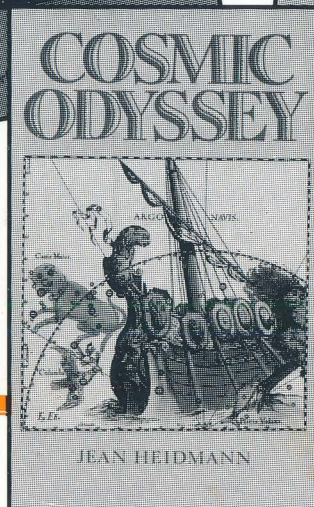
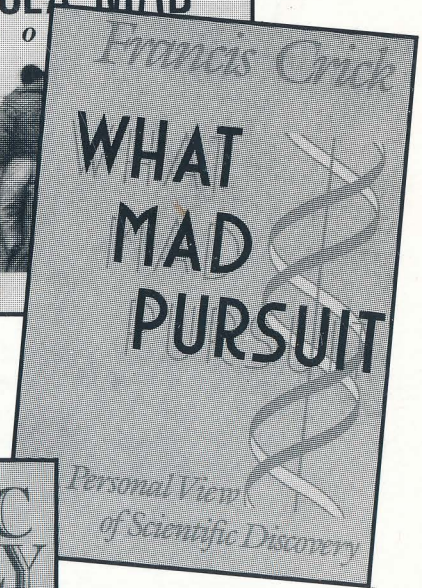
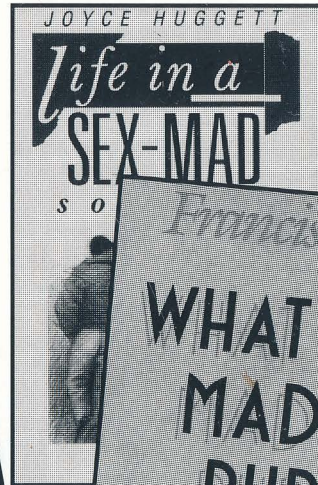
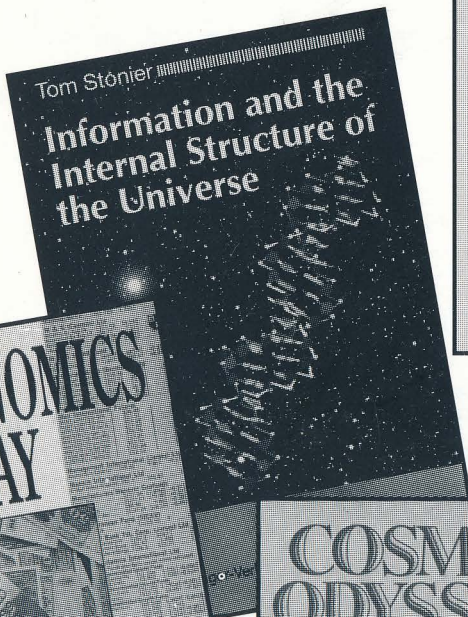


FAITH & THOUGHT

• BULLETIN •



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EDITORIAL

This issue is quite a 'mixed bag' of contents. It was good to have our President, Dr D. J. E. Ingram to give his address at the AGM, and the account here is compiled from notes taken at the time; it thus reads rather telegraphically. The article on the Dead Sea Scrolls by our chairman brings us up to date on this matter. Readers will find how many difficulties attend those who work in this area.

'The "Battle" continues' arose from a meeting in London to launch Paul Davies' book 'The Mind of God', and again has been compiled from notes taken at the time. The last article has been condensed somewhat from a paper published in 'The Modern Churchman' in 1976. It is reproduced here with due acknowledgement, and the hope that it may stimulate some correspondence.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1992

The 1992 AGM of the Victoria Institute was held on Tuesday, May 12th at the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (Christian Impact) St Peter's Church, Vere Street. The Chairman, Terence Mitchell presided. Apologies had been received from Sir Robert Boyd, the Revd Eric Delve (Down to Earth Trust), and Richard Wilkins (Association of Christian teachers). The minutes of the 1991 AGM, published in Faith and Thought Bulletin, 1991, Number 10 (October 1991) were approved. There were no matters arising.

The Chairman reported his pleasure at being able to welcome to the gathering Dr D. J. E. Ingram, President of the Victoria Institute, who was to deliver the Presidential Address.

Membership in 1991 was about 400, compared with 450 for the previous year, and it had been necessary to increase the subscription. An appeal was made to the membership for anyone able and willing to undertake to administer the Institute on an honorary basis. This would cut costs considerably. With regard to the future, a whole day symposium, such as had been the practice in the past, had come up for re-consideration. One suggestion offered was the theme 'The Relevance of Christianity Today', and this idea would be followed up.

Since the 1991 meeting there had been two issues of Science and Christian Belief (Vol. 3/2 and 4/1), and two issues of Faith and Thought Bulletin (issues 10 and 11).

Elections The President and Vice-Presidents were re-elected, and Mr Brian Weller was elected Honorary Treasurer. Mr T. C. Mitchell and Dr A. B. Robins were re-elected for a further term of office. Two names were submitted for election to the Council, the Revd Dr C. W. Karunaratna and the Revd E. C. Lucas. Both were duly elected to Council.

Mr Brian H. T. Weller presented the annual accounts, and made the following points:

1. The Institute is greatly dependent upon the generosity of those members who so kindly make an annual donation
2. In comparing the position as reported in the Accounts in the hands of those present at the A.G.M. i.e. as at 31st December 1991 with the position at 30th September 1988:

General Fund	from o/d £1,987 to credit of £12,415
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Appeal Fund	from £8,089 to £17,853
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An overall improvement in excess of £24,00.

