

Comments On Some Christadelphian Writings

All who read and believe the Bible are conscious of the fact that the world is moving rapidly towards the destruction foretold in Revelation under the symbol of the 7th Vial “poured out into the air.”

This catastrophe, which will cleanse the earth of the wicked and godless in preparation for the Kingdom of God, has long been the subject of the preaching of several sects whose prophetic understanding has been largely derived from the writings of men like Dr. Gratton-Guinness and Dr. Thomas.

Since “The Approaching End of the Age” and ‘Eureka’ and similar books, Bible readers have never been in any doubt that the end of the present order, called in scripture the times of the Gentiles, was to be brought about by a holocaust of destruction involving forces never before released. It used to be thought that these destructive forces were to be hurled against the earth from heaven in the same way as fire came down and destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, supernatural and unforeseeable. It has always been recognised that man’s misguided ingenuity had produced ever more terrible and cruel weapons, but beyond the terrifying high explosive which shattered great cities all over Europe in the last war, it was thought only supernatural forces could develop. Nothing was known to humanity which could bring about the utter and complete wasting and destruction of the entire earth - or practically so - which is predicted in the prophets and by Jesus and the Apostles. What is new to our generation, which was not and could not be foreseen by believers half a century ago, is the discovery of atomic fission - the release of the forces bound by the Creator in the atom. This has put into the hands of men weapons more terrible and deadly than even their discoverers foresaw or imagined; weapons which not only kill and maim those against whom they are used, but which poison and defile the very earth itself and make man’s food and water destructive to life instead of sustaining it. What little we are told or can read and imagine of what will follow the outbreak of war between nations armed with nuclear weapons makes any contemplation of the end of the world and age a matter of shuddering fright. We hope and pray for protection from it by Him who alone can defend from such evil - that we may be counted worthy to escape the things which are coming upon the earth and be removed before Armageddon begins.

These are solemn thoughts, but we can hardly escape them and indeed no intelligent Christian needs reminding that the world has to be changed before peace and righteousness can prevail, but our natural inclination is to push them to the back of our minds and live from day to day. Only so can we have any peace of mind unless we can rise high enough to put complete trust in Our Father and feel assured that we shall be secure. If we can do this, we can face all terrors - we can watch and be ready, knowing that it is at the unexpected hour that Our Saviour is to return.

My purpose here is to remark on the strange situation in which Christadelphians find themselves as the time runs out. For over a century they have been foremost in the study of prophecy and more than any other sect they understand and realise the way the world is going. I think any Christadelphian would agree with what I have written above. They know that it cannot now be long before the last judgments begin to pour out upon an evil and ungodly generation, and one would expect them to be especially and urgently concerned about any aspect of their faith which might be in question.

“Little children, it is the last time; and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come; even now are there many Antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.”

It is widely known that almost from the very commencement there have been divergent views and divisions on a basic doctrine, and in recent years it has become increasingly clear to thoughtful brethren among them that the early Christadelphians did not completely clear away the confusion which has marred the simplicity of the Gospel after it became the accepted religion of the Roman Empire. Yet in these pregnant days what is being done to clear up and resolve these differences and establish whether or no their faith is indeed founded on the Rock which is Christ or on a false foundation? The answer is, nothing, indeed less than nothing, for there are capable and thoughtful brethren who are aware of the existence of the problem but who deliberately ignore it and strive to give their readers the impression that it does not in fact exist or who use their skill to cover up and counteract the efforts of people like us who are trying to bring them into the light.

We would be the last to deny the admirable work which is being done; preaching and special efforts are now almost world-wide; social and charitable work and the care of the sick and aged is past praise; the healing of the so-called Partial Inspiration Division has re-united those who ought never to have been severed. But the sad thing is that all these good works are being accomplished upon a basis which is recognised to be false in vital particulars and the re-union has required as a prime condition the endorsement of a creed which is an affront to intelligent faith. This is, of course, the Statement of Faith, which affirms that “the sentence upon Adam defiled and became a physical law of his being and was transmitted to all his posterity. That Jesus was in the condemned line of Abraham and David, wearing (sic) their condemned nature and that by dying he abrogated the law of condemnation for himself. That the Jews who put Jesus to death were but the instruments in the hand of God for the doing of that which He had determined before to be done, viz. the condemnation of sin in the flesh.”

