?’

‘A necrologist!’ I said, with just a touch of admiration.

He smiled faintly. ‘Technically speaking a necrologist is one who writes obituary notices, who keeps the death-register, but you are right. It ought to be the title for those of us interested in death. Yes, in that sense I am a necrologist.’

‘So that is why I keep seeing you at funerals.’

He inclined his head. ‘Death is really fascinating, especially when it is not wholly in the hands of the undertakers.’

When I looked puzzled he gave a quiet grin. ‘The death industrialists have made it pretty bland,’ he said. ‘I guess that is how people seem to want it. They like the creases smoothed out. They just don’t have to think about death.’

I could see he was not at all morbid. The matter of death, simply intrigued him. Whilst we were talking, a horde of

memories was revisiting me. I reckoned I had tonnes of research material for my new friend. I wondered whether he might be writing a book or even a thesis on the matter.

I said, ‘How would you like to see it handled—I mean the action in the cemetery and the crematorium?’

He thought for a moment. ‘I guess I would like to see it more human. Flocks of children coming to funerals, some of them wondering and asking questions, or just standing there, letting impressions come and sink in. Looking at their parents and wondering about them expressing grief, and sorrow, and even anger. Seeing human emotion in the open, something different from the normal self-control within the family. I would like death to be seen for what it is—at least as it comes to different ones of us.’

Now I was more than intrigued. I was strongly curious. I wanted to know what he had discovered. ‘Is it just that you would go back to former days—back to the time when the undertakers had not subdued it all, made it respectable, and saved us from too much misery?’

He nodded. ‘Something like that, but more. I think our parents and forbears had better ideas of death. They were ideas which made life all the richer. You lived life fully because death was coming. Also, they had an idea that death opened out into a greater arena even than the life they lived here.’

Around us were the human noises. One could sense the relief that the mourning for the one just buried was over. The interruption to life that it had caused was a mere hiatus, a passing moment. At first there had been a subdued hum, a respectful quietness within this well-furnished room, but now people were awakened. They were taking the opportunity to meet old friends and acquaintances. Just a few were

standing alone, staring thoughtfully at the floor, the cup in hand forgotten- memory returning. Here and there were couples like us who were silent. Perhaps death for them was not temporary. Perhaps they had loved deeply, or maybe had hated strongly. It was difficult to know.

Red Polyp was also silent. We put our empty cups on a table, and made our way into the sunlight, pausing on the paved portico. Near us were palms and semi-tropical plants, and a fountain which seemed to indicate we were in the vestibule of a Greek temple. I kept thinking how unreal it all was, though it must have been restful for those who had come with some distress. We watched folk shaking hands, farewelling each other with appropriate smiles. A few almost dived into their vehicles as though relieved to be going. Others were quiet, more thoughtful, and yet others a bit stunned by it all.

The retired schoolmaster took an elbow of mine and steered us across the lawn towards the burial area. When he asked, I assured him I had plenty of time. In fact I was hoping he would continue our conversation. We found a seat under a tree and sat for a time without speaking. Then he pointed towards an older burial area.

‘See the old headstones,’ he said, ‘they used to be high, didn’t they. Sort of substantial, you might say.’

When I nodded he pointed to a new burial lawn area. ‘See the headstones there? They are flat, almost ground level. The cemetery people are democratizing death.’ He grinned. ‘We are all turning into flat-earthers. People feel more secure when everything is reduced to the horizontal. Give the older folk their due, they gave a certain dignity to death. There was a choice as to now you would respect your dead.’

‘In the old days they had high columns, broken columns

to show a life was cut off before completing maturity. The Latin peoples made a special thing out of death. They built family mausoleums, had shelves on which to put the coffins.

Sometimes there were photographs of the dead, solidly framed. The dead were with us in life. Centuries ago they had full sized effigies of the deceased, so he or she lay sleeping on top of the coffin, and you almost expected them to wake at any moment. “Gone” did not mean “forgotten.”

‘Today it is neat death and nice death and calm death, It is lawns and flowers and bright sunshine, and not messy clay and clods. The mechanical diggers assure tidiness. Rolled turf soon covers the temporary rupture of the soil. In their death they are all one!’

Red raised his hand, sweeping in its gesture across the calm acres of quiescent bones and ashes.

‘Behold the homogenized necropolis-democratized city of the dead! The tall poppies are gone. Death has been domesticated. Smooth and bland are thy ways, oh hosts of the departed!’

It was not irony. It was not sarcasm. It was just a gentle, sad statement.

I said, ‘You feel deeply about all this, don’t you?’

He nodded admission. Then he asked, ‘Have you ever been to a military war cemetery?’

When I shook my head he said, ‘A pity. That is where you see grandeur. There is grandeur in the walls they build with the names of the dead and the missing, but it is the sight of the thousands of headstones, tolerably tall, row upon row, placed in military precision. You might call it homogenized, but it isn’t. Not really. It is as though every headstone is a sentinel, and all are *at attention—together.*’

He sighed- ‘I was up at the Adelaide River war cemetery.

The headstones weren't just cement. They were marble. Those killed in Darwin in the Japanese raids, and those who died at sea—they were all there. Civilians in one place, and the servicemen in another. Never mind. They were greatly honoured.'

He threw his hands up in disgust. 'What did they do? They took out the headstones, and put little blocks in their place, just about level with the ground, and plaques to make it quieter, less confronting. Pity! In their death they were not divided, only levelled out to mediocrity.'

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Red was certainly on his hobby horse, but I sensed there was more to it than a gripping enthusiasm, that there was a philosophy of death behind these critical remarks.

I said, 'Then how do you see death?' Doubtless my question was ordinary enough.

He looked at me. 'You are the one who ought to know what death is. That's your profession.'

'More to do with life than death,' I said, and having said it felt the remark was lame.

'Life and death,' he said, 'what is the difference? You live life when you are sure of death. Knowing death assures that you live life. I wouldn't call myself a theologian, but since Jesus claimed to be the resurrection and the life, then he is to be heard above all others.'

He looked at me. 'I try to penetrate the minds of these undertaker fellows. They are trained bland, and maybe they get to think death is a nothing. Just wait, John, until they have to face it—in an accident, or with a disease, or just out of old age. It is different when it is your own death, it's real enough then. These burial attendants do their best I know,

but the grief just can't touch them, and they see little magnificence and grandeur in a person dying. They are on the commercial side of the occasion.'

'Then how do you see it?' I asked, reminding him that he hadn't given an answer.

'It is magnificent,' he said. 'It is reality. It tells us man isn't designed just to be dust and ashes. It tells us this life is a preliminary to the ultimate. This life is penultimate and doesn't hold full meaning within itself. Everything lies ahead—whether it is the outcome of our evil, or the full outcome of our having lived fully.'

I searched theologically in my mind, and could not fault what he was saying.

'You mean heaven and hell?' I asked.

He stared at me for a moment, and then smiled. 'Give it a name,' he said, 'and what does a name teach you? The old Preacher said, "He has put eternity into man's heart." So man is never satisfied with less than that. If he only knew it, he both fears and loves death. He hates it because it confronts him with himself—the self he will never get away from. He has a hankering for death because it opens the door to what is better than this existence, or—maybe—ever so much worse. Somehow—behind everything—he wants to come to grips with his destiny.'

He switched again, 'Ever been to a military funeral? Have you seen the pomp and the splendour, the gravity and the triumph? Have you watched the ritual? Runs rings around your pathetic little slipping the body into the ground—with just decent haste. They take time, do these military men and women. They faced the issues of life and death in their wars. They saw moments of *horror*, stupid waste of life, but yet there were grand dimensions about it

all. So they blow the "Last Post" with its sad notes, and its seeming finality. Then there is what Whittier called "the silence of eternity". After that strong silence they play "Reveille" and they are joyously telling their comrade to awaken out of sleep. Majesty is coming! Meaning is appearing! Life is on the move-forever! This is what it was always about!

Red did not seem embarrassed by his own rhetoric. He believed what he said, and I think he hoped I did. I don't think I ever believed there was a conspiracy of silence in the human race to obscure death, to ignore it, and to put it down, but now I wondered whether I had ever seen death as greatly significant, or magnificent. I always knew men and women feared it. I have seen that kind of terror many times. Occasionally I have had a tinge of dread myself, but faith is a great thing, telling us that death lost its sting with the coming of the One who destroyed its power in his own death, and proved its Impotence in his resurrection. The Man-for-all-men had made death to be a triumph.

It was quiet and peaceful in that man-made necropolis the city of the dead', and I knew these in this place were not seeing what we were seeing. By now they had been made to face up to the issues they had refused to face in life, or they were reaping the outcome of the realism of faith they had had in their Creator and Redeemer.

I think Red and I could have talked for days and weeks. I sensed that death was no special 'thing' with him, and certainly no bugaboo. He was as sane a man as I have met. I think he went to funerals to give some honour and reverence to those who had departed from this life which he

called 'penultimate'. I suspect he touched a bit of 'the other side' as he looked at dug graves, coffins on the crematorium podiums, pastors and clerics as they committed the earthly remains to dust and destiny, and as he listened to the words that humans speak on these occasions.

I tell you, I was thoughtful as we shook hands and smiled and parted, glad to have shared our ideas, and maybe, renewed in our faith that man is not a nonentity, but the living image and glory of God, albeit he has gone far from his great origins. As I walked away to my motor vehicle I thought I had little to give Red for his research. I think he knew it all, anyway, and I had learned a lot from him. Quite a lot.

## *The Altar Sanctifies the Gift*<sup>1</sup>

Come, lamb that I am:  
Come to the holy altar.  
Come, lamb, in your sinfulness,  
Lamb, in your uncleanness.  
Come, lamb, to your destined death.  
Come, lamb, to the altar.

The lamb has come to the altar,  
Come in the Lamb,  
Come in his death, died in his sacrifice.  
The lamb that was unclean has  
Given his life, given it  
In the Lamb that gave it:  
Has sacrificed itself in the sanctifying Altar,  
The Altar of the Cross.  
In the Lamb that was slain  
The lamb was immolated.

In the fire of the Cross  
The lamb has become purified.  
The Altar has sanctified the lamb  
In the sanctifying Lamb of the Altar.

Sing praises, O you redeemed lamb,  
Whose sacrifice is pure and acceptable,  
Made total in the acceptance  
Of the Holy Sacrifice.  
There the purification is not the end,  
But the beginning which continues forever:  
The incessant sanctification through the Lamb,  
And thus the continuing holiness  
Of the lamb accepted, the lamb worshipping,  
And the lamb with its life forever  
In the Lamb, and  
In the Father of the Lamb.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 23:19; Exodus 29:37.

## *Jephthah and His Noble Daughter*

What happens when the Spirit of God comes upon a human being? Obviously something of an unusual nature. Writers, artists, and sculptors-to say nothing of musical composers-speak of inspiration which has come to them in unusual but wonderful ways. We have many examples of this in human history, too numerous to be retailed here. Some, with a theological bent of mind, will not allow that such visitations can be those of the Holy Spirit of God, although there is no reason to object to the Spirit of creation being also the Spirit of inspiration in any person. Each human being has received the life he lives from the Spirit, who, himself, sustains and maintains the life of all things. In this sense nothing is secular. There is no reason why the Spirit should not have inspired Michaelangelo, the Bachs and Handel, as they, themselves, believed.

In the Scriptures there are graphic accounts of the Spirit coming upon various person. A prophet was never considered to be a true prophet apart from the Spirit. Joseph

was said by the pharaoh of his day to be one 'in whom is the spirit of the gods'. Moses received an effusion of the Spirit of God. This he later shared with his seventy elders:

Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was upon him and put it upon the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied.

There are accounts of the Spirit coming upon an artisan such as Bezalel, upon various of the judges, on kings such as Saul and David, and upon schools of the prophets. Prophets themselves spoke of a day when God would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, and this was predicted in the prototype of the revived bones in the valley of dry bones (Ezek. 37), and fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2).

The chronicle of Jephthah the Gileadite is found in the eleventh and twelfth chapters of the Book of Judges, and we begin our story with the Spirit of God coming upon this one of the judges-those who operated in Israel from the time of Joshua's death until the days of Samuel. In 11:29-31 we read,

Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites. And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said, 'If thou wilt give the Ammonites into my hand, then whoever comes forth from the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the Lord's, and I will offer him up for a burnt offering.'

It is this vow of Jephthah which we shall mainly consider, and-even more particularly-the sorrow it brought both

to him and his daughter. Firstly, however, we need to understand its setting.

Jephthah was one of a number of sons born to their father Gilead. Gilead, of course, was named from the district in which he lived, that which nowadays is called Trans-Jordan, and which Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh were given after they helped their brethren settle in Canaan. Being on the other side of Jordan, situated between the two rivers Jabbok and Arnon, it was more open to invasion and conquest. Indeed, the land had once belonged to the Amorites, who themselves had taken it from the Ammonites.

Jephthah was the one son who had not been born of a lawful wife of Gilead. His mother had been a harlot, and for such there was no inheritance within a family. His brothers knew this and made sure he was cast out of the family. The account says that he fled from his brothers, and dwelt in the land of Tob, which was quite some distance away, and a place in the wilderness. We are also told that 'worthless fellows' collected around him, and went raiding with him, which really made him the head of a band of brigands.

There must have been something about the man that caused others to gather to him and fight with him. It is not difficult to imagine his bitterness at being rejected by his family, nor his feelings about being the child of a harlot. Even so, there was something about him which was strong and attractive, and when the Ammonites began warring against Israel, the elders of Gilead went up to see Jephthah, and to bring him back to lead the army of Israel against the Ammonites.

It was a moment of triumph for Jephthah, but he did not accept their offer immediately. He said, 'Did you not hate

me, and drive me out of my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in trouble?' Their reply was that they knew him to be the man for the task of defeating the Ammonites, and that they wished to make him head over all Gilead.

This must have been a sweet revelation to the brigand chief. He would not only be head over his own family, including his brethren who had cast him out, but over the whole of Gilead. In short, he would be a prince and a judge. This shows how much observed he had been, and doubtless accounts of his exploits had filtered back to the heart of the Transjordan.

The day came when the calling of Jephthah was made official. It was spelled out 'before the Lord at Mizpah'. The child of a harlot was now the prince of his people. In today's way of speaking, 'He now had to prove himself,' not, it seems, that they doubted he could, so noted a fighter and tactician he was.

\* \* \*

Jephthah first approached Ammon, seeking dialogue. His message was that of a general and prince speaking to his equivalent number in the enemy camp. The reply he had was that Gilead really belonged to Ammon. Jephthah replied in terms of sane history. It was now three hundred years since the Amorites had been dispossessed of the land in which half of the tribe of Manasseh and the tribes of Gad and Reuben had dwelt. Why, after three hundred years, should Ammon take up arms? In fact they had not possessed the land of Gilead at the time of the Israelitish invasion. The Amorites had taken it from them long before that time.

Jephthah was versed in 'land rights'. The belief in his day was that the local gods gave the land to whom they would, and in this way the inhabitants had received their territorial rights. Chemosh the god of the Ammonites had given them the land in which they lived, and Yahweh had given Israel the land in which it dwelt. The Ammonites ought to observe this fact, accept it, and desist from war with Israel. If there were to be a war, then the outcome of it would prove which God was the stronger. In this case, then, there would be a battle between Chemosh and Yahweh.

It appears, then, that the new leader of Gilead was well acquainted with the history of Israel, and with Yahweh, the true God. He also debated well with the king of Ammon. If land rights existed after three hundred years, and the dispossessed fought for their rights to repossess the land, then there would be havoc through the whole earth.

The king of the Ammonites simply replied that he was coming to repossess the land. Undoubtedly Ammon was very powerful, and the task seemed large for the Gileadites.

\* \* \*

It was at this point that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah. The anointing, in itself, was the sign that God was with His people. Israel had learned-and relearned that when it obeyed God it prospered and was protected from its enemies. When, however, it sinned, turned to worship the local idols, and refused to live in the law of the Lord, then judgement came upon it, and would continue until it repented, turned back to God, and implored Him to cease His judgements and save them.

When a judge was raised up, this was not the action of the people but of God. Hence when the Spirit came upon

Jephthah, it was known to the new prince of Gilead and his people that God was with them, empowering them for victory. As we have suggested before, the actual experience emotional, religious and spiritual-could be known only to the person himself, and its details are in that sense intimate, personal and private, but the outcome of it was to be objective. Therefore we can say that that coming upon a person of the Spirit of God was a most objective happening. It was not something summoned by a person within himself, the result of some mental illumination, and some great resolve of one's own spirit, particularly a resolve to be powerful, to defeat the enemy, and to fulfil some ambition to be great.

If we think about Jephthah, then, in one sense, we talk about any one person. What would transform a family castaway, a petty brigand, a bedouin of the wilderness into a strong general and prince? Every man needs power beyond himself to grow into something he has not been. Noble birth, good education and fine training do not-of themselves-give character to a man. The visitation of God is what recreates a man, bringing him into new birth, giving him human renascence. His humanity is filled out, strengthened and equipped for the vocation to which he has always been moving, wittingly or unknowingly.

This was what happened with Jephthah, and the vision of God's enemies defeated, Ammon crushed and Israel relieved of devastating pressures caused the new prince to make his vow to God:

*And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said, 'If thou wilt give the Ammonites into my hand, then whoever comes forth from the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the Lord's, and I will offer him up for a burnt offering.'*

## *The Stranger in the Cemetery*

For us who read this vow in our day it seems foolish and unnecessary. We also have the advantage of knowing that the first to greet him on his return home would be his daughter, who was his only child. Armed with such knowledge we pronounce the vow as foolish. The writer of Ecclesiastes said,

When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake; why should God be angry at your voice, and destroy the work of your hands?

Deuteronomy 23:21-23 may have been in the mind of the writer of Ecclesiastes:

When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not be slack to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin in you. But if you refrain from vowing, it shall be no sin in you. You shall be careful to perform what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth.

Numbers 30:2 was also along the same lines:

When a man vows a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

No one needs to make a vow. No one has to make a vow. The question is, 'Why did Jephthah make the vow he did?' The answer is clear. He was a man filled with the Spirit. He was a prince to his people. He may have had some personal sense of ambition, but he was imbued with loyalty as an Israelite. He knew the vocation of his people, the God Who was theirs, the destiny in which they were involved,

## Jephthah and His Noble Daughter

and it was imperative that the Ammonites be defeated. The passage does not indicate that he made a vow and then in the strength of it 'passed through Gilead and Manasseh' and eventually to the Ammonites to confront them. It seems he made a quick pass through the land, and as he did he vowed his vow. He was passionately concerned to win the victory. What could he give to God—not as a bribe, and not to win favour, but as the sign of his earnestness, and the expression of his yearning?

It would have to be someone of his own household, and this one he would offer up as a burnt sacrifice. Who that would be we are not told, but it does not seem he envisaged his own daughter. He wanted to give God some visible expression of his passionate gratitude, a seal of his strong intention to defeat the enemy of Israel. To do this would not be simple, and it demanded dependence upon God. So he made his vow.

We are tempted to think that in this moment of charismatic fervour and anticipated triumph he may have vowed foolishly. Carried away by a charge of emotion he may have made an irrational decision. People with 'charisma' are often this way. The seers in the Old Testament were prophets, but the seer often was not looked upon with the same credibility as 'the prophets of the word', for ecstasy is not wholly to be trusted, except perhaps by the superstitious, and the seers were generally ecstatic. It was the prophet of the word, i.e. the prophet who said, 'Thus says the Lord', who attracted most trust. This was not only because he seemed more rational, but because the very word of the Lord was what brought reverence to the faithful

Even so, we must not think of Jephthah as being swept

away. The stakes were very high, and this newly made prince was being true in character. What is more, he won the day, defeating the enemy, 'and he smote them from Aroer to the neighbourhood of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim, with a very great slaughter. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel'.

What a victory that was, and how unbelievable! The dispossessed son of the harlot had been blessed and elevated by God, and that trust had been vindicated. So in the delight and triumph of victory Jephthah returned home.

What a home-coming he anticipated!

She came out 'with timbrels and with dances'. She knew of the victory and could scarcely wait for him to appear. Her dear father, prince of Gilead, liberator of Israel, vanquisher of the dreaded Ammonites. Her grandmother had been a harlot, and her father a brigand, but now he was lord over all the Transjordan kingdom, and hailed in Israel as its deliverer.

She was his only child, the darling of his heart. He saw her come out of the house with joy and delight. He watched her weaving and swaying, dancing and darting, playing her music of adoration and greeting. Her face shone with love and admiration.

When he saw her he tore his clothes in a terrible despair. '... whoever comes forth from the doors of my house to meet me ... shall be the Lord's, and I will offer him up for a burnt offering. 'He could now recall those words. One of the most poignant of all dramas in history was being played. Jephthah had shown that he would give himself up to God more than any Ammonite would give himself to Chemosh.

He had not anticipated that it would be his daughter, a virgin-one who would normally remain in the house whilst mature women came out, or perhaps servants who would welcome and serve their returning master. But she was so filled with joy at her father's success that she broke through traditional restraints, and emerged to welcome him. When she did this she broke her father's heart. The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart no doubt, for this God does not despise. The heart of the judge of Gilead was broken. He had offered his best and now it had been received. Far from being a mistake through an irrational impulse, Jephthah was giving his utmost in relation to God and the cause of Israel. In a way it was an Abraham-Isaac repeat, although this time there was to be no substitutionary ram caught in a thicket.

\* \* \*

It is the daughter who confronts us with her quiet character, and her spiritual depth. When her father tells her the facts, she does not swoon like some highly emotional woman in a Victorian drama. She does not think about the histrionic possibilities of the case. She has no desire to pose as a martyr for the truth. She is simply and wonderfully calm. She is also a daughter of the great covenant of her forefathers. She knows and worships Yahweh. So she says, 'My father, if you have opened your mouth to the Lord, do to me according to what has gone forth from your mouth, now that the Lord has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites.'

She knew her father dare not go back on his vow. She also knew that that vow had not been foolish and irresponsible. He must go through with it, and she as his daughter must also go through with it. There was no recriminations, no

crying, 'Father! How could you have done such a thing?' There was no trace of anger, bitterness or disgust. There was only greatness of spirit. If we think it was only resignation-fine as such resignation might have been then we are wrong. She was as loyal a patriot of the people of God and His covenant as was her father, for 'the Lord has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites'. She thrilled to the victory as much as any other in Israel.

We do not know whether there was a time between her first utterance and the second. Probably not. Probably she saw immediately all the implications, just as a modern young woman thinks much in terms of a glory box—a hope chest—and anticipates the event of marriage and of being a wife and mother, so too would the unnamed daughter have lived in such hopes. It seems she summed up the matter immediately, accepted it, and came to terms with it. She said to her father, 'Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my companions.'

We are told he said to her, 'Go.'

\* \* \*

She went on the mountains with her companions for two months and 'bewailed her virginity'. Other translations have 'weep that I may die a virgin', or 'mourn the matter of my virginity'. Whatever terms are used, the event certainly is very moving to us who are spectators. The weeping and crying on the hills of Jephthah's daughter and her young companions surely wrings our hearts in any generation. It is the stuff of grand opera, designed to show us the greatness of the human spirit when faced with tragedy. Yet, even while we say that, we know we live in an age when chastity

is not widely held in high regard, where-in our generation millions of aborted fetuses have been destroyed with little regard for them, and millions take to divorce as the quick way out of relational difficulties. Wifehood and motherhood are often regarded almost as impediments to self-realization and self-fulfilment. Patriarchal and matriarchal leadership are often regarded as the butt of mirthless wit. The idea of a young maiden bewailing her virginity on the mountains, and other equally sincere loving friends doing the same, is looked upon as a bit of a farce.

Even so, in every age there is a quiet majority which holds to high thinking, and noble living, and values domestic life as being of the prime order.

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What we do not know for sure is whether she was to return to immediate death after the mourning, to become a bleeding body, and then, having died, to be a burnt sacrifice. This is where the sacred text is silent. On first reading it would seem that this became the case. If that was so, then it is strange that she did not mourn her death, but only her unfulfilled virginity—her loss of husband, home and children. Perhaps the nobility of her spirit in being a daughter of the covenant made her largely disregard her death. She may well have been proud of that coming death.

Even so, readers of the story are puzzled. Since the text does not speak directly of her death, was it that the writer passed over it as too painful a fact to be told, or was it even that he could not approve the vow of Jephthah? Or was it that she did not become a bleeding body and burnt offering but that she was dedicated to the service of God—ever to remain a virgin?

We cannot say with certainty. It can be rightly argued that since God had not allowed Isaac to be slain as a burnt offering that He would not have allowed it in the case of the daughter of this judge of Israel. Sacrificial human burnt offerings present a problem. Leviticus 18:21, 20:2-5, Deuteronomy 12:31 and 18: 10 forbid the use of human sacrifice, as that was the hated pattern of worship to Molech. It seems, then, that Jephthah's vow must either have been an illicit one, or one which had an inbuilt saving clause, an escape from actual slaughter, whilst preserving the intent of giving something substantial to God. The commentary of Keil and Delitzsch spends pages explaining that it would have been impossible for the father to sacrifice his daughter, since she would have had to be offered on the altar in the temple—an unthinkable matter. To be offered on another altar would have been unacceptable to God. Some commentators see Jephthah as half a Canaanite in his understanding, but then the difficulty is that human sacrifice was not an order in Canaanite religions.

The *Authorized Version* states in judges 11:39, 'And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her *according* to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man'. This translation does give some scope to think that his vow was fulfilled in essence by her knowing no man thereafter, but most modern translations allow no such scope. They all indicate that Jephthah had her offered as a sacrifice. The *New American Standard Bible* alone seems to follow the *Authorized Version*. It is well known that down through the centuries there have been commentators who favour the thought that Jephthah saw his vow as being fulfilled in his daughter's perpetual virginity, and her service to God in

this state. Others who do not see the text as allowing that, even go beyond the muteness of the text to translate 'she died a virgin' (*New English Bible*). There can be no doubt that she died a virgin, but the inference in this case could be that she died from the sacrifice.

\* \* \*

One would certainly like to believe she was not sacrificed on a physical altar, that the annual four days of mourning by the daughters of Israel was not for her sacrificial death but for her perpetual virginity, as indeed seems to be the case. It may be just the horror of human sacrifice that repels. Whatever be the case, we are left with a sense of awe at the responsibility of making vows, and of the irreversible nature of them. In days when vows and covenants and agreements are so often repudiated, we feel we are in the presence of greatness when we contemplate Jephthah and his noble daughter. The whole event causes us to take sober stock of ourselves, and to ask whether we too—as did these—are constantly keeping our integrity.

Because of its very nature, the story clings to us and does not allow us to enter into the easy-going spirit of our days. It is a powerful legacy left to all who call themselves covenant sons and covenant daughters of the Most High God.

*Jephthah*

When he remembered—and the memory was oft—  
The thought came crowding with its innate pain  
That his mother was a harlot, a thing of shame  
Even in the days of the judges—the strong men  
Who led the turbulent multitude, those who  
Did what was right in their own eyes. A harlot  
Of the holy people was a woman whose child  
Seemed destined to a no-life, a banishment  
By the half-brothers whose eyes were set steadily  
On the inheritance. In Israel of the all-days  
The inheritance mattered.  
The covenant was the blessing,  
And the land was highly esteemed; no less  
Because of the Canaanites who plundered,  
Who regained where they could  
In the turbulence of idolatry, the fearful fascination  
Of the no-gods whose passion turned  
The holy people to the no-people.

Out in the wilderness of Tob his thoughts  
Turned often to Gilead—father of his homeland,

And homeland of his father. He longed  
For the warmth of the home-hearth, the smiles,  
The fun and the laughter of his family,  
The strange and yearning look his father  
Would share in the secret moments  
Born of both shame and hope; the look  
Which told him he was loved—whatever;  
Then the bitterness returning  
With the memory of banishment.  
Thus closest ties bring memories of pain  
Again, again, and then again.

In the desert days the others had come to him  
Hoping as bedouins do—rough brigandage,  
Excursions wild, and passionate times  
As terrorists of the enemy, pitting fierce  
Their bid to live against the odds  
That made them worthless fellows.  
Some passion strange within their veins  
Made them as one on horse, or ass or camel wild,  
Or fleet of foot in forays and excursions.  
They followed strong the imperious Jephthah  
Till all the land—even the Ammonites  
Knew the dread fierceness of the welded band  
One in their banishment and their fight for life.

Then came the Ammonite—once half-repressed  
But now the oppressor strong—to war against  
The covenant-sons, the children of old Jacob,  
Whose fortunes rose and waned  
According to their faithlessness, their faithfulness,  
And prayer to God their Saviour.

*The Stranger in the Cemetery*

The elders of the naked Gilead-open  
To sudden devastations, sudden wars  
Brought by the hating nations, the idolaters  
Whose god was Chemosh, and whose slaves they were,  
Seeking the death of Israel, Yahweh's sons—  
These Gilead elders sent to Tob, to Jephthah.  
Earnest within their shame they sought  
The fierce brigand, the warring chief  
Of the motley ravaging crew. They sought  
A leader who would be a prince and judge,  
And set them free from terror. They knew  
The man would never turn and rend  
Those who had asked his mercy for their land.  
They knew this banished son would bring  
The grace of freedom; would bring  
The retribution of their Yahweh God  
In the unfailing covenant of peace.

Then came the Spirit on the man  
Until his heart and mind afire  
Was set to purge the land, to rid its fear  
By the swift terror of an insistent victory  
In the face of towering odds.  
The Spirit came that he might liberate  
Those who had banished him  
Through hauteur on his harlot origins.  
Jephthah the new prince surrendered all  
To Yahweh in his noble passion.  
'All that I have is yours,' he said,  
'And when I turn to home—sword-sheathed  
From the triumph of the kill  
That which most greets me first

*Jephthah*

Shall be a bloody sacrifice,  
A holocaust to you, O Lord,  
Who gives us such high victory.'

Thus vowing, he and all his troops  
Plundered the plundering Ammonites.  
The fierce passion of the covenant tribe  
Drove hard against the rightless enemy.  
All Ammon now subdued, the prince returned  
To his own hearth. Not far from it  
He heard the soft tinkle of a timbrel sweet  
As from his house emerged his loved  
And only child. The sight of her  
Froze heart and mind and weakened every limb.  
The passionate pain tore at his brain  
As he tore at his robes, and cried  
For her whose holocaust was near—  
A sacrifice to God, the fruit of vow  
Which now within his mind  
A fire was beyond recall, a leaping thing  
That burned and burned,  
And caused the flood of tears to flow.

Child of his heart, child of his loneliness,  
Child of his aching love-child of his life.  
She faced him clearly as the truth was heard,  
Bid him to faithful be to his own word  
Uttered to God. No protest came  
To virginal lips, to virginal heart  
That longed to be-as every maid  
The mother of her babes,  
The daughters and the sons

*The Stranger in the Cemetery*

Of purest matrimony. Her mind  
Had dwelt on things like these,  
As do the minds of daughters fair  
Within the land of covenant.

Proud were her eyes as firm she gazed  
At the prince her father-the conqueror  
Whose hand had delivered fair Gilead  
And set its people free, the people who  
Had banished him. His passion lay  
Not in their goodness or their ill  
Which banished him to Tob, but in God;  
His trust and faith was true to Him.  
The Spirit bid him vow his best,  
And now she faced him, filled with love,  
A female Isaac, a daughter loved beyond all else.

The legend has come down in time,  
And few there be whose hearts ignore  
Her sweet nobility. 'Let me mourn my chastity,' she asked,  
'Let me and all my sister-brides  
Weep on the mountains, weep for loss  
Of motherhood, and children fair,  
And noble sons, and daughters pure.  
Let me just weep that I will never be  
The mother every woman longs to be.'

The tale has come with deepest woe  
That in the end-when months had gone—  
Jephthah had had her killed.  
Perhaps his blow had felled her life

*Jephthah*

As the virginal sapling falls  
On the tree-clad hills, and lies  
In silent stillness. It is said  
That the blood flowed freely with his tears  
And the fiery bier transported her  
To Yahweh's arms. We do not know.

Another legend had it that—  
Bewailing finished-she returned  
To Jephthah's silent hearth and lived  
Perpetual virgin in the work  
And worship of her holy God.  
The vibrant life of passion was  
Now love and service for the Holy One,  
The God of favour and of steadfast love.

Which tale is true?  
We do not know. We speculate  
And find no answer. We spend  
The hours of sorrow in our thoughts for her  
Whose heart insistent was  
That Jephthah keep his holy vow  
And not renege. A vow that's made to God  
Can never be reversed. The holy fear  
Brings wisdom of the deepest kind.  
That wisdom shames our foolish minds  
That quickly judge old Jephthah's vow  
And make it foolish.  
His broken heart and contrite mind  
Lived as the genuine sacrifice  
To holy Father-God. His pain and hers  
Come down to wake our sleeping thought

*The Stranger in the Cemetery*

And show our superficial minds to be  
Empty of truth, of that reality  
Which springs as truth from God.

Four days in every year—so runs the tale—  
The virgins of the land would come  
And wail upon the mountain; wail for her  
Whose sacrifice of motherhood denied  
Touched at the deepest wells of them,  
And caused their pity as a spring to flow  
In tears afresh. What depth!  
What passionate purity that understands  
The deepest labyrinths of femininity,  
And yet more understands  
The passion of the father and the girl  
For God Himself!

*Truly Knowing God and Man*

***Truly Knowing  
God and Man***

**Part One: Breakthrough to God**

**INTRODUCTION: MAN KNOWING GOD**

A man can know God! A man can break through to God! Some of us simply take it for granted that if we wish to know God then we surely can. For various reasons—as we shall see—this is a foolish assumption. Is it that a man can know God, or is it, rather, that God knows a man, that God breaks through to a man? Paul said, ‘Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God...’ (Gal. 4:8-9). He meant that there was a time when they—the Galatians—did not know God, but they did know ‘gods’. It would seem

to be a general principle that you know *either* God *or* gods, but you have to come to know one or the other. That knowing is essential, for some reason or other. We will look at this thought later, but first let us concentrate on the idea of coming to know God.

‘To be known by God’-that is the term, but what does it mean? Firstly, it means that whilst they (the Galatians) had come-at last-to acknowledge God, it was really God who first had acknowledged them, and this had led them to acknowledge Him. Secondly, it means they had come into true knowledge of God, not by aspiring or working to obtain it, but because the Gospel-which Paul had preached to them-had given true revelation of God.

The thought of being known by God is also seen in the statement, ‘But if one loves God, one is known by him’. We love God because He first loved us. The revelation of His love shows that He knows us, and that is why we come to know Him. The initiative always comes from God, so that as He knows us we come to know Him. From one point of view this can be called ‘elective love’. Thus God tells Israel, ‘You only have I known of all the families of the earth’ (Amos 3:2). With this goes the amazing statement of Malachi 1:2—‘Yet I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau’-and it is to be seen that God loves Jacob but not Esau, and the love is not simply an emotional but an elective one.

#### KNOWING AND NOT KNOWING GOD

If our introduction is a little unclear at this point, I believe it will become crystal clear later on in our essay. It would seem

that when man was made in the image of God and was truly the image and glory of God’ (Gen. 1:26; 1 Cor. 11:7), then the affinity between God and man meant that man knew God. He knew Him only as a man can know God, and that meant he truly knew God. That knowledge was innate in creation, and must have been very wonderful.

Man refused this knowledge. The passage of Romans 1:18-25 says that although man knew God he did not acknowledge Him as God. He refused the true order of all things—i.e. God, man, and creation-and reshaped things after the pattern of idolatry. ‘He exchanged the truth of God for a lie.’ In Romans 1:28 this is reiterated: ‘And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct.’

Man, then, not only does not wish to know God but cannot-of himself-know God. Paul quotes Psalms 14:1-2 and 53:1-2: ‘No one understands, no one seeks for God.’ If this is true then the whole human race is cut off from the knowledge of God. This is a staggering statement, for It seems to be universally believed that if a man would care to seek after and know God then he would. The weakness of this idea is that it ignores the problem of man knowing God, which is that man in his sinfulness would be confronted by God in His holiness: moral demands would be made of him which he could not fulfil; nor would he wish to do so.

#### The Imperative of Man Knowing God

Since God created man, it is imperative for man to know God. He cannot be himself without knowing God, for he is only truly himself when he does know God. Knowing God

is indispensable to his truly being himself. Man is only fully man when he is in union with God. There must be in him, then, the tug to come again to the knowledge of God, and the misery of not knowing God must intensify this. Of course man, in refusing the knowledge of God, committed himself to a life of not knowing God. The only way in which he could exist in the universe was to invent his idols, and to channel all elements of love and worship towards these. If man could not pervert the glory of God into these images sometimes mental, sometimes fantastic, and sometimes objectified in material forms-then he would go mad with unfulfilled desire.

What-sadly enough-man has not realized is that he cannot devise his idols and have them neutral towards him. The satanic, the occultic and the demonic look upon the idols as their natural possession and habitat. In this sense the most beautiful of man's devising become the foul haunts of evil. The idols become the tyrants who enslave mankind.

### **The Basic Barrier to Knowing God**

I am sure that some who have read what I have written above will want to take issue with me. Especially they will want to take issue with my assertion-the assertion of the psalmists and Paul-that no one seeks after God, and no one understands Him. It would appear that many are seeking after God-hence the many religions of the world. It must be seen that these are not ways of seeking after God, but ways of insulating man against finding God! It is having God on human terms and conditions.

We often hear the statement, 'Out there are many who are looking for something. They may not know it, but what

they are seeking for is God.' I doubt whether this is true. I am sure that 'out there' man is seeking for something, for he has lost what is most valuable to him-the knowledge of God. He is seeking a substitute, a surrogate God who will not confront him with his sin and evil, and who will allow him latitude in moral-or Immoral-living. Religions certainly throw the onus on man to succeed, and he likes this-painful as his endeavours may be-because it saves his ego. Nothing is so fervent and avid as the religious ego.

The second argument which is brought against my assertion that man does not wish to know God is, seemingly, a powerful one. The fact is that many *do* know God: they have come to know Him. Of course, many do know God, but this is because God has drawn them. He has known them so that they will come to know Him. Had He not taken the initiative, they never would have done so. Of course, it appears they took the initiative, and we do not wish to argue with this. However, the moral powerlessness of man, the bondage of his will to sin and evil, and his desire for autonomy all ensure he cannot move towards God.