3. But expenditure had risen by £1,377 to £7,490 for year ended 31.12.91

4. As a result of the investment of the Sir John A. Fleming legacy investment income had risen by more than £1,300 pa to £1,465
5. Because administration costs continue to rise, the Institute needs an injection of additional capital funds; an endowment of some £20,000 to £30,000
6. The increased subscriptions from 1st January this year; an extra £3 per member, £1.50 per joint member related only to the increased cost of publication and distribution over the last three years.
7. Council had approved the retrospective transfer of £2,000 from Appeal Fund to General Fund as in the NOTE to the 31.12.91 Balance Sheet
8. My personal thanks for members' encouraging greetings from the 1990 AGM which had greatly cheered me whilst in hospital recovering from a heart attack exactly one year ago today.

Mr Weller then proposed the election of Benson, Catt and Company as Auditors, and this was carried.

This concluded the business meeting, and the Chairman invited Dr E. C. Lucas to introduce the speaker, Dr D. J. E. Ingram, to deliver his address.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: BALANCE—AN ESSENTIAL CONCEPT IN SCIENCE AND RELIGION?

Often we have to hold apparently opposite ideas in balance. This is not dilution of either, but a holding of both in tension. For example, the contemporary idea of *chaos* does not do away with the *uniformity of nature*. In the theological sphere, we have opposites such as *free-will* and *pre-destination* to hold in balance. It is sometimes asked 'What is the difference in outlook between the sciences and the humanities?', and this is hard to answer. In science we could say that one is on the 'outside' (objective) and in the humanities, on the 'inside' (subjective), but this is somewhat simplistic. In science we try not to let OUR ideas interfere with the results, which is not true in the humanities. For instance, if comparing, say, 'Hamlet' with 'Macbeth' we could not apply scientific analysis very usefully. Could we say, then, that Christianity is a more humanities approach than a scientific?

It is interesting to compare science and theology from the viewpoint of a series of matched pairs of apparent 'opposites'.

1) In theology we have a balance to strike between *pre-destination* and *free-will*. For example, in Ephesians we are 'chosen before the

foundation of the world', but in Deuteronomy, we are enjoined to 'choose life', and in Romans, 'all those who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved'. In science a parallel comparison might be between *prediction* and *chaos* (where we have too many data to confuse the picture).

2) Another balance is that between *faith* and *works*. 'By grace are you saved, not of works', but 'faith without works is dead'. Faith seems to be more of a 'potential', whereas works is an 'action'. A similar situation in science might well be the tension between heredity and environment—nature and nurture. We are initially programmed by DNA, but we are not *just* DNA.

3) Then there is the contrast between *fear* (of God) and *love*. In Luke we are enjoined to fear, but in John's epistle 'there is no fear in love'. We hold these together by using them in the appropriate situation. The fear of the Lord is to do with our actions and God's attitude to them, whereas the love of God is the result of God's action and our response to it. Similarly, in science, we have the *particle-wave* paradox. Elementary particles can be seen to behave as BOTH particle and wave, but it depends on how we design our experiments as to which behaviour we see predominate. Again the 'right' situation has to be selected.

4) There is an important balance to strike in Christian practice between the *church* and the *individual*. In Romans, 'we, though many, are one body' but in Ephesians 'everyone in particular'. This is a current issue when thinking of Church unity. We must remember that unity is not uniformity. In science, the comparison is between the *quantum* (individual) and the *classical* (large numbers) behaviour. (However our understanding of the behaviour of the single quantum is changing today, which might make this comparison less applicable. Ed.)

5) *Privilege* and *responsibility* is a delicate balance to strike in the modern world, for the Christian. In fact, we must try and hold these in tension continuously—both are important. In scientific terms we have a comparison between '*top-down*' and '*bottom-up*', eg, in administrative circles, both these concepts must be practised for efficient management, otherwise extremes result, and wasteful antagonisms.

A common question asked by students is 'Why is it that the scientist who studies nature doesn't believe in God (who made it)?' The answer might be to think of two people watching a TV programme. One is lost in the story, the other is concerned with how the picture is being produced. Another problem to be resolved is to do with the Anthropic Principle. Are we unique in the Universe, or is there a

probability of many universes? Is science really objective? Can science be 'falsified' (Popper's criterion for a theory). A partial answer to such questions might be that we need to have a *creative* imagination, as well as *data* on which to work.

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

The Dead Sea Scrolls have been in and out of the news ever since the discovery of the first manuscripts in 1947. A persistent suggestion has been that they contain new evidence which undermines what is known from the New Testament about the origins of Christianity, and that this has been suppressed by people with a religious axe to grind. This belief has been fed, so to speak, by the fact that 45 years since the first discovery, the documents have still not all been published. A considerable number of them have been, however, the main Oxford University Press series, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*, having run to eight quarto volumes (I (1955), II (1961), III (1962), IV (1965), V (1968), VI (1977), VII (1982), VIII (1990), IX (in press), and X well advanced), and there have been a number of text publications outside the series.

Seven substantial scrolls—two copies of Isaiah, a Commentary on Habakkuk, a Genesis Apocryphon, and the sectarian documents, Community Rule (Manual of Discipline), Messianic Rule (Rule of the Congregation), and War Rule (War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness)—were already published by 1955; and an eighth major manuscript, the Temple Scroll, which became available in 1967, was published in 1977. Most other manuscripts of reasonable size have also been published, but the finds included thousands of smaller fragments, many with only a few characters on them, and it is largely these which have caused the great delay in completing the full publication.