Superficially, most of these statements would appear to be based upon a sort of interpretation of scripture, but it is true to say that hardly one word of them is in fact truly scriptural. Collectively they constitute what is probably the worst piece of apostate dogma which has ever been compiled. It is impossible to say to-day what proportion of Christadelphians really understand and believe these statements.

John Carter made it quite plain in August, 1958, that he does not accept that Jesus was in any sense under condemnation and also that he rejects the concept of sin-in-the-flesh as used in the Statement of Faith and quoted above.

How is it possible then for the organization to continue which is founded upon such falsehood? The simple explanation is that the Christadelphian Community has acquired a life of its own independent of its constituent members, its literature, its institutions, its finances, now constitute an organization or an entity which can exist and perpetuate itself independently of those who belong to it. It is now virtually impossible for any individual to alter its structure or markedly change its direction. Individuals may think, and up to a point they may speak and write their own thoughts, but the organisation is too strong and too entrenched to be changed. Undoubtedly there are very many among them who recognise that sinful flesh is nonsense and that the affirmation that Jesus was defiled and obliged to die for his own deliverance very near to blasphemy, but they know that they have to be very careful about mentioning the fact, otherwise those others - whether now a minority or a majority - who still fail to appreciate the apostate origin of their mis-beliefs will insist on disfellowshipping, since they have the Statement of Faith as their weapon. Anyone whose conscience or intelligence debars him from

ignoring the situation is now allowed a certain amount of rope, as was John Carter, but ultimately his only course is to shut up and stifle his conscience or to resign, since he has hope neither of being allowed to preach what he believes to be the truth nor of changing the basic of the Community.

It is really remarkable how, in view of the evident desire to keep the matter quiet in the interests of peace and unity, almost every issue of The Christadelphian exemplifies the well-nigh unbelievable contradictions and cleavages which exist. Let us take a look at the November, 1960 issue. Here are good and well written articles by Cyril Cooper, John Carter, L. G. Sargent and a number of others. With hardly an exception these are men well capable of logical reasoning and well read. It is safe to say that one half of the research and thought which has gone into either of their articles would have sufficed to enable them to discover that where the Statement of Faith says in Clause IX that because Jesus had a human body He had to suffer the death required by the righteousness of God, it is making a charge against God which the worst enemy of Christianity could not justify from scripture. It is affirming as a fact a thing which revolts ordinary common-sense. I say they could have discovered this; but I think in fact they already know it but lack the courage to tackle the situation.

L. G. Sargent makes an interesting and intelligent effort to explain the incident of the legion of devils investing the herd of swine. He would have found it no more difficult and perhaps more rewarding to have discussed the present condition of his own Community and their strange possession with that devil known as “changed flesh,” or that “sentence which defiled and became a physical law of his being and (was) transmitted to all his posterity.” Surely the Galileans were no more primitive and gullible in requiring a visual demonstration to convince them that a man had been restored to sanity than people to-day who can believe that a “sentence” could “defile physically” and be transmitted? The contemporaries of those same swineherds said that Jesus Himself had a devil because He could work a miracle. We haven’t made much progress in 1900 years when we find Dr. A. D. Norris affirming that when Jesus died on the cross the devil hung there dead. If Norris is right, then the Jews were more right than we have always thought. But we think that Jesus proved them both wrong.

The Exhortation by Cyril Cooper based on the experiences of the Prophet Hosea is also a good and thoughtful application of lessons to be learnt from the painful trials he went through. In the course of it Brother Cooper says that but for God’s forbearance we should not be able to meet in hope of redemption and life eternal. Very true, indeed, but how unspeakably sad it is that the implication of Christadelphian doctrine destroys the very principle upon which God has extended His forbearance. Earlier the writer asks the Question: “Is it necessarily unreasonable that a perfect man should suffer a cruel death, if as a result the world should be drawn to God and eternally saved?” This is to ask if the ends justify the means - if evil means - and who will deny that the death of Jesus was an evil - justify the good end.

This question exposes the bankruptcy of the Christadelphian faith - that they have no understanding or explanation to offer of the event which is the soul and centre of the Christian Gospel. The writer does not indeed answer the Question. He quotes Psalm 37 and tells us that this is the answer of faith. This was R. Roberts favourite escape when he was in a jamb - we would have expected something better from the writer under review. The text he quotes says: “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.”