Having said all this, I believe men and women wish to know God, although I do not think this means that they seek after Him and desire to know Him from a pure motive.

### **Man Wanting and Not Wanting to Know God**

It would seem that I have raised an antinomy, i.e. man does not want to know God, and yet wants to know God. I am sure this is correct. We should first recognize the fact that although man has fallen, yet the image of God has not been obliterated. That is man's painful tension. On the one hand he has the drive of the image of God within him, and

on the other, the drive of his alienated ego to go his own way.

Yes, he wants to know God, as indeed Satan and all evil powers would wish to know God. Creation abhors a vacuum of knowledge. Satan desires to know God so that he can know how to fight Him and subvert His authority. The same thrust is in man, and man-like other personal evil powers—is driven by curiosity and pride to know God.

Knowledge is a primary theme, and the desire for it a primary drive, in this universe. Often knowledge would seem to presuppose wisdom. In this respect Paul observes, 'Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.' Paul and James speak of two kinds of wisdom. Paul refers to the wisdom of God and the wisdom of this world. James says that there is a wisdom which does not come down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish'. He says that 'the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity' (3:15-17).

The impediment to true knowledge and wisdom is the human *nous*, i.e. the fallen man's mind-bent, intelligence use, attitude, understanding. Until there is repentance (*metanoia*; 'change of *nous*'), man remains what Jesus might call 'the man as yet not twice-born' (John 3:1-6), i.e. the man not yet begotten anew from above. Paul would call him 'the natural man', and insist that he 'cannot receive the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness to him' (I Cor. 2:14). Jude would describe this person as 'worldly, devoid of the Spirit' (v. 19).

The reason why man cannot come to know God is that there can be no 'key of knowledge' for him whilst he is 'the natural man'. This does not mean that he cannot read

theology, that he cannot be religious, and that he cannot have a vast store of information—even biblical information—about God. He can, and does, but this does not mean he knows God or can come to know God on that basis. He cannot, and this is by nature of the case, for knowing God is a *relational* matter. Where man does not know God relationally, he does not know God. The fact that he has devised his own ontology, and has rationalized God, man, and creation along his own lines precludes him from knowing God.

#### MAN SEEKING TO KNOW GOD

**Jesus** said, 'And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent' (John 17:3). John the apostle said similar words: 'And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.'

It is worth our while to ponder these statements. Man—as created—knew God, and knew him in innocence. He was in union with God. When he broke that union he ceased to know God. He lost the key of knowledge. Whilst we do not posit that man in innocence had eternal life, we do know that Jesus said that to come to know (the true) God and His Son was in fact to have eternal life. This relational union with God is what brings a person to know God, and that relationship is the very experience of eternal life. The obverse is also true. If a man will not know God he cannot have eternal life, and if he does not have eternal life he

cannot have true knowledge of God. It is as simple and profound as that.

If it is possible for us to distinguish at all between *gnosis*, (knowledge) and *epignosis* (true deep knowledge), then perhaps we could say that intellectual and even propositional knowledge of God is at best a form of *gnosis*, but it is never *epignosis*. This allows us, now, to pursue one or two useful observations.

### Because Ineffable God Cannot Be Known

We have said that fallen man has an attitudinal impediment to knowing God. In the Old Testament we see the incessant rivalry between the True God and the ubiquitous gods and idols. Israel—at its prophetic best—established the stupidity of the idols, and the surpassing wisdom of Yahweh, the Most High God. For example, see Exodus 15:11:

Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods?  
Who is like unto thee, majestic in holiness,  
terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?’

The idols are dumb, are inept, and cannot—essentially—do wonders. God is the living God, the God Who acts. All history is under His hands—and so on. Yet given all this in, the great argument for Yahweh was that He was (is) incomparable. There is nothing on this earth which can represent Him. There is no thing or creature which can act even as an analogy, and if there were it would be incompetent to communicate God. Man has no point of commencement in seeking the knowledge of God. Thus in Isaiah 40:18-26 God asks first through his prophet, ‘To

whom will you like him?’ He then goes on to ridicule any comparison of Himself and idols, for He speaks of His creating of all things, and quickly outclasses the idols.

If there is no point of commencement in coming to the knowledge of God, then how can man know God? The answer to this question is quite dynamic: man can know God only because God chooses to reveal Himself. The *fact* that He chooses this means He is the God of grace, love and mercy, since He had no obligation whatever to bring the knowledge of Himself to rebellious humanity. That He does is the explanation why there were (and are) so many human beings in history who know the only true God.

Although this is not our subject now, let us note that God has ever revealed Himself through numerous media such as the creation, angelic visitants, theophanies, covenant, the law, the prophets, His Son, the holy Scriptures, His people (the faithful, the nation of Israel, and the church) and His acts in history. What we must understand about these media is that for the most part they are ignored. Revelation is not an act which *ex opere operato* (i.e. the act of itself is effective) brings people to see and know God. The fact of God’s ineffability does not alter. Man—unaided—cannot know Him, and of course wills not to know Him.

### The Nature of Man’s Investigation into God

Knowing God in nature and not in grace must mean that the intellectual brilliance of man may produce a vast literature and body of theology. This has been so throughout history, and so brilliant has it been that in some areas of the Christian church philosophy has greatly influenced the

thinking which is called 'Christian'. The question, 'Jerusalem or Athens?' has been tossed backwards and forwards over nearly two thousand years. Some have answered, 'Jerusalem *and* Athens.' Scholars have noted the essential differences between Jewish and Greek thinking. Some claim that the new Israel—the church—took aboard Greek as well as Jewish luggage.

The subject is a complicated one, and too difficult for us to embark on at this point. What is clear—it seems to me—is that the faith of Israel, and the teaching of covenant, of redemption, and the ultimate eschaton are all basically of Israel, and whilst Christ came to epitomize, actuate and reveal the essence of this truth, it means that there can be nothing but 'Jerusalem'-earthly and heavenly. Whatever Athens has to give must be under the aegis of the true Jerusalem, and in accordance with it. We must acknowledge that 'the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof', and this includes Athens and what it can contribute. Revelation 21:22-27 speaks of the 'kings of the earth' bringing their glory into the Holy City, for 'they shall bring into it the glory and honour of the nations', and this cannot be paganism or idolatry 'Christianized', i.e. untruth baptized into the faith, but what God has given to humanity being purged of its false elements. Nothing that is 'an abomination or falsehood' shall enter the City.

Likewise, then, anything which is not consonant with the truth of the true God shall be unacceptable in the ultimate. For this reason the results of man's reasoning about God must be consonant with God's revelation of Himself, and therefore with His nature, or it will be rejected. This can be seen in I Corinthians 1:22-23, where Paul says, 'For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ

crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.' This shows there can be falsehood in Jerusalem as in Athens, and only what is of the Kingdom of God is in the ultimate admissible to it.

#### Because of Luther's Deus Absconditus and Deus Revelatus

Luther believed that God could not be known by man in nature, i.e. fallen man unaided by God. He asserted that when man seeks to know God by his reason, then God is Deus absconditus—the hidden God. All that man thinks about God is speculative and therefore inconclusive. Indeed, it is a figmentum. This is because God will not be investigated by man. In one sense there is that of God which He never reveals to man. It is not for man.

Luther\*\* speaks also of the 'clothed God' (Deus vestitus or Deus involutus) who is not Deus nudus or Deus absolutus—the naked or absolute God. Man cannot know God in His absolute Being, but he can know Him in His 'clothed' being, i.e. as Deus revelatus. That is, God reveals Himself in Christ. Indeed, there is no other way we can know Him. We cannot know Him apart from Christ. The only way we know God is to come to Him by Christ. Christ is the Mediator between God and man, and Christ as the Son is the revelation of the Father, and as Redeemer reveals the redemptive nature of God. What is more, Christ is the wisdom of God, for 'in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell', and in him 'are

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\* I have been greatly helped in this section on the truth of God as Luther saw it, by G. S. Hendry's book, *God the Creator*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1937.

hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge', as indeed God has made him 'our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption' (Col. 1:19; 2:3; 1 Cor. 1:30). As John wrote, 'No man has seen God at any time; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.'

We will not go into the question of whether true sight of God has been always and only through Christ (cf. Rev. 19:10; Luke 24:25-27, 44-48; II Cor. 1:19-22), but we see that this is the case for us since Christ's incarnation and his act of redemption for the world. There is a Deus absconditus Who is hidden from us, and always will be so, as He is God-in-God. When He is not the 'naked' but the 'clothed' God, then we know Him through Christ and He is for us the Deus revelatus, and the Deus revelatus brings to us that of the Deus absconditus—God as He essentially is—as much as we need to know HIM.

Luther, then, is saying that no man can know God directly, and whilst man cuts himself off from true knowledge of God by his sin and rebellion, yet God—for His part—sees man cannot know Him, for He chooses to reveal Himself as the God of grace, love and mercy—the truth of which will always be hidden from man until he repents and has faith in the living God, in which case Deus absconditus becomes Deus revelatus. These two are not antitheses. It is the Deus absconditus that Deus revelatus reveals.

We conclude, then, that man may wish to know God for reasons best known to him, but which are unacceptable to God. God, Who has always been revealing Himself, reveals Himself supremely in Jesus Christ, so that where repentance and faith are evoked and exercised, man comes to know God.

## BREAKTHROUGH TO GOD

We now come to the crux of the first part of our study on truly knowing God. If we accept the fact that man cannot know God—of himself—that God chooses to reveal Himself through many media, and that His full, true revelation of Himself is in Christ, then we can come to know God.

Theological questions should not impede, such as when we say man is incapable of initiating a seeking for God, that man has not power to come to God, and that man is unable to see the truth, for in one sense these are academic matters. We see a person who wants to know God. That is what concerns him, and us, i.e. a man wants to know God.

### The Knowledge of God Essential for True Living

In Israel all members of the nation were expected to know God because of the covenant. God had revealed Himself by covenant. This is seen in many places, but best of all in Exodus 34:6-7:

The Lord passed before him [Moses], and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.'

There was no question, then, that members of Israel should come to know God. They knew Him because He first knew them (Amos 3:2; cf. Gal. 4:8-9).

We have already seen that the knowledge of God is dynamic. Indeed, all that Israel had of worth came from

knowing God as their Covenant-Father. When then—within Israel—there was a rejection of the knowledge of God, then such was a recipe for disaster. In Isaiah 1:2-31 God gives the principle responsible for their tragedy: ‘The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not understand.’

In Hosea 4:1-3 the condition of the nation is terrible because ‘there is no knowledge of God in the land’, and so there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds and murder follows murder’. God says, ‘My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.’ Then later (6:1-6) God calls His people, so that ‘in their distress they seek me, saying, Come let us return to the Lord; for he has torn, that he may heal us; he has stricken, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. ‘Then they say, *Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord.*’ With this endeavour in mind they hear the voice of God: ‘For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, *the knowledge of God*, rather than burnt offerings.’

The knowledge of God, then, is most dynamic for true and moral living.

### **COMING TO KNOW GOD THROUGH CHRIST**

John (1:18) puts it simply: ‘No man has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.’ Jesus told them clearly that they could not-of themselves-know God as Father, or himself as Son. In Matthew 11:27 he told his disciples, ‘All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son

except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.’

These statements tell us that apart from the Son we can never know God. That is very devastating when thought about. Everything is narrowed down to the Son, and that is exclusive; but then everything is widened out to full knowledge of God by the Son, and that is wonderful.

It is God clothing Himself from *Deus absconditus* to *Deus involutus* and *Deus revelatus* through the Son. In Part Two of this essay—‘Breakthrough to the Father’—we will explore this much further. It is sufficient now to see that Jesus said he came into the world to bear witness to the truth, that he told the truth as he had heard it from God, and that he was the way, the truth, and the life—to God, and of God as Father. No one could come to the Father but by him.

Time would fail us to tell it all: the Incarnation; the Baptism, when he was attested to by God the Father; his Transfiguration, when the Father said, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen One—hear him’; and then the Cross, where he spoke to the Father so intimately that a thief repented and was redeemed, a centurion was convinced that he was the Son of God; and his Resurrection, when he told them he was ascending to his Father and their Father, his God, and their God. As such he had been able to say, ‘He that has seen me has seen the Father.’ Truly he declared God.

Christ, then, was—and is—the ‘visible expression of the invisible God’. No man has ever seen God; the Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has declared Him. So now we see God and cannot complain that we cannot know Him. We only do not know Him if *we wish not to know Him. Even then God may break in upon us, and we could be undone!*

Christ, then, shows us the Father by all that he is, and all that he does. He reveals God as love, for he shows that God is the Initiator of the Cross and the Resurrection. He shows us the fruit of the Cross in repentance, faith, forgiveness, purification of sin's pollution, and justification from its accusation and guilt. In the experience of these things we really come to know God.

This is borne out in the promise of the New Covenant as found in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and confirmed by Christ when he said, 'This is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for you and for many for the remission [forgiveness] of sins.' In the prophecy it was stated, 'And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. 'That is, we come to *know God* in the forgiveness of sins. This is because we know He is love by the forgiveness of sins. We see He is not heavy, judgemental and grim, but One Who sets us free from our sins, and gives us eternal life.

The forgiveness of sins, then, is very powerful. The actual release from guilt and fear of death is very rich, and with the realization that all this has happened comes love that floods into our hearts. That is why Jesus said to the paralysed man, 'Take heart—your sins are forgiven. 'That is why the woman who was a sinner loved much—because she had been forgiven much. Thus the old anger with God, the old enmity, and the old misunderstanding is finished when we see God through Christ. It is then that we come to know Him the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, and so we come into the knowledge of God, and this constitutes eternal life.

We can talk, then, of our 'breakthrough to God'. We can say we know Him, and then add, 'Or rather, He has known us, and so we know Him', and this is, of course, 'eternal life'.

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*No human being can assess or compute the misery which attends his race if he has not yet come to know God. It is when we come to know God that the tragedy, the sorrow, and the terror of the human spirit are seen for what they are. Christ the Redeemer was 'a man of sorrows and familiar with grief'. His sorrow was for the sorrow of man's sorrow and his grief for the grief of man. Man is a lonely, alienated creature because he has cut himself off from the life of God. He has refused the incredible joy of fellowship with God, the peace and serenity of trust in the faithful Creator, the tears and gratitude of the reconciled sinner. Dislocated in his spirit, lost as to his true identity, unfulfilled as regards his appointed high destiny, and being the slave of his ego, his own perverse anger, bitterness and cruelty, man is in himself a painful contradiction of the very image of God, which image he is—come life, come death, come accomplishment, or come inner existential misery.*

*No wonder, then, when this prodigal turns to go home to the Father, to go back to 'my God and your God', that the fear and trembling which come from the grief and misery all lift! The homing radar orients towards the house of reconciliation and the city of the people of the Father. Weeping has endured for the night but joy comes in the morning. No wonder there are rapturous homecoming cries, the prodigal weeping on the shoulder of the father,*

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*and all the angels of heaven uttering their rapturous cries. God's love is not a myth, for it has suffered on craggy Golgotha as its blood has spattered on its hard stones. God has always worked to bring the prodigals home, and once home they know the joy they had denied themselves, and the peace they had refused in their stubborn hearts.*

*'Breakthrough to God!' Of course, breakthrough to the blazing heart of compassion and healing love. joy cometh in the morning, yea, and at all times. Nothing matters now but that the lost sons are home, and daughters who had died are now alive. 'Coming to know God' is not a mere objective fact of fine theology but the dynamic up-drawing and outbursting of the redeemed family. Coming to know God is the heart of all things, and the richest and highest expression of the Eternal love, grace and mercy. No wonder all the stars of the morning sing, and all the sons of God shout for joy!*

## **PART TWO: BREAKTHROUGH TO THE FATHER**

### **THE TRIUNE GODHEAD**

Because man is made in the image of the Triune God then there is something in man which responds to the nature of God, i.e. the Persons and the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Created man had a rich affinity with God, and

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knew Him not so much by a theology of God as by a relationship with Him. We see that since the beginning of time the Father, the Son, and the Spirit have combined in the work of creation, of redemption, and now in the holiness of the believer, and his ultimate glorification. In this sense God has always worked with man.

### **GOD IS OUR FATHER**

When the Preacher in the Book of Ecclesiastes wanted to get us to know that God is Other than us, he said, 'God is in heaven and you [are] on earth.' This also was what Jesus was about when he said, 'You have one Father, even your Father who is in heaven.' He did not wish to confuse earthly fatherhood with the heavenly Fatherhood. Jesus made it clear, time and again, especially in John's Gospel, that the Father is in heaven, that he—Jesus—had known the Father, had been commanded by Him, worked as the Father bade him, and had an intimate relationship with Him.

We saw in John 1: 18 that no man has ever seen God, but the Son who is in the bosom of the Father has declared or shown Him to man. So what we are about in this section of our study is not simply knowing God as 'God', but coming to know Him as 'Father'. We might think that since God's Fatherhood is Other than human fatherhood then knowing Him as Father might not be especially satisfying or fulfilling. This is because (i) we still compare his Fatherhood with the fatherhood we have known, and (ii) we think that His Fatherhood might be heavy and demanding. How wrong we would be to think in these ways!

### FATHERHOOD IS ALL AND IS EVERYTHING

Just as I believe men and women will be in great tension if they do not know God, I also believe that man can be delivered from much pain and suffering by coming to know God as Father. It would be possible to show that since 'we [all men] are his offspring', then to worship idols is to make the idols into surrogate fathers (cf. Acts 17:26-31) and so to incur God's judgement. God highly esteems His own Fatherhood of His Son, but also of all His children. Hence Jesus' constant emphasis upon His own Sonship, and his persistent use of the term 'your heavenly Father'.

Ephesians 3:14-15 portrays Paul as saying, 'I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.' This can equally be translated 'the Father, from whom all familyhood in heaven and on earth is derived', and also 'from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth is derived'. This makes God's Fatherhood fontal to all relationships, and gives rich meaning both to fatherhood and familyhood. We could, perhaps, start from the internal relationships of the Triune God, i.e. of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and show that all human relationships derive from this fontal source, and reflect in some way the Godhead, since man is the image and glory of God. Thus, when Paul says in 4:6 of the same Letter, 'one God and Father of us all, who is above all, and through all, and in all', he is speaking about a Fatherhood that embraces the Father's entire family. There is not one aspect of 'aboveness' and 'throughness' and 'in-ness' to which His Fatherhood does not relate.

Some have been unable to cope with the confrontation of this Fatherhood, and have suggested that the Fatherhood

could not be ontological and therefore genuine Fatherhood of humanity, i.e. God cannot be the Father of a human being. The answer to this is Paul's salutation in Ephesians 1: 2-3, 'Grace to you and peace from God **our** Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of **our** Lord Jesus Christ. . .' In this passage God is undoubtedly ontologically the Father of His Son, Jesus Christ. For Paul to claim that God is 'our Father' must mean that He is indeed our Father, and not just figuratively so. It is true that in Psalm 103:13 the psalmist says, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him' (AV), for this is a figurative comparison, but there is no comparison in the Ephesian opening passage.

Elsewhere Paul uses the idea of adoption (Gal. 4:4-6; Rom. 8:14-17), but there is no suggestion that Sonship and Fatherhood are figurative. Indeed, in both cases the cry of 'Abba! Father!' comes from the heart of the child of God, who is aided by the Spirit. Even more, in the whole passage of Galatians 3:16 to 4:7 the emphasis is that we share in the very Sonship of Christ himself, since we have 'put on Christ', are 'one in Christ', and have 'the Spirit of his Son'. Nothing could be more intimate, hence the verb for adoption contains *huios* (the Greek word for 'son'), and this answers to *pater* (Father), but even more intimately to *Abba!* (i.e. 'dear Father'). The insistence that this is merely metaphorical is obnoxious. Whoever cried 'Abba!' to an earthly metaphorical father, much less to the Heavenly Father, i.e. to 'your Father who is in heaven'? We must protest against this denigration of God's Fatherhood, i.e. making it simply figurative.

How, then, do we come to know God as Father? The answer is simple: through the Father Himself, through the

Son of the Father and the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, and so can communicate Him to us in our inner being.

### COMING TO KNOW GOD AS FATHER

Let us reiterate. If we simply know God as God, then we will see the One we call the Father of Christ to be the Creator, and we will see His Son as the Redeemer, and His Holy Spirit—probably—as the Sanctifier, but we will miss knowing God intimately as our Father, and His Son as our Elder Brother who leads us to the Father and is Lord over all things, and the Holy Spirit as the one who brings sonship to us in the Son and the Father. This being the case, can we really say we know God? Each must answer that question for himself.

If we look at the history of the Christian church, and Christian doctrine, we will be surprised at the small emphasis given on God as Father, especially in its relational significance for God's people. What has often been missed is the truth that Christ came to show the Father. When he said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life,' he meant, 'As the Son I have come to show you the Father.' That is why he said, 'No man comes to the Father, but by me.' He meant he was (is) the way of the Father, the truth of the Father, and the life of the Father. This is the equivalent of what we saw in Matthew 11:27, when he said no one could know the Son apart from the Father (cf. John 6:44, 65), or the Father apart from the Son. When he said, 'He that has seen me has seen the Father,' then everything has been said.

None of this will be powerful for us, unless we see that

the Father and the Son from time immemorial have worked together in creation and in redemption. That is why we said in Part One of our study that the Son 'clothed' God for us by his mediating ministry, and so we came to see Him as love, the One Who redeems us. Likewise, through the Son we must see Him declared as 'the Father'. This was the Name that Jesus revealed uniquely to his followers (John 17:12, 26), especially when he showed them that 'thou hast loved them even as thou hast loved me'—a strange phenomenon if the Father is only metaphorical!

As we have seen, it was the Father and Son working from before time, and through all time to effect the redemption of fallen man that reveals the love of the Father for us. By the Son, then, we come to know God as Father. At the same time (cf. John 16:12-15; Matt. 10:20; Gal. 4:5-6; Rom. 8:15) the Holy Spirit shows us the Father and the Son, applies their redeeming work in our hearts, and causes us to realize God is our Father via the involuntary cry of 'Abba! Father!'

This having happened to us, we now know God as Father. Thus we reach our familyhood in the Son (cf. Matt. 11:27; John 14: 1-10; John 20:17; Heb. 2:9-17) and in the Spirit, as we have seen immediately above.

Wonderfully enough, we are not left in loneliness because God is ineffable, and therefore unknowable. We are not left to try to understand the *Deus absconditus* when we are only humans, and fallen humans at that. Nor has God left us in our obstinacy to misunderstand Him, to hate Him, and to rationalize all His goodness as useless. No! He has visited us in Christ and the Spirit to make us His sons- 'to bring many sons into glory'-for this is the true goal of His Fatherhood.

*The Stranger in the Cemetery*

Thus we now know God, not only theologically, or even biblically, but we know Him intimately and personally. Doubtless we have much yet to learn of God, and to progress in knowing God (Phil. 3:10), and doubtless now we only 'see in a glass darkly', but we 'will see him face to face, and know, even as we also ourselves are known'. It is comforting to realize that He knows us, and so we know Him. It is utterly thrilling *to know that we know Him!*

*I Saw It Break Tonight*

I saw it break tonight—the sunset.  
Its pulsing flame leapt quivering through the sky.  
I saw an astral ocean all aflame,  
Which beached a thousand thousand craft  
Of ancient tribes and tongues  
On golden shores long lost to present memories.

I saw the ocean sink behind the hills,  
Taking the tribes and craft—the ancient fire  
That spills from opened veins and passionate hearts,  
Creating all anew the cycles of our timeless history.

I saw the gentle night close over all  
The hills and plains and seas and shores  
I saw it lay its covering of peace—a blanket deep  
So putting all its pains to rest—a cov'ring quiet  
Renewing there, within, the day to come.

*The Stranger in the Cemetery*

I saw it break today—the sunrise—  
its fiery flame leapt up aloft, afresh.  
I saw no astral shores, no atavistic craft,  
But only a strong and steady day  
In which the tribes of *now* must live  
And face the present issues of their time.

*I saw the sun rise steady in the sky  
That we beneath it now must live or die.*

*Koheleth and the Congregation*

***Koheleth and the Congregation***

INTRODUCTION TO KOHELETH

AND HIS CONGREGATION

Although we do not all have the gift or office of a pastor, yet we are all involved in pastoral ministry, the ministry of feeding and keeping the flock. This theme we have chosen may seem to be a strange choice for such pastoral ministry, yet in the Book of Ecclesiastes the main character is the one who was known as 'The Preacher' (Eng.), 'Koheleth' (Heb.), and 'Ecclesiastes' (Gr.). One thing he had in common with us of more modern days was that he preached to a congregation. Technically he was not a pastor as today some are pastors, for his role was more that of a lecturer talking to people who had come to hear him because he was most interesting, and could be quite informative, and thus helpful. His modern equivalent today would be a layman invited to speak, who had had rich experience of life, and who had gathered wisdom in the process, and who-being a person

of integrity and Intelligence-would be gladly listened to. The difference in Koheleth's case was that he was not invited by the hierarchy at the Temple. People wanted to listen to him because he had experienced life so much, was well known and respected. Hearers thought they would learn something from him. Possibly he taught in the Temple court, as Jesus and others did later.

Since Koheleth was not a pastor as such, the teaching of the law, and the leading of the worship, and the personal instruction in spiritual life would be given by the priest or priests. We have evidence that this was the case. Even so, the Temple congregation did not approximate to our modern cathedral congregation, as worshippers flowed backwards and forwards from all parts of the country to be present at the various festivals and to attend to such matters as circumcision of a newly born boy, of certain sacrifices relating to guilt and thanksgiving, and to worship the Lord. All Israel really constituted the one congregation (*qahal*), and this was under one king who was supposed to be the shepherd (pastor) of his people, whilst the high priest would represent that congregation to God. The later development of the synagogue was a ready model for the new Christian church, and since it had elders and not priests, there was scope for (so-called) laymen to contribute their gifts in worship, and in commentary upon the lections. It is clear from the New Testament that there were local congregations and that their synagogues had a social function to play.

Koheleth's congregation, then, was partly 'by the way', although it was the Preacher's steady and studied intention to get his truth across to people. This man was truly a man of the world, as well as a man of faith, and hard-headed

professionals and tradesmen would be eager enough to hear him. In this sense he was fairly close to the lecturers of our day who speak on business principles, professional acumen, and who give expensive lectures on organization, promotion of oneself, salesmanship, facing the contemporary tensions and stresses that come upon one, and learning to mix vocation with psychology and religion to get the best results. The difference between the Preacher and his modern equivalent was that Koheleth had made an objective and intelligent enquiry into life and faith, and had arrived at a distinctive and dynamic view of God, man, God's law, morality, life and death. His was not a psycho-religious *schema* or methodology for making the most of life.

When it comes to the constitution of his congregation I believe he spoke to people who appreciated wisdom, although their motives may have been quite worldly. I have seen hippies entranced by Koheleth's reasonings, for

hippies are generally of a highly intellectual strata of life. Even so, I think Koheleth spoke to people who were both religious and worldly-wise. Doubtless their religion was part of their culture, and they may well have been regular worshippers, but were seeing everything from a utilitarian point of view. If they had religious devotion, then it would presumably have been part of a way of life which they were tempted to regard as they did other parts of life, life being the sum of those parts. It seems to me that it would have been very hard to break through their fairly case-hardened ideas of life, to bring them to the more dynamic view that Koheleth had discovered. In any case, what he had to say is essential for all persons in all ages to know, but especially for those whose religion blind's them to reality.

## KOHELETH-THE MAN QUALIFIED TO TEACH

**Koheleth** has been the centre of much enquiry and study. He has always intrigued the man in the street as much as the scholars who have tried to analyse his sermons. The Book opens with the identification of the writer-preacher: 'The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem'. He is evidently King Solomon. In 1:12 he claims, 'I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem'. In 2:9 he said he had become great and surpassed all who were before him in Jerusalem. The comment on him in 12:9-10 is,

Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find pleasing words, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

Scholars both of Jewish and Christian persuasion do not think Koheleth was King Solomon. This conviction is based on a number of factors which we cannot enter into here. Linguistic evidence points to a much later date than the time of Solomon's monarchy. Solomon himself, although reputedly a wise man, had come to the end of his days in the midst of idolatry, mainly through his many foreign wives and their worship systems, as also his own politics whereby he maintained international power and esteem. There is no evidence that Solomon repented of his involvement in idolatry.

It seems, then, that Koheleth was a man of the world himself, and was recognized as such. He was a man who had made his way to a dynamic faith in God, as the internal evidence of the Book would indicate. He had studied Solomon thoroughly, and found him to be a good model for

his thesis or philosophy of the successful man who also knew God. In one sense Koheleth acted his life out as though it were Solomon's, for purposes of preaching. We could almost say that Koheleth worked empathically with his model. As, in plays of Shakespeare, that bard wrote of real men and women but built them up to his personal image of them, so did Koheleth with Solomon. As with the characters of Shakespeare an actor may use the image the playwright has created—i.e. often beyond the person himself—so, too, the actor can enter into the character he is portraying and make him live, so much so that he almost becomes the *alter ego* of that one. It seems that Koheleth had utilized the life, experience, and times of Solomon to be the *métier* of his own understanding and philosophy of life.

## SOME ATTITUDES TO KOHELETH

Being brought up to believe that the Preacher was 'the natural man', i.e. one who did not understand the things of the Spirit, I was inclined to write off the Book as my mentors did. It was—they said—given to us as an example of the worldly man's view of life—cynical, sterile, and unworthy of true life as it is lived in God. One commentator has called him 'the gentle cynic'. It was included in the canon only in order to show how *not* to see life, for the New Covenant was to hold better things. No wonder, then, that a battle was fought regarding its quality and its inclusion—or otherwise—into the canon of the Bible. Others see Koheleth as a mixture of worldliness and religion, cynicism and yet sensible joy in living that will terminate with the grave. For some there is nihilism with worldly wisdom—an

expedient to help us to cope with this futile mortality which is ours. So run the many views.

I have been surprised, recently, to find how many folk believe it is unprofitable even to study the Book. It is there like a foreign object within the otherwise warm and useful canon. In the case of the Book of the Revelation many think it to be a sombre Book, dealing with judgements, conflict and gloom, so that they deliberately stay away from it. In the case of Ecclesiastes they feel it is a hotch-potch of undelectable things, and is better left untasted. That is a pity, since the Book speaks plainly enough, and is valuable for all times. Of course, it requires steady reading and attention to see what the Preacher is really saying, since so many views obtain on the substance of the text, and we could be misled as to its true meaning. Study of the Book will be rewarding if we assume that it must be of value since it is in the canon of Scripture, and as such—rightly understood—is the word of God.

#### THE PRINCIPLE BY WHICH KOHELETH WRITES HIS SERMON

We take it that the sermon was delivered by mouth. Maybe it was a series of sermons. Also it has been written down, but was not purely a literary exercise—a piece of valuable prose-poetry. Great value lies in delivering the truth to a congregation of living people. One is put on his metal more than is a writer. Karl Marx spoke from his ivory tower but did not go where men were worked, where they were workers. Koheleth addressed a congregation, as we address one. In their eyes he was authentic in that he had had

experience of this world. In that sense his sermon was a witness to what he had done, what he had learned, and what he had discovered about the journey of man through life, both 'under the sun' and 'with God'. 'Says the Preacher' (1:2; 7:27; 12:9-14) shows that it is the one man who understands himself to be the Preacher who speaks out of his life's experience, albeit he incorporates the history of 'the king over Israel in Jerusalem'.

#### What Koheleth Saw

The Preacher had set out deliberately to view, experience and understand everything 'under the sun' (1:12—4:16). Some men see, experience and understand in an arbitrary way. They follow their own wills either existentially or deliberately. They adduce conclusions from what they have experienced. They do this in a sort of 'flat-earth' ontology, i.e. they deduce principles of human living from their experience, i.e. 'I have been through it, and I know it. 'Nobody can shift such dogmatizers from their stated dogmatic positions.

Koheleth was different. 'I applied my mind to seek and to search out *by wisdom* all that is done under heaven.' He partly assumed that he had wisdom by which he could do this, and partly—we suppose—augmented that wisdom as he sought out things. 'I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.' He appears to claim that of anyone in this world he was most qualified to research the matter of human living, and to come to conclusions regarding it. He added, 'I applied my *mind* to know wisdom and to know madness and folly.' In

other words, he did not merely experience these things, but wanted to get to the essence of them. He assumed he could draw a conclusion—or conclusions—from his intelligent research.

Again he said to himself, 'Come now, I will make a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself.' He sought to understand laughter and pleasure. 'I searched *with my mind* how to cheer my body with wine—my *mind still guiding me with wisdom*—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven during the few days of their life.' Koheleth was not simply abandoning himself to the things which he experienced. He was *rational* about all of them, seeking to understand them, not allowing himself to become the object of them.

In this vein he researched the experiences of becoming rich, having great possessions, having great power and authority, and having varied experience in sex—'concubines, man's delight'. When full experiment had been made he had not been diverted by passion or lust, or the absolutizing of any one thing, i.e. he had not been caught into idolizing any particular person, position or thing. He claimed, 'So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; also *my wisdom remained with me*.' He came to the conclusion that 'wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness'. That is, he did not denigrate the wisdom he had.

### The Conclusion of Utilized Wisdom

Naturally we are eager to know what conclusions Koheleth drew from his research. His *evaluation* of life, his research and his efforts are as follows:

- Everything done under the sun is vanity and a striving after wind.
- Knowing wisdom, madness and folly 'is but a striving after wind'.
- Pleasure, enjoying oneself is vanity.
- Laughter is mad, and pleasure is useless.
- The building of great works, the acquiring of wealth, vast possessions, slaves and concubines, power and authority are all 'vanity and a striving after wind'.
- All acquiring is but vanity because, having done this, 'who knows whether a fool will not inherit it all?'
- There is no ultimate difference between the fate of a wise and rich man, and of a fool, because both die. In this sense a man is no better off than a beast, since both come to death. 'All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again.'

The results of this experimentation-with wisdom-are as follows:

- 'I hated life.'
- 'I hated toil.'
- 'I turned about and gave my heart up to despair.'
- 'I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive.'
- He saw of a man who has toiled that 'all his days are full of pain, and his work is a vexation'.

### The Seeming Conclusion of the Preacher

We say 'seeming', because the ultimate conclusion of Koheleth is not what we have just recorded, above. His conclusion is firmly that everything-repeat, everything is 'vanity and a striving after wind'. What does he mean by 'vanity' and 'a striving after wind'? Vanity is a word we find in the New Testament in Romans 8:20-21, where the

creation is subjected to vanity, i.e. futility, i.e. inability to exercise its true functional fullness, which inability is linked with corruption and decay. The opposite of vanity is living in 'the glorious liberty of the children of God', i.e. where there is no pointlessness to life and existence.

Vanity is much like this in the Old Testament. Job chapter 7 shows the insubstantiality and mortality of man. His days are 'a breath', i.e. 'vanity' (v. 16), his life is but a breath, i.e. 'wind' (v. 7), life is but a cloud that fades and vanishes (v. 9). Vanity, then, is insubstantiality, emptiness, temporality, pointlessness, and untrustworthiness. We are tempted to say it is 'nothingness' but unfortunately it *is* actually something, which being something is *as* nothing because it is empty, futile, pointless—and so on. Nihilism would claim all things to be vanity and 'trying to catch the wind', but would see the creation as essentially pointless and futile. That is not the case with the Preacher, who sees it as vanity by *comparing it with that which if not vain*. You cannot speak of vanity unless there is that which is not vain. The existentialist who says, 'This life is absurd,' has in mind something which is not absurd, and is positing it as the true thing. Koheleth does not hold to nihilistic philosophy. As we will see, he thinks there is more to life than vanity.

### KOHELETH'S BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF ALL THINGS

The Preacher gives his powerful conclusion to everything in 12:13-14,

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will

bring every deed into judgement, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

We will deal with this conclusion later. At first sight it appears to be a matter of works, and even of legal obedience to God. It is not, but for the moment we can see what is in the Preacher's mind, i.e. the whole of man is to fear God and keep His commandments. There is no suggestion that this is 'vanity and a striving after wind'. Why, then, does he insist that all things are 'vanity and a striving after wind'? Much of the answer lies in the four phrases he uses: 'under the sun', 'beneath the sun', 'under heaven' and 'on the earth'. These terms are used for what we might call 'horizontal life'. The Preacher had tried to develop a rationale for life on the earth. His view was purely horizontal. Even though we are aware he had a knowledge of God, this was not mentioned whilst he was evaluating life 'under the sun'. At that stage one might have called him 'the secular man'. He was looking for meaning and purpose—i.e. true wisdom—on the secular plane. He found none. He was sure everything was 'vanity and a striving after wind'.

### The Significance of Vanity

Vanity has no significance except to show that what seems to be substantial is really empty, that what appears to be life is nothing. Its tragedy lies in that it purports to be what it is not. If all is vanity then the implications are enormous, particularly with a view to the entire creation. Creation has no essential reality, so that its Maker must be impugned for creating what is senseless. Indeed, on this score 'the heavens declare the emptiness of God, and the firmament shows His senselessness'. Thus everything is

stripped of any meaning. Intellectual life has no authentic real and sensual life is without point. No wonder Koheleth thinks man's end can be no better than that of the beast.

On the other hand, the emptiness of all things teaches man to give no great allegiance to the creation, to expect nothing of life, so that idolatry proves equally insubstantial. We might think on this score that this seeming pessimism of Koheleth is a good thing. Disabusing man of any trust in anything, he may now be ready to trust God. Having no idol that is substantial, he may now look to the Eternal God.

Not so, for the Eternal God would be of no consequence. He could not be called 'faithful Creator', for what He has created yields nothing but vanity when man tries it out. No, we have to look again at Koheleth and mark him down as a cynic, or a nihilist, or just a plain pessimist. A cynic is one who has been disillusioned of his expectation, a nihilist is one who is positive there is nothing that essentially has being in the universe, and a pessimist is one who thinks nothing will come his way.

### **Koheleth the Man of Faith**

It is no wonder the Book of the Preacher has puzzled people. It seems Koheleth is either a mixture of two things-cynicism and faith-or the Book has different sources and has been edited from time to time in an endeavour to give it some semblance of unity. It might even seem to be two jigsaw sets of pictures which have never really been worked out, and could not be, by nature of the case, much less reconciled in the one frame.