When the enormous extent of the various finds was recognised in the early 1950s, G. Lancaster Harding (English, Protestant), the Director of Antiquities in Jordan, invited R. de Vaux (French, Roman Catholic), the Director of the Ecole biblique in Jerusalem, to direct their study and publication. To accomplish this de Vaux formed an international team consisting (in alphabetical order) of J. Allegro (English, agnostic), M. Baillet (French, Roman Catholic), F. M. Cross (American, Protestant), H. Hunzinger (German, Protestant), P. W. Skehan (American, Roman Catholic), J. Starcky (French, Roman Catholic), and J. Strugnell (English, Protestant). The very composition of this team, and particularly the fact that it included Allegro, later

well known for his theories about mushrooms and fertility, and who would undoubtedly have made the most of anything which might undermine Christianity, shows the absurdity of the suggestion that there could have been a conspiracy to suppress embarrassing manuscripts. Moreover the association of Protestants and Catholics together, shows that the allegations in the recent book *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* by Baigent and Leigh (who had previously published a fanciful account of the 'Holy Grail') about a Roman Catholic plot are nonsense.

There has been criticism of the desire of those working on the scrolls officially, to produce definitive editions, involving great delays because of the immense expenditure of time needed for hunting for joins, or matching fragments, but this is a situation familiar to anyone in the academic world, where most scholars who have given years to a task wish to produce careful work which will last, and to have priority in publication. It is human nature. It may be true that if photographs of all the fragments had been published, higgledy piggledy so to speak, as soon as they could be photographed and printed, scholars working independently might have made progress on many texts. There would have been much duplication of effort, however, and the absence of the vital clues of colour, texture and exact profile and scale, which can only be used by someone on the spot, would have led to many false trails, some of which would no doubt have got into the popular literature, from which it normally takes years to eradicate them. Such photographic plates of fragments have been published recently, but it remains to be seen whether this will really lead to much useful further progress.

Reference: R. H. Eisenman and J. M. Robinson. *A Facsimile Edition of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Biblical Archaeological Society, Washington D.C. 1991, 2 vols. 1785 plates.

THE 'BATTLE' CONTINUES

The time-honoured 'battle' between Bishop Wilberforce and T. H. Huxley has been revived to some extent over these last months—according to the Press. In fact, the so-called 'confrontation' of the 19th century has been much exaggerated according to historians of science. The 20th-century 're-run' has been in the headlines largely because of Dr Richard Dawkins' strong views, and the fact that he challenged the Archbishop of York to a debate at the International Science Festival in Edinburgh earlier this year. Both men are scientists, Dawkins a biologist and Habgood a physiologist. One

would imagine that a scientist-turned clergyman must be a particular irritant to an atheistic scientist, calling for more than usual opprobrium. The Press reported the debate, but perhaps over-emphasised the heat at the expense of the light which it shed.

The Editor attended a panel discussion held in the Royal Society in May, which was convened by Dr Paul Davies to launch his latest book, 'The Mind of God'. The meeting attracted quite a large audience who were addressed by four panellists, Dr Davies being in the chair. The panel responded to questions put by the chairman, and was made up of Dr Dawkins, Sir Herman Bondi, physicist and humanist, who were countered by Professor Russell Stannard, Christian physicist, and Bishop Hugh Montefiore. This last-named wrote his account of the gathering in the 'Church Times' a short time after. It seemed to the Editor that opinion was roughly equally divided in the audience, but this is a subjective view, based on the response which the few questions allowed to the audience evoked from them.

Much discussion by the panel revolved around the 'god of the gaps' approach to the science-faith debate. As science advances further with its explanation of the universe, is God being forced into the ever-shrinking gaps in our knowledge? He is only invoked to explain the so-far inexplicable. Both Montefiore and Stannard would have none of this. God is transcendent as Creator and Sustainer, or he is nothing. Bishop Hugh claimed that one of our big 'gaps' is the effect of the spirit upon the material, which is not being much addressed; this is obviously a particular concern of his. Stannard, for his part, said that 'gaps' never convince us of God's existence. Both Christians tried to come to terms with the way in which God acts in a universe set up with laws. Are these broken when miracles occur? Does God intervene to suspend His laws? Montefiore suggested this might be the case, but Stannard was happier interpreting miracles as spiritual 'messages', especially in John's gospel. ('A miracle is that which increases faith'—from Shaw's St. Joan).

Bondi's view of science was as a search—constantly advancing and changing. Hence a 'Theory of Everything' was an absurdity and meaningless. The concept of God was a vague one, and Bondi repeatedly spelled out his abhorrence of absolute certainty. The 'arrogance of certainty' was anathema to him. Dawkins claimed that physics may come to an end some day, but Bondi's picture was of an island of knowledge which increased in size as more was discovered about the universe. As it did so, so also did the boundary with the unknown increase. Understanding of complexity has to proceed step by step. Bondi was puzzled to know how the mental and spiritual were related, as he could not come to grips with the spiritual. Was

this dimension outside the mental/physical picture? Stannard answered this by linking the physical and mental to thoughts and ideas, and the spiritual to our relationship with God. He was particularly concerned with the response of the public at large to recent advances in knowledge. The Big-Bang theory, which seems to have gained some more support from recent discoveries, has made people react quite strongly, so that they feel more uncertain of the universe than they have previously.

Dawkins was very categorical on the issue of 'design'—an illusion in his view. In order for Darwinism to help physicists with their struggles over creation, one would need a multiplicity of universes, large numbers being necessary. Stannard suggested that this could possibly help in the explanation of the Anthropic Principle (that the universe seems to be designed for life to exist), but to a Christian a population of universes would not appeal. To a biologist like Dawkins, such an idea was to be considered. It seemed at one point that the discussion focussed on this point: design and creation by God, as against an 'apparent design' resulting from an almost infinite number of universes to allow chance to operate.