I do not see how anyone could honestly regard this as the answer to the problem of why the Christian faith has as its pivot the cruel death of its perfect Exemplar. All that the Psalmist does here is to draw attention to the ultimate reward of the righteous. In point of fact, if we

consider Jesus, the reverse is true – the perfect and the upright man came to an end very different from that promised in the Psalm, so that there must have been another factor in His case; His life and death are not to be evaluated or explained on the basis that every man will be rewarded according as he has done, and that it therefore follows that the righteous will be finally blessed. It is really a woeful under estimate of the sacrifice of Our Saviour to regard it as part of the process by which Jesus - though indeed a perfect man and upright - attained His well-deserved peace. Rather it is the process by which He obtained for us, who are neither perfect nor upright, the chance to share His peace.

The Psalmist is uttering a wide general truth; the best of men are imperfect and in the sight of God prostrate, not upright, and they can only become perfect and upright in a comparative sense. Only insofar as we are entitled to that uprightness and perfection which is conferred by a true faith in and understanding of the Atonement can we regard ourselves as covered by the Psalmist's words. Cyril Cooper's reasoning here is in effect a re-affirmation of the Christadelphian dogma that the death of Christ was necessary for, or part of the process by which He became perfect. It simply will not do. "Yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered, and being made perfect, he became (by dying for them) the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." That is to say, He learned what obedience involved by the temptations He suffered – both in the wilderness and in the lifetime of doing the will of God; He was made and shown to be perfect by the things He suffered in His living experience in contact with evil men, false friends, rejection and hatred, and it was only then – being made perfect - that he could by his death become the author of eternal salvation. The proof for this lies in the actual facts of the case and in the Mosaic Law of Sacrifice that the offering was required to be legally clean and physically perfect. These requirements were antecedent to the sacrifice; therefore, to regard the death of Jesus as contributing to His perfecting is to make the antitype inferior to the type.

Cyril Cooper concludes his exhortation with the lovely words from Isaiah 53, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

There is a pitiful appropriateness in the first seven of those words for those who uphold the Christadelphian Statement of Faith - who in effect sit in Moses' seat in latter-day Jewry. Their tradition has laid it down that human flesh is physically defiled; that Jesus sharing this flesh inherited defilement and condemnation and therefore was required by God to submit to death for His own salvation and therefore for Himself (literally). If this were indeed the case, let these modern prophets tell us why Isaiah did not think to say that the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of Himself. Truly, all these sheep have gone astray, and one can only wonder whether they are not now making their iniquities too great even for the Lord himself to bear.

Another article in the same issue is called "The Uses of Suffering" and is by John Marshall. This too, is interesting, both for what it says and what it implies, but one thing which becomes very evident to the reader is that its Author has had very little personal experience of suffering and has not really thought the problem out. No one, I think, who had either suffered himself or suffered with others would have written, as he does, - "It is perhaps heartening to know too, that suffering, which is really the offspring of sin, was used to destroy the evil that bore it." Is it true that suffering is really the offspring of sin? Obviously it can be. It sometimes happens- perhaps it often happens – that people who live vicious lives bring disease upon themselves. But disease quite as often over-takes the innocent good-living person. After Jesus has answered that question put to him, "Master, who did sin, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" one would hardly expect to find an enlightened man