In fact the Book is the description of two views we can

have of life. The first-with which we have partly dealt-is that of seeing everything in this world on the horizontal. On this horizontal everything is vanity and a striving after wind. The other view is when man knows God, and looks at the horizontal via a true relationship with the vertical. When we know God and know Him as Creator—'Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth'; 'He has made everything beautiful in its time' then we look at this world with different eyes. To see it, and live in it, and experiment in it only on the horizontal plane is to do it despite. The horizontal and the vertical-rightly understood-are one, as we will shortly see. Thus to horizontalize all things is not only to put them out of perspective, but is to attempt an impossible task. Nothing God creates is vain nor its true use vanity, since He has made everything beautiful in its own time (appropriate, functional; cf. Gen. 1:31; Eccl. 7:29), and what we do is in accordance with its appropriate time.

### **An Evaluation of Horizontal Living and Wisdom**

By 'wisdom' we do not merely mean knowledge. The most informed scientist may not be a wise person. Nor, for that matter, the most informed theologian. Both are observers of the phenomenology of things, but it does not mean they are wise regarding these things. Anyone who moves skilfully on the horizontal is regarded as wise, and so he is-in regard to these horizontal things. He works out an ontology, such as, say, the eco-system. Roughly speaking, his reasoning must be limited to the three dimensions and the five senses. He works out the functional nature of things on this plane. In fact there is no other plane for him,

for if there were he would view it all differently.

People caught in the idolatry of some person or thing tend to absolutize that thing. There can be no question of anything having essential being as an idol. Hence the attempt to gain satisfaction from anything-or even all things-of the creation is doomed to failure. We must all end up as cynics, or angry and disappointed. Seen and experienced from this point of view, everything *must* be vanity. I believe Koheleth knew this very well, and felt he was doing a service to convince others they were on a foolish quest. He tried to arrest them in their tracks, and turn them into a more fruitful path.

### The Pastoral Value of Koheleth's Evaluation of the Horizontal

I believe it is fair to say that the Preacher's immediate audience could approximate to our congregations. In the West we are mainly concerned with security, enjoyment of things, and obtaining goals. Short-term goals do away with the need for long-term ones. We can become occupied with the horizontal-as was Koheleth-and derive some intellectual and sensual satisfaction from it. It is only when we stop and think, or compare it with godly living and reality, that we see how empty it is.

Koheleth was trying to debunk the horizontal as such. The religious conditioning, culture and training of his audience would have led them to believe they were not merely horizontal. This was a great delusion. We can easily secularize God, worship and religion. In fact I believe many dislike the Book of Ecclesiastes because they unconsciously fear the unmasking of their secularity. If we can show the

Preacher's valuable understanding to our congregations it could make a vast difference to them. Their ontology would then have to move out to a wider perspective. An ontology of the horizontal cannot be a true one, and will not ultimately answer to man's ancient knowledge of God-the innate knowledge he keeps unsuccessfully trying to push away.

### THE DYNAMIC FAITH AND TRUE WISDOM OF KOHELETH

Whilst much of Ecclesiastes is autobiographical, Koheleth does not tell us in so many words (i) how he could, firstly, simply pursue a horizontal investigation into the nature of things, and then (ii) how he came to change from that to a 'horizontal-vertical' understanding of life through some dynamic experience of God. We have seen in history that men like Enoch, Abraham, Jacob, Isaiah, Jeremiah, John and Paul—to name only a few—all received revelations of God, and so henceforth refused to look at things from a horizontal perspective. Job is a case in point: whilst he did not have a 'horizontal' perspective, yet, as he confessed, he had known God 'with the hearing of the ear', but that changed to 'a seeing of the eyes', so that his wisdom expanded enormously and he came to peace of heart.

What Koheleth's experience of God was we do not know, but we see his knowledge of God in a number of statements—some of which are paraphrased—and these tell us of a strong faith in God:

- Apart from God, who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the man who pleases Him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy (2:25-26).

## *The Stranger in the Cemetery*

- *I* have seen the business God has given to the sons of men to be busy with (3:10).
- He has made everything beautiful (appropriate, functional) in its own time (3:11),
- It is God's gift to man that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil (3:13).
- Whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything be taken from it; God has made it so, in *order that men should fear before Him* (3:14). He who fears God shall come forth from them all, i.e. things which may normally destroy a man (7:15-18).
- God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for He has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work (3:17).
- God is testing the sons of men to show them that they are but beasts (3:18).
- Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Don't let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth (5:1-2).
- When dreams increase, empty words grow many: but do you fear God (5:7).
- It is good for a man to enjoy his days upon the earth, for these God has given him. He also gives a man wealth and possessions to enjoy, for this is the gift of God (5:18-19).
- *God gives* to another wealth, possessions and honour, but *God does not give him* the power to enjoy them, which is a painful thing-an evil (6:1-2).
- We should enjoy the day of prosperity and ponder the day of adversity since *God gives- us both* (7:14).
- Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, it will be well with *those who fear God*, but it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because *he does not fear before God* (8:12-13).
- Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already approved what you do (9:7).

## *Koheleth and the Congregation*

- As you do not know how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything (11:5).
- The youth is to rejoice in all that he does, 'but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgement' (11:9).
- Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth (12:1).
- The end of the matter; all has been heard, Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole (duty) of man. For God will bring every deed into judgement, with every secret thing, whether good or evil (12:13-14).

Now all these elements—along with the rest of the text not devoted to the horizontal perspective—help us to see the theology of the Preacher. Roughly it can be summarized as follows:

(a) *God is sovereign*. He has created all things appropriately, as 3:11 and Genesis 1:31 show. The world (or eternity) has been put into our heart by God, hence we have an eternal and not a horizontal perspective by nature.

(b) *Men should always keep in mind that He is Creator, and so the), should live according to the ontological principles of creation* (3:11; cf. Gen. 1:31). Those who do not will have a sad end, especially in old age.

(c) *God in His sovereignty has ordained all times and seasons*, and whatever happens—good or bad—comes from His hands, and so we are to accept the fact of a time for this and a time for that, not absolutizing any 'this' or 'that', knowing God controls all things. This means the world is not an end in itself. Satisfying life cannot be found on 'the horizontal' (under the sun') as such.

(d) All God does *endures forever*, and the knowledge of this brings proper fear of God—as He intends. Man ought to fear God. *Fear of God is always good* (3:14; 5:7; 8:12; 8:13; 12:13).

(e) *God is the Giver* (1:13; 2:26; 3:10; 5:18, 19; 6:2; 8:15; 9:9). On the one hand He gives wealth to one person, but not the power to enjoy it. Others He does not make wealthy but they enjoy their state of life—and this is a gift. He gives power to enjoy wealth, and power to enjoy humble existence as a labourer. Not to enjoy what God has given is to reject the gifts and so, too, to denigrate the generous nature of God. It is to do what a man decides for himself—on the horizontal plane, of course. Hence the sinner seeks all things ‘horizontally’, by his own efforts.

(f) The world is a moral place. Man must keep God’s commandments. *He judges the rebellious sinner, but blesses the man who pleases Him*, i.e. the man who fears Him and keeps His commandments. The sinner if he is not immediately reprovved (judged), will think he can get away with his sin, but this is not so.

(g) *Worship of God is to be a thing of reverence* (guard your steps when you go to the house of God’), since He is in heaven (transcendent), and we on earth (i.e. are creatures). For this reason we should not ‘offer the sacrifice of fools’, i.e. downgrade the solemn and wonderful means of salvation, offering emptily and presumptuously (cf. Ps. 51:17; cf. I Sam. 15:22; Amos 5:21-25; Micah 6:7-8). We ought not to make vows to Him that we will not keep, or be foolishly talkative before Him.

### Conclusion as to Koheleth’s Faith and Wisdom

If we sift the sayings of Koheleth we see he has knowledge of Genesis chapters I to 11. He has a strong doctrine of God as Creator, as Provider, and knows His redemptive power via the sacrifices. He has a knowledge of the creation as functional, He has a doctrine of man as a creature, mortal, sinful, under judgement, and whilst certain men are evil in their thrust, yet others are righteous and good, but only as they fear God and keep His commandments, and rightly worship Him. The latter know the gift of God’s pleasure and can enjoy living in His creation. The whole of man is to fear God and keep His commandments. We take it that this was both Koheleth’s theology and his experience. He who knows and does similarly may enjoy life and family, though there be great injustices and suffering upon earth, for God’s sovereignty holds the answer to these things.

### THE PASTORAL VALUE OF THE TEACHING OF ECCLESIASTES

Koheleth set out to show the futility of living only on and in the horizontal plane. He had done this, had seen the true nature of God, and come to know the eternal frame of reference in which God has placed man, so that man cannot be satisfied apart from it. Man seeks to absolutize the things of creation, including religion itself. Was this so with many in the Preacher’s audience? Is it so with our people? Do our people know that ‘the whole of man is to fear God and keep his commandments’? Do they know the powerful truth of Psalms such as 1, 19 and 119, i.e. the dynamic nature of

God's word, precepts, laws, commandments, light and truth, so that in following these, man lives up fully to what he is in God? Can we draw our people on to this? Do we live thus?

What we must recognize is that Ecclesiastes is one Book of the canon, and as such must be seen in the context of all other Scriptures (cf. 11 Tim. 3:15-17), for no Book should ever be seen on its own, otherwise we absolutize its message. It is true that the rich matters of God's covenantal glory do not come to us in full bloom in Ecclesiastes, but even the writer's mention of sacrifice and his reverent regard for It indicate something of that covenantal grace. It is true that there is not a developed doctrine of wonderful life beyond the grave, but then that is not the thrust of the Book. Incidentally, commentators differ over 3:21, and it seems there is good textual evidence to say that the spirit of man flies upward to God whilst the spirit of the beast goes downward to the soil. If this is so, then Koheleth may well have the view expressed in Psalm 49 which, though it seems to speak of cessation of being at death, or-at the most-the shadowy existence of man in Sheol-yet it rises to say, 'But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me', which, again, is in line with Psalm 16:9-11:

Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;  
my body also dwells secure.  
For thou dost not give me up to Sheol,  
or let thy godly one see the Pit.  
Thou dost show me the path of life;  
in thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are  
pleasures for evermore.

If we see and teach the truth of Ecclesiastes in the context

of all Scripture, then it will be immensely valuable. It will be valuable to show the pessimist, the nihilist, the hedonist, and the secular man that things are not as they appear to be to them, and that there is a purpose in life, since God has created us for such living. All is not vanity when we fear God and keep His commandments. True knowledge of God is not merely utilitarian—i.e. we can enjoy life if we do so-and-so—but is the true way of man, the functional way of living, and therefore the only way.

We must see that we absolutize nothing, that we do not fall back into horizontal perspectives, that we understand the delight of doing God's will, and that we do not fail to enjoy what God has given, shunning asceticism, and being grateful for that enjoyment of life which comes to us giftwise from heaven. We, too, must understand the dynamics of obedience and the fulfilment of our lives as creatures of the Creator, children of the Father, and subjects of the great King. We will then know we have come to the true wisdom of God. That is why we must keep on asking ourselves whether we have not horizontalized the vertical, and whether or not, therefore, the hunger of our hearts remains unappeased.

\* \* \*

*Note 1:* Whilst it is true that man lives on the horizontal level, and cannot have full knowledge and true wisdom because of his failure to think and live vertically as well, yet we ought not to despise man, or estimate his vast accumulation of knowledge as pointless, frivolous and empty. What man discovers as he tries to find out the end from the beginning' Is certainly valuable, and makes a great contribution to the human race. If this same knowledge were to be *put* into true perspective—the eternal

perspective—then it would be ever so much more valuable. Horizontal wisdom cannot be full wisdom. If man ontologizes the horizontal, then his wisdom will be inadequate. If he comes to know God and to live within Him, then he will discover that horizontal-vertical ontology which will cause him to rejoice and enjoy life immensely. His previous insights will now become wonderful.

*Note 2:* The Scriptures show us that ‘the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’ (Rev. 19: 10), i.e. all prophecy relates to Christ (Luke 24:25-27), who himself has been made unto us the wisdom of God in righteousness, sanctification and redemption (I Cor. 1:30-31), hence we boast not in ourselves but in the Lord. Colossians 1: 19 and 2:3 show us that all God’s wisdom is hidden in Christ, so that he is, indeed, God’s wisdom. Whilst the lawyers may have taken away ‘the key of knowledge’ (Luke 11:52), i.e. the revelation of God by which men enter the Kingdom, yet Christ gave the keys of the Kingdom to his disciples. They may now open the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4, 9; Col. 1:26-27) and his Gospel (II Cor. 4:1), and so the whole mystery of life. People talk about ‘the enigma of Ecclesiastes’, but there is no enigma when a person is born from above, sees and enters the Kingdom, for then he is not the natural man but the spiritual, and knows all things (I Cor. 2:10-14; 1 John 2:20-27). Christ is the Key. With him life is no enigma. He is the revelation of the Father. It is this revelation which causes us to ‘fear God and keep his commandments’.

## *I Killed a Man*

I killed a man, I killed him dead,  
And from his veins the life-blood fled,  
I killed him quick upon the floor,  
I watched the life-blood from him pour.  
I killed his wife, I saw her die,  
Although she lived before my eye.  
She lived and lives, and dies in pain,  
She saw the life flee from his veins,  
She sees the crimson blood afresh  
Bleed from the rent within his flesh.  
I see the horror in her eyes;  
She sees his terror as he dies.

I killed a man, I took his life,  
And killed the joy within his wife,  
I bled his joy from out his heart,  
I took his hidden inner part  
Until it flowed upon the floor  
And he was living man no more.  
I took his right to live along,

*The Stranger in the Cemetery*

To think a thought, to sing a song,  
To smile or frown or have a place,  
To jump for Joy or run a race,  
To give, to get, to know, to smile,  
To make or mend and live awhile,  
I took it all in one quick blow,  
In one red flash I saw it go.  
In one quick act his river ran;  
I saw it end the living man.

I killed the man, I took his life,  
I loosed him from this present strife,  
This thing of peace, this thing of power,  
This living in the present hour,  
This being man, this being soul,  
This moving to a given goal,  
This right to use the given gift  
To sense, discern and sieve and sift,  
To judge, to ponder, think and plan  
And do what makes a man a man,  
To have and hold and make a place  
Within the moving human race;  
The right to die when time is time  
Within the cadence of the rime,  
To live the whole, to live the lot,  
And not to perish in a jot.

I killed the man, I took his health,  
I took his peace, I took his self,  
He fled this life upon the floor  
And looked as though he were no more.  
The man I killed lives in my brain,

*I Killed a Man*

Torments me ever in the pain  
My spirit feels, my mem'ry knows,  
Of guilt that ever heavy grows.  
I feel its throb, I feel its pain,  
I live in torment, burn in shame,  
I live in horror, live in dread,  
I live as ghost, I live as dead.  
I do not live—the holy ire  
Burns me in perpetual fire—  
I cry, I scream, I writhe in pain  
To bring the murd'rous hour again,  
Reverse the act, recall the blade,  
Undo the dreadful move I made.  
I cannot change this dreadful course  
Or cool the burning of remorse,  
I cannot make this guilt to cease  
And bring my horrified soul to peace.  
I wander desert, hill and dale,  
The night is black, the day is pale,  
My face is wan, my joy is fled,  
My heart is cold, my spirit dead.

I wish that blood had never spilled,  
I wish my hand had never killed,  
I wish I had not held the knife  
That split his flesh and took his life.  
I wish his eyes with joy would glow  
At sight of her, and she would know  
The wonder of a union dear  
That banishes the pain and fear  
That now she knows as living death  
Because I killed his vital breath.

No wish can change what now is fact,  
No will recall the deadly act.

Then I must guilty ever be,  
And flee through all eternity;  
By searching, peace I cannot find—  
I cannot flee my guilty mind—  
I killed a man, but that killed me,  
I live in death and death's in me.  
I killed a man, his blood I shed,  
But I'm the one who's doubly dead.

If mercy's not, I'm not forgiven,  
My soul for ever is unshriven,  
I die for ever in my shames,  
Know the burning of hell's flames,  
Groan for ever in my loss  
If there's no Christ, and there's no Cross!

***Rejoicing, JOY  
and Enjoyment for  
God's People***

In a previous essay in this *book—Kohleth and the Congregation—we saw* that the Preacher—Kohleth—had a great message for us. A few personal friends who had read this essay asked for an elaboration on his teaching on the enjoyment of life. I began to look at areas where this could be developed, and felt that the tension which exists in the Book is between everything being vanity and the commands of the Preacher to enjoy life. These two things seem to be at odds with one another. How can everything under the sun be vanity, and yet we be expected to enjoy it all?

I further thought that in the pastoral context of the church we often find little joy, and even a certain grimness in the fellowship. We know that joy is a fruit of the Spirit, and is the natural response to the Gospel, and I wondered why Christians—who should be the most joyful people in society—often are the least joyful. Nehemiah once said,

‘The joy of the Lord is your strength,’ so that joy is an essential—indeed a primary—element of true living, especially because we proclaim ‘the good news’, i.e. ‘tidings of great joy’. I realize that a study on joy does not necessarily promote or stimulate joy, yet it may be helpful to examine the biblical reasons for joy, and perhaps we can amend what is lacking, and so find great joy. Joy and enjoyment are intimately linked, so that I feel a study of enjoyment in Ecclesiastes may be helpful. How wonderful it would be to have continuous joy in the congregation!

### THE PROBLEM OF VANITY AND ENJOYMENT IN ECCLESIASTES

The Preacher of Ecclesiastes sees that everything ‘under the sun’ is only vanity. That is, as a person observes life, he can find no explanation of its meaning, nor understand its goals. This is because he looks at it all ‘on the horizontal’, i.e. tries to understand ‘the end from the beginning’—a hopeless task. Koheleth constantly says that no matter how wise a person is, nor how much he tries to figure things out, he cannot. Nor can he be satisfied with not trying to know, for ‘God has put eternity into his heart so that by searching he cannot find out the end from the beginning’. Man, then, has a drive to rationalize all things, but being a creature of the creation cannot absolutize the ‘all things’, (i) because he will never know all things, and (ii) because it is beyond his capacity to rationalize them. Only God can know them.

Having shown man he cannot know the end from the beginning, the Preacher seems to taunt man by saying that in the face of the vanity of all things, man must nevertheless

enjoy everything—his toil, his food, drink, wife and family; indeed, all of life. What Koheleth is saying is that if we fear God, if we please Him, then we will discover that all things are there for our enjoyment. We should, then, enjoy them. The wicked man does not really enjoy them, and one to whom God has given ‘wealth, possessions and honour, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires’ cannot enjoy what he has because God does not give him the *gift* to enjoy them. This would seem to mean that those who fear God are given such a gift. However, the man who keeps trying to understand it all is frustrated, and loses sleep because ‘that which is, is far off and deep, very deep, and who can find it out?’

I thought that those of us who are theologians may have fallen into the same trap, trying to wrap ourselves around the whole scheme, action and wisdom of God, and so never find satisfaction, whereas the simple, humble person who trusts God finds rich enjoyment of life, and great joy in his Lord.

### JOY IN THE FACE OF A WORLD IN ELEMENTS OF AGONY

Paul has shown us that ‘the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now’ (Rom. 8:22). This, of course, is quite a subject all on its own. Jesus said, ‘In the world you shall have tribulation.’ He has some powerful apocalyptic statements on such tribulation as in Matthew 24. The Book of the Revelation speaks of the intense conflicts that surround the Christian church, especially in the face of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. The

four beasts of Daniel, the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, the seven opened seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of wrath all combine to show us that history is a cauldron of turmoil. It is constantly beastly, devising its beasts from its own beastliness. There is nothing to encourage us to enjoy this world as it is.

Unfortunately for us who are preachers and teachers, our congregations for the most part put prophecy and apocalyptic in a special category which does not relate to what we call 'everyday life'. Many of the children's cartoons are more apocalyptic than the 'soapies', for they have grim powers which fight amongst themselves for supremacy of the universe. People in congregations are more concerned with interest rates, the cost of living, the tragedies about them of drink and drugs, of poverty and international pressures than they are in a theology of catastrophes and judgements.

At this moment the state of the world—often called nature—is deeply troubling. One university lecturer tells us the world has about forty years left if it does not get its conservation act together. Suddenly conservation is the big subject. Human beings seem to be afraid of creation. Now that fear is being enlarged as some of our blessings such as petro-chemical products are turning into cursings. Pesticides, detergents and plastics are confronting us with poisoned plants, animals and foods. Our streams, rivers and oceans are increasingly becoming a problem. The world is eroding where forests are cut down. Nuclear waste is threatening us with cancer and other diseases. The ecological imbalance is hurtling us towards catastrophic disaster.

There are also many other things of great danger. In this context, then, is it foolish escapism to talk of joy in life and

enjoyment of the things of the creation? Is our ministry to calm fears, to encourage the faint-hearted, or is such talk flying in the face of threatening disaster? I am sure we need to know the nature of joy and enjoyment, not absolutizing them in any way, but seeing their place, value and practice in the light of God's word. If God's people cannot have 'glad tidings of great joy' in this age, then what is the value of the Gospel? Also, would we be cheating on the world if we had joy when the world is in so much tribulation?

### THE BIBLICAL BASES AND WAYS OF JOY

I am aware that a word study on joy, backed with textual references, does not much move anyone, let alone stimulate them to joy. Since being in the Kingdom of God is simply 'righteousness peace and joy in the Holy Spirit'—the Holy Spirit giving us the fruit of the Gospel, i.e. 'love, joy and peace'—we all ought to be creatures of great joy. Perhaps we are, and do not even realize it. If we ask how we would be if the Gospel and the Spirit were taken from us, I think we would discover we do indeed now have great joy. How, then, is this so released that we live consciously in the good of it, and thus enjoy our living? I believe some of the elements below will make more conscious to us the various sources of joy.

#### The joy of the Lord

In Psalm 16:11 the composer sings, 'In thy presence is fullness of joy.' Nothing more needs to be said. Psalm 21:6 speaks of 'the joy of thy presence'. In Psalm 36:8 the

psalmist says, 'Thou givest them drink from the river of thy delights', and in 43:4 of 'God my exceeding joy'. In Nehemiah 8:10 the weeping Israelites are told, 'Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength'. In Isaiah 65:19 God says, 'I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people.' God, then, rejoices with His people, and in Zephaniah 3:17 the prophet says of God, 'He will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love.'

Of course it is what we should expect of God, seeing He is the fountain of joy. Twice Jesus speaks of 'my joy' (John 15: 11; John 17:13), and wishes his disciples to have this joy. joy flows from the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22), for he is the one who inspires with joy (I Thess. 1:6; Acts 13:52).

### The joy of Creation

Job 38:7 speaks of creation, when 'The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy'. The nature of creation is such that the psalmist says, 'For thou, O Lord, hast made me glad by thy work; at the works of thy hands I sing for joy' (Ps. 92:4). A constant statement is 'All thy works praise thee,' and creation is constantly filled with joy, the hills depicted as clapping their hands, the rivers laughing, the field exulting and the trees of the woods singing for joy (Ps. 96:11-12). Creation is a constant source of joy to man, for 'every tree of the garden was good for food and pleasant to the eyes', and 'everything created by God is good', and He 'richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy' (Gen. 2:9; 1 Tim. 1:4; 6:17).

No wonder the psalmist said, 'May the Lord rejoice in his works' (Ps. 104:3 1), i.e. He saw that all He had made was 'very good' (Gen. 1:31).

### The Joy of Covenant

If we are going to look for 'proof-texts' for this particular theme, we may find few as such, the main source of joy being God Himself, but then as He manifested Himself in covenant as 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.' Some of the causes of joy within the covenant are as follows:

- God's presence (Ps. 21:6; 16:11).
- God's law (Ps. 1:2; 19:8; 119-in many verses).
- God's judgements (Ps. 48:11; 97:8; cf. 96:10-13).
- God's sovereignty (Ps. 97: 1).
- The salvation of God (Ps. 9:14; 13:5; 51:12; Isa. 25:9; Hab. 3:17-19).
- The love and mercy of God (Ps. 13:5; 31:7; 90:14).
- The day the Lord has made (Ps. 118:24).
- The words of the Lord which bring comfort (Jer. 15:16; Ps. 119:14; cf. Ezek. 3:3; job 23:12).

It is evident from the Old Testament that Israel was a nation which knew great joy from seeking the Lord (Ps. 40:16; 70:4), from righteousness (Ps. 97:11-12), from His protection (Ps. 4:7-8), from His restoration (Ps. 51:8; 53:6; 126:1ff.)—among many other things.

The greatest joy seems to be shown in worship. There are innumerable Psalms relating to worship (e.g. 42:4; 43:4; 81:1-4; 116:18f.). Psalms 144-150 are rich in the praise and joy of worship. The many festivals were times of family and national rejoicing. In Nehemiah we have a good example of the joy of restoration to the land: 'And they offered great

sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off. In 11 Chronicles 29:30 we read, 'And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed down and worshipped'. Psalm 98 is a special psalm of joy about worship, used endlessly by the church in both Testaments.

### The Joy of the Coming Kingdom, Messiah, and Salvation

If we understand the fall of man from his primal joy, his descent into sin, and his misery, then we will better understand the joys of covenant. However, many in Israel were disobedient, and so the prophecies of a Person to come who would be Messiah, the Davidic King, the Son of God and the Son of man—as well as the Righteous Branch, and the Suffering Servant—all inspired the nation to look forward to joy, as in Isaiah 9:1-7:

Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased its joy; they rejoice before thee as with joy at the harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil (v. 3).

Isaiah 49 is another great Messianic passage:

Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth-, break forth, O mountains, into singing!

For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his afflicted (v. 13).

Other great prophecies tell of coming joy, such as Isaiah 61:3 and all of Isaiah 55, and in Isaiah 56:6-7 there is a coming joy for the Gentiles. In Isaiah 60:15-16 Israel shall

be made 'a joy from age to age', whilst in Isaiah 61: 1 -11 joy shall come both to Israel and the nations. In Isaiah 65:17-19 there is the great promise of renewal and restoration, even to the new heavens and the new earth-'I [will] create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy'. This is virtually repeated in Isaiah 66:10, 14 and 22. There is- also the significant promise of Isaiah 25:6-10, which closes with, 'This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation'. Equivalent promises of salvation and its joy are found in Joel 2:21, 23 and Zechariah 10:7. Zechariah 9:9 is the famous exhortation to joy because of the King who comes into Jerusalem, 'riding upon an ass, upon a colt, the foal of an ass'.

### THE MATTER OF JOY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

**With** the coming, establishment, and continuity of the New Covenant we find immense joy. At the Annunciation Mary utters the Magnificat, crying, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour'; the angel tells the shepherds, 'Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people'; and the wise men 'rejoiced exceedingly with great joy'. In his ministry Jesus tells of the joy of the woman who finds her lost coin, of the shepherd who rejoices when he finds his lost sheep, and the father who is filled with joy when his son returns, and all illustrate the fact that 'there is joy in heaven'-in the presence of the angels-over one sinner who repents.

Jesus brought immense relief and joy to the sick, the demon-possessed, and to those bound in guilt. He told

parables of the Kingdom which spoke of joy. He taught that if one is persecuted for the Kingdom's sake then he is to leap with joy! The disciples return with joy to Jesus after casting out demons. At that time Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit as he prayed to his Father. There was great joy at his resurrection, and after his ascension the disciples returned with joy to Jerusalem. Their Gospel proclamation brought great joy. Philip's ministry resulted in 'much joy in that city', and later the Ethiopian eunuch went on his way rejoicing. The apostles counted it all joy that they were permitted to suffer for Christ's sake. Later, when persecuted at Antioch in Pisidia, 'the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit'.

The Epistles are filled with exhortations to rejoice. The message—which we will later examine—is that joy comes with suffering—not, of course, morbid or masochistic suffering, but genuine suffering for Christ's sake. The church at Thessalonica is said to have received the Gospel 'with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit'. The Kingdom of God is described as being 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit'. The Epistle to Philippi was written by Paul from prison, but has more about joy in it than any other. The First Petrine Epistle speaks of exulting in Christ, who is unseen, 'with joy unutterable and full of glory'. The last words of the last Epistle (Jude) relate to the prayer for Christ to present us 'before the presence of his glory, with rejoicing'.

There is much joy in the Book of the Revelation, especially in the worship sections, as they deal with creation, salvation, the defeat of evil, and establishment of God's Kingship over all. The greatest nominated joy is that which will come at the marriage of the Bride and of the Lamb.

Doubtless much of the joy in the New Testament comports with that of the Old, in its emphasis on creation, salvation, and the anticipation of the ultimate Day of the Lord. We will look at some of these elements, but the message of the New Testament is that 'glad tidings of great joy' come powerfully to men and women in their misery, and in the despair of the world, and bring responsive listeners to true joy.

It is this joy we wish more to examine, so that we may know how to act in these present days.

### THE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE

Whilst surveys such as we have just done of Old and New Testaments may grip us afresh with the truth of God, and greatly cheer our congregations, yet we rarely have the opportunity to communicate such coverages. Those of us who are pastors must understand the world in which we live, and help our people to face the waves of thought and feelings which keep sweeping across society. We must be purveyors of joy with the power of immediacy. How can we communicate God's joy dynamically in a world which seems to be set on a path of doom, and how can we avoid simply cheering up our people, and perhaps merely making them happy?

I have no doubt that the immediate answer is the one that has always been, namely that God is King in His world, that creation belongs to Him, and that every living soul is accountable to Him. He is the living God—the One who acts in every detail of human history because it is under His sovereignty. He is Liberator of all imprisoned spirits of men through His Son Jesus Christ. His Gospel alone is the

source of the joy man needs, and must have, if he is to live in a crooked world. Yet His Gospel is not separated from Him. God is our good news. Fellowship with the Father and the Son, through the Holy Spirit, is the personal and unending way of joy. There is no other. Hence we must not seek directly to simply encourage men and women, but we must urge them to personal fellowship with God, in Whom alone true joy is to be found. This will mean coming back time and again to 'the old, old story'.

We must realize, nevertheless, that 'the old, old story' is not merely sentimental and individualistic—a story known in a spiritual ghetto—for it is the story of creation, of mankind, of salvation history, of the plan of God's wise will and counsel worked out in the arena of creation and throughout all time. For this reason we need to look at past history and know the score of Divine triumph. We need to face what is about us now, and what prophecy has told us is coming. We need to see and assess the forces that are pitted against us in the clash and collision of two kingdoms—that of Satan and God. If we are squeamish, dilatory or personally ambitious, then we will bring no true joy to anyone. We will not know the joy of the Lord which is our strength, especially in these terrible times.

I suggest therefore that we look at our times, see afresh God's way, and live by the elements which will keep our JOY strong and vibrant.

### **The Situation in Which We Are Living**

In each decade and generation mankind is occupied with its present context of living. From a reading of the Book of the Revelation—within the context of the unity of the

entire Scriptures—we know that every age is apocalyptic. We expect to feel, sense, and know the reverberations of the conflict between Christ and the Beast, between the Bride and Babylon, but as preachers and teachers we are required to discern, interpret and communicate these matters to our people—to know Satan's devices and not be dismayed by them, but rather to overcome the Dragon, and vanquish him at every point.

At this moment the nations are no less in conflict than ever they have been. As ever, men's hearts are failing them for fear. Every day brings its news of murders, rapes, greed, nepotism, selfishness and discontent within our local society and across our nation. Drugs are enormously on the increase, and mafias even worse than the Mafia hold politicians in their grip, whilst the drugs themselves are morally weakening the nations who are involved in the smuggling and dispensing trades. Trade wars, conniving and bargaining are no less than ever they were. Most countries of the Third World are so heavily in debt that countries like Brazil are raping the land and rain forests to get rich quickly and come out from under the crushing burden of the current mortgages.

Terrorism is on the increase. International travel is a life hazard. Anyone may be held hostage at any moment. Violence is on the increase. Children on the streets is the new and terrible order of the day. Modern technology had promised a quick, rich paradise on earth, but it is all going sour on us. Not only is the dreadful threat of a nuclear holocaust ever present, but the weaponry available—both nuclear and conventional—could blow our world sky-high, time and again. The chemicals which promised freedom from disease, and the fuels and their by-products which promised

modern comforts, are turning on us, and we have a world threatened with a diminished ozone layer, the greenhouse effect, whilst rain forests—sometimes called ‘the lungs of our planet’—are being ravaged beyond immediate repair. Creeks, streams, rivers and oceans are rapidly becoming polluted. The ecological balance is in imminent danger of being displaced. Doom and gloom stare us in the face. Not only are there endangered species of plants, trees, birds and animals, but ancient and primitive human tribes are being rapidly displaced and in danger of extinction.

On the level of our humanity we are facing other forms of disaster. The family unit has been ravaged. Fatherhood has been despised and in many cases scattered to the wind. Single parenthood is rapidly increasing—one of the causes of family disintegration and young people being thrust out on to the streets. Enormous anger is being shown at and’ from the family breakdown. Nine out of every ten murders happen within families. Most child molestation in incest and cruelty happen within families. The expectancy of long marriage is almost absent. Sexual promiscuity is no longer known under that heading: sexual freedom, so-called, is the new order. Sexual deviations are fast being legitimized.

In describing these things we have but touched the tip of the iceberg. We have sown a wind and reaped a whirlwind. Sadly enough, we are now sowing a whirlwind and will reap a devastating cyclone. The constant flow of Cold War and Warm War (*Perestroika*) still keeps the nations in suspicion and tension. The conflicts of multi-culturalism in our own country and the commercial invasion of Japan portend the loss of identity of ‘the lucky country’, and the changes that face us will sweep away old landmarks.

Within the church we seem never to have known such

fragmentation, such pluralism of ideas, doctrines, practices and techniques. We have imported the ecclesiastical divisions and problems of North America, and have been strongly conditioned by the current humanism that is insisting on psychological and sociological solutions to the human problem, whilst a barrage of therapies, social welfare, social justice and social activism have drawn us into ways of life and worship which outdate and outmode our former modes and patterns of church-living and action. The Scriptures have been subjected to critical analysis, changing hermeneutics, and interpretation so cautious that authoritative preaching and teaching is almost in the discard. The new ecclesiastical egalitarianism is sweeping away distinctions of every kind. Humanistic feminism is making powerful inroads, and with it a return to ancient gnosticism, mysticism, and worship of the feminine as the dynamic drive of nature. The occult is making its invasion through systems of positive thinking, possibility thinking and Eastern religionism, all combining to form syncretistic systems of new gospels.

And so we could go on. Our tabulations of these things might never end. How, then, dare we have a privatized ecclesiastical joy in the midst of so much damaging change, human suffering, and the doom which is coming across the world? Well might we ask the question, and well might we ask ourselves whether we can be true shepherds in such a world as is ours today.

### **BEING PASTORS AND PEOPLE AND BRINGING JOY IN TODAY'S WORLD**

The first way we could choose to bring back joy to our alarmed people would be to smile at the human and

ecological situation, as though everything is a bit exaggerated. We could talk of panic-politics, and even panic theology, as though these things are not to be taken seriously. We could further point out that things have always seemed bad when you looked only on the bad side of things. We could encourage folk to realize that humanity will brave out these storms as it has done so with every other visitation, and because there is some reality in these arguments, they may have a certain value. Certainly we can say that the church has faced terrible situations throughout its two thousand years of existence, such as the heresies of the first few centuries, the early persecutions, the invasion of Rome by the Vandals and Goths in the fourth century, the dark ages when truth went into a decline and the Roman church achieved temporal power, the rise of the scourge of Islam, the scandalous life of much of the church, and the loss of evangelical truth prior to the Reformation, the Inquisition, the religious wars, the decline of true doctrine with the coming of the Age of Enlightenment, the vacuous years of Broadchurchmanship, and the persecutions within this century of churches by Nazism and Communism.

The second way to go—an addition to the first—is to show that humanity has an inbuilt moral sense, so that excesses tend to be countered by a certain conservatism, that basic morality still prevails, and that humanity has always survived its most radical changes. Again there is certain factual evidence for this. We could show that certain forces are working against a nuclear holocaust, that progress has been made in cleansing of human pollution, and that conservationists are developing an ever-enlarging lobby, whilst politicians sense the way the winds are blowing, and—most

of all—humanity is always prepared to make sacrifices to retain its existence on this planet, i.e. it practises enlightened self-interest. Again there is something factual in this method of tempering alarm in our people.

### The Biblical Way to Joy

I believe the true way to go is the biblical way, for there is a biblical way. It is somewhat as follows:

(a) We should understand and teach the sovereignty of God. That is, that God is Creator, that He is a faithful Creator, and will guard His universe in the way He sees fit, even if that does include disasters and catastrophes. Such sovereignty has planned all events, including salvation and the ultimate reconciliation and regeneration of all things.

(b) We should understand and teach the nature of the conflict between God and Satan. This will entail showing God's plan for salvation, and Satan's attempts to foil such, and his own endeavours to set up his world system as primary within creation. It is within this conflict that there are the great and terrible apocalyptic happenings.

(c) We should teach the nature of the wrath of God upon man. That is, we should show man to be guilty and under the continual wrath of God, in his conscience, so that all he sees is necessarily from a guilty stance, and a distorted point of view. Hence his fear at what is happening today, his attempts to find pleasure in order to neutralize his own fear, and his selfish efforts to secure himself against death. We must show that

things do not happen arbitrarily, and that God is still the active judge of all the earth.

(d) The most dynamic of all biblical elements is the saving grace and love of God, by which, if a man know them, he can face all the tempests that come, because (i) he knows God is loving, faithful, and works all things for his good, and (ii) he recognizes that a blind and hostile fate is not working, but—in the ultimate—God alone, so that calamities, catastrophes and disasters are part of His sovereign plan and working. The dynamics of justification, sanctification, and anticipation (hope) of the eschaton are what keep a person in the perspective of the truth of God.

We should therefore work along these lines, which is another way of saying we should know God personally, be under His Lordship, be in union with Him, abide in Him as He abides in us. It is this personal knowledge of Him which is our chief joy, and which enables us to live in times both ordinary and extraordinary. I would like, finally, to suggest two more things, the first being 'the way of Koheleth', and the second, prescriptions of Scripture for joy.

#### *The Way of Koheleth*

We have seen that the Preacher teaches that whenever we see 'everything under the sun' from a confined horizontal viewpoint, then it is all vanity. Thus, whilst all things are significant—including the scenario of tragedy we have outlined above—nothing is in any sense really significant. If we try to devise 'an ontology of the horizontal', it will not prove viable. It is a canon of our own devising and cannot stand up to the reality of horizontal-vertical ontology.