In answer to a question from the floor as to whether science gave the 'how' and faith the 'why', Dawkins said the question had no meaning for him. Montefiore claimed that people need a purpose, a 'why', and Bondi said that WE give purpose to life (humanism). Stannard attempted to answer the question as to the origin of the laws of the universe by suggesting that quantum fluctuations at zero time can account for the origin, but there is no 'space' at this point and mathematics precludes our finding ultimates. Bondi said that we find laws where we choose to look for them.

One questioner likened God to a gardener; we see Him in love, beauty, truth, etc. But believers would claim that God is much more than these. Towards the end of the meeting, Dawkins re-iterated his conception of religion as a virus, passed on through generations. The effect of infection by such a virus would be to make us feel that we believe in something, but were not sure what it was: it might convince us that we ought to go and kill someone. This was countered by Stannard's view that a very effective idea and worth spreading might be the instruction to 'love your enemies'. The final word came from Bondi, much concerned over man's inhumanity to man. For generations religious people have put each other to death for what they believed. Religion was more destructive than constructive, and it was humanism which had tamed Christianity. He made a plea for more tolerance above all else.

NEIGHBOURS UNBORN

What will happen to the human race if it adopts Christianity?

Somewhere in the world, at any given moment, a child is being born into inescapable poverty and sickness. The duty to help that child, physically and mentally, falls on any Christian who has it in his power to help. The child's distress has already occurred. But should it have occurred? Should it, ideally, have been prevented from occurring? In other words, what has Christianity to say about a child not yet conceived? Can there be a duty to the unborn? If so, what is it?

The answer in specific cases—and every case is specific—has to be found in the individual conscience; or rather since we are talking of a joint activity, within the consciences of the married couple concerned. Christianity, in one aspect of it, consists in subordinating every activity to the will of God.

But, while the conscience remains the final arbiter, general considerations may help it to reach the right conclusion. I shall try to summarize what I believe to be the most important of them.

1. Before a child is conceived, it has no existence.

If there were souls awaiting incarnation, one could imagine a duty to provide them with a body, so that the soul might come to perfection. Christianity is precise and intelligible. It has no room for duties which there is no possibility of ascertaining, still less of fulfilling. If there is a duty to bring a child into the world, it is a duty owed to God, not to the eventual child—whose pre-natal needs, if any, are incapable of being known.

2. The Christian duty to a child, once it has been born, is to bring it up in the knowledge of God through Christ, so that the soul may become a living member of the Kingdom of God. 'Duty to God' and 'duty to neighbour' are here seen to coincide in their simplest and most important function. God requires the soul to be with him in his own environment; and the child needs the life of the soul for its personal fulfilment.

3. That God desires the life of the individual soul, so that it may be with him when it leaves the body, is evident from the teaching of Jesus. It is confirmed by his Resurrection and Ascension, and by the power which he gave to his followers to become 'children of God' through the grace of the Spirit.

If this gift of 'eternal life' is looked at, not as a bonus for good living, but as the object for which mortal existence was designed to be a preparation, then it becomes apparent that God's purpose in creating the human race was and is the creation of 'immortal' souls.

This view is confirmed by the nature of the physical universe. Its

incalculable size, duration and complexity do not conceal the fact of its essential transience and flux. Since a stable physical millennium is impossible, the field of human permanence and perfection has to lie outside time and space.

4. The will of God that all human beings should be drawn towards this permanence and perfection is confirmed by Jesus' insistence that his Gospel is universal and that it must be carried to the ends of the earth.

There is no evidence that any part of the human race is constitutionally incapable of receiving the truth of the Gospel. Missionary experience confirms that Jesus revealed a picture of ultimate reality capable of being recognized by the human heart, whatever its mental background or the colour of its skin.

5. The new condition—or phenomenon, rather—which Jesus introduced into the human species was called the Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of Heaven). It means the society (association or Church) of those who have received life in the soul while still living in the body. The novel characteristic of this Kingdom is its power to extend itself by its own internal dynamic. The metaphor of the leaven in the flour conveys this aspect of it most forcibly. The dynamic is, of course, the power of the Spirit of God working within the hearts and minds of members of the Kingdom and so influencing others to become members.

Admission to membership is through the grace of God. Jesus promised that anyone who sincerely believes in him will not be turned away. As evidence of sincerity, it will be necessary first to obey the conscience in renouncing interests and attachments which stand in the way of membership. This is commonly called repentance of sins; and is commonly followed by the grace which denotes God's forgiveness.

6. Against that background the question repeats itself: Is it better that a child should be brought into this world or not be brought into this world?

We have come some way towards the answer, in compassionate terms, when we note:

- (a) that we are thinking about the giving of existence to a non-existent being;
- (b) that this existence has to be one of pain and suffering, whichever way we look at it. If the child is fortunate enough to learn the truth of Christianity, the suffering can be redeemed. If he is not so fortunate, he will be condemned to a life without certain knowledge of the means of fulfilment;

- (c) that living conditions, in physical terms, are likely to become progressively worse on this crowded globe.

But we have still some way to go before we come to the Christian answer, even in general terms.

Apart from the interests of a non-existent being—that is, of the 'child' before it is conceived—there are clearly other factors to be taken into account.

(i) *The interests of the prospective parents.* The desire to bring children into the world is so deep-rooted that nothing less commanding than the emotional, intellectual and spiritual appeal of Christianity is likely to dislodge it.

It is possible, of course, if the predicted population explosion occurs, that sheer human compassion for posterity may influence married couples either to limit reproduction severely or to forgo it altogether. But this sacrifice of natural desires and affections will be a sad and negative business unless accompanied by Christian faith and love. If there is to be a halt, and eventually a decline, in population, the human race will feel thwarted unless they are fully and consciously aware of serving the Creator's purpose in allowing the trend to continue.