writing of suffering in this way. He commences his article with these words "We have not far to turn from the bright and shining beauties of nature to see the ugliness of sin and suffering." In recent weeks we have been witnessing one of the bright and shining beauties of nature - widespread flooding, ruining people's homes and causing misery and distress. Another is the epidemic of foot and mouth disease, others are earth-quakes and tornados and forest fires, bringing suffering and destruction to innocent creatures - human and animal. If we say all this is the effect of the curse upon the ground for Adam's sake, that is one thing. A case can be made. But friend Marshall rejects this view; he says, "We cannot make Adam the burden (sic) of our sorrows. All of us inherit the effect of millenniums of sin and wickedness." The fact of the matter is, of course, that he is still enveloped by the smog of original sin, believes that the evil is in our flesh and blood, and that therefore disease and suffering is a good thing for those who are so unfortunate as to experience it. One can only wonder to what extent he has analysed for himself the doctrines he has inherited and which move him to write: "Sin poisons, and leads to suffering, not only from wrong-doing and its consequences but from disease with its miseries." I invite the reader - and if this should come to his notice, the writer also - to consider this sentence and ask himself what it means. (It will be found on page 507 of the November Christadelphian in context.) Leaving aside its grammatical short-comings, what is it intended to tell us? Is it supposed to be an explanation on a medical basis or on a psychological one - or is it supposed to be religion? Evidently the writer himself is more than a bit uncertain, for he adds, as a sort of qualification, "Not that individually and literally we deserve disease through our sin, but rather we become the victims of sin's whole miserable heritage." This amounts to a complete contradiction of what he has already been saying - that we must not put the blame on Adam for the suffering resulting from the sins we commit ourselves - and now he says we do not individually and literally deserve to suffer for our own sins but become the victims of a miserable heritage. He has really only left himself one place to put the blame - on the Creator Himself. Doubtless he would reject this conclusion indignantly, but that is the position he has argued himself into. After all, it was his own idea to reflect on the uses of suffering and he must get himself out of his own dilemma. It is very remarkable how people speak and write things which they and we are so accustomed to that they sound quite reasonable, yet which when analysed and thought about have neither discernible meaning nor relation to reality. It is easy to write, "Sin poisons" and there is a sense in which it is true, but only as a figure of speech. Sin is transgression of law - an abstract conception; no one can swallow sin like a dose of arsenic and become poisoned. Actions which are sin may lead to disease which may kill, but this is quite a different thing, and people writing to instruct the simple ought not to write things which are not true. As has been said, it is probable that the writer himself has no clear idea of his position and had no intention of being confused or misleading. The explanation is that the mind becomes so permeated with a false conception and the clichés which embody it so familiar, that logic and illogic have no bearing. Brought up on the doctrine that sin has changed man's nature and resulted in a defilement which is inherited and cumulative and produces not only wickedness but also disease and death, they are perhaps no longer capable of considering an alternative view. Why do these people never ask themselves, when they talk about us as inheriting the effects of millenniums of sin and wickedness, how few generations of sinners it took to produce the first murderer, or how many millenniums of sin and wickedness can still produce a saint. It would be a very simple lesson if they would ask themselves how it happens that disease and death operate among God's lesser creations - In the animal world, where sin does not reign. These "Reflections on the way" are doubtless most sincere and well intentioned, but they are in fact mainly reflections on the wrong way, based upon a philosophy of life which is fundamentally false. We are not born evil. We do not, and thank God we cannot, inherit the effects of millenniums of sin and wickedness. We are as capable today of obeying God as Adam was In Eden - no more - no less. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man:

but God is faithful, who will, not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” And there is no commandment of God which we could not keep, if we would. Disease may overtake us, from many different causes, including a foolish or sinful way of life, but to describe suffering and disease as the offspring of sin is plain nonsense. Some of the greatest saints have suffered most and the most wicked and evil sometimes enjoy the best of health and live longest. This indiscriminating mix-up of religion and half-baked physiology leads to the most foolish and God-dishonouring conclusions.

This brings me to the last, and in some respects the most significant of the articles in the November Christadelphian; one entitled “Redemption” by A. L. Galbraith of Melbourne. It is both the best and the worst of those I have dealt with; best in that it presents a sound and well-illustrated exposition of the scriptural principle of redemption; worst in that its Author then deliberately de-values that exposition and denies the application of the principle to the one event to which it was directed - the sacrifice of Christ.

He commences by acknowledging the truth of the teaching which is the basis of the beliefs of The Nazarene Fellowship and which alone provides a full and satisfying explanation of the death of Jesus Christ, saying, “Literally, redeemed means to buy back, to buy back something which has been sold or mortgaged.” This is very true and it was first advanced by Edward Turney in 1873, when he showed that this was the very principle upon which Jesus gave His life a ransom for many. A. L. Galbraith goes on to explain how the form arose from the practice of slavery under which men could be bought and sold like cattle and were completely under the control of the master who owned them. He mentions Joseph, literally sold by his brothers for 20 pieces of silver to the Midianites and how, as a result, the Israelites found themselves in bondage in Egypt, from whence they were brought out by Moses, in the words of Deuteronomy 7, “Redeemed out of the house of bondmen.” He refers to the law of redemption, under which an Israelite had the right to redeem a brother who had been sold into slavery and also tells how it is said that for their idolatry the Children of Israel were sold by God into captivity to the Kings of Mesopotamia. All these and other allusions to the various uses of the idea of redemption are outlined by the writer and recognised as illustrating a clear scriptural principle. What does he then do? Does he take the obvious course and go to the New Testament and enquire to what extent, if any, the principle applies in explanation of the great redemption? Oh dear no. Over and over again the term is used, as in Colossians 1:14, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins”, and one would naturally think there was some reason for coupling the term redemption with forgiveness. This, however, is far too straightforward a process for a Christadelphian. His purpose is not to discover what light the various examples of its use can throw upon the reason for the shedding of the blood of Christ, but to prove that such use of them by Nazarene Fellowship writers is unjustified. This is the real object of his article and probably the reason why John Carter has included it at this time. He is not really concerned with scripture principles as such, nor with redemption as a vital aspect - in fact the chief explanation of the Atonement. Mr. Galbraith’s object is to defend the Christadelphian theory of the Crucifixion against what he describes as “the error of Renunciationism; that Christ must have been outside the condemnation of death in order to obtain the release of those who were in bondage.” This is, of course, one aspect of what we believe and it alone accounts for the necessity for Jesus to have been begotten by the Holy Spirit of a virgin. It was dubbed by R. Roberts ‘Renunciationism’ because Edward Turney said when he realised that it was true and scriptural, that he renounced his former Christadelphian view that Christ was under condemnation because he was a human being.