Koheleth keeps speaking of 'the fear of God', 'pleasing the Lord', 'the judgements of God' and 'God's commandments'. The whole of man is to fear God and keep His commandments. Whilst this is experience 'under heaven', it is not all that is 'under heaven'. When a man tries to devise his horizontal ontology he finds it does not yield satisfaction. Why? Because 'God has set eternity into man's heart so that by searching he cannot find out the end from the beginning.' Man cannot absolutize the horizontal and come to any authentic conclusion.

If all things on the horizontal are vanity, then how can one enjoy life—its toil, its pleasures, eating and drinking, one's wealth and possessions, one's spouse and family? The answer is that all things on the horizontal get their true meaning from reference to God, His sovereignty—there is a time and place for everything under the sun—His commandments and His *gift of enjoyment*. If a man will not seek to understand it all from his own intelligence and wisdom, but 'let God be God' and leave it at that—in God's hands—then he will indeed enjoy life immensely, come wind, come weather, come calamities, disasters, injustices and the like. None of these things—including both life and death—shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

I think this is what we should first try to do ourselves, so that then we can teach others to revert to simplicity, to trust in God and be obedient to Him, and enjoy this life He has given us.

#### *The Way of Biblical Prescriptions*

I suggest, now, that we go back to the early parts of our study and look at the sources of joy. Primarily God is our

true Source, but we are not speaking as the mystics do, who practice exercises to come to union with God. We are talking about the prescriptions of God within His covenant, i.e. the commands He gives to His people. Thus 'to fear God and keep his commandments is the whole of man.' Even so, we are not talking about a severe legal obedience. We are talking about a heart that has been circumcised to love God (Deut. 30:6) so that we obey Him 'from the heart'—a thought often found in Scripture. Let us look again at some of the sources of joy we have already nominated:

- God's presence (Ps. 21:6; 16:11).
- God's law (Ps. 1:2; 19:8; 119—in many verses).
- God's judgements (Ps. 48: 11; 97:8; cf. 96:10-13).
- God's sovereignty (Ps. 97: 1).
- The salvation of God (Ps. 9:14; 13:5; 51:12; Isa. 25:9; Hab. 3:17-19).
- The love and mercy of God (Ps. 13:5; 31:7; 90:14).
- The day the Lord has made (Ps. 118:24).
- The words of the Lord which bring comfort Jer. 15:16; Ps. 119:14; cf. Ezek. 3:3; job 23:12).

Now if we were to closely examine these, develop an understanding of them in their contexts, and then practicalize them in life, I believe we would constantly be tapping the subterranean oceans of joy. This practice would be never-ending, and would provide its ongoing cumulative stimulation and motivation.

Further, I believe we should see the open-handedness of God as the great Giver, for giving is His joy. Learning this we would then become givers to both God and man, which would increase the joy. We are not in a hedonistic and

utilitarian hunt for joy, but simply wish to understand its functional manners.

In James 1:17 we discover that God is essentially Giver, and all His giving is pure, hence all His gifts bring richness. 'God so loved that he gave' refers to all His ways. He loves a cheerful (Gr. *hilarios*) giver, because He Himself is hilarious in giving! This is seen in various of the covenantal passages such as Deuteronomy 12:1-28, 16:9-16 and 26:5 -19. The substance of these is that God has blessed His people, and they shall keep festivals—times of rejoicing when they will offer sacrifices to the Lord. They will also have festivals in which they eat and drink to their hearts' content. Far from asceticism, good eating and drinking is a source of joy God wishes them to utilize. They are even to expend certain tithes in such festivity. At the same time they are to give the sacred portions—as God has commanded—to 'the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow', as well as to sons and daughters, menservants and maidservants.

In other words, a true person of God cannot have joy when he has not done what is in his power to provide for the needy out of the substance he has (cf. I John 3:17-22; James 5:1-6). To give to God without giving to man is to give to none, including God. In the New Testament, II Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 have superb teaching on the joy of giving. One of the primary things of worship is thanksgiving, but such will be wooden unless thanksgiving is itself expressed in giving to others. Our thanksgiving arises from His giving in creation, preservation, salvation and ultimate glorification.

If we take the other elements nominated above as seriously as receiving and giving, then we will certainly

enjoy the life He has given. Whilst not being indifferent to the agonies of this world—the groaning and travailing both in the world and in us—nor careless as to its needs, we know that

his anger is but for a moment, and his favour is for a lifetime.

Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

### CONCLUSION: THE MATTER OF JOY AND SUFFERING

Our study would be incomplete if we simply left the mystery of suffering in God's hands, and refused to see the biblical rationale given to us. Paul's statement is, 'provided that we suffer with him in order that we may be gloried with him', i.e. 'Through trials to glory'. Glory is, of course, simply love and peace and joy—man at last transformed into his true being. In 11 Corinthians 4:17 he says of suffering, 'For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. 'The apostles—we saw—left the Sanhedrin 'rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name'. On another occasion of persecution 'the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit'. Jesus had told such to leap for joy, for great was their reward in heaven.

The subject is a vast one, and we do not have the time here to deal with it, but the substance of it is clear. True joy comes with suffering. Suffering and joy are not opposites. Suffering does not cancel joy. To suffer is to share Christ's sufferings, even 'fill them up', and this is what brings joy. In

all of this the joy of the Lord Himself is our strength. We are glad that

thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.

## **JOY**

joy comes bounding on the lightened spirit  
Like a playful lion—a great cat.  
Its sheathed paws, its rearing body,  
Turning and tossing in abandonment,  
Delighted in its boisterous powers,  
But empty of cant and cruelty.

Joy is a buoyant thing,  
Filling the dulled spirit and flagging heart  
With the new life of surging reality.  
It is God coming upon the dark spirit,  
Enlightening it; upon the burdened mind,  
Lightening it; upon the flagging heart,  
Refreshing it; and upon the old and worn soul,  
Renewing it.

Joy is the new inflowing of the lost life,  
Reforming the deformed, enlivening  
The dead and the dulled, the dry and the dreary,  
Until the Divine intention is fulfilled;

## Joy

Until the no-purpose is transformed to the purposeful,  
And the lack-lustre shines afresh  
With the pristine glory—the sheer being  
Of the image of the Very God.

Joy, too, is a quiet flowing.  
Small trickles become thin streams—  
Growing backwaters uniting silently.  
So chuckling creeks become rivers,  
And the rivers become the wide gentle ocean,  
Spilling across dried wastes to make  
Interminable shores of the vast spirit  
Of the recreated man.

Sometimes the silent ocean  
Is lost to sight in the subterranean spirit,  
Is caught and covered as the anguish comes.  
A labyrinthine storehouse  
Is there for the needling of the mind and heart  
In the hours of painful suffering.  
The mystery of love demands that joy  
Sustain the beleaguered spirit,  
And keep it firm when the deadly destruction  
Would annihilate the redeeming labour  
Of the new creation for the lost and old.

We have seen joy in the painful Cross,  
The tired gasping of the dehydrated One,  
The utilized endless resources  
Nigh unto exhaustion—and extinction—  
When the joy had all but vanished.  
Yet the sigh drew on the imperishable,

*The Stranger in the Cemetery*

The renewed resource of the Eternal Joy—  
God Himself-coming at the appointed time  
To defeat the dark emptiness  
Of the militant evil.

We have seen joy in the beleaguered—  
The saints and the weak ones, the poor and faint,  
The seeming ignoble, and the non-ones.  
We have seen joy sustain them to their end  
And tip them into glory—true to that goal,  
And take them—full—to the eternal beginning  
Of the new time.

*The Mind-Copier*

***The Mind-Copier***

I guess I'll have to get this down whilst it is still warm. About the mind-copier, I mean. Until late last night I did not know there was—is—such a thing as a mind-copier. I ought to have known, seeing I am in the business of desktop publishing. I have the latest in computers, good software, a Laser printer, and a printing press. I even have a scanner. How is it, then, that I did not know there was—is—a mind-copier? By a mind-copier we mean, of course, that just as a photocopier duplicates the original script, so a mind-copier copies down the thoughts of the mind. Naturally enough, in my line of work, I have a photocopier, but had never realized that they had invented such a thing as a mind-copier.

I now have to confess that my mind was in a whirl last night when we arrived at Port Lincoln in South Australia to see our daughter, her husband and their four children—all girls. The excitement of travelling through strange towns on the Eyre Peninsula—one of them nearly a ghost town—had filled me with a wonderful excitement. Stories and poems kept stimulating themselves into being, and I could

only write down a portion of them. The further thrill of meeting the family, especially one of the children—Jennifer—who had a morbid interest in my sore gammy knee (she kept on wanting to touch it and try it out) was almost too much. Not even the late-night hot drink of sleep-inducing beverage could quiet my thrumming nerves.

I lay back in the bed thinking, whilst my wife escaped into slumberland by evasive means. This time she was not going to help me talk myself out to exhaustion. She herself was already exhausted and was quickly lost to me. My mind was like a clothes-washer; it kept twirling and tumbling and jumbling all my thoughts together until I thought I would go crazy.

There was nothing new in this, of course, but my mind battled away to do something about its incredible fertility. Stories flashed past my bewildered eyes. Poems did a dance and a jig and leapt up into the ozone to be lost. Incredible concepts got themselves born in a trice, and I nearly drowned under the avalanche of them. It was then the idea of the mind-copier flashed on me.

The problem was that I did not dare rise, sit at a desk, and begin scribbling. My wife would have awakened. At home it would not have mattered.

Awaking, she would hiss, 'Whatever are you doing? Don't you know you will wake the whole house?'

I would reply, sotto voce, 'Don't worry. I will make no noise.'

'Then what do you think wakened me?' she would ask.

To continue the argument would be futile. The next thing she would be telling me that I am never quiet, that our daughter would worry about my being unable to sleep, and would think it all related to her cooking. Some of the children

might awake, and then they would want to be in bed with their grandparents.

I lay there silently—and miserable. I knew I should be up recording my stories, poems and thoughts for an eager and grateful posterity. I was denying the world this visitation of brilliance. How, then, could I lie there thinking and yet write nothing, but at the same time record what ought not to be lost?

It was then the invention of the mind-copier happened. The whole machine came floating into my orbit. I was entranced. I blessed it. I wondered why such a machine had not previously been invented, or when invented we had not been told about it. I was totally unconscious that I had just created it. I have never had much appreciation of myself as an inventor. Here, however, I had really done something, even if I did not know it!

Let me tell you how I saw It all. I saw everything that I was thinking in black and white, something of a print out of my thoughts all rolling down from my mind and piling up in spools of prodigal creativity. I knew this sort of thing went on all the time, but since I was bound to my bed I could not get up and give some of the ideas a re-run through my word processor. I fumed a bit, utterly frustrated at my helplessness. So I devised the mind-copier. The copier was to feed the spools of thought—the stories, poems, impressions and concepts—directly into itself, recording everything, allowing the ideas to go to their natural data bank in the unconscious mind, but retaining the mind-copies for whatever use might be thought appropriate.

When I had set the mind-copier on 'Conscious' and 'Unconscious' by pressing a couple of buttons, I felt I could fall asleep, knowing the machine would be doing its work right

royally and loyally. I had a certain happiness in knowing that the world now had a great future before it. Why not? Only in the knowledge that great minds are working for the security of the human race can one sleep easily and serenely. However, just when I was about to doze off a sudden thought came flashing in, energizing me to the nth degree. In a moment of time I had been transported to past days of my life—the years of the 20s, the 30s and the 40s.

I realized with dazzling clarity that since the brain retains all its experiences, ideas and concepts, and since they are all stored away in the data banks of memory, that I only had to stimulate these banks into yielding up their valuable lodes of treasures, and the mind-copier would spill out on to the world what had been hitherto hidden in millions of lives. With a bit of luck I might even be able to tap in on Jung's racial consciousness and its memory, and thus go back—via a present mind—to former generations.

I was helpless with the wonder of it. I saw vast storehouses—data banks storing what had been retrieved from our memory data banks—arising all over the world. Materials which had been relegated to the back of the mind, but which might be of great importance, would now be available. I lay there, stunned with the wonder of it all. Doubtless this mind-copier would be one of the most valuable inventions man had known. Tears of joy and delight welled out of my eyes and on to the Duna quilt—most of which my wife had captured for herself.

Of course, I could scarcely contain my excitement, but then an even greater and deeper sense of wonder was beginning to overwhelm me. My very own mind-copier was churning out a long spool of thought—the readings I had known in the 20s to the 40s—and I almost shouted, 'Why, of course!'

I wondered why the thought had not previously struck me, the thought of the thought-stream. Now to you moderns, living as you do in a wildly expressive and tactile age—e.g. the 'rock' thing, the 'heavy metal' thing, the 'scream-asyou-will-and-express-yourself' thing—you, sadly enough, know little of the world we moved in. Those were the days of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust. They were the days of introspection, the days of extreme introspection, the days of 'the thought-stream'. Every novelist worth his—or her—salt, knew how to show you what a person was thinking at any given moment. just imagine that!

What is more, it was recognized that every thought of every imagination of man's heart was valuable only continually. No thought or idea was to be missed, any more than you would pass over chance nuggets of gold in a digging, or a clutch of diamonds in a mine. Every thought must be recorded, and—if possible—thoughts about thoughts. My! They were some days!

Now I share with you the brilliant insight that came to me. It suddenly became obvious to me that when a writer of the 'thought-stream' novel describes the thoughts of his subject, he cannot properly do so. I mean that when a man thinks about what he is thinking, then he is no longer purely thinking what he thinks he was thinking. Thinking about thinking means that the immediate thoughts of his mind are about his thoughts, but are not those thoughts, but thoughts about those thoughts, which then become his real thoughts. I trust that you do not find this simple matter confusing.

I saw, then, the impossibility of writing a pure thought-stream novel, and I regretted the fact, because James Joyce and Virginia Woolf wrote such good novels. How many

delightful hours I had spent wandering around the world of these characters, yet of what genuine value was that unless I could understand what they were thinking about what they were doing—or going to do? Thought-streams have always attracted me, especially my own thought-stream, which was at that moment trying to express itself, but—by nature of the case—could not do so.

Ah! The greatness of my thought was that the mind-copier would copy down the thought before one could think about the thought Itself. What Proust, Woolf and Joyce could not do, we now, by virtue and operation of the mindcopier, could do.

\* \* \*

On my bed I was in a state of joyous hilarity. I easily understood the mind of Archimedes, and his joyous shout, 'Eureka!' I was—at that moment—about to give a great shout myself, but remembering who was slumbering beside me, and the in-laws in other silent rooms, I kept the thrill of it to a strict silence. Even so, my mind kept stumbling over its own thoughts. Soon all thought would come directly—i.e. with immediacy—from a person to his mind-copier print out.

'Oh! What a new world!' I kept shouting to myself. 'Yes, what a world of revelations! Now we will know how human beings really think, especially when they are not bound to rationalize those thoughts—when they come freely via the mind-copier. Idly, I began to imagine my own wife's mind—the mind that planned so much for our family, for our lives, and which especially was concerned with me.

Why was it that, at that point, a vague uneasiness began to pervade me, penetrating to the depths of my thinking? I

was not sure, but I began to have doubts about naked and uninsulated thought. I thought of all the careful and conscious rationalization of our ideas that we bring to one another. A mind—copier—honest as a camera—would spell out what human beings really think. I decided that I—for one—would keep my copier's copies in a very private place. Best for all, even best for me, that I should do that. The relief from planning this quiet concealment almost brought me serenity, something I have rarely enjoyed in life. Knowing the copier was set to the 'Conscious' and 'Unconscious' recorder buttons I relaxed, sinking into the pillows and soft mattress. I gathered the remaining fragment of the Duna quilt about my neck and chest, and determined to sleep.

\* \* \*

This morning—of course—a vast and deep disappointment has come to me. I have realized in my waking hour that the mind-copier was a figment of my mind. In that strange irrational area—that time between being awake and drifting off into sleep—I had devised the mind-copier. Yes, I was deeply disappointed, but shortly after, my mind—ever fertile—began to think how such a copier could be made. I thought of telepathy, of empathy, of the ability to link up with the nerve centres of the brain, and—utilizing the very power of that organ—to spell out its ideas so that some instrument could record it. You can see by my very description of what might be able to be invented that I am still a long way off. Never mind, the idea has been brilliant. In this short tale I may even have stimulated a natural inventor who will now set about devising it.

Of course, the matter needs to be thought through. Not for nothing would we wish to discredit Joyce, Woolf and

Proust and other 'thought-stream' writers, some who have hung on even until today. They worked hard and brilliantly in their novels, and deserve continuing praise. Also I am reluctant to spill out such machines on to the market until we have devised courses to cope with the direct thinking of other human beings.

Maybe the whole idea isn't so good, after all. That night, lying back in enforced silence, and conscripted rumination, it seemed the greatest of all ideas devised.

Now I am not sure; not sure at all. I don't think I will even ask my wife about it, she being so brilliant, and all. She might even give me a taste of her mind, of her thinking, unobscured by introspective investigation.

She is like that.

*I Think I Saw*

I think I saw a rainbow on the moon;  
I think I heard a sparrow sing a tune;  
I think I saw a horse and rider fly  
Across the azure of the morning sky.

I think I saw an orange and a plum,  
Together making music on a drum;  
A horse and cow were chewing on a prune,  
The hour I saw the rainbow on the moon.

I think I heard a sparrow sing a song,  
A lark go chirping cheerfully along;  
A crow nearby was playing on a flute;  
A bull with folded horns was looking cute.

I think I saw a vast committee meet  
To tame the restless crowds that throng the street;  
They talked about the rainbow on the moon,  
And how a common sparrow sings a tune.

*The Stranger in the Cemetery*

I think they passed some motions strong and fair  
Against the horse and rider in the air,  
Against a crow that plays upon a flute,  
Against a placid bull that looks so cute.

I saw those pompous members flop and die;  
I saw they vanished in the azure sky.  
I think they all boiled down to only one  
Who ostracized himself up to the sun.

I think I saw a rainbow and a tune,  
A lark, a wombat and a prune  
Go seven ways to live or die,  
Or land upon the rainbowed moon on high.

I think I saw these things within my dreams,  
Where not one thing is really as it seems.  
I'm glad I saw the motions—passed—diminish,  
Committee fade, corrections finish.

I'm glad that left to rule was only one,  
And he who tried so hard to ostracize our fun  
Has gone-his efforts all diminished  
So now my brilliant song is almost finished.

I'm glad I saw a rainbow on the moon;  
And glad I heard a sparrow sing a tune;  
I'm glad I saw a horse and rider fly  
Across the azure of the morning sky.

I'm glad these things keep coming to my head:  
So glad my heart with fantasy is fed.

*I Think I Saw*

I think I'll teach myself the sparrow's tune,  
Or take a coloured rainbow to the moon.

## ***To Sleep—Perchance to Dream***

### **AN INTRODUCTION TO SLEEP**

Sleeping is a fascinating single thought, let alone it being a whole vast subject. Just think of the millions who each night strive to sleep, and of the many who are unable. Some cannot sleep simply because of circumstances such as extreme heat or extreme cold, heavy illnesses, lack of food or surfeit of it; others because of the problems they have to sift through. There are those who cannot sleep in a bed other than their own, and some because they are in a city or place other than their own. Many cannot sleep because of fear of their surroundings, or because duty calls them out early in the day and they worry as to whether they will oversleep. So we could lengthen the list of the things which cause sleeplessness.

#### **The Matter of Sleep and Sleeplessness**

Not being a doctor or a professional psychologist I cannot authentically prescribe methods for sleeping. However,

as a working layman I have a fund of information, stories and suggestions for ways and means of sleeping, and I shall try to inject these into this otherwise seemingly harmless essay.

First let us take the worship of sleep. That there is a great worship of sleep cannot be in doubt. Its adoration is universal. For many it is a pleasant idolatry. Sleep represents many things, such as a temporary escape from harsh realities which confront us daily, and special realities which weigh heavily upon us. It can be a temporary relief from the effects of disappointment and bitterness, cruelty and hurt, resentment and anger, fear and horror—that is, if we can eventually come to slumber. It is then a time of rehabilitation, restoring the emotional reserves so that, on waking, the person can resume the battles that continually confront.

There seems to be a general instinctive understanding that we need sleep. We need rest, and although some people's sleep is a time of restlessness it would seem that many battles are fought and even won in that time of slumber. We have all heard stories of mathematical, scientific and even relational problems that have been solved during repose. A person awakes with delight, having come to a solution, and this—seemingly—without having thought it through. Doubtless it has been thought through unconsciously in the watches of the night.

Attitudes can be changed with thorough rest. Some causes of anger or resentment can be reduced through an overnight sleep, probably because the person was emotionally exhausted when provoked. Of course, many volumes have been written on the nature, value and effects of dreams. It would appear that the mind can dredge up materials for giving expression to our deep and repressed desires, can

assist us to emerge from feelings of inferiority, and can give us what are often called 'creative insights'. So we come into a new day with fresh ideas, strong resolves, confidence and joy. This is probably one of the reasons why we have a high regard for sleep, and a love of it.

Sleep, of course, can be taken in instalments. Some folk can have a catnap, a short few minutes of utter relaxation, and awake as refreshed as if that time had been a whole night. Others are simply forced to rest every so often, or their strength becomes played out. Some are habituated in taking a siesta, though generally this is practised in countries which have a high temperature or heavy humidity. Some professional and business men find a short nap after lunch gives them restored vigour for the demanding work they do. Everyone has seen that this is not confined to them, for we have often seen a working man or a farmer having his forty winks before resuming the demanding day. We know that shift workers have to plan moments of restorative sleep or they will not manage their operations competently. So we could go on—and on!

### DOING SOMETHING ABOUT SLEEP AND SLEEPLESSNESS

The reason for this essay is the interesting discovery I recently made. It was this: that in each of us is a kind of monitor, or—if you will—a sleep-and-wake computer. I mean the computer controls the times of our sleeping and awakening. No sooner did I form this theory than I heard an announcement on TV of a new Australian drug which will help us to overcome jet lag. The inventor of the drug

said that within our brains is a kind of time sensor which actually keeps us oriented to meteorological time. We know—generally speaking—the time of night and day, and even times during nights and days, and so we find sudden shifts in time zones—such as losses and gains of hours or days—to be very confusing. The drug simply sedates this inner monitor, helping the mind to pass over the unusual changes in time, and so jet lag is not experienced.

I am happy that the professionals have discovered this time sensor and can—to a great degree—help us to control it. My thinking is on similar lines, but is mainly connected with that other moral sensor (or, moral censor)—the conscience. As you well know, it is conscience which drives us to certain activity and achievement in life. Perhaps—more correctly—it is the principles by which the conscience works that drive us, though via the conscience. The West, it has been said, is generally driven by 'the puritan work-ethic'. I think this is roughly true, although my observations when travelling in many cultures is that there is a fairly compulsive work drive in most societies. There are, of course, so many exceptions to the rule as almost to obliterate it, but I have the feeling that people who deliberately do not work are going against their natural feelings, and that, in fact, it is often more difficult not to work than to work. It is hard work not to work! Professional beggars are examples of this. They beg in order to escape work, but in fact begging is hard work.

### The Driving Force of the Puritan Work-Ethic —Disturber of Sleep

Now for this puritan work-ethic: what is it? Well, it seems that most of us become guilty when we do not work,

so we find *it* easier to work. We chase the perpetual carrot put before us—the promise that if we work we will have a clear conscience, and since a clear conscience brings peace to the human spirit then we will live at peace. Not so, for there is an unseen factor which is very powerful. It is what we call the self-justifying technique of the human mind. Since we all feel to some degree inferior, to some degree wrong, we try to show to ourselves and others that we are not inferior and rarely wrong. We do this by accomplishment. Thus we are performance-oriented.

Sadly enough, enough is never enough! We are driven on to better and greater exploits. We are like the white mouse on its circular wheel, and the faster we go, the faster goes the mill-wheel. Of course I am exaggerating a little. There are sensible people who keep this sort of thing in reasonable control, but the urge is there. Doubtless, too, there are other factors governing this strong drive to achieve, such as self-preservation, provision for the future, insurance against want and poverty, the attainment to fame, and similar motivations. I think all these may still be linked with the major constraint of proving ourselves. Incidentally, selfjustification often involves self-atonement, i.e. a pay off to the moral powers-that-be for our sins and failures, especially the ones we do not admit!

### The Time Sensor and the Moral Censor

**What**, then, has all this to do with sleep, and—perhaps—with the lack of it? I believe that the time sensor within us, and the moral sensor-cum-censor are linked. The conscience is saying, 'Thus and thus are what you ought to do.' The time sensor says, 'This is the time you have.' The

conscious mind reasons, 'I cannot do it all in the time I have, so I must prepare for my tomorrow when I will catch up with what is lacking, and even—perhaps—get ahead.' Ah! Get ahead. What a joyous thought and an illusion. Never mind; the mind is at it, planning, scheming, working it all out.

So, then, we set the pattern in our inner computer. We need to rise at such and such a time, work for so long, have our permitted recreation, and then-to sleep! At least that is how I have found it. I must not of course generalize from this particular example. Even so, I have the strong feeling that many work this way, except—of course—the sedators. They are the folk who have inbuilt systems of opiates which they release into the bloodstream, thus putting the conscience into drowsy states, and even dulling the senses of the tyrannous conscience. These are the ones who sleep on; for ever it might seem. They wake up, surprised that day has again dawned, and even more that it has dawned so lately! We will return to these dear ones, but I suspect they have to wake up to their consciences, sooner or later.

As an essayist I am aware that certain readers never think you say a thing rightly, or correctly, or well. In their case my self-justifying faculty begins its domestic work. I say to you critics, 'Ah! You claim to be the ones who are not driven by compulsive self-justification, who are not the victims of a tyrannous conscience, and you are the ones who have escaped the work-ethic conditioning. Most favoured ones, bear with us lesser mortals! Have your greatness in simplicity and, if possible, in anonymity. Spare us from the humiliation which comes when we are confronted by such who can measure their work, their thinking, their sleeping and their waking and dictate how it should be, i.e. who do all things well.

### Learning Anti-Insomnia Techniques: Some Prescriptions

To resume our discussion of life on this lesser mortal plane, let me say that I believe we can help ourselves greatly in the matter of life—working and recreation, sleeping and waking—by certain understandings, and deliberately applied techniques. To give an example: my local general practitioner has given me certain rules for sleeping. I must have a sensible approach to work, to recreation and to sleep. I must divest my mind—at night—of the cares of the day, and especially of those of tomorrow. I must have eaten sensibly before going to bed, i.e. not indulged in too solid foods, spiced dishes and other intensely gourmet-style foods, strong stimulants and the like. I should develop a regular pattern of sleeping and waking times, and perhaps a glass of a certain warm beverage before sleep will be helpful. I must say I think the advice is good, and I have followed it. It seems, however, that it is for a special class of people, of which I am not one.

My prescription is: become justified by grace and faith, and you will be well on the way to diminishing your self-justifying, self-proving, and self-atoning efforts which seem to be inbuilt into fallen man. Because man has fallen short of God's glory, and hence of his own (innate) glory, he is always trying to climb up to a plateau of personal glory. His attainments will help him here-so he reasons. He would like to lay in a store of glory much in the same way as a man lays in a store of money and success-to insure him against the future and its dangers. I cannot pause here to indicate the many problems which come to man when he is thus in competition with all his—her—fellow creatures. No wonder many of us do not sleep.

The second element of my prescription is linked with the first, i.e. love God, love others, love yourself. Now this prescription is impossible of attainment if we think it can happen from ourselves. We can only love others when we see and live in the love of God. The principle is, 'We love, because He first loved us'. If you have a secular mind, do not drop reading these words. just see whether you can love others and yourself, without the knowledge of God. Many of our gripes and complaints rise from the fact that we claim God is remote, indifferent, and even callous and judgemental. Pause for a moment and ask why we should accuse Him of this when common sense tells us that if He exists He would not be like this. The very fact that we accuse Him of lesser states of being than He ought to have informs us that we have an image of what is really good, and really loving. So where did that come from? Why do we insist this is the way God ought to be?

I believe the answer is that we are angry people, are driven by our consciences—although we deny this—and anger is what breaks our relationships with God, others, and ourselves. Anger generally arises when things do not turn out as we plan them, i.e. when we cannot get our own way. Unfortunately we live in a world where others are the same as us. Hence the competition, the disappointments, the anger, and the consequent hurts, wounds and reactions. We see injustices unrequited, cruelty unjudged, and evil unpunished, and we mentally shake our fists at God for a dilatory Deity, and an unsympathetic Creator.

If what I say is true, then no wonder we have times when we lack the sleep that we know we need. If we were to be justified by grace then we would never need to justify ourselves in the various forms by which we attempt to do

so. This would save us a lot of time and effort which we could better use. If we loved God, one another, and ourselves, then that would also save a great amount of time.

### Control of the Inner Elements

Now to that inner monitor, the time sensor and computer. What would happen here? Can the human mind determine what it will do, or does it determine what we do? I think it is both. Everything in a human being should be under his control, normally speaking. I think that is the teaching of the Scriptures. For example, James says the tongue can be 'an unruly member'. He implies that it must be kept strictly to the use for which we need it. It already has a use, a faculty, an operation, but this must be kept within the will of the person, as a horse is by a bridle.

Generally speaking, there are a number of forces working upon the human spirit: those within and those outside. The inside ones we know: the outside ones are God, other human beings, and powers—personalities of an occult kind which are evil. We have to note that there is no such abstract element or 'thing' as 'good' or 'evil'. There are only personal forces such as God and creatures which are earthly (terrestrial) or heavenly (celestial). Man is never left to himself by God or these other personal beings. So we are saying that when we wish to control our own faculties such as the tongue, a time sensor, and a conscience, then we can never do it unimpeded or unaided by such forces as we have mentioned.

To bring this into the practical area of human sleeping, I believe we can rightly reason as follows:

I have a faculty which listens to my mind when it plans to operate by ideas and actions. This faculty helps to programme my movements, or perhaps is programmed for my intended movements. Hence when I lay my head on the pillow I have roughly worked out my life for tomorrow. Of course I cannot control many things—such as circumstances, environment, and my reactions and responses to them—and so my programme is primarily of intention. I cannot guarantee execution of it. The forces mentioned above move in for all sorts of reasons to aid or impede. Even so, when I sleep, my mind is on the future. Because it is so demanding, I may sleep very little, or I may rise to get things ready, and even execute some portions of that programme. This is what makes sleep difficult for me. Of course if I have no programme or refuse to yield to vocational and conscience pressures, then I have conflict and that will not help me to sleep. I will then face the test of whether I will deal with my inner computer—giving it other directions—or seek chemical ways of sleeping—short of exercise or mental argumentation which may weary me and bring me to sleep. A good bit of advice to remember is that given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: 'Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day.'

Doubtless some who read the above will be surprised by the curious reasoning of my mind, but I believe what I have written to be substantially correct. I have, however, left out one important factor, namely vocation. Vocation is what being a human being is all about. Most folk try to discover the vocation most congenial, useful and fulfilling to themselves. Whilst this vocation is important, the one I am speaking about is 'What is my calling, here, in this world and life, and what is its goal or purpose?'

That is, my vocation may be that of a professional person, a business man, a tradesman or a labourer. My true

calling is the reason for my being on this earth, and travelling towards life beyond this one I am now living. This may surprise some readers, but if we are not here for some purpose then everything we know is on 'the horizontal', and it means we are creatures of time, who, having gone through their time, are now *non est*, i.e. are dead for ever, having gone to dust. Where vocation has the two dimensions—horizontal and vertical—then it has rich meaning.

I doubt whether conscience can be so strong, our inner computers and monitors so sensitive to what we *ought* to do, that we can be as restful as we would desire, unless we comply.

What, then, should be the practical outcome of my reasoning, especially in regard to sleeping? My answer is:

(a) Have a conscious relationship with God—in love—and love others and yourself. This will cut away the trouble and tensions which come from inadequate relationships. In this respect do not go to bed with relational unfinished business, that is, with anger, resentment and bitterness, with a sense of injustice done, and with an insistence upon being requited.

(b) Seek, sense and know your general vocation in life as a true existent in this universe. Seek only to do that which appears to fit that vocation, and do not be led into guilt regarding failure, or pride regarding success.

(c) Make sure you are not over-programming yourself: assess what is right and proper, accept that assessment, and speak to your inner monitor and your time sensor in that regard. Do not do works to clear guilt, to obtain fame, or to be recognized and praised. All these things are really extraneous to true life.

(d) Believe that God has given you all things richly to enjoy, especially as you recognize the Source of these things, and are grateful to Him for them. Realize that you are intended—and commanded—to enjoy them, no matter what sorrow or suffering may come as you travel through life. Not to enjoy them is virtual disobedience.

(e) Come fully to understand the sovereignty of God, i.e. that He is King over all things, and being this way He works and orders all things for the good of His people, even though some of those 'things' do not seem to be good, at the time.

I suppose if you spend your time doing what I have recommended, then you will sleep out of sheer exhaustion! What I mean is that people drive themselves into restlessness and sleeplessness, especially when they are occupied *only* with their *own* things. It is surprising what a range of things are my things, such as spouse, children, possessions, relatives, friends, companions in work, sport, acquiring things, and in social intercourse. If I can go beyond the range even of them—although including them—then my mind will surely be at peace. What I am really suggesting is that refreshing sleep comes to us as a gift, but the use of it is conditioned by our own attitudes. I have known people who sleep because they are exhausted emotionally; who derive only temporary relief or help, because of their self-orientation. I know others who work hard, do not introspect, and seem to have healthy sleep.

For the professional sleeper I have little time, and almost nothing to say, i.e. the person who has denuded himself—herself—of a sense of vocation, fails to be occupied with the woes of this world as well as its joys, and who makes an idolatry of sleep. This somniac has a disease of sorts,

compulsively having to doze, snore, snooze, nap, slump and slumber. Sleep (Gr. *hypnos*) hypnotizes this one, and becomes the sole goal of life. Such is a clever protest against the healthy order of creation. I have also heard bizarre explanations of oversleeping such as 'I never wanted to leave my mother's womb. I can remember that fact. That is why I want to stay in the womb of the night. 'That was told me by an otherwise very intelligent person.

### HORIZONTAL THINKING— THE ENEMY OF SLEEP

One of the keys to understanding sleeplessness is the treatment of it in the book *Ecclesiastes*. The title in Greek means *The Preacher*, and in Hebrew *Koheleth*. The Preacher—Koheleth—has an understanding of sleeplessness, for he speaks of it. However, to understand his understanding we need to know the whole plan and thrust of the book. Briefly summarizing this book—and using not so much his terms as our own—Koheleth is saying that when he views 'everything under the sun' from the vantage point of the horizontal, then he can only conclude that everything repeat, everything—is 'vanity and a striving after wind'. That is, it is empty, purposeless, pointless, and futile.

'From the vantage point of the horizontal' needs to be explained. If we use our human reason and wisdom, and see everything 'under the sun', i.e. make no reference to the Divine, to the vertical dimension, then we have only a horizontal universe. By nature of the case we can never see the point of anything, or the real value of anything. When, however, the Preacher thinks in terms of God, his reasoning

changes. The horizontal—though still apparently horizontal—is seen differently. There is now a horizontal-vertical perspective.

Koheleth tells us that he set about to understand all things by his wisdom, and indeed worked hard at this—harder than any man ever has! He could only come to one conclusion, i.e. the one we mentioned above: that all things are vanity. What worried him was that having worked hard to achieve something and discovering it was all vanity, he concluded regarding such as himself, 'All his days are full of pain, and his work is a vexation; *even in the night his mind does not rest*' (2:23). His mind does not rest for three reasons: (i) because he is driven on to complete his quest of understanding 'all the business that God gives to men to do under the sun' but cannot rationalize it; (ii) his mind cannot cease from that quest for it is now compulsive in its enquiry; (iii) he is angry at the injustice of working hard only to know the fruits of all his labours will probably go to some careless person who will cheerfully squander it. With this injustice is the added injustice that man, having been given a mind and wisdom, cannot discover the purpose of living on this planet. If he discovers anything it is that nothing is anything, and everything is nothing, i.e. 'vanity and a striving after wind'.

The compulsion that drives man to seek a rationale to existence is that 'God has put eternity into man's mind, so that by searching he cannot find out the end from the beginning' (3:11). In other words, he has the sense of the horizontal, but cannot be satisfied only with the horizontal (everything under the sun') because God has put eternity into his heart, i.e. given him the tug and pull of that which is vertical. It is easy for us to see that man can see the

horizontal for what it really is only when he has a horizontal—vertical perspective. Then ‘everything under the sun’ is *not* vanity. What it is cannot be encapsulated in any philosophy or reasoned system, but can only be known in the action of pleasing God, i.e. doing His will (2:26; 7:26; cf. 8:3), for ‘the whole of man is to fear God and keep his commandments’ (12:13). In other words, man will only know as he goes (i.e. does the will of God), and will only go as he knows.

Koheleth comes to understand that he cannot understand by human wisdom what God is about. Two quotes will illuminate this, the first being, ‘All this I have tested by wisdom; I said, "I will be wise"; but it was far from me. That which is, is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?’ (7:23; cf. 1:2-11 where investigation alters nothing). The second quote is 8:16-17:

When I applied my mind to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night one’s eyes see sleep; then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out; even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.

We have, then, been given a most valuable principle, namely that man will never be able to rest in his spirit or ever have complete sleep and rest, because he insists on trying to know what he cannot know! If, however, he will give up his quest he will find rest of spirit, enjoy life on the horizontal whilst eternity is in his heart, and will *sleep well*. Koheleth has other fascinating insights. One is, ‘Sweet is *the sleep* of a labourer, whether he eats little or much; but the surfeit of the rich will not let him sleep. ‘Whilst the rich person has eaten—or overeaten—his gourmet foods and destroyed his digestion and hence cannot sleep, yet that is,

perhaps, not all the matter. The rich man is as compulsive in his quest for riches and horizontal security as the Preacher is in his to know what everything is all about, i.e. to know the end from the beginning’.