But, that said, there remains the question whether women—or certain women—need to bear children for their personal fulfilment. Is the reproductive instinct so much a part of their nature as human beings, that no other activity, no other relationship, physical or spiritual, is able to take its place?

It is obviously not possible, within the scope of this article, to treat that question as fully as it deserves. We can start by making some distinctions, not always recognized.

The distinction between the mating instinct and the breeding instinct, is one. The distinction between the breeding instinct and the maternal instinct, is another.

Until contraception came to be generally accepted and practised, the first of those distinctions was relatively immaterial. In the vast majority of cases marriage was inseparable from parenthood. Today it is increasingly practicable, throughout the world, to consider marriage and reproduction as distinct activities.

For the great majority of healthy men and women, a lasting union provides the best basis for physical, mental and spiritual fulfilment. One could even argue—for reasons too long to give here—that the natural Christian unit in society is more often a married couple than a single man or woman. The sayings of Jesus would not seem to contradict that view.

To regard the marriage relationship in itself as inherently

incapable of providing fulfilment to the parties, tends to diminish the value of that relationship.

If women were wise, they would insist on this point even more strongly than men are inclined to do. For the first time in history, science and custom have united to enable women to become full and equal partners with men in marriage. They, as well as men, can insist that they have physical and mental and spiritual needs requiring satisfaction through union and companionship; and that the satisfaction does not have to be paid for by pregnancy, childbirth and the bringing up of children. If women insist long enough and loud enough, men may come to accept as a commonplace what they are only beginning to appreciate here and there: that women are born to have souls, as well as men; that the soul has no sex; and that that—not a less flattering male supposition—is the reason why 'in heaven there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage'. Christianity can hardly mean something less generous than this.

Given the establishment of a marriage on this footing, i.e. the fulfilment of the mating instinct of equal partners, the question of adding children to that relationship can be separately evaluated. Obviously, in such a partnership, the decision will be a joint one; and, since we are discussing the effect of Christianity on the human race as a whole, it must be assumed to be taken in a Christian spirit. That would seem to require the second of our distinctions: between the breeding or reproductive instinct, which women have inherited through hundreds of thousands of years of evolutionary biological functions, and another instinct which can be called 'maternal', because it relates to the care of children, but is in fact independent of motherhood or blood-relationship and contains the minimum of possessiveness. This is the instinct which sees children not as babes, to be adored in their cradles and petted in the nursery, but as souls in embryo, destined to grow up to uncertainty and suffering and therefore needing an early and lasting assurance that a loving Creator is always at hand to help them. This instinct lies at the heart of Christianity.

Every year more and more children throughout the world are being born into homes which cannot provide them with the assurance they need. Against that background, if Christianity is to spread as it must, it is more than possible that Christian married couples will increasingly choose to fulfil their maternal and paternal instincts by caring for children already born, whose need is absolute and immediate, rather than bring into the world more children to experience the same need.

(ii) *The interests of the world at large.* Under this heading, for the

purposes of analysis, falls the question whether, at a given time and place, it is best that the population should be maintained or increased or decreased.

The short answer, from a Christian point of view, has to be this: that human reproduction is not to be governed by economic or political or demographic considerations. This is true, whatever the size or fortunes of the community concerned. It is true for a race or a nation; and it is true, in its ultimate extension, for the human species as a whole.

The only valid criteria are Christian criteria, some of which have been noted. One cannot say otherwise and remain a Christian.

I have no wish to be horrific in a sober context; but simply to insist that the Christian community must unite in formulating and expressing its views on human reproduction. If once it concedes that total numbers—whether viewed in terms of a maximum or minimum or even an optimum—have any relevance to the question whether a specific married couple (and every couple is specific) should or should not have a child or children, it has taken a decisive step away from the Kingdom of God.

(iii) *The will of God.* Under this all-embracing heading we return, as we have to, to what we believe in general terms to be the will of God in relation to human reproduction. In general terms that qualification cannot be repeated too often. The particular answer in each case belongs to the Christian conscience of those concerned.

It is clear from the teaching of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, that every human activity has to be subordinated to the work of extending the Kingdom of God. On the subject of marriage and family involvements, the directions are specific; even ruthless. Jesus recognises that marriage is the natural condition for most men; but he speaks with approval of those who are willing to remain unmarried so that they can serve the Kingdom better. His own true family, he says, are those who follow his teaching. Spiritual affinity is more important than blood-relationships. He speaks in the strongest terms of the duty to care for children and instruct them in the truth about God. He nowhere indicates that the breeding of children is part of this duty. Ideally, all human energy is to be devoted primarily to the task of bringing the light of divine truth to the minds of other human beings, whenever and wherever they may appear on the earth.

Against that background—in trepidation, but still in faith and hope—a Christian married couple will pray for guidance. They went into marriage in the belief that their union would help them to serve the Kingdom of God more effectively. At the time when Jesus spoke about marriage in relation to the Kingdom, marriage was virtually

synonymous with having children. Today there is an option: Shall we leave the way open for a child? Or shall we close it?

When the teaching is silent, what does the spirit of the teaching say?

What that spirit has to say to the couple concerned, is a matter for their private ear. Nevertheless, it is not forbidden—and may therefore be required—for Christians generally to try to come closer to a general interpretation of that spirit, using such rational faculties as God has given them.