We think it appropriate here to remind our readers that in 1958 John Carter gave expression to the same truth when he wrote, "Otherwise, since Jesus was of our nature, He would be a child of wrath; which is absurd." However, he is still the Editor and under obligation to defend the traditional theory, and therefore he permits his contributors still to produce the old arguments.

Referring to the concept of redemption, to buy back something sold or mortgaged, A. L. Galbraith goes on :- "But we are so accustomed to Bible language that we often fail to notice that expressions are used figuratively." He must have a very poor opinion of the level of intelligence of his readers. Any Bible reader knows full well that it is full of figures of speech of all kinds, and no one with an ounce of discernment would be likely to take a figurative expression and give it a literal application. But neither on the other hand will an honest expositor devalue a literal fact or legal principle by making it merely figurative when it is in reality factually prophetic. We are dealing with principles and facts, not figures of speech. For example, in Exodus, the passage of the Red Sea, the wandering in the wilderness and the entrance into the Promised Land may be described as figurative; but they were literal happenings which were factually prophetic of equally literal events in the experience of men and women who are delivered from the bondage of sin, and who by baptism become heirs of the Kingdom. Any Christadelphian who was foolish enough to affirm that the things that happened to Israel were only figurative, and that therefore the events they prefigured are not to be expected to come literally to pass would get short shrift from his brothers and sisters. But this is exactly what A. L. Galbraith has done with Redemption. Having described and explained the process of redemption, he says, "All this seems very clear and beautiful, but there have been some who have pushed the figure too far."

Of course, there are always people who will make the mistake of pushing a thing too far. They will try to find a precise significance, for example, of every least detail of a parable or similitude, and no one would defend this. But this is not A. L. Galbraith's objection, for a little later he says, "in the literal case of the owner of a slave who was redeemed, the owner had, as a matter of commercial transaction, to release the slave when payment was made. But our redemption is entirely different; God has done it freely."

Now we have it! It is not, in short, a matter of some having pushed too far a figure which he admits seems very clear and beautiful, but, "Our redemption is entirely different." Why should it be entirely different? It is a gratuitous assumption. Why does a scriptural principle which is very clear and beautiful when it is applied to the deliverance of a nation from Egypt or a brother from slavery suddenly become "entirely different" when applied to that event by which the human race has been delivered from the result of sin? This is the negation of reasoned exposition. Is it not true that whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning? If so, what are we supposed to learn from the use of the term 'redemption' and the principle of redeeming by purchase? Nothing apparently. We are expected to suppose that there was no other object than the simple recording of historical events, when Moses was moved by the Holy Spirit to set down the details of Israel's captivity and deliverance or to give them the law requiring the individual ransom of every soul by the half-shekel tribute. Had not all those things a purpose over and above their immediate application and significance? Of course they had; and what can this be other than the explanatory light they throw upon the transaction by which the world was redeemed. How foolish then, and infinitely sad, to see a Bible reader, a Christadelphian, recognising and approving the scriptural principle redemption and then, when he ought to reach the logical conclusion of his reasoning and apply it in order to understand how and why Jesus was able to redeem the world, say, "It is entirely different; God has done it freely." It is absolutely untrue; God has not done it freely; God has done it at

the expense of the life of His Only Begotten Son. He has only done it freely in the sense that it is free to us - we have not nor can contribute anything to our own redemption - not even our - more or less - obedience. Don't forget that while we were yet sinners that Christ died for the ungodly.