This little venture, then, into the wisdom of Ecclesiastes, has given us the key to restful sleep, i.e. to please God. To do His will is the way to joy in heart and enjoyment in life, and sweet sleep in the night. This is because ‘the whole of man is to fear God and keep his commandments’. As the psalmist said,

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;

the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;

the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;

the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;

the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever;

the ordinances of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;

sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover by them is thy servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

#### GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS ON THE MATTER OF SLEEP

##### **Sleep Is a Social Thing**

Sleeping is most significant. Husband and wife—at least at the beginning—find it a rich experience. The intimacy of

being in the one bed, having the one mind, sharing life in all its forms—including sleep—is so significant that if one spouse leaves the other and retires even temporarily to another bed, then this is most distressing. Probably one of the powerful forms of marital protest is to permanently sleep apart.

Children love to remain with their parents in bed—a custom followed by many families in some cultures—or they like to rise early to come in to Mum and Dad to have a morning cuddle. Children in kindergartens sleep more easily when others are sleeping. Indeed the whole human race, whether its members be aged or young, seems to live in praise of sleep.

### Sleep and God

The Scriptures abound in mentions of sleep. Perhaps the most famous is that God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and then created woman out of his side. What a sleep! What an awakening!

Jacob slept soundly at Bethel the night of his dream when he saw a stairway to heaven, and angels ascending and descending upon it. Dreams and visions were the material from which the prophets spoke (cf. Num. 12:6; Jer. 23:23f.; Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17). Dreams form a large part of the Old and New Testaments, for God often speaks to His people via their dreams. This makes us think of the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and baker who were in gaol with Joseph. It also makes us think of the dreams that Joseph interpreted for Pharaoh, and Daniel for Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. All these 'messages' were given in sleep.

Perhaps one of the most helpful passages on sleep is in

Psalm 127:2: 'It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.' It really means that you may get into tension trying to maintain life by extra working, but in the ultimate it is God who gives sleep. Indeed the translation should almost certainly be 'he gives to his beloved in sleep', i.e. God provides for His beloved even while they sleep. Perhaps, also, there is the thought that what we need most of all comes to us from God when we sleep. This certainly fits with much that we have said above. At the same time sensible work brings enjoyment of sleep. In Ecclesiastes 5:12 the Preacher says, 'Sweet is the sleep of a labourer, whether he eats little or much; but the surfeit of the rich will not let him sleep.' Few are the worries of an honest worker, and many the cares of a rich man!

Proverbs 20:13 has good advice: 'Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty; open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread.' The writer asks (6:9-11), 'How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?' He observes, 'A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a vagabond, and want like an armed man.' The moral does not need to be pointed out.

The same writer prescribes 'following after wisdom' as a recipe, for he says (3:24), 'when you lie down your sleep will be sweet.' Death in the Bible is often referred to as a sleep (cf. Dan. 12:2). Jesus said that the little sick girl was only asleep (Matt. 9:24), and was not dead. Likewise Lazarus was asleep—not dead (John 11: 11; cf. I Cor. 15:5 1; 1 Thess. 4:14). Jesus came to awaken Lazarus out of sleep. This sleep is death as seen by us, for it appears, often, that the person has gone to sleep. On the other side there is not 'soul-sleep'

but immediate being with Christ. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are alive since God is not the God of the dead but the living. Perhaps the best way to see this is that from our point of view they are asleep—even in the grave—but the moment of their entrance into the life beyond is the time—in time—of the resurrection; not an easy thought to assimilate, since it has obvious difficulties, but it is probably the correct one.

In the Bible not all sleep is good, for it has the cast of death about it. In Romans 13:11 Paul says It is high time we awaken from sleep—the sleep of sloth and fleshliness. Similarly in Ephesians 5:14 Paul cries, ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.’ This has its origin in Isaiah 26:19—‘O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For thy dew is a dew of light’—and the powerful arousal appeal of Isaiah 52:1 —‘Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments.

Of course all creation awaits the trumpet-call to life—the divine ‘Reveille’—of the archangel, and then sleep shall be no more, for ‘there shall be no night there’, but of course there will be the Sabbath rest that God has promised to His sin-distorted and sin-disarranged creation, the rest of being in His presence. Sleep will not be needed as a restorative, for He is the elixir of life, ‘the Fountain of Living Waters’.

### Sleep and the Arts

Sleep is a great theme in music and art. Dreams abound in them both, but we cannot here deal with these. In literature we have so much recorded regarding sleep—a sleep that is sweet because of a quiet conscience and a joyful experience of God and His world—and also a sleep that is troubled,

disturbed or *non est* because of an unquiet conscience, and a guilty breast.

Of the latter there springs to mind both Macbeth and his Lady:

Methought I heard a voice cry ‘Sleep no more!  
Macbeth does murder sleep,’ the innocent sleep,  
Sleep that knits up the ravell’d sleeve of care,  
The death of each day’s life, sore labour’s bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature’s second course,  
Chief nourisher in life’s feast.

Glamis hath murder’d sleep, and therefore Cawdor  
Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!

Lady Macbeth herself said, ‘We will eat our meal in fear, and sleep in the affliction of these terrible dreams that shake us nightly,’ whilst of the king she says, ‘Duncan is in his grave; after life’s fitful fever he sleeps well.’

John Fletcher spoke of ‘Care-charming Sleep, thou easer of all woes. ‘Phillip Brooks’ beautiful Christmas carol speaks of Bethlehem’s ‘deep and dreamless sleep’—enough to make any of us envy it! Milton spoke of ‘dewy-feather’d sleep’. Alice Meynell speaks beautifully of ‘Flocks of the memories of the day draw near the dovecote doors of sleep.’ William Henley spoke uncharacteristically of ‘Night with her train of stars. And her great gift of sleep.’ John Keats said,

O magic sleep! O comfortable bird,  
That broodest o’er the troubled sea of the mind  
Till it is hush’d and smooth!

So we could go on, quoting many times the thoughts of our race regarding sleep. Sleep comes as a welcome guest, a beautiful gift, the sweet restorer, the balm of woe—and a

thousand other things. Writers, musicians and artists have well divined and well defined the nature of sleep. The guilty have fearful nights, the anxious miss the joy, the innocent know peace, and all need sleep—come what may!

Perhaps Samuel Taylor Coleridge has uttered some of the best words through the lips of the Ancient Mariner. This slayer of the albatross lived to rue the day of that killing. How long and sleepless were his days of guilt, until he could cry,

*Oh Sleep! it is a gentle thing; Beloved from pole to pole, To Mary Queen the praise be given! She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven, That slid into my soul.*

The good words of a sage may calm us, as David's music calmed the tormented King Saul, but where guilt has not yet been despatched from us by yonder Cross, then sleep will never be sweet and dreamless, or strong and prophetic, yielding the true words, truth and treasures of heaven. Let us sleep the sleep of the justified!

#### **A CONCLUSION AS TO THE MATTER OF SLEEP**

For years the idea of writing an essay on sleep has been with me. I think I was merely anxious to help my fellowcreatures out of the problem of insomnia—useless hours spent mainly on bemoaning that one cannot sleep. So I began this essay, but the strong theme got out of hand, and took me—willy-nilly—where it would, and so we have said all too little on the one hand and all too much on the other.

The truth is that when we absolutize anything we give it

the nature of a lord, a god, and an idol. Sleep is good as it comes, and as it goes. It is better to sleep without pondering the matter of sleep than to come under such a tyranny. There are some people who have not slept in years, and seem little the worse for it, though they may, of course, have been the better for it—had they had it. It is an attested fact that many of the great men and women of the world have what we would call minimal sleep. Many sleep no more than four of the twenty-four hours of a day. Some even less. They are fascinated by life, jealous of time, keen to utilize their hours, and almost begrudge the necessity to sleep. It would seem, also, that the world may be better off for their lesser sleep.

On the one hand, evil men, schemers and plotters use the terrible hours of the night to plan their dreadful schemes; on the other, good men and women use the same hours to further the high destiny of the human race. It would seem that what obsesses us often keeps us wakeful, and this for good or ill. We will never be able to compute the loving sacrifice of parents who have stayed awake to care for sick and bewildered children, or just stayed awake in their concern and prayers for children who may have proved wayward. Love so often keeps some awake that others may sleep.

There are yet others who could not sleep because of the danger—physical, moral and spiritual—which faced their loved ones. These have spent sleepless nights in protective prayer, calling upon God to protect and save His children. Many miracles have been wrought in the night. As Jesus spent nights in prayer praying to his Father, so many of his people have done so throughout the ages. Sleep may become an idolatry to some, but the sacrifice of it by others can be a benison upon the world.

*The Stranger in the Cemetery*

It might be good, then, to conclude our thoughts on sleep with ones on wakefulness, perhaps the best of all being that of David:

My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat,  
and my mouth praises thee with joyful lips,  
when I think of thee upon my bed,  
and meditate on thee in the watches of the night;  
for thou hast been my help,  
and in the shadow of thy wings I sing for joy.  
My soul clings to thee; thy right hand upholds me.

*Four Times  
Last Night*

Four times last night I was awakened.  
'Fear Death!' a strident voice was saying.  
Four frogs of vast dimensions spoke  
As though the Deity had said,  
'Be harbingers.'

At first I scarce conceived that words  
Spoken by frogs could terrify a man.  
Fear death!—indeed!  
What nonsense spoke those deep-voiced things,  
But all the while within—  
The place where time and memory lurk—  
There stirred the knowledge '  
Death is death indeed,  
And after death is death again—  
The death called "second death."

***Whom Shall  
We Blame?***

Four times the warners spoke,  
And having spoke they ceased.  
A simple episode—forsooth.  
But memory is memory,  
And all the while I lay awake  
Or slept—to hear again—  
'Fear death! Fear death!  
Fear death! Fear death!'  
And this, in truth, I do, afresh.

Last time—the fifth—the sonorous frogs  
Cried, 'Take life! Take life!  
Take life! Take life!'  
And this I also sought to do  
From him whose hands—hard- scarred—  
Give life to all, in grace.

And so I laid my spirit down in peace,  
And slept the sleep of those who live,  
And never never die.

Who likes to be blamed for anything? Blame carries the thought of imperfection, of guilt, and of some kind of punishment. 'You must take the blame for this' is a pronouncement we do not wish to hear. We resent it, and oppose it. We immediately start defending ourselves against the charge. We rationalize away the blame, perhaps offloading it on to others. Probably we do not believe there are people who are wholly blameless. Perhaps we are even a little cynical about the matter, asking, 'Who—in the world—is ever wholly blameless?'

**THE BLAMELESS MAN**

God asked Satan—one of His angelic sons—'Have you considered my servant job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and

turns away from evil?’ (Job 1:8; 2:3; cf. 1:1). Whatever Satan’s reply was, God was saying that Job was blameless. In Job 2:3 God repeated the question to Satan, and added, ‘He still holds fast his integrity, although you moved me against him, to destroy him without a cause.’

We know the story of job, how God permitted Satan to afflict him so that he was brought to an ash-heap, full of sores, having lost all in the world except his wife, who nagged at him to ‘Curse God and die.’ This was the man whom God called blameless. The question we will ask is, ‘Was Job, in fact, a blameless man?’ He seemed many times to waver, many times to ask questions of God in bitterness of spirit, and he was certainly critical of his questioners who insisted they were trying to comfort him.

The Hebrew words *tam* or *tamim* carried the ideas of fullness, of completion, a quality that is plain to people who see it. We read of Noah, who was ‘a righteous man, blameless in his generation’. We are told that he ‘walked with God’. God told Abraham, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless.’ The victim of a peace offering, sacrificed to God, had to be blameless, i.e. ‘perfect; there shall be no blemish in it’ (Lev. 22:2 If.). To offer a blemished victim was tantamount to blasphemy. David, having been delivered from the hand of Saul, said, ‘This God-his way is perfect,’ and, ‘He has made my way perfect’ (11 Sam. 22:3 1, 33). Psalm 37:37 enjoins, ‘Mark the blameless [perfect] man, and behold the upright’.

In the New Testament different words for ‘blameless’ and ‘perfect’ are used. The main verb *teleioo* speaks of fullness and completeness rather than of impeccability or flawlessness. Jesus’ cry ‘It is finished!’ derives from this. Christ became perfect through what he suffered, although

at no point was he imperfect. He certainly was a perfect sacrifice—as against a blemished one—for he offered himself ‘without blemish’ to God and thereby ‘perfected for all time those who are sanctified’. To be perfect as one’s Father in heaven is perfect is to have full relationships with others, in love, rather than to be flawless persons.

We conclude that a blameless person is not wholly flawless, but that he is one who seeks to be, that he is one who is mature and complete, at least for that stage of life to which he has grown. He does not lag behind in right attitudes and proper growth. In the Bible the perfect or blameless man is what he is because he knows and relates to God.

#### THE CASE OF THE BLAMELESS MAN—JOB

In the Book of job no one can properly impugn job as a faulty and blameworthy man, for God had attested that he was ‘a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil’. Yet, if we read the text of the book thoroughly, we find that the man had had many faults, and that he had not been without sin. In 13:13-28 he seems to deliver a diatribe against God. First he insists that he will be vindicated if God is bringing this case against him: ‘I know that I shall be vindicated.’ Thus confronting Him, he says, ‘How many are my iniquities and my sins? Make me know my transgression and my sin.’ He adds, ‘For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me inherit the iniquities of my youth.’ Surely these are not the words of a blameless man. It seems he is admitting his sinfulness—as surely he is—but he is saying at the same time that something has made him a righteous man. Indeed, throughout

the book this is the basis of all his arguments. He is not suffering because he is sinful. There is no basis or cause for suffering to come to him from that direction.

We who watch the scenario know that he is suffering because Satan is trying to get him to break, to believe he has lost his integrity, and so to give in to his incompetent counsellors and their theology. No, he will not do this, for the first verses of chapter one give us the clue. In 1:4-5 we read:

His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each on his day; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the days of the feast had run their course, job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, 'It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.'

Job's understanding that in their feasting and merriment his children may have slipped over the bounds of righteousness and sinned, meant that *their guilt must be immediately cleared*. This could only be done by sacrifice. Sinning, and the guilt of sin, is what turns a man against God and causes him to curse Him. This is seen in Colossians 1:21, where Paul said, 'You, who were once estranged and hostile in mind, [by] doing evil deeds. . .', i.e. our guilt makes us hate God, as surely as Cain hated Him, and his own brother Abel because his deeds were righteous. Job, being in possession of this valuable knowledge, sent for his children, and took them to the sacrifices. They watched the act of substitution, and saw that by the sacrifice offered personally for each of them they were no longer guilty. The thrust to curse God because of their guilt was thus neutralized, and they were again in the clear with God. God's provision, Himself, of this atonement (cf. Lev. 17: 11) would also show them the

great love and grace of God.

If job knew this principle then he had acted by it for himself in his own life, and he knew as *well* as Abel, and as well as David, and as well as the breast-beating taxgatherer in the temple (Luke 18:9-14), that he was clear of guilt. Why, then, did his friends insist he should come before God in repentance and receive forgiveness and be relieved of his suffering for his sins? *He* knew this was not necessary. Sure, he had sinned, and sure, there had been iniquities in his youth, but why should God arraign him with these in his days of blamelessness? That is why he would go to court with God to clear his name!

Job, then, had the great advantage of being able to admit to every sin of his, and the things he had done wrong, but know and say-with the New Testament believers who had comprehended God's justifying grace-that he was blameless before God. In this sense so were Noah and Abraham and David able to say they were justified in God's sight. If that were the case, then they had no need to stand as sinful before men.

### THE SINFUL WHO ARE NOT JUSTIFIED

Recently I watched a discussion carried on between a Christian theologian, a Jewish Rabbi, and a professor of

Islamic theology. The Jewish Rabbi and the Muslim theologian were anxious to make a point in which they stood united. It was that man was not born in sin, and in this sense was not basically a sinner. It made me realize afresh how far Paul from judaistic theology would seem to stand. Having lived amongst Moslems for many years, I knew they thought man

was a sinner only because he committed sins, and that he did not commit sin because he was a sinner. That is, they did not accept the doctrine of original sin. These two theologians said as much. They quite gloried in the fact that man was not congenitally a sinner. How fortunate they were!

In Romans 5:12 Paul said, 'by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men for all *did* sin.' Earlier in his Romans letter (3:23) he had said, 'all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. 'In the 5:12 statement he was saying that when Adam sinned we all sinned, just as he is claiming that when Christ obeyed we all obeyed. The first is original sin, and the second—we might say—is original righteousness. When he said in 3:23 'all have sinned', he was simply stating a fact of life which even the Jewish Rabbi and the Islamic theologian could not deny.

The Christian faces two elements: (i) that he is a sinner in Adam, and (ii) that he commits actual acts of sin. For both he is judged before God. It is interesting that the Jews regarded the Gentiles (other nations) as 'sinners of the Gentiles' (Gal. 2:15), and that Moslems regard non-Muslims as unworthy, i.e. infidels—the equivalent of 'sinners of the Gentiles'. David said, 'Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.' Job asked (14:4) 'Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?', and his gloomy counsellor—Eliphaz the Temanite—echoed, 'What is man, that he can be clean? Or he that is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?' (15:14; cf. 25:4). This would seem to mean that man is born in original sin, and does not just catch the contagion from the human race.

The New Testament is clear: man is a sinner, and sins—

continually:

He shall save his people from their sins.

To give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins.

God, be merciful to me a sinner!

Man, your sins are forgiven you.

Her sins, which are many, are forgiven.

Forgiveness of sins shall be preached in his name among all nations.

Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!.

Every one who commits sin is the slave of sin.

He will convince the world of sin, because they do not believe in me.

This is my blood . . . shed for the forgiveness of sins.

Be baptized for the forgiveness of sins.

That your sins may be blotted out.

He was exalted to give forgiveness of sins.

Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins.

Through this man is declared unto you the forgiveness of sins.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered.

Sin entered into the world through one man for all did sin.

Sending his own Son . . . for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.

The sting of death is sin.

Who gave himself for our sins,

You were dead through . . . sins.

Redemption . . . the forgiveness of sins.

He was offered once to bear the sins of many.

I will remember their sins no more.

When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.

Christ also died for sins, once for all.

He was cleansed from his old sins.

Christ died not only for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world.

He is the propitiation for our sins.

Your sins are forgiven for his sake.

Who has freed us from our sins.

When it comes to the matter of being sinners, Christ said, 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' It was said that he ate with taxgatherers (i.e. ex-communicant Jews) and sinners. In Luke 7:37 we are told of 'a woman of the city, who was a sinner'. Like the taxgatherers of the Gospels (e.g. Zacchaeus) she was a notorious sinner, and so an ex-communicant who could only stand in 'the court of sinners' where Gentiles were equally permitted to stand.

Paul's famous statement regarding himself surely incorporates all of us—whether Jews or Gentiles: 'The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the foremost of sinners.' Note that he did not say, 'I was the chief of sinners,' but 'I am the chief of sinners.' Equally John says, 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.' We saw that Jesus said he came not for the righteous—if there were ever any such—but to bring sinners to repentance. In Luke 13:1-5 he made it clear that calamities which happened to persons did not certify them as worse sinners than others, but that all of us need to repent or calamities will eventually come our way.

### **THE BLAME AND SHAME EXPUNGED BY CHRIST**

#### **Who Is To Blame?**

Every man is to blame for his own sin. This is made clear in Ezekiel chapter 18. For generations people had said, 'Our fathers are responsible for the calamity that has come upon us, for God has visited their sins upon us—to the third and

fourth generation.' They thought themselves blameless, but their parents blameful. Their parents were not only to be blamed for their own sins, but for the sins of their children. To this heresy God replied, 'This proverb shall no more be heard in Israel, which has been heard in Israel, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge."' 'The sins of the parents were only to be visited on the children who themselves persisted in their parents' idolatry.

Ezekiel 18 makes it clear that only the soul that sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. The prophet made it clear that the son of a wicked father could take the path of the righteous, just as the son of a righteous father could decide to take the way of the wicked. Every person makes his own choice.

#### **Who Blames?**

In Ezekiel 18:25-32 we see that Israel has been blaming God for the things that have been happening to it. They have been saying, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' God answers, 'Is it not your ways that are not just?' God is undoubtedly blamed most of all for the sad things, the hard things and the tragic things that happen. Is He not in charge, and must not all blame be laid upon Him? Abraham said, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' Of course! Even so, we blame God. He is the Great Scape-goat.

Everyone blames everyone when anyone is blamed. This is generally true. When accused of blame we easily rationalize the blame away. We try to find someone on whom we

can off-load our sin and guilt. We are competent at justifying ourselves. We simply cannot live with blame, shame and guilt. We judge others. We are critical of them. We blame our parents, their upbringing of us, our environment, circumstances and even heredity for our failures. We do not take full responsibility for them.

The fact is that there is no way of cleansing ourselves from blame and shame.

### **The Way Out of Shame and Blame**

**Job** was very strong, very sure of himself, very certain he was blameless even though he knew of the sins of his youth, and the failures of later age. He knew that that way was the way in which God had justified him, through sacrifice.

Let us imagine we are Job's children and we go to the place of sacrifice. We do not know when Job lived, or even whether he was a member of Israel, so that we are not sure of how the sacrifice was carried out. For our purposes we will take the Levitical sacrifices as our model. These are found in Leviticus chapters I to 7. The principle of offering the sacrifice is set out in Leviticus chapter 1.

The worshipper brought the victim—the animal—into the court of sacrifice, and laid his hands firmly and forcefully upon the animal. This was to identify him with the victim, so that his sins were laid upon the creature about to be sacrificed. Taking the long sacrificial knife from the priest, he would cut the throat of the victim, so that all its blood poured forth. The priest would catch the blood and throw it on the four sides of the altar. God it was who gave the blood for atonement, for the life of the flesh was in the blood. This violent killing denoted the nature of atonement for sin—

that of life having to be taken, or given, for one's sins. The worshipper then had to divide the animal, cleanse it from the soiling of excreta, and the priest would make atonement by laying it on the altar as it was appropriately divided, and so the person's sins were atoned for.

Elsewhere we are told that the altar, being holy, sanctified the gift, i.e. the sacrifice. We saw in Leviticus 22:21 that the victim had to be blameless, i.e. without blemish, otherwise atonement could not be made. In Hebrews 9:14 we are told that Jesus offered himself 'without blemish', and as a consequence was the victim whose blood 'purifies the conscience from dead works, to serve the living God'.

It is time, then, that we look at Christ's sacrifice of himself, for 'Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God' (Eph. 5:2; Gal. 2:20). His sacrifice was perfect, 'like that of a lamb without blemish or spot'. 'The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all', and God 'made him to be sin, who knew no sin', for 'Christ. . died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God'. 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.' It is clear that 'he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed'. just as the lamb before the altar shed all its blood, so 'he poured out his soul unto death'. All his life bled and fled that we might be forgiven, accounted righteous, having our sins covered, for 'by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities'.

These things tell us he took the blame, and the shame, and bore it all to extinction. Like Noah, Abraham, David

and job of old, we can claim ourselves to be blameless though we have sinned no less than they, for—like them—we ‘are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith’. When we read the accounts of the lives of Abel, Noah, Abraham, David and job—amongst many others—we discover that these men knew the principle of propitiatory sacrifice—that sacrifice in which God at once pours out His wrath upon sin and evil and averts the flow of that wrath from the sinner to the victim of the sacrifice. It is a lesson in understanding the holiness of God, His rightful wrath upon all evil, and yet His amazing mercy as He provides the atonement in the ancient sacrifices, and supremely in the propitiation He provided for man in His Son, Jesus Christ. Whilst the blood of bulls and goats could not really wash away sins, yet the *precious* blood of Christ could—and did.

That blood was precious in that it was rare, so rare that it was unique. It was untainted blood, as he was a pure sacrifice, such as has only ever been in him. It was precious in that we love that blood—that life given in sacrifice for us out of his love, a ‘fragrant offering and sacrifice to God’.

We see, then, that men such as Abel, Noah, Abraham, David and job were not men of superficial thinking and understanding. They understood the profound mystery of sacrifice. They placed their trust in that God-appointed and God-given sacrifice. Abel did so by faith; Noah was a preacher of righteousness through faith in God; Abraham offered sacrifice because he was justified by faith; David knew that sacrifice was not a mere ritual, but was ‘a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart’, and job, who had offered sacrifices for his children, offered nothing less for

himself, and hence could stand firm on the fact that he was blameless.

### THERE IS NO OTHER WAY

**We** can trust the model of Leviticus chapters I to 7, for it was the one given by God. Doubtless there is a universal recognition that sins need to be expiated, and most will expiate if they can. Expiation is man working out the punishment for his sin, but propitiation is God working out the judgement of sin within the Godhead, for man, by His Son. Doubtless the way of the Cross must be the only way this can happen. We doubt not that could there have been another way then the way of the Cross would not have been used. The substitutionary sacrifice stands as an unalterable demand of God, and in Christ, as His whole provision to take the blame from man and declare him acquitted of all guilt and shame.

Of course, when we speak of substitution, we first speak of identification. Christ did not go into some moral vacuum in a situation detached from ours, and work out propitiation apart from the human race. He was made ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’. He was ‘born of a woman, born under the law’. Perhaps we do not understand all that this means, but we are told that ‘he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin’, and that ‘he had to be made like his brethren in every respect’. He was one who ‘in every respect has been tempted as we are’. In this sense he identified with us, for his humanity was real and his life in the flesh truly human.

Even more a mystery of identification to be a true substitute took place at the Cross. As sure as he took the place of

Barabbas, as surely he took our place. Paul said, 'We are convinced that if one died for all, then did all die.' Surely we cannot come closer to substitution than that! In I Peter 3:18 it is again put clearly: 'For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous'. When God made him to be sin, then that was the ultimate identification of the Lamb with the sinner. Doubtless it was all mankind which crucified him, i.e. all our sins combined to crucify, and doubtless we did not—with joy—place our hand humbly upon that Lamb. To the contrary, we accused him of blasphemy, but he did not withdraw from us. He prayed for us that we might be forgiven. He died for us that we might have that forgiveness. In fact he offered himself up through the eternal Spirit—without blemish—and became the blemished for the blemished, taking the blame and making us blameless. This is the true substitutionary sacrifice.

What we will never know is the agony of his becoming sin for us, bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, identifying with us in the very core of our being so that it could be said that we were crucified with him. If we were not there *in* that Substitute, then he were no Substitute, and if he were no Substitute, then there were no efficacious sacrifice; we would all be still in our sin and sins—the entire world would be lost in its blame and shame.

#### Our Blamelessness God's Perfect Will From All Time

In Ephesians 1:4 we are told that God 'chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him'. The work 'In him' was the work of the Cross to bring us to the blameless or justified state. That is why Christ was said to be made by God

'our wisdom, our righteousness, and sanctification and redemption'. Paul said, 'And you, who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him.' Paul prays for the Philippians, 'that your love may abound more and more... so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.'

The same Paul sees that there is a battle for blamelessness. On the one hand the believer must purify himself from all that is unclean, i.e. must refuse what is impure, and on the other hand must rest in the fact that when he—the believer—is accused then he realize that 'it is God who justifies'. He must also realize that Christ has died, has risen, and is now at the right hand of God interceding against all who accuse, and would draw the believer back into despair, as though he were not blameless, so that perhaps he—the accused believer—might commence again the soul-wearying task of self-justification, self-atonement, and the bitter work of accusing others. No! The believer is freed from all this.

He is part of Christ's living body, the church, and 'Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and *without blemish*'. Truly, Christ is the only way to our becoming, and being, blameless.

*The Pointless Pistol*

I saw a man in the vegie garden.  
He was pointing a black pistol  
At the latent strawberries—  
The Spring had not yet come—  
And I wondered as he slanted  
The pistol to the earth,  
And at the strawberries.

I had not seen a man in any vegie garden,  
And black pistols—I think—  
Are quite rare, especially in gardens.  
I wondered at the whole matter.  
I felt that large cabbages  
With hard impassionate hearts  
Are a more proper target  
For slanted black pistols In any vegie garden.

What happened with the pistol,  
What happened from the man,

I do not know. I am puzzled  
Why a man should aim a pistol  
At latent strawberries—they were not yet  
Seasonally awake. Asleep,  
They were ignorant of the man  
And his dark armaments.

Pray for the strawberries,  
And pray for the man.  
I did not capture his features  
To report to our Neighbourhood Watch.  
This was a pity, but then this—  
I forgot to tell you—was only  
A waking dream, and momentary.

Next time I will look more closely  
If a man points a black pistol  
At winter-sleeping strawberries.

## ***Let Flow the Floodtide of Love***

I think that one of the highest statements of what a human can be is made by John the Apostle. He said, in his

First Letter, 'No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.' At first sight it seems simple enough, but it is profound. It is not seen fully until we look at another statement in John's Gospel. There he said, 'No man has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.'

There is an equation here. Let us work it out. In his Gospel he says, (i) No man has ever seen God; (ii) the God whom no man has ever seen has been declared by the Son. In his First Letter he says, (i) no man has ever seen God; (ii) when we love one another, God's love is perfected in us. (i) in the Gospel and (i) in the First Letter are the same. In the Gospel (ii) is that people have God declared to them by the Son; in the First Letter (ii) is that people have God declared to them by the perfect love of God in them.

This is seen more clearly if another translation of (ii) in

the First Letter is seen, i.e. 'if we love one another, God dwells in us and his love has come to its full goal in us.' This means that when we become God-possessed, then God is declared by us to those who have never seen Him. I hope a reader of this paragraph will not brush over it, and that he will read it time and again until the equation is made. Simply put, the (i) of the Gospel and the (i) of the Letter equal each other, and the (ii) of the Gospel and the (ii) of the Letter are virtual equivalents. In the Gospel the Son reveals the Father, and in the Letter those loving one another reveal God. God was in the Son by nature of the case, and God is in His people through redemption and love.

This, then, is 'one of the highest statements of what a human can be'. If it is true, then it means that in this world of humanity there are those who can reveal God. It is they in whom God abides, and in whom He has brought His love to perfection, and the bringing of it to perfection is by their loving one another.

### **THE LOVE THESIS OF JOHN THE LETTER-WRITER**

We will call him 'John the Letter-Writer' because some scholars think the letter-writing John was not the John who wrote the Gospel. It does not much matter. We have the Johannine Letters which certainly have the apostolic ring. The three Letters appear to have come from the one hand, and it is the hand of a man in whom God's love had come to its full goal.

Whilst the Letters deserve a full and detailed setting out of John's thinking, yet in I John 4:7-21 the heart of the

matter is given to us. Paraphrased and partly commented upon, it goes something like this:

Beloved, let us love one another. That is what is required. However, we cannot of ourselves, and from ourselves, love with the kind of love God requires. Love comes only from God, but then it does come to us from God!

If we do not love one another, then we are not of God. We do not know God. God is love, and he who knows God is love, loves. He cannot do other than love.

The one who loves has been through the experience of being born of God. He has gone through the transformation of the new birth.

God shows the love that is His—and there is no other true love—by sending His Son into the world to give us life. Apart from him there is no true life, no eternal life. He came that we might have life.

How, then, did this life come to us? It came through his act of the propitiation of our sins. That is, the work which he did upon the Cross dealt with the guilt and judgement of our sins, destroyed the death of judgement which was coming to us, and set us free to live.

We had not loved God, but He loved us, so much so that He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. In fact, we had hated Him. Nevertheless He loved us.

The outcome of seeing His love in propitiation, and receiving the gifts of forgiveness, justification and new life, obligates us to love one another. We not only love Him because He first loved us, but we love all persons everywhere because He first loved us.

No man has ever seen God; if we love one another God actually dwells in us—each one personally, and in all of us corporately—and so His love is the love by which we love one another. It is His love which comes to its true goal in us.

We know the strange and wonderful truth that we live in Him—God—and He lives in us, because His Spirit has come to dwell in us and show us all these things. He—the Spirit—is the one who makes real and practical our indwelling God and God's indwelling us.

We know, and we tell others, that God has sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world. We of the apostolic band saw the Son on earth, but the Spirit has made this to be truth (reality) to us.

Those of us who have seen it this way confess it to all. We confess that Jesus is the Son of God. This is because God dwells in us, and we dwell in God. What else could happen other than our confession, for when one dwells in God and God in him, then confession must happen.

From what I have said it is clear that we have come to know this great truth, namely, God—in Christ—has loved us. 'God is Love' is what we know. Now we know this in the experience of living in God, and God living in us. We know it in the very action of loving Him and others. That is, we came to know His love and began to love, As we continue to love we continue to know the love which is His.

This love of God for us comes to its full goal in us, so that we may have no fears about the day of judgement. In regard to that day of judgement we are as guiltless as the Son himself! Amazing, yes, but it is true. In this world in which we now live we are as guiltless as is he.

You see, there is no fear in love. Fear has to do with the punishment which comes to men and women for the guilt of their sins on the day of judgement. If we fear we show that we do not understand God's love, and that it has not thus come to its full goal in us, for His love—perfected in us—casts out all fear of judgement and its punishment.

We love because He first loved us. The well-spring of all our actions is His love.

This being the case we must love all human beings, and if a man claim to love God, and yet hate his brother, then he can be nothing but a liar. His brother is his own flesh-and-blood—peer humanity—and seen with his own eyes. What a claim to make that he loves the Unseen God when he cannot love his brother! He cannot love the image of God—his brother—and yet claims to love God Himself!

We started by saying, 'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God.' How right and natural, then, to love one's brother. God has commanded this. This is how it has to be.

## LOVE AND FEAR

Let us break into John's 'thesis' at the point of his discussion of fear (verses 17-18). We have seen that love casts out fear. It is God's love that casts out fear. If we do not know God's love then fear will always be with us. John claims that fear in man has to do with the punishment of judgement. Does John mean that all fear has to do with the matter of judgement? I believe we can say that all *wrong* fear has to do with the matter of judgement. By wrong fear I mean the slavish dread—the heart-sickening dread—which is deep down in the human heart, and is the very essence of human guilt.

The writer of the Book of Proverbs often spoke of 'the fear of the Lord', and spoke of it as a wonderful thing: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.' This statement is expounded in Isaiah 66:2b: 'But this is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.'

There is no slavishness in such fear. The writer of Proverbs also said, 'The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life'; 'The fear of the Lord prolongs life'; 'The fear of the Lord has strong confidence', i.e. 'gives good grounds for confidence' (M. These Scriptures show us that this kind of fear-awe and reverence of the Lord-is healthy. 'Good grounds for confidence' is a thought echoed by John: 'In this is love... that we may have confidence for the day of judgement.' The writer of the Book of Hebrews wrote (2:14-15),

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he [Jesus] himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.

This passage tells us that men and women live in the fear of death all their lives and that the devil uses their fear of death to keep them in bondage. This is one of those biblical revelations which we never come to know from our own minds and observation. Thus, when the saints in Revelation 12:11 conquer the dragon—that ancient serpent the devil—then it is by the death of Christ, and by having no fear of death: 'for they loved not their lives even unto death'.

All of this calls us to look at fear in our own lives. It has been said that our fear of life is really our fear of death, for our fear of death is fear of judgement. We are afraid to die because we deserve death. Death, as we know it, is not normal for man. Death may be normal because of our mortality, but the death we die as sinners has within it the sting which is sin. Sadly enough the whole human race has deep fear of death. The shadow and the cloud of it is over all our actions. Without the sting of sin, death would be so natural, so sweet and rich a transition from the seen world into the glory of the unseen, yet most real, eternal world.

There are some interesting examples of fear in the New Testament. There is the fear the disciples experienced on the lake when a sudden storm arose and they thought they were about to perish. Fear gripped them, but when Jesus stood and calmed the elements of strong winds and high waves, a new kind of fear gripped them. The calm seemed even more awesome than the storm with its threat of death. When they reached the shore the demoniac of Gadara came rushing towards them—a fearsome sight. The disciples were gripped with fear. When Jesus; exorcized the horde of demons from the demoniac and allowed them to go into the swine who rushed into the lake and were drowned, then the local inhabitants returned to see the man in his right mind,

clothed and sitting at Jesus' feet. The sight of such peace brought dread to them and they pleaded with Christ to depart from their midst.

There is a beautiful example of true fear of the Lord. It was when Peter fell at Jesus' feet and cried, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' He had seen the power and holiness of Jesus in the event of the miraculous haul of fish. The revelation of God always brings that 'fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom'. As we have seen, it is the man who trembles at God's word who is in right relationship with God. This was the fear Isaiah knew in the temple when he saw the holiness of the Lord, and which David knew when his sin was inescapably rooted home to him. Such fear is also faith in the redemptive love of God.

The fear of death—of judgement—is most humiliating to the human spirit. Many grovel before death, because of the death that is already in them. They abide in death and death abides in them. They are outside God, and God is outside of them. Yet even this is only a foretaste of what the Scriptures call 'the second death', something too terrible for human flesh and blood to contemplate. Yet the glory of the gospel is that the whole fear of death is obliterated because 'he has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light'! What glorious words, and how wonderful to live without the fear of death.

### THE LOVE OF GOD COMING TO ITS FULL GOAL IN US

Having seen the triumph of love in the abolition of death and in the gift of life to mankind through the Cross and the

Resurrection, we are now drawn to look at the life of love. It seems the aged John never tired in his admonitions to love:

Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment which you had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new commandment, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining... He who loves his brother abides in the light, and in it there is no cause for stumbling.

For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another ... We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren... Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth.

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God.

Every one who loves the parent loves the child.

And now I beg you, lady, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning, that we love one another.

### The Perfection of Love

There are two occasions in John's First Letter when the verb 'to perfect' (*teleioo*) is used in a number of places, namely 2:5; 4:12; 4:17 and 4:18. The adjective 'perfect' is used in 4:18—'perfect love' (*teleia agape*). What, then, is 'the perfection of love'? Much has been written about it, but we need here to see it for ourselves.

The verb 'to perfect' (*teleioo*) is not so much concerned with flawlessness of impeccability as it is with bringing something—or someone—to fullness, maturity and completion. Thus in 2:5—'Whoever keeps his [God's] word, in him truly love for God is perfected' (RSV). Some translations

have 'the love of God is perfected', i.e. God's love has come to its full goal in the obedient person. The use of the genitive (of, for: *tou*) can be subjective or objective, i.e. It is God's love for us or our love for God. The same use can be seen in 2:15—either 'love for the Father' or the 'love of the Father'. Doubtless love for God and God's love are in the one bundle, but it seems better to think of it as God's love having its full way (and sway) in us.

In 4:12, 'If we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us' is quite clear. His love comes to full expression in us, In 4:17, 'In this is love perfected with us' must surely mean that we see the fullness of God's love, the love which initiated propitiation, is so full in us that we know there is no punishment to face. Thus the statement makes sense—'perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love.' If we still fear, then the comprehension of God's complete and redeeming love has not yet reached us. Perfect love is God's, not ours, yet we are expected to love out of the complete love of God.