The considerations already noted, fall, I believe, within the scope of this licence or requirement. For one generation to have compassion for the next, is clearly within the general spirit of the teaching. For individuals in any generation to be willing to sacrifice natural desires and affections, if the situation calls for such sacrifice, is less than the requirement that they shall be willing to lay down their own lives: and that requirement is sanctioned by patriotism, the noblest of man-made ideals and only lower than the Christian ideal itself.

But equally, it may be said, the call of Christian duty can point the other way, or seem to. God works through human instruments; not, in general, through angels or other supernatural agencies. To extend his Kingdom, he requires willing agents. We have noted already the organic process by which a member becomes an agent through the very nature of his own creative experience on adoption to membership. What is more reasonable than to expect that the child of Christian parents, themselves members of the Kingdom, will readily—not to say, automatically—become a member also? On that basis, it must be right that the parents should have as many children as possible, so that the Kingdom may be extended as quickly as possible.

This point of view, though hallowed by Church tradition and reflected in the sacrament of infant baptism, does not accord with the facts. By a disposition that often seems harsh, but may in the long run prove to be merciful, human nature was not designed to work on those simple lines. Though physical life and physical characteristics are hereditary, the life of the soul is not. 'Flesh can give birth only to flesh; it is spirit that gives birth to spirit' (John, 3:6). Admission into the Kingdom of God, as taught by Jesus and fully explained in the Fourth Gospel, is through repentance, amendment of life, forgiveness, and the grace of God. By that grace the spiritual personality comes to birth; becomes a member of the Kingdom. These are things that happen—when they happen—in a mind adult enough, by the test of spiritual understanding, to take a positive, conscious decision. In the case of Jesus himself, if we accept the record, he was a grown man when 'the Spirit descended on him' after baptism by John in the River Jordan. His mission then began.

If Christianity is to be shorn of sentiment, so as to become fully effective in the world, this realism has to be grasped, however much it may hurt to do so. There is no such thing as nominal Christianity.

The stark reality of spiritual life, expressed in those terms, may seem to be a mixed blessing. Yet it is necessary for the human soul to pass through this period of trial before it can reach its ultimate fulfilment. The road may not be the one for everyone to take: 'many are called but few are chosen'. The Creator did not force it on anyone. No one was born into it. Yet, because it is the way of fulfilment; and because every Christian knows in his heart, in spite of his own failures, that it may prove to be the way of fulfilment for others, the Kingdom of God goes on trying to extend itself. This is its inner dynamic. Everyone, the Christian believes, has to be given the chance, through knowledge of the facts, to find his own fulfilment through his own personal commitment. If it is indeed the will of God that his Kingdom be extended throughout the world, the extension will not come in any decisive way from the birth of children to Christian parents. The parents can and will give their children the essential facts, as they see them. But the operative words are more likely to come from a stranger; and, by the same token, the parents may find themselves better able to help a stranger's child than their own.

When these factors are evaluated—as sooner or later they must be—they will be found, I believe, to reflect an organic relationship which can throw much-needed light on the human way ahead. Before very long—perhaps within the course of the next generation—the world will see the beginning of two concurrent movements.

First in importance, a rapid extension of the Christian faith. This will come about through a pincer-movement, so to speak. At the top, the leaders of oecumenical thought in the Christian Churches will come to realize that their preoccupation with public worship, liturgy, sacraments, organization, ecclesiastical politics and (most misleading of all) civil politics as the means of achieving a just and equal social order in material terms—that this preoccupation is barren and misconceived. They will be driven back to a fresh appraisal of their task of extending the Kingdom of God in spiritual terms; terms which relate the individual soul to its after-life, not to a social millennium. This appraisal will be matched and accelerated by the growing realization, at ground level, of the emptiness of human life without an engrossing and plainly worthwhile purpose. Human nature thrives on loyalty, dedication, self-sacrifice, companionship. The peoples of the world have seen through—or will soon have seen through—the snares and inadequacies of nationalism, imperialism and communism.

The hunger in the soul, because it is rational, looks to be fed by the supernatural.

Secondly, but running *pari passu* with this movement towards God, there will be a decline in the world's population. Some of the causes have been noted.

Let us assume—as we have to assume, if we are optimistic—that the Christian cause prevails. So long as the birth-rate continues to outrun the supply of Christian agents, as it does at present, the labourers' will be too few for 'the harvest'. There is no escape, short of a miracle, from that tragically realistic assessment. But suppose that this proportion changes. Suppose that the Kingdom of God comes near to being co-extensive with the human race; near, that is, to the original Christian objective. Will it then matter how large—or how small—is the total of members still alive in the flesh? Will it matter, by the same token, if that number vanished to zero?

By visualizing that possible outcome we may be better able to judge, as Christian thinkers, what our true feelings are about the nature and purpose of human life, as designed by God.

We can reasonably start with the assumption—formulated earlier as a deduction—that God's purpose from beginning to end was and is spiritual. That is to say that, in creating a transient physical universe and transient human creatures within it, he intended to produce something of permanent concern to him in his own environment. We have the evidence of the Christian Episode (the words and events described in the New Testament) that the human soul answers to that intention, in so far as it can receive power to survive the death of the body. We also have in the Christian Episode simple directions as to how that survival may be achieved, and clear instruction to every human being to work for it in himself and in others. The organic pattern is complete. Man does not need to look further in the universe either for his own fulfilment or for some other revelation of the Creator's purpose.

The Kingdom of God spreads through love and care and concern, through compassion for physical and mental suffering; not through contempt, superiority and cold instruction. But underlying this care is the knowledge that every human being, whether sick or healthy, will sooner or later need a conscious relationship with God.