If our redemption is entirely different from the ransom of a captive or a slave, why did Christ have to give His life to set us free? If God has done it freely, in the sense the writer asserts, why did He give His Son to be a sacrifice?

A. L. Galbraith acknowledges that the Apostle Paul speaks of himself in Romans as "Sold under sin" and that certain brethren were guilty of denying the Lord that bought them, and he adds, very strangely in view of the case he is arguing, Of course, the price that was paid, he had said in his first Epistle, was the precious blood of Christ.

On the face of it one would say that this was a clear admission that the principle underlying the sacrifice of Christ was precisely the same as that in the ransom of a captive or in the purchased freedom of a man sold into slavery. The difference is solely in the nature of the purchase price or ransom, but this difference is specifically mentioned and defined by the Apostle Peter as not a difference of principle but of value or degree. "We were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from our vain conversation received by tradition from our fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot." It appears to this writer that anyone who will maintain in the face of this definitive statement by an Apostle that redemption through the blood of Christ is only figurative, is anti-Christ; he is in fact doing exactly what those others did - denying the Lord that bought him and treading underfoot the blood of the Covenant.

We know, of course, what is his undeclared purpose; he is defending the Statement of Faith against "This error which has been revived in recent years and put forward even in Australia." What, however, is his overt argument? It is to the effect that since there is no one to whom the blood of Christ was paid, therefore it cannot have been in any real sense the counterpart of the ransom price paid for the release of a captive. He says:-

"When a slave was released, the price of redemption was paid to the slave's former owner. If in this figurative use sin is represented as the owner, how was the price paid to Sin?"

How any Bible reader, especially a Christadelphian, can ask such a question is a puzzle indeed, and nothing we could say will answer him more effectively than the words of Dr. Thomas, which we quote from

C. C. Walker's pamphlet, "A Ransom for All," pp. 3 and 4 :-

"Dr. Thomas says in eureka, Vol. 1, p.20, Paul reminds the Saints in Rome that they were all the servants of sin once; but thanks God on their behalf that they had been freed from Sin, and were now the servants of Righteousness... They obeyed a form of teaching which emancipated, liberated, or set them free, from the Lordship of Sin. This was Paul's mission, to invite men to a change of masters. He addressed himself to free men and slaves, all of whom, whatever their political or social position, were in bondage to the Devil or Sin... He invited sin's servants to become Jehovah's servants upon the principle of purchase... Redemption is release for a ransom. All who become God's servants are therefore released from a former lord by purchase. The purchaser is Jehovah, the price, or ransom paid, the precious blood of the flesh... of Christ... Satan took the price of release. In the day of his power he valued the blood

as thirty pieces of silver... The life being purchased for this amount of blood money, Satan nailed the Christ-Lamb to the tree; and poured out his life with a spear... condemned and persecuted, he nevertheless laid down his life to purchase their release from the bondage of Sin and Death.”

Is it not astounding, in view of the existence of a passage like this, written by Dr. Thomas and included by C. C. Walker in a pamphlet printed and sold by The Christadelphian Office that the present Editor can print such an article as this by A. L. Galbraith in which he asks, “How was the price paid to Sin?” “We cannot make payment to an abstraction.” “This idea led to confusion.” “It is clear that the idea of what the payment is and to whom the payment is made must not be pressed in the figurative use of the term.” Let the reader compare these misdirected objections with the scriptural force of Dr. Thomas’s exposition and then ask himself how far Christadelphians have fallen in their futile efforts to justify their doctrine of physical condemnation and Christ crucified for himself.

Leaving aside, however, what early Christadelphians have said, of which we, ourselves, are often critical; in the face of all that the Prophets and Apostles, and even Jesus himself have stated about his life given as a ransom, his blood as a purchase price, his death as a sacrifice; for anyone to deny the principle of redemption on the ground that no one received his life or his blood seems perverse in the extreme. No one could possibly have received the price Jesus paid, but this does not mean that His life was not paid as a ransom or that the principle is not parallel with other ransoms. The fact that we cannot point to a literal person or power by whom man is enslaved, but only to a legal position in which man is scripturally regarded as in debt to a personification of evil called Sin, does not mean that redemption is only a figure of speech, and not a reality. The proof is that the life was literally given. If redemption is only figurative, why did not Jesus only die figuratively? We are dealing with a unique event - there is no parallel except in principle; the considerations are so infinitely greater. Life is without price and it cannot be handed over from one to another like a bag of gold or a cheque, but we must not therefore make the mistake of denying or reversing the principle of redemption under which Christ gave His life for ours.