### Perfect Love in Action

John makes it clear that the working of God's love in us is to do with obedience:

And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says, 'I know him' but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God [or, God's love] is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him; he who says he abides in him ought to walk the same way in which he [Jesus] walked (2:3-6).

Jesus had said, 'If you love me you will keep my commandments.'

Obedience is the outworking of love which springs from God first loving us. Knowing God is knowing that He is love (4:7-8), and the obedience of love follows the knowing. Jesus' command to love is one of the commands we follow. Abiding in God is known by God's love coming to its full goal in us, i.e. by obedience to His commands and by loving the brethren.

When, then, we come to 4:12, we are struck by this principle: 'God *actually lives in us*; His love comes to its full expression and goal in us.' I have italicized the first part of the statement lest we read it without comprehending its staggering nature, lest we read it with nonchalance—matter almost of blasphemy! We have to realize that God living in us is the height of all human experience. We ask, 'How could love not come to its full goal in us if God lives in us?' Love must—in one sense—force us to love, and to love the unlovely at that! Thus in saying, 'God is love and he that abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him,' John is saying something so rich and so high in reality and experience that it is mind-boggling. The thrust of John's thesis is, 'Let flow the floodtide of love, since God is in us and we in Him.' To dam this up would not only do damage in human relationships but bring catastrophe to the one who does the damming. It has been observed that the reason the Dead Sea is dead is because everything flows into it, but nothing out of it. Likewise the Sea of Galilee is fresh and life-giving and fertile because what comes in also flows out.

The perfecting of God's love in us *is known only in the loving!*  
Thus Robert Southwell's word,

Not where I breathe,  
But where I love, I live.

This, then, is wholly practical—this loving. John’s exposition on love alone is enough material for the practicality of love. At this point we need to emphasize that we cannot *claim* to know the love of God if we do not love. Then we cannot *livingly* know that love if we do not live it. These are not words intended to be negative or judgemental, for the *very loving* is our life. The *very loving* is what being human is all about.

### CONCLUSION

Let us go back to the verse which first gripped us, the one of I John 4:12:

No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

Now let us join it with John 1: 18:

No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.

What result do we get? This, that in John 1: 18 the Son shows the Father, and in I John 4:12 the people of God show the Father, when (i) we love one another, because (ii) the Father dwells in us and we dwell in Him, and (iii) God’s love has come to its full goal in us because of (i) and (ii). This is an astounding conclusion. It teaches us that when we love others then God is manifested. We should see that it is God’s love flowing *through us*, not some love of ours flowing *from us*.

Perhaps the most wonderful thing of all is that we really know this love when we love. Whatever we may know concerning God’s love, it is never fully real to us until we

*love. This is* abiding In God and God abiding in us. This is abiding in love, and *love* abiding in us.

***Love Casts Out Fear***

They say that in the dead of night  
There is an hour that's calm, that's quiet.  
Men's spirits from them—almost fled—  
Are poised as though in jeopardy.  
It seems the strength is gone,  
And life has drained  
As though the ocean on its verge  
Is almost stilled. They say  
This is the time when hearts will fail  
And life depart.

Many a time this hour comes  
When I awake from death—it seems—  
Full wond'ring if the life remains  
Or I am gone with it  
To shades beyond my ken,  
To silent nothingness. I seem  
Passive beyond awakening—  
The tide long gone—never to return.

It's in those times I find a calm  
That's passionless and free.  
I have no wild or strong desire  
To find my liberty in strength  
And conquer that which man has not  
In all his rich millenniums.  
When sun is strong, and day is bright,  
And even when the day is night  
My spirit, restless, strives to gain  
More inches on our human plain  
Till miles are won—horizons new  
Break into our widest human view.  
That is my normal mind.

Not so when dawn is not in sight,  
Not when it is the hour of night  
When spirit's drained, ambition's dead,  
And human thinking's almost fled  
Beyond our power's recall.  
Is this the hour of God,  
Or hour of death?  
Presage of life to come,  
Or life to flee? I do not know;  
I only know that I  
Am gladly helpless, fully weak,  
Not having my autonomy  
Habitual as in hours of day  
That surge with power and purpose.

I come slow-witted knowing nought  
As in the brilliant times, yet think  
I never knew such peace, such quiet calm,

Such passionless poise,  
Such natural balm  
To heal the inner wounds that throb  
When memory returns. This memory  
Is filled with beauty, filled with truth,  
With seeing what I never saw.  
In quiet mind I see anew  
The things that were, that are,  
That now are as they were,  
Gentle and lovely, kind and strong,  
Nought raucous, nought unlovely song  
Screeched in the modern way of pride  
And restless surging of the wayless heart.

I think I see within these passionless hours  
The love of God so gentle, yet so strong,  
That all my fear is thrust beyond my sight  
As though it never were.  
There mem'ry's pain is joy  
For God is present here  
Within this sea of thought  
That barely laps His shore  
In suppliant peace and still serenity.  
His Presence brings past to be  
A joyful present, and the present too  
Is one with past and future things.  
His touch is one that unifies  
Bewildering patchwork of events and times  
And makes it all one entity.

Tonight my spirit rests in me  
As sharing in His own tranquillity

That cost Him once a Cross—  
An entry into man's domain  
With all its restless sin and pain  
And senseless cruelty.  
I love this hour when I, so weak,  
Can only see and feel in full  
His power of quiet love.  
Ambition's fled, and pride is low  
And I am with the God I know  
Whose Name is Love. I know  
His Name is Love. I know,  
He gives that love when we—  
Faced with our own mortality,  
Are glad to live in Him.

## *Reviving the Humble*

‘his spirit returned and he revived’; and in Nehemiah 4:2, where Nehemiah was to ‘revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that’. A corpse was revived when it was hurriedly thrown into Elisha’s grave and touched his bones.

For Israel to be revived was for the nation to repent of its sin and return to God. Virtually dead in its relationship to God, God would touch it with His enlivening steadfast love and it would become His nation again, fresh with worship and life.

\* \* \*

One of the rich passages speaking of God’s steadfast love, and His intention to revive his sinful people is Isaiah 57:14-21:

The psalmist cried out of the midst of misery,

Wilt thou not revive us again,  
that thy people may rejoice in thee?

God’s answer lies in the same Psalm—85—in verses 10-11:

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;  
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.  
Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,  
and righteousness will look down from the sky.

What do we mean by the verb ‘to revive’? Generally speaking in the Old Testament it means ‘to live’, i.e. ‘to live again’, ‘to make or keep alive’, and has the present sense of revive, i.e. ‘to freshen’, ‘to enliven’. Revival is that action of God whereby He brings again to life that which has become dead, and keeps it in the state of life. Examples of this are in Genesis 45:27, where Jacob’s spirit revived when he heard the news that his son Joseph was still alive; in Judges 15: 18-19, when Samson, exhausted from slaying one thousand Philistines, was dying of thirst, but as water came to him

And it shall be said,  
‘Build up, build up, prepare the way,  
remove every obstruction from my people’s way.’  
For thus says the high and lofty One  
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:  
‘I dwell in the high and holy place,  
and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit,  
to revive the spirit of the humble,  
and to revive the heart of the contrite.  
For I will not contend for ever,  
nor will I always be angry;  
for from me proceeds the spirit,  
and I have made the breath of life.  
Because of the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry,  
I smote him, I hid my face and was angry;  
but he went on backsliding in the way of his own heart.  
I have seen his ways, but I will heal him;  
I will lead him and requite him with comfort,  
creating for his mourners the fruit of the lips.  
Peace, peace, to the far and to the near, says the Lord;

and I will heal him.  
But the wicked are like the tossing sea;  
for it cannot rest,  
and its waters toss up mire and dirt.  
There is no peace, says my God,  
for the wicked.'

This passage commences with a statement which reminds us of Isaiah 40:1-5, where the prophet tells Israel that 'her warfare is ended' and 'her iniquity is pardoned'. Then a voice cries for the great road to be built straight, the levels of the road to be easy for travel, for One is coming Who will travel to them. So here in Isaiah 57:14 is the injunction:

'Build up, build up, prepare the way,  
remove every obstruction from my people's way.'

This means that God is to come directly to His people and do something. They must build a highway for His coming. What, then, is He going to do but revive them? God—their God—takes the initiative—not them! God purposes to revive them: they do not ask for it. The next question is 'Why is He going to revive them?' and the answer must be that they are His covenant people. How is He going to revive them? By His loving, healing presence in their midst:

For thus says the high and lofty One  
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:  
'I dwell in the high and holy place,  
and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit,  
to revive the spirit of the humble,  
and to revive the heart of the contrite.'

The first thing God does is reveal Himself by His word. He tells them, 'I am the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy.' They have been worshipping idols, as we read in previous passages of this chapter.

Indeed their idolatry has been no less than evil. He had told them (57: 10), 'You were wearied 'with the length of your way, but you did not say, "It is hopeless"; you found new life for your strength, and so you were not faint.' Now He is contrasting Himself with the empty and evil idols. He is the high and lofty One. In Himself He is exalted above all things. Beside Him the gods and idols diminish to nothing. They are seen as insignificant, insubstantial, futile and piffling. They are at the lowest level. He is 'the eternally dwelling one'. It is in Him to dwell for ever. His place is not *in* eternity—as though eternity were His location—but He is eternity itself. If we can speak of His place, then it is 'the high and holy place'. Indeed He is pure habitation. His name is *qadosh*, the Holy One separated from all that is unclean and impure. He is purity Himself.

'Whose name is Holy' has a history in Israel. First of all there is the Name, i.e. the *I Am*, the *I AM WHOMI AM*. This was the name Israel began to call on in the days of Seth—Yahweh—, and was the name by which Israel lived. Then the term 'whose name is Holy' came to be something recognized amongst the covenant-people. In Psalm 33 it is written,

Our soul waits for the Lord;  
he is our help and shield.  
Yea, our heart is glad in him,  
because *we trust in his holy name*.  
Let thy steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us,  
even as we hope in thee.

Again there is the well-loved Psalm 103, which opens with  
*Bless the Lord, O my soul;  
and all that is within me, bless his holy name!*

Psalm 145 closes with the beautiful benediction,

My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord,  
and let all flesh *bless his holy name* for ever and ever.

When Israel hears these words of God's loftiness, His holy name, and His 'dwelling for ever', then their eyes will open widely to His true character and nature, and there will be dread and fear and true trembling. There will be an unmasking of the evil of these degrading idols. Later in Isaiah, God says, 'This is the man to whom I will look, he that... trembles at my word.'

They have not trembled at His word, but have persisted in their idols. That is why it is amazing to hear God say, 'I dwell also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit.' Is He saying that there are such, or is He saying He is making some persons to be this way? It would seem to be the latter. He is doing something which will bring them to humility and contrition of heart. When He has brought them to this state, then He will revive them. How, then, does He bring them to this condition?

The truth is He has been dealing with them all the time to change their hearts from worshipping the idols. They are His covenant-people, and for that reason He has been dealing with them. He says,

I will not contend for ever,  
nor will I always be angry;  
for from me proceeds the spirit,  
and I have made the breath of life.  
Because of the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry,  
I smote him, I hid my face and was angry;  
but he went on backsliding in the way of his own heart.

He means, 'I have been angry with this one "because of

the iniquity of his covetousness., 'He adds, 'I smote him.' This ought to have brought the idolater to his senses, but it did not. He hid His face from him. This ought to have brought dread and anguish to the heart of the idolater, but it did not. 'I was angry' must mean that God continually revealed His wrath upon the defaulter. This ought to have brought the person to brokenness and repentance, but it did not. Indeed this one 'went on backsliding in the way of his own heart'.

We are faced with somewhat of a dilemma. God punishes in order to break the spirit of the sinful idolater, but it makes no difference. Does it, then, harden the heart of the sinner? We do not know. What we do know is that God says,

I will not contend for ever,  
nor will I always be angry;  
for from me proceeds the spirit,  
and I have made the breath of life.

By this we are led to the very wonderful understanding that God will only punish to a certain point, then He will release the person from the punishment, and *it is the release which will bring that person to humility, brokenness and contrition*. That God is not angry for ever is echoed in many places. The first is the great covenant-revelation of Exodus 34:6-7, 'The Lord, the Lord... merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love'. Psalm 103:8-10 says,

The Lord is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
He will not always chide,  
nor will he keep his anger for ever.  
He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor requite us according to our iniquities.

Again, Psalm 78:37-39 speaks of the rebellion of Israel, and His compassion upon them:

Their heart was not steadfast toward him;  
they were not true to his covenant.  
Yet he, being compassionate,  
forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them;  
he restrained his anger often,  
and did not stir up all his wrath.  
He remembered that they were but flesh,  
a wind that passes and comes not again.

These psalms remind us of God's conversation with Israel in Isaiah 54:7-10:

For a brief moment I forsook you,  
but with great compassion I will gather you.  
*In overflowing* wrath for a moment  
I hid my face from you,  
but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,  
says the Lord, your Redeemer...  
For the mountains may depart  
and the hills be removed,  
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,  
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,  
says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

What amazes us is that the Lord Who has been angry with Israel and has smitten it, should not go on smiting when Israel goes on 'backsliding in the way of his own heart'. Is it—as in Isaiah 40:1-2—that she has been punished enough?

Comfort, comfort my people,  
says your God.  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her

that her warfare is **ended**,  
that her iniquity is pardoned,  
that she has received from the Lord's hand  
double for all her sins.

It would seem that this was the case, though she was still in her backsliding, but God has His reason for relinquishing His chastisement, for He says (57:16),

I will not contend for ever,  
nor will I always be angry;  
for from me proceeds the spirit,  
and I have made the breath of life.

He means that if He contends for ever, then—in the words of George Adam Smith—their spirit before Me would fail, and the souls I Myself have made.\* Keil and Delitzsch, in their commentary on Isaiah, translate, 'I am not angry for ever, for the spirit would pine away before me, and the souls of men which I have created.' The *New International Version* has, 'the spirit of man would grow faint before me—the breath of man that I have created'.

Now it is evident that this was what was happening with Israel. It was growing faint in spirit, and so God gave it this beautiful promise:

I dwell in the high and holy place,  
and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit,  
to revive the spirit of the humble,  
and to revive the heart of the contrite (57:15).

What, then, did the promise mean? It meant that God would come and dwell with the person who—through the mercy and grace of God—had come to repentance. This person would be one who was brought to the end of his

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\* *The Book of Isaiah*, ad. Inc, 2 vols, Harper and Brothers, n.d.

tether, faint from his sin and continuous rebellion and the appropriate chastisement of God. This one would have contrition-sorrow for his sin. He would be in the same situation as was David when he cried,

*The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou will not despise.*

David had been brought down to the depths of anguish when he realized the enormity of his own sin. If, then, we seek God's revival of our hearts and of His people, it will come when we accept His judgements as just, and believe in His long-suffering and His steadfast love. The incredible, glorious thing is that the Holy One comes to these poor human hearts and makes His dwelling in them. It may well be that Isaiah was speaking of all Israel, and was saying that the Lord had long ago taken up His dwelling in Mount Zion, above the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant, overshadowed by the glorious cherubim—that He was dwelling amongst His people. Even so, when God dwelt in the temple of the covenant, He also dwelt in the temple of every heart-of those who were 'sons of the covenant'.

Likewise in the New Testament the Father dwells in the new temple, the church. Paul asked the Corinthians, 'Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?' (I Cor. 3:16). They were 'a holy temple in the Lord', and they were 'built into it for a *dwelling* place of God in the Spirit' (Eph. 2:21-22). That there is a personal indwelling of God, Paul also made clear to the Corinthian believers when he asked, 'Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?' (I Cor. 6:19).

'Faintness of spirit' is across our world, today. It is obviously from our sin—as the human race—but it is also from 'the wrath of God which is being revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress [hold down] the truth in [acts of] unrighteousness'. The same 'faintness' is across much of the church. Just as the world outside the covenant-people is given to the elements of the apocalyptic 'dragon', 'beasts' and 'Babylon the mother of harlots', so inside the covenant-people—the church there is also a faintness. The Scriptures are largely discounted by some. Others are caught in various idolatries, and yet others are seeking by human intelligence to stimulate the churches. Methods for reviving the church are many, either by trying to go back to periods of church history when certain doctrines seemed to reform and renew the church of the day, or trying to go forward by using the insights of psychology and sociology as they—in their turn—are generally used to keep humanity in sensibility of purpose and action.

What is apparent in the passage of Isaiah 57:14-21 is that it is God Who moves to effect revival. As we have seen, He does this by revealing Himself as the True, High and Holy One, by relinquishing His judgements and displaying His effective grace, and by His personal indwelling of those who respond to His call to make a straight highway for Him—a direct road into their hearts. Of the person who receives His acts of grace and love, God says,

*I have seen his ways, but I will heal him;  
I will lead him and requite him with comfort,  
creating for his mourners the fruit of the lips.  
Peace, peace to the far and to the near, says the Lord;  
and I will heal him.*

This surely means that that fainting one has been renewed in life. He is healed of his wounds that come from rebellion and its judgements. He has been walking a wrong path which is no true path, but now he is restored to the way of God and guided. Security returns to him. So he is comforted, encouraged to live afresh. Those about him who have mourned for his condition, and who, perhaps, themselves have been in the same suffering, now see the hand of God evidently upon him, and they cease their mourning and turn to praise. The beautiful statement of 'Peace, peace, to the far and the near. I will heal them' is spoken by God, and reminds us of Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:17, 'He [Christ] came and preached peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near.' This was the peace wrought by the blood of the Cross, i.e. reconciliation between God and man. Jeremiah often spoke of people crying 'Peace! Peace!' where there was no peace, God's healing balm would truly heal the wounds of His stricken people.

At the same time, there are the deliberately unrepentant ones. Of them-and to them-He speaks,

*But the wicked are like the tossing sea;  
for it cannot rest,  
and its waters toss up mire and dirt.  
There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.*

We see, then, as in Exodus 34:6-7, that whilst God forgives the 'iniquity and transgression and sin' of His people, He 'will by no means clear the guilty', i.e. the guilty who persist in their sin and will not repent. Revival comes only to those who recognize God's mercy and grace, and advert to it. If we look at the lot of the impenitent, it is a sad one, but in some sense a natural one. All that has ever gone into the mind and memory has been acts of iniquity and moral

pollution. Restlessness is the lot of the wicked. They are ever driven on, and from time to time 'the mire and dirt' of past experiences dredges up under the storms of life, and is cast upon the shores of the wicked person. We are reminded of Jude's terrible words, 'wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame' (v. 13). There is no known method that man has devised which can bring perpetual peace to the sinner. His sin is always finding him out.

### ISRAEL PLEADS FOR REVIVAL

There were times in Israel when there were those who cried to God for revival. They recognized the need of the land. They recognized the signs of God's wrath and His chastisement, but they also knew the nature of God as their Covenant-Father, and so they sought His face and prayed to Him.

Psalm 85 is an excellent statement of Israel before God, its prayer for revival, and its assurance that He would renew His people:

*Lord, thou wast favourable to thy land;  
thou didst restore the fortunes of Jacob.  
Thou didst forgive the iniquity of thy people;  
thou didst pardon all their sin.  
Thou didst withdraw all thy wrath;  
thou didst turn from thy hot anger.*

*Restore us again, O God of our salvation,  
and put away thy indignation toward us'.  
Wilt thou be angry with us for ever?  
Wilt thou prolong thy anger to all generations?  
Wilt thou not revive us again,  
that thy people may rejoice in thee?  
Show us thy steadfast love, O Lord,*

and grant us thy salvation.

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,  
for he will speak peace to his people,  
to his saints, to those who turn to him in their hearts.  
Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,  
that glory may dwell in our land.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet,  
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.  
Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,  
and righteousness will look down from the sky.  
Yea, the Lord will give what is good,  
and our land will yield its increase.  
Righteousness will go before him,  
and make his footsteps a way.

This psalm beautifully fits the pattern of what we have seen in Isaiah 57:14-21. In the first stanza the psalmist acknowledges the goodness of God toward Israel, for He had restored the fortunes of Israel, had seen to it that the people were pardoned for their waywardness, and had turned back His 'hot anger'. In the second stanza he really acknowledges the fact that God has been justified in being angry with the nation but pleads for God to cease from His wrath so *that they will be revived*. Only then will the people rejoice in their God—the God of their salvation.

In the third stanza he wishes to be quiet and hear what God is saying to him, being assured that 'he will speak peace to the people'. Stanza four is rich in its anticipation that all the loving character of the Covenant-God will restore Israel from its fallen condition.

In this psalm, the character of God, as He had promised in His revelation to Moses that it would always be (Exod. 34:6-7), is certainly understood. In fact the psalmist *insists* that God be as He promised He would be. Also one can hear

the principle In the whole psalm of what God had told Solomon would be the case with Himself and His dwelling place—the temple which had just been built:

Then the Lord appeared to Solomon in the night, and said to him: I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sins and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there for ever; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time' (11 Chron. 7:12-16).

Notice the elements we have seen in Isaiah 57:14-21 and Psalm 85. (i) there is the mention of 'my name', that is, 'his holy name'; (ii) there is the mention of humbling oneself—it is the humble one who is revived; (iii) there is the mention of the anger which brings drought, plague and famine to Israel. Repentance, turning to God and praying are the elements which will move God to revive His people and their land.

\* \* \*

Further to this is the classic passage on revival which we find in the prophecy of Habakkuk. God told the prophet that He would send the Chaldeans—'a bitter and hasty nation'—to ravage the land of Israel. The prophet then prayed to God for the people. He accepted the fact—though he dreaded it—that Israel must suffer God's anger for its sins, and what sins they had been! He recognizes that the suffering will be terrible, but He realizes God will also judge

the very people who are the instrument of His anger: the Chaldeans. Look, then, at his prayer for Israel (3:2):

0 Lord, I have heard the report of thee,  
and thy work, 0 Lord, do I fear.  
In the midst of the years renew [revive] it;  
in the midst of the years make it known;  
in wrath remember mercy.

He was really saying that judgement must come, but would God please do what He had once done in relation to the oppression of the Egyptians, i.e. do a new work, and liberate His oppressed people—reviving firstly through purifying judgement and then through His marvellous mercy.

\* \* \*

Again, in Hosea 5:13 to 6:2 there is another instance of this judgement-revival operation of God. Ephraim and Judah are addressed as the whole people of God who have sinned. Their sin has been added to by their asking help of a foreign power. God will carry out His anger until they repent and turn to Him. Then He will revive them.

When Ephraim saw his sickness,  
and Judah his wound,  
then Ephraim went to Assyria,  
and sent to the great king.  
But he is not able to cure you  
or heal your wound.  
For I will be like a lion to Ephraim,  
and like a young lion to the house of Judah.  
I, even I, will rend and go away,  
I will carry off, and none shall rescue.

I will return again to my place,  
until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face,

and in their distress they seek me, saying,  
'Come, let us return to the Lord;  
for he has torn, that he may heal us;  
he has stricken, and he will bind us up.  
After two days he will revive us;  
on the third day he will raise us up,  
that we may live before him.'

The prophet then urges them to believe God for this revival and pursue Him in His mercy and grace.

'Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord;  
his going forth is as sure as the dawn;  
he will come to us as the showers,  
as the spring rains that water the earth.'

In this remarkable passage we see what we have seen before—that when Israel sins and receives God's anger there is an unalterable law which comes into operation, i.e. when the nation repents it is revived. This principle is as immutable as the law of dawns and the annual spring rains! Revival will come!

\* \* \*

All that we have set out above is found expressed in great detail in Nehemiah chapter 9 and in Daniel chapter 9. In the first passage Ezra stood before God and confessed the wonder of God's grace in choosing Abraham, in liberating Israel from Egypt, and bringing the people to the promised land. Ezra then confessed the sins of the fathers of Israel, stating that God *had* to abandon them to the hands of their enemies. He acknowledged,

'Many years thou didst bear with them, and didst warn them by thy Spirit, through thy prophets; yet they would not give ear... Never

theless in thy great mercies thou didst not make an end of them or forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God.'

Ezra further pleaded,

'Now therefore, our God, the great and mighty and terrible God, who keepest covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to thee that has come upon us. . .'

He was asking God to make an end to His anger upon the nation, and liberate them from the oppression which was still with them, even as returned exiles. The basis for his plea was the covenant steadfast love of God.

Daniel's ninth chapter makes an even more extended statement. He opened his address to God by saying,

'O Lord, the great and terrible God, who keepest covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from thy commandments and ordinances; we have not listened to thy servants the prophets, who spoke in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.'

In the midst of his address he said,

'To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness; because we have rebelled against him, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.'

The chapter then proceeds to acknowledge the righteousness of God in judging and punishing Israel, but Daniel believed his intercession should be heard by God, and answered in accordance with God's covenant nature, and the promise of II Chronicles 7:14:

'Now, therefore, O our God, hearken to the prayer of thy servant and to his supplications, and for thy own sake, O Lord, cause thy face to

shine upon thy sanctuary, which is desolate. O my God, incline thy ear and hear; open thy eyes and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name; for we do not present our supplications before thee on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of thy great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, give heed and act; delay not, for thy own sake, O my God, because thy city and thy people are called by thy name.'

The prayer was heard, for Gabriel the archangel came to give Daniel the answer to his prayer. The answer was detailed. Many things would have to happen before the prophet's prayer could be answered in full, yet its answer would be a process of history, an action of God amongst the nations, from which He was not absent, but present as 'the living God'.

\* \* \*

From all these Scriptures we see the solution to our present situation in the world. God has commanded all men everywhere to repent. The obligation is upon all men to come to God in repentance. God's wrath is presently being revealed upon all who persist in their sin and rebellion. The human race will only be brought to life when it acknowledges Messiah and seeks God's forgiveness from sins through the Cross of His Son, The Spirit of God has come to bring the Gospel of God to the nations, and to each person in the world.

Even so, it is the church which feels most keenly the need for revival. The church, too, knows the same principles in the New Covenant as Israel knew in the former covenant. If the church follows modern idolatry, then God's anger will be upon it. If the time is ripe for judgement, then it will begin in the house of God. If in that household the high and

## *The Stranger in the Cemetery*

lofty nature of God is acknowledged, and if men and women become humbled and contrite, then He will visit them to 'revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite'.

The way of repentance and self-humbling is known to us. God is waiting to revive us. If prior to that reviving we need the purifying judgement, then let it be. Let our prayer be,

O Lord, I have heard the report of thee,  
and thy work, O Lord, do I fear.

In the midst of the years renew [revive] it;  
in the midst of the years make it known;

and let us also pray,

Come, let us return to the Lord;  
for he has torn, that he may heal us;  
he has stricken, and he will bind us up.

After two days he will revive us;  
on the third day he will raise us up,  
that we may live before him.

Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord;  
his going forth is as sure as the dawn;  
he will come to us as the showers,  
as the spring rains that water the earth.

Yes, with Israel let us pray,

Restore us again, O God of our salvation,  
and put away thy indignation toward us!  
Wilt thou be angry with us for ever?  
Wilt thou prolong thy anger to all generations?  
*Wilt thou not revive us again,*  
that thy people may rejoice in thee?  
Show us thy steadfast love, O Lord,  
and grant us thy salvation.

Having seen the principles by which God revives His people we can come before Him accordingly. The New

## *Reviving the Humble*

Testament tells us that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit come to dwell in us. God dwells with the one who is humble and contrite to revive that one. 'He who loves,' John tells us, 'abides in God, and God in Him.' As Paul put it, 'For me to live is Christ!' This is, of course, true revival. The ears and the heart of the Lord are in His true temple, the living church.

\* \* \*

What do we say in conclusion? Simply this: that Scripture teaches us that God always works consistently with His own nature. Naturally, it is not easy for our minds to grasp the whole of His Being. We tend to think of Him in regard to His different works as Creator, Father, King, Redeemer and Restorer of all things. We do not see His character as One. Hence, when we do a study as we have just done, regarding the way He works in revival, we tend to make it to be one of His many modes of operating. We also think that whilst He worked with Israel this way, and has even worked with the church this way, that His principle of judgement, release of judgement followed by an action of great grace and love, is a 'one-off or a 'one-on' thing. No, for He worked time and again on this principle with Israel; works time and again with His church and Christian nations in the same way, and works with each of His children in the same way.

The value of our conclusion will be that we see that He constantly works this way in the life of each believer. We are constantly tempted to idolatry, to drifting from Him, to acts which are wholly inconsistent with our union with Him. So He contends with us, is angry, smites us, chastises

us, and then ceases chiding, and gives us His grace and love, so that we become humble and contrite and seek His reviving—the reviving which comes from His indwelling our hearts. If we see this is what happens, then it may help us to understand the storms which often assault us in our lives. It may also help to keep us away from things harmful, and establish us in the things of true life. We learn to refuse things that bring death, and cling to the things which are of life.

*The Limit*

To be human-to be me,  
To be what it is to live,  
To be warm and palpable, thinking,  
And to know the inner tides  
Moving, surging, urging  
And receding—  
This is to sense the illimitable,  
To reach out beyond all parameters  
And be whole beyond even  
Human wholeness.

These are the thoughts that often come.  
They come when the spirit wakes  
In the watches of the night,  
And suddenly is alive; is alert  
With boundless imaginations,  
Sensitive discernings,  
And wholesome understandings  
Of what it is to be man, and what  
The nature is of God Himself  
And His vast and rich creation.

*The Stranger in the Cemetery*

Such thoughts tell us  
That we were made for immortality,  
Made to be as gods  
Under the Eternal God;  
Made to be fountains of life  
From the Over-Fountain;  
Made to be reflectors of light  
From the Ever-Glory  
Of the Eternal Light,  
The Light which lightens every man  
And overcomes the darkness  
That would ever threaten  
His given immortality.

Sometimes when the understanding comes,  
Sometimes when the thinking breaks forth  
In scintillating brilliance,  
And the mind and heart  
Are dazzled by the endless possibilities,  
A cold fear is sent—a sentinel stab  
Of protective warning  
From the Most High, the protective One  
Who re-establishes the creaturely,  
The filial and subject nature  
Of us, the children of the Kingdom.

How high and heady be our thoughts  
Who have the promise of eternal life,  
The beauties and the glories  
Of coming immortality. We imagine  
That this is from ourselves—of us—  
So thus the hubris grows,

*The Limit*

The pride expands,  
The heady thinking mounts  
To hateful arrogance.  
It's then the stab of fear  
Is sent to make us sane. Our creatureness  
Stares us so grimly in the face  
And warns against Our lethal idiocy.

To be 'as Him' is not our part,  
Though 'like Him' is the gift He gives.  
We are not clones, small gods of God,  
To be as God Himself. The drift  
To be immortal of ourselves—  
No less than hideous—  
Is what destroys us full  
And sets us on the path of death  
Self-cut from life—the chip that  
Tosses on the ocean's breast  
And drifts to death itself.

He comes in stern rebuke,  
Withdraws the pleasures of His love,  
The steady joys, the 'whelming peace,  
The boundless sights  
And intimations of Himself.  
Drear grows the sky,  
Sad grows the land,  
And in the night the terror comes.  
Forgiveness is as not,  
And purity is darkly blurred,  
And Cross has faded,

Tomb's as dark  
As if he'd not arisen.

The limit comes into the mind,  
The fear into the heart,  
The body numbed  
The spirit limp,  
Are all His gift.  
The heart cries out for peace,  
Is suppliant for joy,  
Desires the gift of fear,  
Weeps passionately for love,  
And sets the highest gift afresh—  
Astral forgiveness,  
The pledge of holy love,  
The wisdom and the righteousness.

Thank Him He sets His limits on our heart,  
Returns us to our creatureness,  
And freshens us in filial joy.  
Our hearts leap up to Him anew,  
Who lately all too heady were  
In fancied human deity.  
Rebuked, the spirit turns  
To peaceful union with His life  
And nestles in His saving grace,  
And rests within His love.

## *Regression*

He said to her, as they lay in their long, wide bed, 'Why is it that I keep pushing back to my childhood, or rather, Just back to the past, generally?'

'I suppose it is part of what they call old age,' she answered, 'but then you are not really old. We are not really old.'

He heard her, and it pleased him, but he seemed to take no notice. 'No,' he said, 'I really want to know why it is that I keep going back to the past.'

She knew that if she answered—if she took on the subject—that it would be endless talk. He was like a terrier after a rat. His mind darted here and there, though purposively. She was rather afraid he would not be put off. He sniffed ideas as the terrier would the rat.

She took the step boldly. 'We always try to get back to where we were secure; where we thought we were secure.'

He understood that. 'Yes! Yes!' he said, with a little excitement, 'to where we were secure.' A further thought struck him. 'Are we ever secure?' He had been lying there, wondering why he could not sleep. Ideas kept turning over in his

mind, like waves that surge, go forward, and then roll back on themselves.

He repeated it. 'Are we ever secure?' He wondered about that.

She knew he would not sleep, and she was sorry for him, but she loved her sleep, and wanted to get back to it. He rarely awakened her—not, anyway, deliberately. Now his mind was up and away, thinking, thinking, thinking.

He liked the thought about security. He had always lived life pretty much to the full—his 'full'—and she admitted he hadn't done too badly, what with his writing and his lecturing, and his being able to relate very well to almost anyone, and being absolutely without compromise. She knew him to be a person of integrity.

Integrity? Why, he would never let one thought deceive another. If it appeared to be so, he would discipline that thought. He would work until things became a harmony in his mind. Everything had to be reconciled—everything! He was a terror for truth. A terror for probity. Even now he would not let this idea be an idea which floated and just evoked idea after idea. He had to be sure it was genuine and sane.

She was patient and kind. 'When we are young there is some kind of security,' she said. 'We think everything is reasonably in order. Parents assure us of that. They have a system. It is a system of morality, of living. We never question it. We never suspect it might not be valid. And so we feel secure.' She paused, knowing the opening of the theme would lead on to interminable discussion.

'And—?' He pressed her.

'And,' she said, 'we find out later that it is not all that secure. Nothing is absolutely stable. We find deceit in our

parents, and human foibles, and some anger. So we see them as somewhat insecure, and we question their system.'

'Oh!' he said, as though he had seen it suddenly. He had a thought of his own. 'Yet we still think we had security, and since everything cannot be total insecurity, we keep on thinking we are living in security, even if it is only of a relative kind.'

She was glad that they had gotten this far so quickly. 'Yes,' she said. 'Then we keep trying out other systems of security.'

He was enjoying the discussion. 'I see,' he said. 'So we find security in what kind of things?'

She said, 'In succeeding in what we do. In having many friends who support us. In having ideas which make us comfortable. So we do the rounds—sport, pleasure, sex, money, power, position, achievement, and the like.'

He nodded. As always he thought her clever. Brilliant, really. He was, underneath, humble in her presence, grateful for her intelligence and discernment. He knew, even as they talked, that she was much of his security. She had a never-ending understanding of things. In his own way he did also, but he could never make dependable leaps as she did. He had to build as he went, idea upon idea. He built in a neat and tidy fashion, but he built for the thing to endure. Even now he was building.

'So many things are evocative,' he said. 'You smell something and a garden floods into you—from the past. You hear music and you are there again—where you were. You hear someone say something, and it all comes back—conversations unconsciously stored away. People and expressions and actions. They come like a darling flood.'

She caught a bit of his happiness. She knew evocation

very well. 'Memory is for assisting us,' she said, making it sound like an aphorism, but not intending it to be so.

'Memory is incredible,' he said, supporting her, urging her to say more.

'Memory is a great data bank,' she said. 'It is a repository, but not one in which dust settles and covers it. Memory is most dynamic.'

He liked it more and more. He lay there, grateful that their lot had long ago been cast together. Before time, probably. He did not believe in fate. He believed in destiny. He was glad they had married, even though at the time it had seemed fairly ordinary. No flashing lights, really. No bombs going off in the dark. No heavy shelling. It had been like this for years, but under it all he had known it to be right. That part of memory was as good-if not better-than the former part; the part where he was a child with his family, growing up, learning, and having dreams for the future.

They lay there for a time, quietly grateful that they were not alone like so many million others were alone. They might not always agree, but they never cheated each other with their ideas or their emotions. So they knew something very stable. Now, as they lay there, they knew that—come what may—they could share their life, their experiences, their ideas. Even so, they knew that every person has a terminus. If humans are fortunate the terminus does not eventuate before death, but only at death. Even then...

'I keep going on sentimental journeys,' he said. 'You know that only too well, Emily. Sometimes I beg a week or two away from you, and I go back to where I was, and it is terrific. Really terrific. I even walk where I was as a boy, and stand still, looking at old places. Even if they have changed—and mostly they have—I recreate them. I bring them back

to what they are; that is, what they were now becomes what they are. Changes don't worry me., I know they can't really change what was—my being in all those things. That part stays with us forever.'

'Memory makes everything to be what it was—forever,' she said, and smiled. She, too, had her memories, her sentimental journeys, although mostly they were in her mind. She dipped into the past for refreshment. She also knew that everything of the past wasn't attractive. There had been the sins, the crimes, the cruelties, the deviations, the hurts and the angers, not only of others, but of herself.

It was about that that he was talking. 'It's strange, but although you have many hurtful things happen, and some painful things also, they don't seem to affect you any more.'

'They don't affect you,' she said. 'You are too guileless for them to get hold of you. If they affect you, it seems they do so for good, although that may not be their intention. You have a good past because you are honest. You will not deceive yourself.'

He had never seen it that way, but he knew it was true. Even so, there was a pang in his spirit. 'Is going back an escape thing? Is it failure to face up to the present?'

She thought he faced up quite well to the present, but she wasn't sure about his attitude to the future. However, when she thought about it they were all one really—past, present and future. Each depended on the other. Together they made a whole.

She was feeling a trifle tired, a little drowsy. She knew he would not sleep if he did not clear it. Even if she slipped away into sleep he would be thinking on and on, and their bonding was such that she would feel it in her sleep. She decided she had better go with him until he, too, went to sleep.

‘Going back into the past is legitimate,’ she said. ‘But one mustn’t live only in the past.’

‘But is it trying to get security, and not facing up to the present, and not thinking about the future?’ he worried.

She marvelled at the way he trusted her. She was his sounding board, but she was more than that. She was also a fount of wisdom on which he drew. He rarely acknowledged it, because he thought she knew he believed in her, and was grateful.