If this is a true interpretation of what human life is about, a difficult question presents itself when we venture to contemplate the cessation of all human life. I say cessation rather than termination, because the termination of the species *simpliciter* can hardly be a rational or worthy objective, any more than suicide is a rational and worthy objective. But for a man to exhaust himself in a good cause, or

deliberately go to meet certain death in a good cause, is to follow the noblest Christian example. And what is true for the individual, can hardly be wholly untrue for the species. Every death, when all is said, is an individual death; and every soul is an individual soul. If the body of the individual is ancillary to the life of his soul, it cannot be otherwise with that aggregate of bodies which is the human race. If the race as a whole shall have completed its task by bringing the whole of its membership—its dwindling residual membership—within the Kingdom of God, there can be no further useful exchange of spiritual energy. At that point it would seem to be as natural for the race to accept physical extinction, as it is natural for one man to do so.

But this does not answer the difficult question: given that God desires the life and presence of human souls in heaven, how many souls does he desire?

Merely to pose that question in those terms—though the terms are fair and honest—is to point the absurdity of expecting an answer; and therefore the irrelevance of the question.

In short, we have been told as much as we need to know. The mathematics belong to God, and are humanly unknowable. What we do know, as Christians, is our continuing duty to bring souls to God. When the Christian species has completed this duty, the tally of souls will be what it will be. This will have to remain an article of faith. Indeed, throughout the piece—and particularly, perhaps, in the terminal stages—men and women may well have to continue to live and act in faith, as they have always had to do in the past. There is no reason to suppose that God will waive that requirement, though it is always open to him to do so through specific signs of his presence and approval. When I spoke earlier about the Christian experience of certainty, I did not mean more—thought I also did not mean less—than the certainty that God revealed himself through Christ. Up till now the way of advance has always been to cling to that personal certainty and try to translate it into words and actions, so that others may share it. In that effort, reason had a continuing part to play in support of the initial inspiration.

A reluctance to think rationally about the implications of their faith in the supernatural, may well be the chief reason why the Christian Churches are failing to make sufficient progress in the modern world. Let it be supposed, for example, that the forecast here outlined is accepted as having a logical basis. There will still be some to say that, because God created human life, it is impious even to think about discontinuing that life. They will forget that God gave the spirit also, and that the spirit takes precedence over the flesh.

There will also be some—and these mainly not Christians—who

are so attached to the notion of evolution that they invest it with a life and purpose of its own.

It is nevertheless useful, even necessary, to view the Christian era against its biological background, rather than against the account given in Genesis. The struggle, which Jesus brought the human race the power to win, is essentially between the spiritual strain in man and his biological strain. Jesus, in his teaching, dramatised the latter as 'the world, the flesh and the devil'. We do not need, I think, to use those terms, provided we make no mistake about the reality of the contest. The biological force urges physical survival: blind physical survival of the species at any cost. The spiritual force, exemplified in the teaching and life of Jesus, cares nothing for physical survival—whether of the individual, the nation, the race, or the whole human species—except in so far as it consciously serves the life of the soul within and beyond the body.

I must not, I suppose, leave this projection without a reference to the Last Judgement and the Second Coming. It is already plain, I hope, that the present forecast is independent of those doctrines, as commonly visualized: that is, in the apocalyptic language of the New Testament. What God's judgement may be of us after death, no one can tell. But this review is concerned with the human future in time and space. In that context it is possible to give a rational and practical interpretation to this somewhat vague area of theology.

The Second Coming of Christ, which he himself foretold during his life and after his Resurrection, has already taken place. It occurred soon after his Ascension. It began, according to certain records, at Pentecost, and has continued ever since. The essence of the Christian experience is that Jesus is still alive in the hearts and minds of those who believe in him. By the operation of his Spirit—which is the Spirit of God himself—he is judging the world here and now. Men and women are being guided, through their consciences, to form a right judgement of themselves, of their function in the universe, of their relationship with God and with their fellow human creatures. There is therefore no need, while the Christian faith still burns, for a second physical manifestation of the Son of God. If and when that need arises, the human race will already have condemned itself.

Two final words: one about the theological colour of this article; the other on a practical point.

It may be said that the writer is too close to gnosticism to be trusted. I hope that those who are tempted to make that charge will note the fundamental distinction between the gnostic heresy and the views here expressed. God, I believe and maintain, made the universe of his express will; and made man, within the universe, of his express

will. The human struggle, therefore, is of his own express making. He wants us to win the struggle, and has shown us how to do so. Why he gave us this test, I do not know, and do not ask to know. But I am certain that the pain and suffering, inseparable from human existence, have a value which we shall one day understand. In the meantime I cannot reject—and I do not believe that Christ would urge us to reject—a practical compassion which will save some future generation from the test which we ourselves, alive as we are, cannot escape.

In the phasing-out period there will obviously be practical problems to overcome. It will be necessary to adopt a way of life both simpler in its needs and more dependent on automation to supply them. As the population falls, it will gradually concentrate in a number of areas chosen for their climate, agricultural resources and access to hydro-electric power. These areas will be linked by television and radio. In the final generation, when the population becomes increasingly aged, they will rely more and more for their subsistence on processed and refrigerated food and medicine. A computerized system, requiring the minimum of maintenance and backed by alternative sources of power, will compensate for the lack of an active labour force. The planning and construction of such a system should not be beyond the technical capacity of a race that has already visited the moon. As for morale, all will depend on whether this gallant band of survivors is convinced that their faith and self-sacrifice reflect the Creator's will. Without that conviction human affairs will never have approached this quiet consummation: either the species will have raced ahead into a final cataclysm; or God will have made his purpose known to some other effect, beyond our present contemplation. But if that spiritual conviction persists and is well-founded, I do not doubt that God will intervene to save the last generation from its physical loneliness: just as he intervened, through the life and resurrection of Christ, to save all subsequent generations from their spiritual loneliness.