If a man is in debt for £1,000 and his friend produces the money and frees him from debt, that is redemption; and A. L. Galbraith agrees. If, however, a man is in debt for his life and God says, “I give my Son His life to pay your debt,” A. L. Galbraith says, “Oh NO, this is entirely different - you cannot make payments to an abstraction.” Very well - if that is his judgment so be it; but to our mind he is deserving the Master’s rebuke, “Full well ye reject the commandments of God, that ye may keep your own traditions.” It is little wonder that Christadelphians have no explanation of the Atonement beyond that Jesus was a martyr, faithful even unto death. More than one of them has deplored the lack of emotional appeal in their religion but who have they to blame but themselves when they leave no stone unturned in order to remove every element of self- sacrifice from what Jesus went through because their tradition binds them to the theory that he had no alternative?

Finally, let us take a look at the explanation which A. L. Galbraith advances; because, of course, this is the acid test. If he presents something simple and clear and which is in harmony with scripture, he deserves our attention. If not - if there is confusion, or contradiction, he is not worth listening to. He writes:-

“But our redemption is entirely different: God has done it freely. The literal facts are that we tend to follow the dictates of a defiled mind, the lusts of the flesh. We do wrong. How can we be saved from it? It is not that our wrong acts do God

harm, but they are offensive to God, because they show a rebellious mind. They show a mind that is not subject to God, and God must be the supreme Master of all, otherwise His work, as we might say, is out of joint. And so God has provided a means, and this means centres round Christ. We have sinned - and it is necessary that we should acknowledge our iniquity. That is the beginning of our redemption, and if we do that and do it in the particular way that God has provided, if we acknowledge by baptism the principles that were exemplified in the life and sacrifice of Christ, then God will forgive us our sins for Christ's sake. That is the literal fact, that it is all of God's goodness, of His grace. God has freely, in His love for us, offered to forgive us our sins and to grant us a boon, a blessing which is far beyond anything that we could ever deserve, anything that we could imagine, that we might become partakers of divine nature."

Now, although this may be a very reasonable outline of Christadelphian theory, it is very certain that it is not an outline of the explanation of the Atonement given in Scripture, for in it the sole basis and foundation of redemption is not the death of Christ but man's admission of iniquity and thus he makes salvation a matter of works - our own response to God, not God's mercy to us. The sacrifice of Christ, instead of being in fact the very ground and centre of it all, becomes no more than one of the conditions of forgiveness - the more important of which, so we are told, is that we acknowledge our iniquity.

Without going into it in too great detail, our most obvious objections to A. L. Galbraith's explanation quoted are:-

1) Our redemption is not entirely different - it is the same in principle but on an infinitely higher level.

2) God has not done it freely - He has done it at the expense of the life of His Son.

3) The human mind is not defiled - if it were, the blame and responsibility for sin could only be upon the Creator Himself.

4) We do worry - that is true - but that is not what we need salvation from. We can still do wrong even when we have received salvation.

5) Wrong acts do not always show a rebellious mind.

6) If actions show that a mind is not subject to God, there can be no hope for anyone.

7) Acknowledgment of an iniquity is not the beginning of our redemption. We were redeemed while we were yet sinners.

I have not expanded upon these objections and obviously some of them would require qualification and explanation, but they will bear thinking about and will suffice to show the defects in the so-called explanation.

Its greatest deficiency however is its failure to offer a reason or purpose for the death of Christ, except in the vague "if we acknowledge by baptism the principles exemplified in the life and sacrifice of Christ."

As we have seen only too clearly the only principle which A. L. Galbraith has mentioned, namely redemption, is the very one he has laboured to destroy or made meaningless. How then is he, himself acknowledging the principles exemplified in the death of Christ?

On his own showing he, himself, does not deserve the boon, the blessing, the forgiveness he has specified, for he is spending his strength to deny the reality of the purchase which alone would qualify him to receive them.