‘It seems all people who are on in years look to the past. It seems to be a phenomenon of maturing. You have to survey all your life, and get it into perspective. Maybe you have to tidy it up before the judgement which is coming.’

They had talked about a final assize; a final tidying up so that one wasn’t left messy for any life that might be ahead. That would be a mercy of whoever did it.

He said, ‘So memory has to do with security, and security has to do with well-being, and memory assists us.’

‘Not all!’ she said sharply. ‘Memory is very painful to some. They remember the day they stopped believing, stopped being secure.’

‘Oh!’ he said, like a little boy trying to have a question answered.

She felt a trifle sharp in her spirit. Sometimes he was incredibly dumb. People admired him, thought highly of his books, but often he missed the very point he was trying to understand.

She said, ‘The time comes when a child or a young person is disillusioned. They have this system in their minds, and it doesn’t work. They are let down by a parent. Maybe by a brother or sister or friend. Maybe society does something terrible—like a crime or a war, or some circumstance comes

crashing down upon them. Security is damaged, if not killed. After that there is no real security.’

‘It can’t be restored?’ he asked. ‘Or can’t you make a new system?’

She said people tried to restore the old, or make new systems. Oh yes, they did that. They were doing it all the time, but getting angrier and angrier when their plans and efforts didn’t work. Nothing really worked.

‘Then how come we feel secure?’ he asked.

She looked at him, troubled. ‘What if I died?’ she asked. She wasn’t looking for bouquets. She had often wondered about the matter.

He thought about it honestly—had many times. ‘I would not want that to happen,’ he said, ‘but I know I could live with it. I would lose your immediate wisdom, but then it is all with me from the past, and I would keep drawing on it.’

‘What if I were just to come to dust?’ she asked. She felt a pattering and a pittering in her heart. She rarely indulged herself like this.

He turned his head from staring at the ceiling, to look into her eyes. He grinned. ‘Some dust!’ he said. ‘Some marvellous dust!’ She loved him for that.

He spoke quietly and seriously. ‘It may all come to dust,’ he said, ‘but it won’t end there.’ Now he was sweeping on in his own inimitable way—the way which never ceased to surprise her. He would talk in humility, and garner any crop that was going, but when he had experienced it, then suddenly it was his, and ideas were linked with all the others he possessed, and out of it would come something of a wisdom which she envied. When he saw a thing—oh, then, he saw the thing.

He kept looking at her. ‘I think the secret lies beyond

dust. Right now we are dynamic dust, and then we will be even more dynamic dust.' He said seriously, 'There is no terminus, and that is what makes the past so valuable. We will never lose it.'

She liked the present very much. She moved over to him in their large bed. Often she wondered whether they had lost the old intimacy when they bought the king-sized bed. She knew they hadn't. It was just that they didn't need that kind of intimacy in that kind of way. They had intimacy enough. They were free enough to be free of insistent intimacy. Intimacy can also be tyrannous. Security was what they had now. Yes, security was the word. But it had not always been like that.

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After a time he went back to one of her ideas. 'Since security figures so largely, can you tell me why it is so?'

'It isn't really security,' she said. 'It is love.'

He lay there for some time, arranging and rearranging his ideas. He kept saying it over to himself: 'It is love.' He wasn't sure that he understood.

She picked up his thinking. She nearly always could do that. 'When we are secure by the fact of parents, and society, and the protection we have in the family and the general system, then anything which attacks it and shows it to be unreliable will come as a shock to us. We become afraid when what we trusted falls down or doesn't work. So we try to build another system. Some of us just get so angry that we refuse to have or believe in any system. We are being shaped into no-hopers, or anarchists, or utopianists. We are fodder for the do-gooders, and the welfare people—the

psychologists, psychiatrists and sociologists, but especially the reformers.'

He knew she had no antipathy for the helping professions and professionals. Nor did he. They seemed to be needed, although he didn't know how permanent was their work. Perhaps it couldn't be enduring or complete, by nature of the case.

'You are saying,' he told her, 'that when we become disillusioned we become insecure, and then don't really know how to handle everything.'

'I am saying,' she told him firmly, 'that there is *no* security. There is *no* system which can offer that. It all depends on how you look at everything, and how you understand it.'

He murmured gently, 'Most people don't understand it. Most just live in it. Some ask questions, and some don't, and most don't get any answers, anyway.'

She agreed with him. Now she was close to sleep. Maybe he was close to sleep.

He was wise enough not to pursue the matter. They had been over this old ground many times. They both knew their mortality didn't really matter—not in the ultimate. They both believed in destiny. Neither of them believed in making it themselves. They just went along—though purposefully—with what was happening.

His mind was tempted to move out on another thought. What if their love was just utilitarian? What if it wasn't real? By now he had learned not to venture out on ideas as ideas, because these could be like termites in a person's spirit—gnawing away, undermining.

Her love was real enough, and so was his, and it wasn't just for themselves, or even their children and their grandchildren. He suddenly concluded that the past was good,

even if there had been enough of hell in it. The present was also good—even with what hell was in it. The future would be good also—even if he didn't know what was in it.

He felt very drowsy, and he wasn't wanting sleep as an escape. He had the thought that somehow he had earned it. He could use it now—enjoy it. He fumbled until he found her hand which was only faintly responsive in his—she was nearly in slumber-land. He pressed it, and they both seemed to float off on the same cloud together. Vaguely he wondered where the cloud would be in the morning, but then he didn't really care. Love would always have to be the reality.

***What Did He See?***

What did he see, this man caught up  
To the third heaven?  
Whether at that time in the body  
Or not in the body, he did not know,  
But he was caught up.  
He was permitted to see  
Things heavenly, things eternal,  
Things that a man cannot be told,  
But—which seeing—he may not utter.  
What did he see?

What is there hidden that we cannot see?—  
That we need to see? Why are we not  
Also caught up? Why, then, this choice  
Of a selected apostle? Why just him  
And not us also? Within ourselves  
We hunger for mystery beyond the reality  
Of daily factual living. We long for rare sights

*The Stranger in the Cemetery*

Of the beloved Father, the Eternal Son;  
We long for the almost seen and the truly felt  
Presence of the Spirit—'Lord and giver of life'.  
For a few rare moments we would escape  
From the living that is by faith  
And launch into the new sight  
Of the heavenly things.

So go our musings, our dreams of sight,  
But such sights are not for experiments.  
Such sights demand more of present man  
Than ever he has known. Man  
Who cannot even travel back to Eden's pristine bliss  
For fear of holy confrontation, cannot travel on  
To the new Eden, the brilliant Paradise,  
The supernal Heavens, lest he die of joy  
Or holy terror. He must wait,  
Must look with faith on things unseen,  
And feel the motions in his heart  
Of the strongly teaching Spirit.  
Here his time is not by chance,  
No hanging on until he slips  
Into eternity. No moment's lost,  
No thought's a gypsy—vagrant-wise—  
Trespassing here on time.  
Our times are in His hands,  
And when it's time we'll know  
And go to that third heaven,  
And even yet beyond—'the seventh',  
As they say—and see Him there  
Where none complains the Mystery is not clear,  
Or longs the more to see.

*What Did He See?*

Why then did he before the time, ascend to see  
What we will one day see?  
Why sight to vision, why the things revealed?  
We know not why; we do know that,  
And that's enough! The stuff  
Of revelation is the truth, and the truth  
Comes through the word, the life,  
The gestures and the utterance.  
Even we, whilst here on earth,  
Can speak great myst'ries in ourselves,  
And better know the things we know  
Until we know them when we'll see—  
No longer hid in Him—all things revealed.

God gives us intimations—sights foreseen—  
That only faith can know. What then?  
If He should give His servant special sights,  
It's all for us, and all for them  
Who see no sights, but need the sights.  
The treasure is increased within  
The earthen vessels until it glows  
With glory that the viewers know  
Is not the man. Heaven's foretaste comes  
To draw us on, and wean us from  
The glories lesser than the whole  
That yet awaits us; Hallelujah.

## *Night-Viewing*

Jonathan Farrow my friend was telling me about his experience watching television the previous night. The thing was fresh in his memory, and as Jonathan is a superb story-teller I settled down to hear what he was about to say. 'I was fairly tired,' he said, 'after my trip up-country and so I turned on the electric blanket, waiting until the bed was really hot, showered, slipped into my pyjamas, stacked up the pillows, and then jumped into bed.'

As you know, we have a T.V. in our bedroom, with a large screen. I had a hot cup of tea on the bedside table, and I settled in to have a good night of viewing. As you also know, Denny, I rarely do this sort of thing—life being too busy—and usually I am off to sleep in no time. Somehow this night I knew I wasn't going to sleep.

'What helped was that Mary was away interstate with our daughter, her husband and the children. I knew there was nothing to interrupt me except, perhaps, the telephone. I guess I am not one for watching documentaries at any great length. One in a night is enough, and generally I watch something to entertain me. My work as a lawyer is fairly serious stuff, and I like something light, by contrast.'

At the same time, I appreciate a film that is thoughtful. You rarely see a great film, and when you do, you appreciate it.

'Denny, I knew that somehow, inside, I was uneasy. This sort of thing does not often happen, and last night I knew I wanted something really entertaining to banish the uneasiness. I also knew that in these cases entertainment is really a form of escape from reality. I guess that is why entertainment is so popular, and so large an industry.'

I had not thought of entertainment as an industry. I had rather thought of it as people exercising gifts they had for the pleasure of others. If Jonathan was correct, then many in that industry must be insecure people. It was a new thought to me. I felt a bit sorry for those who have to work at entertainment, but I suppose writing comes under the heading of entertainment, and I know how difficult it is to get an audience for your own particular product.

Jonathan was still talking. 'I caught the end of the news, and the Channel moved into a general current affairs' type programme. As you know, conservation is a hot topic at the moment. The "Greenies" seemed to be getting the lion's share of attention, and there was something about duckshooters' lead in lagoons, and then a shot of a vast ocean of thick mud, sludge from chemical pollution. They had a view of a man—dark against the sun—walking across the thick slime towards a sunset which looked pale and polluted itself. You could hear the suck and squelch of the Wellington boots, and it was pretty horrible. Nothing entertaining in that! The commentator said his session was taking on the big polluters. I think he said this one was I.C.I.

'Makes you wonder, you know. Rivers seem to be fouled up, fish dying in shoals, algae spreading, oxygen diminishing. Then there is the ozone layer problem, and greenhouse

effects. Brazil seems to be destroying great forests. Age-old giants are being destroyed to get arable land quickly. A cabinet-maker friend of mine bemoans the senseless burning of ancient and matured mahogany. There was also the Alaska thing—oil everywhere, animals, fish and birds dying from inability to breathe. I am shown that one every day. I am astonished at the righteousness of these current affairs' fellows who are bravely defending the last outposts of our dying world.'

Jonathan looked at me. 'Not much fun watching that stuff, especially when you have a conscience. Then they talk about pollution in the home, gases coming off Teddy's plastic skin when it gets warmed up in Baby's hands. You wonder where it's all going to end. I thought I'd switch off the conservationist and the current affairs' fiends, and get on to some entertainment. Then what do I see? Someone making money out of crude sex-humour, giving pet names to genitals, and thinking that funny, or taking the dignity out of the human body by making some of its parts obscene—raising nasty little sniggers. Even the thinking—let alone the talking—was grotesque. I switched to another session, and they were on making the politicians out to be fools, especially with rubbery faces.

'After that I really thought I'd got on to something. Looked like the beginning of a good movie, but it was about abortion. The "Right-to-Lifers" looked pretty crude in the way they ganged up on the abortion clinics, and they went into horrible details about decapitating mature foetuses, and chucking them into garbage cans. I went back to a current affairs' commentator who was talking on the same subject, about twenty million foetuses aborted in the U.S.A. since abortion-on-demand was instituted. You can hardly cope

with statistics like that. Your head swims.

'Believe it or not, when a new film began, and was looking interesting, it was only to reveal an unmarried daughter in upper society who had got pregnant and was arguing with her father about her right to choose abortion if she wished. She thought it was like his cheek to even suggest the child be born! That was when I decided I couldn't get a good programme, and I would read. Bit disappointed, of course, so I opened up one of my small magazines, and began reading a short story. It was about a woman who was a single parent, whose baby cried endlessly, so much so that she put it under the bed to drown its noise. But she could still hear it from the kitchen, so she shut it up in a wardrobe and went off to find someone to help. On the way she was so pent up she decided to have a drink, and got herself drunk. When she returned, the baby was blue with screaming. She rushed out into the rain to put it in the outside toilet. But the writer was deliberately obscure—you didn't know whether she left it on the lid of the bowl, forever, or whether she would get help from the child's reluctant father. I suppose that is how life is sometimes, but surely not all the time.'

Jonathan looked at me in his intense way and said, 'I wonder, Denny, whether we're all gone mad. I read short stories and they are all about druggies in despair, sexual deviates in indignation, social activists protesting against nuclear power, angry young people spray-canning cunning graffiti onto defenceless walls; everyone—almost everyone—having human existential anguish, and the language through which it is expressed is obsessive in regard to genitals, faeces, and illicit copulation. The writers sound like kids who have just discovered naughty words, and who delight fiendishly in using them—over and over and over

again. In that respect their vocabulary is very limited. Rich, evocative words are very sparse. They seem to believe they are macho, and *avant garde*, and intellectually brilliant, despising us for being so ordinary.

‘To many it seems to be clever to talk about the emptiness of life, although some seem to think there is a rare beauty in the stark, the ugly, the deformed and the unhappy. Trouble is, they get published as contemporary or creative writers, and yet they don’t have special depth. They sneer at anything done properly, anything symmetrical and anything beautiful, as though it were obscene, and they make the obscene beautiful. There is a kind of sneaky, nasty vandalism, putting down anything up there, and putting up there anything out of the sewers of their minds.’

Jonathan paused and looked at me. He spread his hands out. ‘What do you do?’ he asked. ‘Nothing seems clean any more.’

He sighed. ‘I was over at Port Lincoln during the week, and we went up the coast about forty kilometres, into a bay where there was no one. The sand was clean on the shores and shining in the sun, with a million shells. Think of it—the waste of those shells. It was a wonder someone hadn’t shovelled them up for shell-grit. I suppose it is because salt isn’t good for chooks. Nothing is much good for anything today.’ He grinned faintly. ‘What a miserable mob we are,’ he said.

‘Fairly miserable, I said, ‘but somehow some of us get a lot out of life.’

‘True,’ he agreed, but he wagged a finger at me. ‘You’re not supposed to get anything out of life,’ he said. ‘That’s cheating.’

When I disagreed weakly he wagged the finger again.

‘What are you doing about the starving hordes, the rampant terrorists, the religious divisions, the Irelands and Lebanons of this world? What, hey?’

He looked faintly wistful. ‘Honestly, Denny,’ he said, ‘I was really looking forward to some good entertainment. Flick! Flick! Flick! goes the remote control. On. Off. On. Off. Suddenly there is a good documentary on the national station. It is about forty thousand children on the streets. There are some good scenes where a son talks of endless beltings from his father, and a girl of being caught in perpetual incest. I wonder whether the whole forty thousand had terrible parents, and whether every child was a victim, and none were just rebels who wanted to do their own thing. Anyone could see that home life has been broken up since the emancipation of the family from strangling divorce. Judge Murphy did a great thing for the nation when he got rid of the wowserish laws that had us in bondage all those years, and set families free under single parents who have to cope with the other single parents who want to see their children, but are restrained. I know—as a lawyer—that nine out of every ten murders happen within the family.’

‘Back to the abortion film and the morally indignant father, who is of late middle-age and is in a rage at his second wife for getting pregnant—at his late age! How hellishly inconvenient! He had hated his daughter for thinking of having an abortion, but now he loathes his second wife for not considering it.’

‘You have to get some fun from the TN., so you give another flick, and you are in the middle of a horror film. A bus goes careering madly into a wasteland, and the busdriver has grown long talons and tears at two beautiful female teenagers. Off that channel, and back to sanity in the

send-up of the politicians. The rubbery faces still grimace and the idiot lips mouth stupidities. Seems you have to be mentally handicapped to qualify for being a leader of your nation. The script-writers are very clever, however. They do well, commercially, out of imbecile members of our parliaments. They themselves are so knowledgeable and brilliant that they should swap with the politicians, but then, who wants to be cartooned in turn—with rubbery faces?’

‘Jonathan,’ I said, ‘what about the beautiful bay north of Port Lincoln—or was it south?’

‘South or north,’ he said, ‘it was beautiful. The water was so clear you could see the white sand, and the patches of seaweed.’

‘No algae?’ I asked.

‘No algae,’ he said, as though he did not know. ‘Honest to God, Denny, no algae. No pollution. No noise pollution. No screaming music groups. No trannies. No broken bottles, no hypodermic syringes or litter of tinnies and condoms. just good beach-land, and good scrub-land behind it, and birds, and a bunny or two. It was great.’

‘Clean?’ I asked.

‘Clean,’ he answered.

His eyes took on a wary look. ‘You trying to turn me off my story?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘but I like the one about the beach.’

He nodded. ‘So do I,’ he agreed, ‘but we have to do our duty. Our duty is to be responsible. We must think about broken marriages, divorce, remarriage and re-remarriage, the children, the anger, the sudden stabbings and shootings. Then there is the pollution. Chemical spills. People evacuated. The drugs. The sleazy sections of cities. Right to life for the unborn; right to decide to abort for the woman. The

tragedy of the male who is dumb but responsible for everything. Where have all the males now gone? Where is the vanishing father?’

I thought Jonathan was muttering to himself. He said, a trifle unsteadily, ‘There must be some other news.’ He was mumbling. This was because he was thinking introspectively. He was starting to talk to himself.

‘Port Lincoln,’ I suggested, and he brightened a little.

‘Beautiful,’ he said. ‘I had a good book too. It was all about the way people used to be. Funny, that. There used to be good things.’

He mooned over what he had said. ‘Couldn’t have been,’ he said. ‘Not really. Must have deluded ourselves. The good old days are just a delusion of fuddy-duddy conservatives.’

‘Much the same thing going on then,’ I agreed, ‘but not so obvious, eh?’

‘No news-sharks,’ he said. ‘No media people then, or not like they are now. Even good news sold in those days. Now it has to be terrible. Injustices are smelled out wherever they are and hauled into the daylight. Thank God for the media! Thank God for despair! Thank God for the new knights-in shining-armour, facing the multi-nationals, setting the leaders to rights, discovering the endless queues of helpless victims and getting justice for them. Nobody is doing wrong down at the low levels. It is all up at the top echelon—the Murdochs and the Bonds, and the conspiring leaders, the mindless politicians.’ He shook his head in wonder. ‘Incredible,’ was all he could say.

We sat there in silence—kind of two minutes’ silence for the good people, the righteous people, the reformers, the idealists, the ‘Fix- it’ battalions. Where would we be without them all?

Jonathan said suddenly, 'There was I with my remote control, and I couldn't get any entertainment. It was all to do with man's evil, the conspiracy of modern science, and the present yen for violence at its worst. I kept flicking the remote control and found I was in a jungle. Sheer escapism was cut off from me. I didn't deserve it—living as I do in this age. I tried channel after channel after channel, but it was the same stuff.'

'That is entertainment,' I said. 'That's what it is all about.'

He scarcely heard me. 'I tell you, I was caught in a jungle. I was beginning to think nothing is any good any more. We have to join the vast battalions who are now liberating the world from the oppressors who have liberated the world from the oppressors all this century. No century has ever been so liberated as our century.'

'Sarcasm will get you nowhere,' I told him sternly, and he nodded.

'The Greenies will get you purified bays and rivers and lagoons,' I said. He nodded dumbly. I went on, 'The righteous researchers and commentators will get us true social justice, children off the streets, families back together, wives and husbands loving one another, women being independent and making their own choices, males being humbled, fathers returning, politicians being transformed into statesmen, economists getting sense, religionists reconciled, ideologists agreeing on a common system, whales, dolphins, seals and sea-lions frolicking everywhere. Everyone happy at last.'

'Now who's being sarcastic?' he asked.

After a time he sighed and said, 'They are all working at it—you have to admire them.'

I agreed. I was wondering whether the baby was still on

the toilet seat. Would a baby not topple onto the floor? Did the reluctant father capitulate? Was there something in the mother that came to the surface and reassured the screaming child? Did love—after all—have some power? Do long talons really grow on men's fingers? I wondered why criminals—embezzlers, bank-robbers, rapists, child-molesters and murderers—when caught, always cover their faces from the T.V. cameras. There must still be shame in the human race.

Jonathan agreed. 'And guilt also,' he said.

Jonathan—being a lawyer—explained to me the nature of guilt. 'It is punishment,' he said solemnly. 'You don't have to be officially convicted before you are guilty. The conscience has already done that. Sin and crime have the inbuilt punishment of guilt.' He spread his hands characteristically. 'People are living in punishment everywhere.'

'Fancy that,' I said. 'Does anyone ever win?'

'What do you think?' he said.

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After that we gave up ruminating, complaining, criticizing. Jonathan had the remote control in his hand. We were in his lounge-room when he flicked the T.V. into action. Three channels had sport.

'I had forgotten about sport,' he said.

'State of origin stuff,' I said, knowingly.

'Tribal warfare,' he said shortly.

We were both in Belgium at the international soccer. We were at the football finals in Liverpool. In the first, enthusiasts were killing other enthusiasts. In the second, the fans were being crushed to death. Terror was rife. Panic was

thrusting children and young people and oldsters up against the barricades. I thought of the public square in Beijing, and a million and a half people protesting stormily.

Soon Jonathan flicked off the remote control. 'Nothing much happening tonight,' he said.

'Not much,' I agreed. We both knew there was a lot happening, though to what point we did not know.

After a time Jonathan broke the silence. 'Are there any great men—or women—these days?' he asked me. 'We need great ones, don't we? I mean wise and intelligent ones who understand it all.'

I thought about that for a time, and then said, 'Well, there are certain ones who are trying.'

He brightened a bit. 'I guess many are, at that. Even we are. It would be terrible if no one was trying.'

I was thinking that about the quiet and unseen ones, the steady un-noisy battlers, and wondered whether theirs was not the greatness. Of course, that is no new thought.

'At least,' I said, 'we are still here.'

He agreed. 'Still here,' he said as he nodded. He rose. 'Let's make a cup of tea.'

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Jonathan is quite a brilliant fellow, and has gone far at the Bar. I was a bit surprised at his depression and told him so. He concentrated on dunking the tea-bag, and only when the **brew** was right did he look up.

'Denny,' he said, 'there has to be a way out of all this. There has to be an answer.'

'God,' I said.

He nodded. 'Doubtless. In this state of things we would

have to invent Him even if He didn't really exist. As a theologian you Insist He is real. As a lawyer I can't understand the nature of law without Him, but I tell you, Denny, I almost got into a panic when I lay back in that bed, looking at the different channels and using my remote control. I suddenly got the feeling that we were all locked into corruption—all of us—and that there was no way out. I came as close to despair as ever in my life. I felt I was suffocating.'

'Why didn't you turn the T.V. off? Why didn't you tell yourself it was all an over-emphasis, an exaggeration, an unbalanced showing of the way things are?'

'Denny, you couldn't turn it off. You have to know the facts. You have to face them. You have to see things as they happen, even if the showing is one-sided. You have to find the answer. You have to work out the solution.'

Jonathan is a good tea-maker. So we sipped in silence. After a time I glanced up, and we exchanged looks. 'What about a bit of my theology?' I asked.

'Oh, by all means,' he said respectfully, but I knew he didn't think I could have an answer for it all. 'But just don't tell me that evil is comparatively less than the good. That still isn't the answer.'

I conceded that easily enough. Evil's dimensions are fearful—there can be no doubt about that. We both knew that—given things as they are—history is always where it is at any point of time. It just happens that way.

'Let us start at law,' I said. 'That's your area. How do you see law?'

Jonathan did not answer immediately. After pondering he said, 'I have the uncanny sense that law—true law—really matters. I believe it is ontological. It is an indispensable part of the true nature of things. Therefore I believe

that in a sense it is eternal. I think it is dangerous for a person to break the law. I think it is of the true essence of life to obey law.'

He looked at me. 'We both know that law in Christian countries (or countries that once purported to be Christian) has come greatly from ancient Judaism, and—more lately—Christian ethical understanding. Of course there is also Roman law which has been added, but basically it was Judaeo-Christian. Right?' When I nodded he went on.

'Both of us know the law has, to a great degree, become a hotch-potch over the years. Interpretation of the law is worked out in judgements regarding practical cases, and law courts are fallible. Governments who legislate have many things in mind, so that making legislation can be influenced by electioneering, the mores of the day, and a thousand other conditioning factors. There is also the matter of imprisonment and the question of punitive and remedial treatments. All of these things have combined to give us law which has greatly changed. As I see it, the substance of the law is still there, but greatly altered, strongly conditioned by all the factors I have spoken of.

Now, Denny, I see administration of law, and the human judiciary as fallible, but I do not think the law ever changes, essentially. I believe that when a man breaks the law of God he has done something he—man—cannot redress. He is a man in guilt. I believe the human race suffers deeply from guilt, and there is no reversal of this. By nature of the case it is irreversible.'

I asked him, 'But what is this to do with what we are talking about—the trouble and tragedy of man, today?'

'Everything, Denny. What I did not tell you about my night-viewing was that I also watched a film of a man who

was on Death Row and was to go to the gas chamber in three hours. A media-man interviewed him during those last three hours. Common sense tells you that gassing a man for having murdered does not recall the murders or make them better. The execution of a man simply tells you that it is a serious thing to murder a person. There may be an element of deterrent in capital punishment, but in this case the man did not believe he had murdered the three teenagers who met their death. It was just that he never really knew what had happened that night. In one sense he could not prove his innocence, and in another he could not accept guilt.

'What he did know was that his death had been called for, justice had to be fulfilled—whatever that may mean—and that he was personally prepared to die without whimpering for mercy. Somehow his death would even the score. I was deeply moved by the film. In fact I thought it the best thing of the night—even better than the research into homeless youth, or the father of the unborn child of his second marriage, who finally capitulated and agreed there be no abortion of his child. As I watched the gassing of the man—simulated, of course—I wondered at the solemnity of death, as well as the high value placed upon human life.'

'By creation it has a high value,' I said, 'and that was why, after the Flood, an animal or person who killed a man must himself be executed, since man is the image of God and striking a man is really striking at God.'

We both sat, sipping tea, and crumbling a biscuit. We were glad to be together. Glad to share, mutually, the problem or predicament of man, because we ourselves were humans.

'I understand the guilt factor,' I said. 'I understand it well. All onslaughts on humanity are onslaughts upon God. An

attack on the dignity of man, such as sneering at the human body, its practice of sociality or its procreative acts, is the real obscenity. The ridicule of leadership in any of its offices is an offence against the source of the authority which has been delegated. Human beings may laugh off their humour, or their vandalizing of that which is sacred, but they must live with the consequent guilt. There is no way of escaping that.'

'Guilt leads to a breakdown of the human spirit,' Jonathan said. 'It prods the sinner on to more acts—sinful or criminal.'

'If guilt is punishment,' I said, 'then it is also retribution for evil done.'

'It burns away, in the conscience,' said Jonathan. 'I have watched that in many of its forms. That is, the accused hide away from television cameras. Guilt and shame are closely linked. Ultimately you cannot beat guilt because you cannot beat the conscience, which is because you cannot beat law. Law never ceases.'

Often I have shivered at statements like that. I was quiet for a few moments and then said, 'God's wrath on evil is that He gives the doer over to his guilt. In one sense guilt is its own judgement, as well as being God's wrath.'

'I understand that,' Jonathan agreed. 'A man stews in his own juice, and God lets him.'

'Yes,' I said, 'but it is more. God does not just abandon man, and let come what may. God, as an act of judgement, gives man up to his guilt. The guilt working in the conscience is the constant act of God. He personally fronts man with his evil, and deliberately gives him over to it.'

Jonathan nodded. 'Otherwise there is no sense to history, no sense to morality, and no actual morality.' He sighed. 'It

is a pity we have lost this dimension of understanding. Working in law courts either makes you callous and indifferent to the whole affair, or you are reminded of it dynamically all the time.'

I said, 'I guess it is a bit like that with some undertakers. It becomes a business to them, but that all alters if they face death themselves.'

Jonathan finished his first cup of tea and began to make a second. He looked at me, stared for a time, and then said quietly, 'Now what about your bit of theology which tells us about the whole mess? How do we rationalize my nightviewing and still have something good that is left?'

'First of all,' I said, 'you have to make allowance for media emphasis and media reporting. One could scarcely say they present the norm of things in their reporting. The problems are there, of course, but some are caught up in the victimization rationalization. Some children are on the streets because of cruel parents, families disintegrating, and the like, but some children think it an adventure to go on the streets. Many—if not most—of our family problems stem from us, and not just from freaks. Not all men are childmolesters or incestuous. Not all rivers are polluted, not all forests vandalized. Economic situations have often been worse than now. The world has had to face tragedy all down through its history, and yet it has survived. I doubt, however, that society has ever been so idealistic, or ever been more given over to the politics of guilt and pity. Never have so many been made to feel so guilty for so little and for so much.'

'The Preacher in his book *Ecclesiastes* once said, "Be not righteous overmuch, and do not make yourself overwise; why should you destroy yourself?" I think he was saying

that when you absolutize anything, you get the whole thing out of proportion. Those who are over-righteous can scarcely see anything that is not wrong, unjust, and which does not need requiring. Conservationists can be one-eyed—everything is going to pollution. Some women see sexual liberty as a human right, and believe abortion goes along with this right. No one excuses violence in the family, but there is a history to it all, and we need to see that. Not everything is as it appears—there are wheels within wheels, and then wheels within those.

‘Jonathan, I think we have forgotten—if ever we knew that all things are not just as they seem. God’s wrath is working in millions of consciences, but His sovereignty is over all. He can turn things to right by this very wrath. Just as penitentiaries were places built to bring repentance, so wrath is there to lead to release, and not necessarily to be something in itself forever. You must not absolutize wrath. If we could see God is working in every detail of every human life, and in all history, then we wouldn’t press the panic button so often, send up fear-flares and be crying out with terror, "Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!"’

We sat for some time, thinking through our own ideas. I had the feeling that better perspectives were working for us both. After a time Jonathan said thoughtfully, ‘Why doesn’t someone write that sort of thing? Why so much fear of everything? Haven’t we got artists and musicians and writers who can tell this to society?’

I felt like telling him that I had been doing that for years, but the opportunity to reach a wide audience just wasn’t there—either by virtue of my limited ability, or by design of forces that disliked the unmasking revelations I tried to communicate. At the same time I knew there was an army

of folk who were communicating, every day, and in many ways, through their personal integrity. I knew Jonathan was one of these. I knew, too, that society, no matter how pagan, or how hell-bent on passion, money and ambition, seems always to right itself, at least to a reasonable degree. Man is not so much depraved that he is not still in the image of his Creator.

I also knew that planted through the media, through the professions, and through the idealists, there have always been those who have fought for reality, and—we say—decency. Some of these have been irreligious, but have espoused morality. Deep down—even if he denies it—man knows what he should know. When he is hard he denies it, but often at the appropriate moment he returns to what he knows is right, and somehow the human scene changes, and is even transformed.

Jonathan was ruminating as we both went to the door. ‘Come to think of it,’ he was saying, ‘we have had great media men, especially the artists, the great writers, the splendid musicians. They have had good things to say, even grand things.’

‘Great lawmen too,’ I said. ‘Great judges, great barristers. Great legislators and great statesmen.’

‘Great wives,’ he said, and was probably thinking of his Mary. ‘Great husbands, great fathers, great children, and most of them not recorded as such, getting no medals, having no fame.’

I knew this wasn’t the answer, or at least only a part of it. To my mind it was just that this world wasn’t really just in the hands of man. Certainly not in the hands of knights-in-shining-armor, and others who were—even unconsciously — ‘Godding it’.

*The Stranger in the Cemetery*

We grinned warmly as we shook hands. We were both pretty tired. I thought Jonathan would probably retire to a good book. I had one for myself, but first there would have to be a bit of a rehearsal with my own wife. I doubted she would see much of it out. She is a quick sleeper, and has never been overly worried about this world and its humanity. She seemed to have come to terms with it even before she was born.

Now, there is a woman of faith for you.

*The Presence*

*The Presence*

Here, where we are, there is nothing,  
Nothing if the Presence is not here.  
If the Presence is the Absence,  
Then the absence of the Presence is intolerable.  
The agony of the Nothing—  
The shadow of the Something—  
Is the unbearable anguish.

The shadow of the Someone  
Falls across the cold barrenness  
Of the deserted human spirit.  
Silently—in *absentia*—  
The effects come. The sterile horror  
Drains the substantial,  
Bleeds the arterial life  
Into the whimpering nothingness  
Of unending pointlessness.

Once there was the Presence,  
The Divine Matrix, the Source,

The fecund Creator-Him  
Out of Whom all that ever is  
And ever will be, flowed.  
The warm, pulsing reality  
Of true humanity lived  
In the heart of the Presence,  
In the ever-present Heart—Himself.

Came the temptation,  
Came the delirious dream,  
The suggested liberation,  
The heady aspiration  
Of autonomous godhead,  
And the dazed spirit dreamed  
Of man-beyond-man,  
Man reaching up and becoming  
As the Presence Himself.

With the temptation the belief,  
The fierce assurance of the seductive—  
The new demanding Presence  
That was no authentic Presence—  
Until the new *credo* was born,  
'I am a Presence in myself,  
From myself to myself,  
And then to all that I will.'

With the new presence  
Came the Absence of the Presence.  
The Presence was intolerable  
To the new autonomous one;  
But when the judgement came

It was the presence of the Presence  
Which made the strong Sound—  
The excruciating Voice—  
Sound through the Edenic Paradise  
To make that Garden Hell.

In the lonely shifts of the night,  
Or the drear days of the deserted spirit,  
There comes the yearning for the fullness—  
The warm substantial reality—  
To authenticate the deadly phantom,  
The insistent ghost-being,  
The violent wraith that must first die  
Before it is resurrected.  
Only crucified can it live,  
Only destroyed can it come to life.

In the unbidden moments  
There comes the Presence.  
Sometimes it is in the anger  
Of the violent mind.  
Sometimes it is in the whistlings,  
In the shrill indignation  
At the neglectful Absence,  
As though the endless protest  
Is the divine right  
Of the separated spirit.

In these unbidden moments  
The Presence comes quietly.  
First the agony, then the joy  
Which spreads as a hot blanket

Pressed on the frozen heart,  
It comes as reviving rain  
Across the sterile sands,  
The empty desert  
Of the deserted mind.

In that ecstasy is the agony,  
In that joy is the unbearable pain.  
In that love is the horror of hate  
Resisting the divine intervention.  
There is the bitter protest,  
The wailing vituperation  
Resisting the inevitable death  
Of the proud autonomous heart  
The lethal crucifixion  
That brings the transforming resurrection.

In the presence of the Presence  
The Absence dissolves.  
The prodigal heart returns  
To the invincible Father.  
The Embrace is the Everlasting Presence  
That makes the regeneration Complete.  
The Abiding One Abides for the abiding  
Of the bidden one: the Glory  
Returns to its human home  
And is satisfied.

## ***Day-Living***

After my friend Denny left me last night, I sat staring at the fire. It is one of those warm slow-combustion stoves which just about mesmerizes you. I was thinking deeply over what we had been discussing. In doing this I realized I was missing a most important chunk of reasoning, or what you might call 'theology'. I was all for calling Denny back, since he was the theologian and I only a man of law, but the hour was quite late, and the fire quite captivating. My wife still being away interstate, and I being free to do as I wished, I remained in my favourite Jason rocker, folded my hands before me, and ruminated.

By the time I felt I ought to go to bed I was a little disturbed that I had not asked or said all I needed to, in regard to our discussion, so I went to bed determined to catch Denny before he left for work the next morning. Unfortunately I missed him, but was glad that I had, as I had another inrush of thinking before I caught up with him by phone at his home. He was not going to be able to spend a full evening, but wondered whether I could call at his study immediately after work, and, if so, whether we could dine out at a

favourite restaurant and chat over the meal. He had to be back at work by eight o'clock for some pastoral counselling. That suited me admirably. I would get what I wanted to say off my chest, and have another quiet night at home.

I picked up Denny at his office, and we made our way to 'The Steak Place', where we ordered our steaks. Denny dabbled with a bread roll, and we began our talk.

'After you left last night,' I said, 'I suddenly realized we had not really finished our little talk.'

Denny was tearing his roll apart, dividing it into little pieces, and putting generous dabs of butter on each portion. Because I like my rolls dry, I passed him my portion of butter, at which he nodded. 'just give me a resumé, Jonathan,' he said. 'What was our conversation all about, and what conclusions did we reach?'

'We were talking about the rather frightful state of the world, about the current doom-and-gloom merchants who have frightened us into thinking the planet may not last more than forty years if we don't get our depollution and conservation act together pretty quickly. Also we were talking about the moral decline of Western society, the breakup of families, the forty thousand young people who are homeless on the streets, and the abortion of millions of human fetuses each year throughout the world. We also talked about the mad orgy of sport and pleasure and the battles of the oppressed of different nations as they struggle for freedom and other human rights.'

'Of course,' Denny said. 'Now it all comes back to me.' He grinned wickedly. 'And what were our solutions to these problems? How did I solve them, and what did you propose?'

I knew he was teasing me. He knew all we had said, but he was getting his facts together, ready for a discussion.

'The first thing we dealt with,' I said, a little primly, 'was that we had plenty of "Fix-it" people around in the media these days. They are not only watch-dogs, ferrets and judges, but they also have the solutions that are needed.'

'Ah, yes!' sighed Denny. 'Just a few royal commissions, more investigations, some scientific research, and finally some legislation, and we will have all problems patched up.'

'Doubtless,' I said, 'those things are necessary and helpful, but they are not the ultimate solution. As a theologian you came to certain conclusions; namely, that things have not changed very much in the history of mankind, that we have had the idea of Doomsday in our minds for a long time, and that the human race is fairly resourceful and may well weather this storm as it has done with others. Little of that is theology of course, but it was your theological understanding that intrigued me, for it fitted my legal ideas of guilt and retribution. You suggested that God has all things in hand because He is Sovereign over His universe. Fair enough. But you suggested more. You suggested that the turmoil in which man is living societally is part of God's judgement. You even went so far as to say that it is His wrath.'

Just at that point the waitress came with two trays and set them down on the table. In no time we were putting away the tasty steaks and accompanying vegetables.