BOOK REVIEWS

Robert E. D. Clark *Tomorrow's World*, The Victoria Institute, 1989, 274 pp., paperback, £5.00

Robert was a member of the Victoria Institute for many years and served for a long time as the editor of the journal. He was a keen Bible student and an avid reader of scientific subjects, his own specialisation being chemistry. He wrote many books on the relationship

between the sciences and the Bible and this manuscript was left unfinished when he died in 1984. David Burgess has edited and published the manuscript in its present form.

The book is subtitled, 'A Scientist looks at the Book of Revelation', and the author explains his reason for writing yet another commentary on the Revelation as the need to see it in terms of science and technology and because most commentators have not taken the prophetic element in the book seriously enough.

The author follows traditional views regarding authorship, attributing it to John the apostle in the reign of Nero and rightly sees the imagery as drawn basically from the Old Testament. He is realistic in seeing the book as a series of dream-like visions with the images continually changing in a non-rational way that is typical of dreams. The symbols themselves are not consistent and must be interpreted according to the context. One theological emphasis I find difficult to accept is his uncritical acceptance of dispensationalist teaching that suggests there are to be several 'raptures' (removal of believers) from the earth and consequently his belief that some of the book is addressed to Christians and some to Jews.

Robert was interested in many fringe subjects like the paranormal, witchcraft and magic and has used his reading to good effect in this commentary. For instance he interprets the locust-like creatures of chapter 9 as hallucinatory creations caused by ergot poisoning and draws parallels with the experiences at Salem leading to the notorious witchcraft trials there.

Many of his interpretations are speculative and he puts them forward as possibilities. The earthquake and subsequent astronomical disturbances associated with the opening of the sixth seal could be interpreted as the aftermath of a nuclear war with shock waves, red light obscuring the moon due to nitrogen oxide gas followed by a nuclear winter leading to violent winds over all the earth. More speculative still are his identification of the great star in 8.10 as a planet diverted from its course by men as a weapon, the possibility that everyone saw the witnesses (chapter 11) because of world-wide T.V. coverage and their miracles being to the use of lasers and mini-rockets fired at clouds to prevent rainfall! Bordering on the bizarre are claims that the 'great eagle' of 12.14 could be an aeroplane and the 'loud' angels (14.6) could be 'satellites, encircling the earth every 90 minutes and changing latitudes with each orbital revolution, so within a day or so all parts of the earth could be reached with taped radio messages . . .' (p. 194).

The editor writes in a postscript that, 'Robert Clark has given the fruit of many years of careful study of the Bible and of science. He has

tried to anticipate some of the possible developments in tomorrow's world. Whether he is completely correct or not is less important than the fact that he is probably the first modern scientist to relate what many Christians take to be the most puzzling book of the Bible to modern science'. I would agree. Although I find many of his speculations hard to accept I commend the book, as I would others written by him, as both easy to read and a stimulus to further reflection.

REG LUHMAN

Michael Taylor *Good for the Poor*, Mowbray, 1990, 114pp., pb, £6.95

To present the dilemmas inherent in the relationship between the alleviation of world poverty and Christianity, without diluting either the complexity of the problems or sentimentalising the faith, demands considerable intellectual honesty and courage. Yet, Michael Taylor has succeeded in doing so, with commendable realism and insight, in this lucid book which will appeal to a wide readership, both of those interested in the Christian faith as the basis of morality as well those concerned practically with the plight of all mankind.

Inevitably he draws selectively from Scripture—from the outset he bases his thesis on two parables—but leads imaginatively from these and has the good sense not to claim any distinctive good for Christians. Indeed, he states categorically that faith cannot produce any easy answers. While the fusion he tries to produce of faith and practical matters is occasionally a little uneasy it is always stimulating and always honestly sought, providing a stimulating basis for informed discussion. Early on, the reader is prepared for the realism of the subsequent chapters in which the value of development and the meaning of good works are discussed by being jolted into a consideration of liberation theology and the premise that values are themselves statements of faith.

Having discussed at length the nature of values, Taylor maintains an exemplary openness, perhaps coloured by his Christian Aid background, by affirming the importance of not presupposing that we in the so-called developed world know best. However, his arguments weaken when he juxtaposes his ideal of people being left to decide for themselves their own values with his assertion of the need to integrate and interrelate mission and development.

By the third chapter his realism has reasserted itself in his

hypothesis that what matters is not what is good but what will work, with examples drawn from the area of rural food production. Nevertheless, while the case for the precedence of technical matters over moral matters is persuasive, the underlying morality and reliance on Christian faith are never far from the surface. What is a little surprising is the occasional logical discontinuity. It is self-evident that rarely is there a direct line from faith and values to particular policies and actions, it is commendable to throw out the generalities of moral sentiments and it is wise to insist on the need for foresight and imagination to determine the consequences of an action but to play down the importance of motives and to state categorically that the morality of an action depends on its consequences is altogether different.

In Chapter 4, the penultimate chapter dealing with strength for the poor, moving examples of the contrast between the enormity of world poverty and the plight of particular people are made real by the author's personal and sensitive involvement. From here, it is a direct step to the concluding chapter in which the ebbing and flowing of confidence in the future is discussed along with some of the paradoxes of Christian hope and what the author tantalisingly calls the pessimism of faith. By his candour in attempting to describe his own faith, including his own tendency to be 'tripped into agnosticism', Michael Taylor perhaps confirms what the reader has suspected all along, that his considerable faith and understanding result from a profound intellectual struggle. He is thus able to conclude this book, in appropriately realistic but nevertheless optimistic tone, grounded in a deep understanding of the Gospel.

MARJORY GRANT

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