I do not want to be misunderstood on this - or to misjudge those I oppose. I recognise that they admit that Salvation centres around Christ; my complaint against them is that their doctrines force them to deny the principle of redemption which, I think, is so clearly and definitely laid down in scripture. Because they will not recognise and confess that by reason of the Virgin birth Jesus' life came direct to Him from God and not from Adam, enabling Him to give it up as the exact equivalent of the life of the race which Adam forfeited, therefore they are compelled one way or another, to deny that He died for us. They know that Salvation centres around Christ, but it is quite beyond them to say why and how it should so centre, except as part of His obedience. All they can see now is forgiveness of their personal sins, freely, for Christ's sake, if they believe and obey. And we must tell them again - and again - that this is not, repeat, is not, the Gospel which was preached by Jesus and the Apostles.

If we were to confine ourselves to a few selected texts in which redemption is associated directly with forgiveness, e.g. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace," as A. L. Galbraith has done, we might satisfy ourselves that Redemption is synonymous with Forgiveness. But there is a very extensive body of scripture in which forgiveness is not even mentioned in connection with the purpose and significance of Christ's death; or if it is mentioned it is as cause and effect, not as a different form for the same thing.

Again, it is only possible to mention a selection of these and ask the reader to draw his own conclusions. The vital factor in them is the changed relationship between the subjects of redemption and their God. It is expressed in a variety of ways, but they all point to the same thing - the removal of a legal disqualification which operates irrespective of personal goodness or badness.

"He took part of flesh and blood, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Hebrews 2:14 - 15.

"Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Colossians 2:15.

"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." 2 Corinthians 5:18.

"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his Cross." Colossians 2:14.

"Having abolished in his flesh -the enmity making peace." Ephesians 2:15.

"For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by his Son, much more... Romans 5:10.

“Who hath delivered us from the dominion of darkness.” Colossians 1:13,

“When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” John 15:12.

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.” Galatians 3:13.

‘He is the mediator of the new covenant, that my means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the old testament, we might receive it.’ Hebrews 9:15.

“Reconciling both Jew and Gentile unto God... having slain the enmity thereby.” Ephesians 2:16.

“But now in Jesus Christ, ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” Ephesians 2:15.

“Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out.” - John 12:31.

“For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” Hebrews 10

The particular value of those passages is that they establish the existence of a legal condition of separation or disinheritance which exists irrespective of our personal character. We do not need “religion” (which means “binding again”) or reconciliation to God because we have sinned as individuals, but because we were born outside Eden.

No one is held responsible or punished for this; on the contrary it has been so decreed by God with the sole object of saving sinners. All the various terms, e.g. subject to bondage; power of death; sold under Sin; the bondage of Satan; alienation; without strength; principalities and power.; dominion of darkness; curse of the law; prince of this world; etc., refer not to personal transgressions at all; they establish the existence of a state of alienation between us, and our Creator which we, ourselves, can do nothing to remove. So long as we are under it - or in it - we shall perish, either as natural brute beasts without understanding or as responsible enlightened men and women judged and found wanting. No amount of good works, morality and charity - not even a perfect life - could bring a man out of this legal condemnation and bondage to death. The only deliverance is through faith in Christ - and this not that vague profession which knows not why or how and even seeks to destroy the meaning of those scriptures which would tell us, but a faith which recognises the wisdom and love of God in what He has done and knows why He has done it. Such a faith requires that we eschew the Creeds and traditions and statements drawn up by men as fallible as ourselves and begin at the beginning, go back to Eden and discover what the Fall of Man is really about.

The old nonsense about a physical change implanting sin and death in our flesh won't wash, because it involves the Saviour in the same predicament as sinners and reduces his sacrifice to a meaningless tragedy.

Adam was on a probation requiring obedience; he disobeyed, forfeited his life and deserved to be put to death. Instead he was spared and lived his natural span on a second probation requiring faith. All his children are offspring of a life to which he had no longer a legal right and are consequently legally dead - or alienated from God, and by enlightenment

they come under the sentence Adam incurred. By voluntarily laying down his own life, Jesus paid Adam's debt - a life for a life, and, retrospectively and prospectively ransomed the whole race from having perished without hope. He thereby made it possible for those of them who believe in him and who in baptism suffer in symbol the death which he suffered literally for them, to receive as the gift of God life everlasting.

This is what we believe and we think it answers to reason and to scripture. Perhaps the reader will compare these few lines of our exposition with the many lines we have quoted in which A. L. Galbraith has expounded his and ask himself which accounts best for the Master's own exposition - "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

E. Brady.