I took up the tab again. 'You suggested that man is a moralist, and something of a perfectionist, and that he has a drive to do the right thing, and to prove himself. So he sets about tidying up his world. I think you were saying that man does without God and so tries to act as God in the world. Anyway he does not succeed. He never will.'

Denny nodded, as though he thought I had fairly well distilled his ideas. He sipped his drink, and looked at me from

under lowered eyebrows. 'What, then, did you want to talk about?' he asked. 'I take it my answer was fully satisfactory?' Again there was the teasing note.

I ignored it. 'Something troubled me after you left. You said that every man is troubled in his conscience, and that his guilt works away at him, and that out of that uneasiness of spirit he does many of his terrible acts of crime and evil. Your conclusion was that far from God neglecting this world He is working in it, and especially in the conscience of man—hence on the one hand man tries to do self-vindicating things, and on the other hand he is driven by his own guilt to do much evil.'

Denny nodded; the grin had now vanished. 'You're right,' he said. 'I don't think I said all that, but anyway it is the logical conclusion of what I was saying. Man is anxious to preserve his world, but his primary drive is to preserve his life, whatever he may claim to the contrary. I think we are all responsible to use this world properly, and to be proper existents within it. We ought to act rightly towards one another. However, our ego-drive and our moralistic endeavours lead us into some strange actions.' He nodded again. 'Yes, I think the human race is under judgement, and that accounts for much of our dilemma today.'

I felt myself shrugging at what Denny was saying. I could neither agree nor disagree. It seemed to me that man was being blamed for more than he did, although at the same time he was doing less than he should for his world. I opened up on the problems that had come to me after Denny had left the house on the previous night.

'If, as you say, man can be very evil, although made in the image of God, and if the image of God in him drives him towards righteousness, then how must we view man in his

world, in his history? If you are correct—and I have a feeling that you are—then what is man's future? Where does your Christian message fit into it, and what hope is there for the world?'

Those ideas had been running through my brain during the night, and even while I was at work in the office. It seemed to me right that human beings should experience retribution for the wrong they have done, but where did God fit into all this? Was He simply a legal Deity, exacting retribution for breaking His law? Was that the beginning and the end of it all?

When Denny had heard me through, he shook his head. 'Not by any means,' he said. 'God is not wrath, but love. Doubtless He is provoked to wrath by our evil, but His anger is not like human anger. It is simply His intention to oppose evil and destroy it—which He would have to do, anyway, or nothing would make sense. Certainly it would not make moral sense.'

Denny toyed with his steak and vegies whilst I absorbed his ideas. The teasing had gone from his voice and the smile from his eyes. He was deadly serious as he leaned forwards, staring at me.

'Without Jesus Christ,' he said, 'there would be no solution. Man would self-destruct from his own guilt and evil. You are a lawyer, and you know that what I am saying now is true. It is this: *guilt is punishment.*'

I knew that to be true, and nodded. I remembered what we had said about the dynamics of guilt the night before. 'You are saying that man must suffer for every act of rebellion, transgression, and wrong.'

'I am saying,' Denny told me, 'that every man and woman suffers continually all the time in his or her conscience. That

is guilt, and that is punishment. Yes, Jonathan, I am saying—as Augustine once said—that man carries about in his conscience every day a testimony to the wrath of God.’

I knew the implications of this. I had often thought about it. ‘But isn’t God loving and merciful?’ I asked.

Yes,’ said Denny, ‘but His own righteousness and law crumble if He gives gratuitous forgiveness and pardon. He must have basis for pardon.’

‘Ah!’ I said, ‘the old penal idea. Christ gets punished for others, and they are let off the hook. Is that it?’

He shook his head, smiling faintly. ‘Almost there, Jonathan, but yet a million miles off. You see, whilst God’s wrath is not man’s guilt, yet man’s guilt is God’s wrath.’

The waitress had brought our coffee. I helped myself to some sugar, and suddenly I knew what Denny was about. ‘You mean that God’s wrath is to let man suffer in himself for his own sin?’

Denny nodded. ‘More than that. God is personal. He always presses up against man. He doesn’t just abandon man to his guilt—He deliberately gives him over to it.’

I had a picture of the human race in turmoil, men’s minds teeming with guilt. It was frightening, but I knew Denny was going to let me have the solution.

‘You see,’ he said, ‘God made Christ—His Son—to *be* sin for us. He laid on him the iniquity of us all, and Christ bore all our sins in his body on the Cross. To bear sins is to bear guilt is to bear wrath.’

I knew these references to Christ’s death very well, but they had never come to me like this. ‘What you mean,’ I said slowly, for I was thinking as I talked, ‘is that Christ actually bore the guilt of our sins. He never committed any of those sins but he bore their guilt.’

‘That’s right,’ said Denny, ‘and as though he had committed them. He took into himself the pain and shame of them, the burden and hurt of them, the defilement and the impurity, along with all elements of guilt, such as fear, loneliness, confusion, and the sense of separation from God.’

‘How does a man do that?’ I asked. ‘After all, he was only one man.’

Denny nodded. ‘Only one man, but a man with a difference. The difference was that he was pure. He was powerful because of purity, because of an undefiled conscience. His love could identify him with every person ever living. It was God who aided him, who identified him with us, and who helped him to take the guilt.’

I knew Denny had to be back in his study by eight, but I was hoping he would not cut short our discussion. Some pieces still did not fit together in my understanding. I think he knew that. He looked at his watch, thought for a moment, and then began afresh.

‘Jonathan, if Christ did what the prophet said he would, that is, "bore our griefs and carried our sorrows", and if—as the same prophet said—"he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities", and if "upon him was the chastisement that made us whole", then it is true that "by his wounds we are healed". What all this means is that Christ has entered into every bit of evil that ever was, every act and experience of every human being, and has suffered the guilt of us all—playing it out to exhaustion and extinction, so that nothing is left to be suffered.’

I knew that for me what Denny was saying was intelligible. I doubted that it would be intelligible for many others. Even I knew I had the key that had been missing after our talk the previous evening. I also knew Denny was pressed

for time, and so I said, 'I guess we had better be going. I'll run you back.'

It was in the car that he turned the key in the lock of my thinking, and fully opened my understanding.

'Do you realize, Jonathan,' he said, 'that if what I have said is true, then Christ has entered into the entire stream of man's history, and into every human's personal experience. I, myself, find it staggering. It means that no one need suffer needlessly from his own or another person's sin, crime or failure. It makes sense if all history is recapitulated in him. I mean that God cannot come closer than that—one with the humanity He created.'

I dropped Denny at his study, and drove on to my place. Long ago I had heard a sad story of an event which had taken place in a Nazi concentration camp in Holland. Some of the prisoners had made contact with the underground resistance force, and, having been discovered, were paying the penalty. I think there were about a dozen men, and a boy aged twelve and a half years. The whole camp had been brought in to witness their execution in the large mess hall. The men and the boy had been made to stand on the dining tables, ropes had been tied around their necks, and the ropes were fastened on to the rafters. At a signal the tables had been pulled away sharply from under them. The men died horribly but quickly. The boy was thin and light, and died slowly, in terrible convulsions, dangling and choking, whilst the other prisoners were forced to move around the executed men in an unending circle.

The man describing the event had said, 'We moved in horror, one after the other, looking at the men hanged, and the boy in his horrible suffering. A man in front of me was an angry atheist. I think he was a Jew who had suffered

terribly. He kept muttering in his rage, "Where is now your God? Where is now your God?" I felt his pain, and wanted to explain, but I knew it would be inappropriate. What I wanted to cry was, "There He is! There He is! Hanging there in that boy! That is where He is!"'

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Now I understood Denny, and I understood God. I saw that nothing happens by chance. Nothing is senseless, rightly seen and rightly understood. My mind was teeming with new thoughts, and new understandings.

I knew that if ever I took off another night, and flicked from channel to channel on the T.V. network, that I would be able to make sense of everything—fearful and terrible though some of it might be, mindless and empty as much of it might seem to be, and wonderful and noble as most of it might appear to me. I now had a new understanding, and I believed I would never lose it.

***The Diminution***

Sometimes I diminute.  
I shrink, growing smaller,  
Losing the vast dimensions  
Of the spirit; withdrawing  
Into the domestic safety  
Of the agreed inane,  
Into the chatter  
Of mindless minds.

Sometimes the lineaments  
Of eternal nobility  
And the expanding infinity  
Cease to impress, to draw,  
To magnify the once eager mind.  
Magnitude then passes;  
Ennui wins the day  
In a mindless accidie;  
And all that is, suddenly becomes  
Pointless.

This shift of spirit,  
This dwindling down  
Of the tired mind,  
Brings blankness of reality.  
The truth seems dry and tasteless,  
And the nerve ends no longer respond  
To the former titillation.  
Unstimulated, the thoughtless cogitation  
Is of escape into the unfronting—  
The meagre mediocre.

Often the mind lies  
In this fallowed blank, protesting  
Against a return to the reality.  
The heart demands a merciful lethality  
Of an unbidden drug.  
The weariness of the spirit  
Protests against the unrelenting law  
Of being human—truly human—  
To the parameters of the ontological,  
To the perimeters of eternally significant  
Action.

In the dullness of this mindlessness  
The humanity rests. The spirit  
Silently gains ground, awakens  
In a puzzlement at the past ennui  
And the tasteless accidie.  
It wonders, as it startles into life,  
About the immediate inaction,  
The murmuring thoughts  
And the growling protests

Of its scowling self.  
Laughter breaks through  
From the transitory damming  
Of the irrepressible dynamic—  
The upward and outward thrusting  
Of the created living breath.

Somewhere—away in the smiling unseen  
Or in the inner consciousness—  
There is a responding laughter,  
Not of an enemy mocking  
But of a friendly understanding  
And a renewed, refreshing confronting  
Of the fallowed spirit.

***Immediacy  
in Life  
and Communication***

The term 'immediacy' is not one which is widely used. *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary* describes it as follows:

1. Freedom from intermediate agency; direct relation or connection; directness. 2. The condition of being the immediate lord or vassal. 3. The condition of being immediate in time.

The word 'immediacy' is not used in Scripture, but the related term 'Immediately' is used some eighty times, only six of these being in the Old Testament and in all cases referring to action in time. Mark uses it thirty-five times in his Gospel. The sense in which we will use it is covered by the first meaning given in the dictionary, namely, 'Freedom from intermediate agency; direct relation or connection; directness'. The reason for pursuing the subject is that in a recent study given on 'Joy' to a pastors' group I said,

Whilst surveys such as we have just done of Old and New Testaments may grip us afresh with the truth of God, and greatly cheer

our congregations, yet we rarely have the opportunity to communicate such coverages. Those of us who are pastors must understand the world in which we live, and help our people to face the waves of thought and feelings which keep sweeping across society. We must be purveyors of joy *with the power of immediacy*. How can we communicate God's joy dynamically in a world which seems to be set on a path of doom, and how can we avoid simply cheering up our people, and perhaps merely making them happy?\*

I was asked, 'What do you mean by "immediacy"?' and this essay is an endeavour to open up the subject as widely as possible. What I really meant was having the power of immediate communication, i.e. the ability to speak so directly that we convey what we mean so that the listener cannot doubt he has heard what has been said. This does not mean the listener agrees with what has been said or receives it, but there is no lack of communication by the person speaking.

In the process of answering the question I told the group that I had invented a new verb—'to revelate'. I said that the verb 'to reveal' simply means we unveil something, and it is the choice of the viewer or listener to receive or reject what has been revealed. The dictionary does speak of a 'revelation', a 'revelationist', a 'revelator', and uses the adjective 'revelatory'. What I meant was that the message communicated was given so powerfully that it had an irresistible *impact* on the listener so that he was forced to some decision regarding the revelation given to him.

It is in this sense that we want to discuss immediacy, for immediacy is revelatory, whereas a mere unveiling of a fact or truth previously concealed may bring little or no

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\* For the whole study, refer to the essay 'Rejoicing, joy and Enjoyment for God's People', pp. 91-113.

response from the viewer or hearer. In both cases the listener will decide his own response since immediacy does not coerce—but in the latter case he is not powerfully confronted. Immediacy is an attempt to speak directly and irresistibly to the hearer. We are not talking about demagogic coercion, personal or mental conditioning—the process of brainwashing—seduction of the mind and will, or the techniques of mesmerism and hypnotism. We are simply saying that immediacy is a clear communication which—for one reason or another—is as clearly received by the listener. Revelatory communication is such that it can break through the well-known techniques of deliberate non-hearing, or deliberate confusing of the material given by the speaker.

Of course, I am assuming there is such a thing as immediacy, and that it is revelatory, and perhaps it can be shown that this is merely an idea in my head.

### GOD, MAN AND IMMEDIACY

If we judge the doctrine of creation correctly, then man was created through the agency of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In this sense man's creation was Trinitarian, and man related intimately with the Godhead. God spoke to him directly, and he was able to respond. No mediation was necessary. The fall of man broke that immediacy in that man had made himself autonomous in intent. Undoubtedly God communicated with him, but man—because of his guilt—was already resistant. Romans 1: 18-32 tells us of the split between man and God. Man rejected his knowledge of God, changed the truth of God into a lie, and refused to acknowledge God. All this is the aetiology of non-hearing—the

deliberately deaf ear, the stubbornness of the human heart against true knowledge.

Every understanding of the Fall must be tempered by the fact that man is made in the image of God and is strongly pressured by this fact. From the beginning there has also always been man-in-faith, this series beginning with Abel, so that there have been those who have responded to God's communication as well as those who have resisted. It is doubtful that there have ever been simple, neutral agnostics, although many have claimed to be.

### God's Media of Communication

We do not say that because God communicates that He is heard. Jesus' saying, 'He that has ears to hear, let him hear', explains the mystery of hearing and non-hearing. God communicates because He wishes His mind to be known. Man is responsible to hear, and non-hearing will be judged as culpable. The various media are creation, theophanic manifestations, covenants, law, the prophets, the actions of God in various forms such as creational, providential, covenantal, redemptive and restorative. God spoke through the prophets to older generations, but has spoken—and speakst—through His own Son in this age. He speaks via the Holy Spirit, in and through His inscripturated word—the Bible—as also through His people—Israel of old, and the church in this present era. We only know about these media from the Scriptures. Left to ourselves we would not think of them.

There is no call for us here to authenticate these media, to show that by conscience and act God speaks to each man. Those who hear know how authentic are these media. Not

to hear them is a difficult matter. God speaks to every man, but not every man listens and knows.

### GOD'S IMMEDIATE COMMUNICATION OF HIMSELF

It seems that when God talked to Adam after the Fall, and Cain after the murder of his brother Abel, that the immediacy was effective in that both knew God's mind towards them, although their conversation held elements of self-excusing. When God spoke with Noah and Abraham there was also immediacy which drew a proper response. God's communication of Himself to Abel—as also Enoch (Gen. 5:24; Jude 14)—was linked with that person being a prophet (Luke 11:5 1). We need to realize that no man could be a prophet without first knowing God, and then going on knowing God. When God made a prophet He did so by revealing Himself to that person. That revelation was of a high order. To know God is everything! Nothing more is needed for any human being. Thus when 'The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia', Abraham ceased from being an idolater and became a person who knew God. Out of that immediacy he was 'the friend of God' and did His will. Likewise this was the case with Isaac and Jacob, who were both prophets (.cf. Gen. 27:27-40; 49:1-27).

### The Prophets and Immediacy

If we take our first dictionary meaning of immediacy as 'Freedom from intermediate agency; direct relation or

connection; directness', then it means God reveals Himself to the prophets that they may communicate Him to others, and do this by means of His word, i.e. not *their* word. This is seen in Exodus 6:30-7:2, where Moses protests that he cannot speak God's word, and Moses is to *mediate* the word through Aaron: 'See, I make you as God to Pharaoh; and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet'. God speaks His word through the prophet, and in that sense the prophet is a mediator. If the prophet does not receive the word directly from God he loses that part of immediacy. The prophet is *as* God Himself speaking. In this sense there is immediacy.

This is seen clearly in the Book of Jeremiah. God's word is dynamic within Jeremiah: 'there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot' (20:9). In 23:29 God asks, 'Is not my word like fire... and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?' That is, His word is dynamic. It is not simply divine information passed on to man, but God speaking directly to man through the prophet (Heb. 1:1).

We need to know that God gave His word to the prophets through 'dreams and visions'. This is seen in Numbers 12:6: 'If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream' (cf. Gen. 46:2; 1 Sam. 3:15; 1 Kings 3:5, 15; Jer. 23:25ff.; Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17). Moses was exceptional in that God spoke to him 'mouth to mouth' (Num. 12:7-8; cf. Deut. 18:18).

The value of the prophetic word is seen in I Samuel 3: 1: 'And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.' Israel needed not only the prophetic *deposit* of the past—the sum of all prophetic communications—but it needed the continuing word of God in the present. Without it, Israel often did not know what to do.

Because the prophetic word was so dynamic and functional to the life of Israel, false prophecy was bound to arise, as it did. Throughout Scripture, prophecy is powerful as it confronts its hearers. This is why Israel had shed the blood of the prophets from Abel to Zechariah (Luke 11:51).

### The Prophets and False Immediacy

Perhaps there is an ontology of prophecy, and wherever anything is authentic, it is seized upon by evil powers or deluded and ambitious human powers. Deuteronomy 18: 9-14 shows false forms of prophecy which are occultic in nature: 'any one who practises divination, a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer... is an abomination to the Lord'. In Jeremiah 23:23-32 there is strong invective against false prophets who cry 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' meaning they have a prophecy from God. God said, 'I am against the prophets... who steal my words from one another.' He also said, 'I am against those who prophesy lying dreams ... and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them; so they do not profit this people at all.'

In the New Testament there are false prophets. Paul talks of those who peddle the word of God (11 Cor. 2:17), and those who practise cunning and tamper with the word of God (11 Cor. 4:2). False prophecy will be evident in the end-times, and in Revelation we have 'the false prophet'. All of these seek to tap in on the innate power of prophecy, i.e. the word of God. In other words, they try to effect a dynamic immediacy in order powerfully to affect their hearers.

## CHRIST AND THE MATTER OF IMMEDIACY

John's Gospel is a clear demonstration of immediacy and its effects. As we proceed through the Gospel we see the polarizing effects of the uttered word, until at the last the chief priests and Pharisees call the Sanhedrin together to plot his death. Of course Jesus was prophetic in act as well as word, e.g. when he drove the money-changers and others from the temple and healed people on the Sabbath day. Jesus claimed he was 'from above' and his listeners 'from below'. He told some they did not believe him even though it was Moses who wrote of him.

He claimed,

*'I speak of what I have seen with my Father. . . but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God ... Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word... He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God ... But you have not known him; I know him. If I said, I do not know him, I should be a liar like you; but I do know him and I keep his word' (John 8:38-55).*

The immediacy of Jesus' words can be seen in his claim, 'The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.' Nothing could be more dynamic.

In Luke's Gospel (8:4-21) he opened up the matter of hearing and refusing to hear. The parable of the sower, the story of the man lighting a lamp and obscuring its light, and the saying when his mother and brethren sought him, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it', are all woven together as an exposition on the willingness or refusal to hear the word of God. In the parable of the sower the four kinds of soil are those who

hear the word of God; but only one hears it properly—those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience.' The other hearers do not truly hear. The man who obscures the light of his lamp does not truly hear or he would hold forth the light to show the way to others. The terrible warning is given, 'Take heed then how you hear; for to him who has will more be given, and from him who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.'

It is in this passage of Luke we have our Lord's words to his disciples, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.' The last clause is a quote from Isaiah 6:9-10. It seems to be an enigmatic saying, but is fairly clear in its Old Testament context: 'The more they hear, the more they will reject, and it is told to them that a judgement may take place by which they are hardened against the word of God.'

Our conclusion here is that it is dangerous to hear and not really to hear, but, hearing, to reject what is heard. That is why Jesus said, more than once, 'He who has an ear to hear, let him hear', a statement made seven times in the Book of the Revelation in the letters to the seven churches. In Jesus' teaching there was always immediacy, and in the letters to the seven churches there was immediacy. Immediacy judges those who refuse it, for they are fighting revelatory ministry.

## IMMEDIACY IN THE APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

At Pentecost, and from Pentecost onwards, we see the apostolic immediacy. Doubtless it was rooted in the revelation

that the Holy Spirit brought—a point to which we will later return. Since the Holy Spirit was to lead them into all the truth, this was really a prophetic revelation of God. The truth is that the apostolic band was filled with the Holy Spirit, who was the witness of truth (Acts 1:8; 1 John 5:7). The immediacy so struck listeners on the day of Pentecost that ‘when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”’ Likewise, shortly afterwards before the Sanhedrin Peter so spoke that ‘When they heard this [statement of Peter and John] they were enraged and wanted to kill them’. No less did Stephen possess that immediacy, and the outcome of his communication was that they stoned him. Following the incident Christians fled from Jerusalem, and Philip the evangelist went to Samaria and preached with great effect.

Paul, on being converted, immediately preached with immediacy. Being in Damascus he drew the wrath of the Jews upon himself, and had to go temporarily to Arabia. The account of his life in Acts—along with Barnabas, Silas and Timothy—shows how powerful was his ministry. We will presently see the principle enabling his immediacy.

### LIVING AND PROCLAIMING IN IMMEDIACY

The quote with which we began was concerned with the subject of joy and the communication of it with immediacy. It is as follows:

Whilst surveys such as we have just done of Old and New Testaments may grip us afresh with the truth of God, and greatly cheer our congregations, yet we rarely have the opportunity to communicate

such coverages. Those of us who are pastors must understand the world in which we live, and help our people to face the waves of thought and feelings which keep sweeping across society. We must be purveyors of joy *with the power of immediacy* How can we communicate God’s joy dynamically in a world which seems to be set on a path of doom, and how can we avoid simply cheering up our people, and perhaps merely making them happy?

In this quote we are saying that although we may amass rich materials on a theme and believe it to be useful for a congregation, yet if it lacks immediacy it is of little value, and virtually makes no impact. So, then, we wish to have immediacy in our ministry. Without going into a ‘how-to’ technique we can arrive at the reality of immediacy.

### Being in the Presence of God

Firstly we must know God, and live in Him, and be obedient to His will. Then it is that immediacy will be present. To know God through the Gospel, through the Son, and through the Spirit is to live in God. John said, ‘the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him,’ i.e. the Son declared the Father from his intimacy with Him. When the angel appeared to Zechariah he told him, ‘I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news.’ Notice that Gabriel stands in the *presence* of God and so, when sent, brings that *presence* with him. He comes—so to speak—with the dew of the sanctuary upon him. This is true immediacy. The preacher who stands in the *presence of* God must have immediacy. We might say the bread is straight from the oven to the consumer! There is no opportunity for staleness.

Paul quoted a Greek poet as saying, 'In Him we live and move and have our being.' The believer does not only have this creational location, but he has a more intimate location in God through redemption. He is reconciled to God, but lives in Him. Jesus spoke of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit taking up their dwelling in the believer (John 14:15-23). He spoke of the believer abiding in him (John 15:1-8). Paul speaks of Christ dwelling in the heart of the believer (Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27-1 Eph. 3:14-19) so that he may 'be filled with all the fullness of God'. John speaks often in his First Epistle of abiding, i.e. remaining and dwelling in God (3:24; 4:12), and his classic statement is 'Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God ... God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him' (4:15-16).

This abiding is no small thing. It arises from being reconciled with God, coming to know Him, and then living in Him, and He dwelling in the person. This is intimate union with God. So intimate is it that John says, 'our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' (I John 1:3). It is the intimacy of knowing God—an experience and reality unsurpassed in the gamut of human living. This is why Jesus said, 'this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent' (John 17:3). In this vein John speaks again: 'And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life' (I John 5:20). Those in Old Testament times who had been met by God, and given visions of Him, had come to know Him. Now, through Christ and the revelatory Spirit, the believer has no less an experience and relationship. From

this point, then, the proclaimer of God and the Gospel can speak with the freshness of intimacy, the anointing of the Spirit, and the knowledge of the word of the living God.

### **Having Continuous Revelation of God Through the Son and the Holy Spirit**

Jesus virtually told his followers that their ministry would be of witness to him (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8; John 15:26-27). Witness is telling the truth as one has seen it, or telling truthfully what one has seen. Jesus said the Spirit of truth would come and lead them into all the truth, and they would then tell the truth (John 16:13). Jesus had borne witness to the truth (John 18:37) and now they were to bear witness to him as the Witness to (or, of) the truth (Acts 1:8). The term 'witness' is used many times in the Book of Acts and the Book of the Revelation. I John 5:7 says, 'And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth'.

The New Testament teaches us that the Holy Spirit leads us to the Son, and the Son leads us to the Father (John 15:16; John 14:6). It also teaches us that the Father and the Son indwell us by the Spirit (Matt. 10:20; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 3:16; Rom. 8:9-11; cf. I John 3:24; 4:13). This is another way of looking at the relationship that the communicator has with God. Not only does the Son lead to the Father, but the Father also leads to the Son (John 6:45,65; Matt. 11:27).

### **The Dynamic Revelation that Makes the Revelator**

Paul spoke in the first chapter of Galatians of those who communicated a false gospel, and of himself who communicated what was true. He told how this came to be. He said,

I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel, For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

The revelation of Jesus Christ was on the road to Damascus, and the full comprehension of it took place in his three days of blindness in the city. However—as with Jeremiah and others who had been set apart from their mother's womb—Paul said God 'was pleased to reveal his Son in me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles'. The order is important—first revelation *to* (i.e. in) the person, and then revelation *through* the person. One cannot reveal what one has not seen; one cannot *but* reveal what one has seen, for it becomes the fire in the heart and in the bones. As Peter said, 'We cannot but tell the things which we have seen and heard.' Because these things are so vital to every human being, and because the salvation of man depends upon them, the constraint and compulsion to tell them is irresistible.

The powerful point we draw in Galatians 1:11-16 is that Paul was converted in order to convert; God revealed His Son to him, that he might reveal that Son to others. To be shown is to know, and to know is to tell.

### MINISTERING IN IMMEDIACY TODAY

It is clear that to minister in and with Immediacy one must know God, be under the Father as a son of God, be under the Lordship of Christ, be filled with the Spirit, and so be led by him. This is the way of true relationship with God—true fellowship with the Father and the Son—and it is out of

that intimacy that one may 'revelate' the truth of God. This requires so living in the Spirit that he constantly reveals 'the deep things of God', so that we are able to communicate them as commanded. As one continues to abide (continue, dwell) in God, then one lives in the reality of the truth. Truth is something one not only knows with all the heart, and mind and will, but something one does, one practises. If we do not continually obey the will of God, and practise the truth, then its reality fades, and we become stale in proclamation. If we gradually devise a righteousness of our own, then the reality of grace pales, and we have little to say because grace seems of small importance. Only the Spirit can keep fresh and vital the truth we proclaim, and he does that in the context of our continuing personal obedience. An adage has it, 'It is better felt than tel't.' We might add, 'When it is felt it is tel't, as when it is tel't it is felt.'

### The Battle for Immediacy

Man's history is the story of his battle to refuse the knowledge of God. He resents—even fears—the constant barrage of revelation that comes through the various media by which God speaks. In one sense it is natural for him to know God, since he has been created in His image. In another sense he is bound *not* to know God for the confrontation of the Holy One is too fearful to contemplate. Hence he suppresses the truth in unrighteousness, he promotes the lie, and he develops techniques of not-hearing. We all know the psychology of refusing to hear. We can change words and meanings given by the speaker before they reach us. We can rationalize them as wrong or foolish. We impute ideas to the proclaimer which he does not think or say. We

also denigrate the messenger as we denigrate God. We gather data that justifies us for not listening.

The word man receives from God is attacked. In Luke 8 the seed is snatched up by the birds—Satan's emissaries. It falls in ground too hard and dry for it to germinate, or—having germinated—the seed dies for lack of depth in soil and understanding. The 'cares and pleasures of this world' are the weeds which grow along with the true plants and choke it. Preachers are dismayed when their words are refused, fall on deaf ears, or are ill-received.

Again, false prophecy, with false immediacy, deceives, allures and seduces. The word of God is peddled and so is not the true word of God. It is tampered with and so becomes used for evil. Constantly a substitute word is devised and is made so attractive that it weans listeners away from the truth. It is mixed with current thinking, present philosophy, psychology, and sociology so that it is changed from its pure form and substance. Nor is this always a conscious endeavour to change the word. Loss of intimate relationship with God leaves the proclaimer open to temptations. He may genuinely wish to attract people to the Gospel and so evades telling the 'scandal of the Cross' or 'the foolishness of the Cross'. He avoids the 'dark sayings' and the 'hard words', and concentrates on the utility of the good news. There is a seeming immediacy about a utilitarian Gospel, because the person is anxious to obtain its benefits, so that he believes the message to be relevant when, in fact, it only appears to be.

Perhaps the greatest impediment to immediacy is that teachers and preachers search the Scriptures to adduce the ways of God, and thus detect principles. They then abstract these from the Scriptures, and form them into a system,

devising a methodology. This methodology is then propounded, and generally as a 'how-to', i.e. how to be saved, how to pray, how to love, how to obey—and so on. It appears good and orthodox, but being abstracted from the personal relationship one must have with God, it becomes a system apart from Him. Naturally enough, there can be no immediacy, for a 'how-to' is often an unconscious endeavour to act from one's self, and not from union with God.

### **The Breaking of the Communication Barriers**

Over many years of teaching and preaching in some twenty-five countries I have noticed that language does not represent an insuperable barrier. Often when we attempt to avoid offence by speaking to the culture of the people, we may miss actual communication. Speaking should be from the heart of one person to the other. The heart to the Hebrews meant the seat of the affections (sometimes called 'emotions'), of the intellect and the will. True theology is theology of the heart. Often a person may inadvertently offend culturally and yet get to the listener. P. T. Forsyth said that the conscience is the most universal thing of all, and that which goes deepest to the conscience goes widest to the world. The person who is ignorant of the nature and dynamics of conscience will not be able to overleap the natural barrier of language. The Americans speak of 'gut communication', and mean that communication is somehow visceral, and not primarily cerebral, although, of course, there must be the use of the intellect. It seems to me that immediacy communicates a relationship we have with God, and although words may be few, yet body language, appropriate gestures and deep sympathy will convey the message.

Linguistics have shown us that translations may appear as foreign to indigenes because the indigenous thought patterns have not been understood. It would seem that exhaustive research would need to be made in order to translate well, or communicate within the thought- framework of a given people. Whilst this exercise must be pursued, yet I believe that the Gospel can simply and quickly be communicated where there is immediacy, since immediacy is always accompanied by love which is empathic, identifying with the listener, and drawing a response—or reaction—from him. I am not suggesting we should short-cut the necessary work of understanding cultural thought patterns, but that we should not be locked into this process. I have noticed the despair of communicators in a foreign culture, especially where words have a different content from the equivalent words in his own language, since the content of words is greatly determined by the culture then the hearers must have the true content of those words injected by the Spirit of truth—even if only at the moment of utterance and reception—and I believe this is what happens in Christian communication. In Australia we talk of having ‘wombat theology’, i.e. indigenous cultural communication. This is a simplistic way of approaching the matter. Immediacy is wholly essential.

### **Immediacy Leads to Immediacy**

Whilst a person may exercise immediacy, the very thing itself comes from his personal relationship with God. It is not, then, intended that that ministry should lead to the communicator, but to God. Because all true proclamation is witness to God, rather than a mere explanation that is

doctrinal and theological, then it will lead the true hearers to God. In turn they will communicate with immediacy. Immediacy springs from ardency or, as Jonathan Edwards would put it, ‘the religious affections’. Peter said, ‘. . . Jesus Christ. Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy’ (I Pet. 1:8). This, in a way, was his continuing answer to Jesus’ questions, ‘Simon, do you love me, do you love me more than these?’

It is the passion which communicates. It is love which is at the heart of the message. We love because He first loved us. Christ’s love controls and constrains us. This is the first love and the continuing love. To abide in God’s love is to abide in God and is for God to abide in us. The love expressed in the Song of Solomon is not too much to describe our love with Him and His with us. We may know the Scriptures well, but not well enough if our love does not show itself towards Him, and does not express itself towards others. Samuel Rutherford has shown us this ardency as perhaps no other has done. ‘Since he looked upon me my heart is not my own; he hath run away to heaven with it, ‘was one of his statements. Strangely enough our love for others cannot exist without first our passion for Him. If it does not exist for others—as for Him—then we have no genuine immediacy.

### **The Cost and Way of Present Immediacy**

Probably no greater expression of communication-inardency can be found than Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians. It is filled with the passion to proclaim. In it the cost of immediacy is set out. The two great passages of his sufferings and labours—6:4-12 and 11:21-29—tell us

of his love for the doomed race. In 4:7-15 he tells us of the identification with the heart of the Gospel which is essential to true preaching. We have the transcendent power of God in our earthly vessels, and whilst we are always carrying about with us the killing of Jesus, we will always be afflicted, perplexed, persecuted and struck down. The reaction to the act of crucifixion—elsewhere described as ‘a scandal’ and ‘foolishness’—will inevitably come and vent Its anger on the messenger, so much one is he with his Lord being-crucified. Such immediacy is present in the preacher on this matter that the hearer reacts as did the hysterical Christ-hating mob on the day of his death. Yet it is the only way of communicating. Whilst this form of death works in the proclaimer, it brings life to the listener. Not only is Christ’s death shown, but his very life is communicated to the hearer. That is how ‘grace comes to more and more people’.

We see, then, that we cannot communicate Christ apart from Christ, his death apart from his death, and his life apart from his life. Only love will bring us to this—the love which springs from intimate fellowship with the Father and the Son. This alone explains the martyrs and their fearlessness in the face of death. It explains the great preachers down through the centuries, such as Paul, Peter and Apollos; Polycarp and Ignatius; Augustine and Tertullian; Calvin, Luther and Zwingli; the Pietists and the Puritans; Jonathan Edwards, the Wesley brothers, George Whitefield and the Welsh Itinerants; the Evangelicals of the nineteenth century, and then the preachers and teachers such as Charles Spurgeon, James **Denney** and **Peter** Forsyth. Nor must we miss the missionary passion which broke out in the first few centuries and carried on down through the

centuries through a holy remnant until in the nineteenth century it broke out afresh, and has carried multitudes into the Kingdom of God. In our age the suffering of believers has been immense—no less than in any other age.

In all of this there has been holy ardency and holy immediacy, so that he—Christ—has seen the fruit of the travail of his soul, and has been satisfied.

*The Last judgement*

Judgements there had been in time, through time,  
And all to meet at this last time  
The final time. The time than none could stop,  
Reverse, destroy, prevent.  
This fearful time, this day of doom,  
This day inevitable, this fear and gloom  
That dogged a million souls,  
Cowed with the coming retribution,  
Yet seeking—hard—to evade,  
To dim the dread, to drown the doom,  
To escape the Love itself  
That died to crush the pride of sin  
And set the human spirit free.

I saw it there beside the sea—  
The sea of God, not man—  
That great white throne, that assize fair,  
That brilliant holy place of God  
Where now He sat in awesome majesty.  
All hell shrank back and death—corrupt—  
Paled paler than its self.

The heavens tainted by the fall  
Of creatures fierce and beauty dead  
Fled to the nethermost parts of hell  
To slip from Eyes that flamed their fire  
Of peerless holiness. I saw  
The earth shrink back, the sea, too, flee  
And hell and Hades could not hold  
The dreadful horror of the sight  
Since holiness consumes the dark  
Till evil curls away in pain  
Burned by its own antipathy  
Of Him Who made and makes all things,  
And having made redeems through shame  
Of that ancient Hangman's Tree.

There was no place that men could hide,  
No place for evil, none for sin.  
There was no point where angels proud  
Could measure scorn, or scoff the truth.  
No place indeed for any creature.  
No refuge cried, 'Come hide in me!'  
Since every refuge sought to hide  
In yet some other place.  
All evil stripped to bare  
Shuddered within itself to die,  
Yet could not dare, as could not hide.  
I heard the moan, the crying groan  
Of all that lived in time, as brilliant light  
Banished the fantasy of night,  
And brought to bear His judgement true.  
Those books of many pages  
Turned in relentless turn

Until each thing made clear  
Harried the shameful hearts of men  
Whose thankless hate had brought  
That Man to death upon that Tree.  
Man's abnegation of his holy self—  
So long concealed—  
Was now unmasked till sin was sin,  
And crime was crime, was crime, was crime.  
I saw the sea give up its dead,  
And hell and death all trembling, pale,  
The sentence heard-their death,  
The second death, the horror hot  
That knows no ceasing night and day.  
In this was flung-this fiery lake  
The evil that once sought  
All men to seduce, all creatures fair  
To rise against their Maker, and subdue  
His holy purpose for His holy world,  
And make His light all dark and gloom.  
I heard the sigh of endless pain  
And knew His retribution true  
At last had reached true justice-height  
And final climax.

I felt the thrill go through the air,  
I felt the joy break through despair;  
I heard the song that rose and rose  
From hearts once cruelly quiet,  
Once sadly silent. Now they saw  
The judgements true-with awe  
The knowledge dawned that God is good,  
That nothing evil ever spawned

May know its victory. Christ's fair blood  
Pursues all evil to its lair  
And makes its end for ever there  
Within the burning lake.

I saw the heavens pass away  
That once had known the conflict strong  
Of prideful angels. I saw the earth  
That once had pitted selfish pride  
Against the God Who made it. Saw  
The seething sea of man's iniquity  
Vanish before the eyes of Him  
Who once created it in joy  
And beauty sinless. I saw it writhe  
As cleansing power from the Cross  
Surged through all things in judgement strong,  
Purging the evil until they  
Were pristine-pure again,  
Until the whole creation- heavens and earth  
Became His new-His true Creation.

At times I hear this song within my soul,  
And when the pain of sin-within, without  
Comes coursing in its evil way  
I sing within my heart-my spirit new  
That God is pure, and God is true,  
And evil's doomed, and truth is strong.  
I long-and know the longing's right  
That soon His eyes will banish night  
And bring the eternal day. I weep for joy,  
For Cross on Calv'ry's Hill,

*The Stranger in the Cemetery*

For heart of God—that heart of love—  
And love the great white throne;  
Fear not that it is pure but thrill with JOY  
That name of mine is written in His book,  
That I shall never dread to see His look  
But love to see His eyes that love my own,  
And me, and—too—His people all elect.