

## THINKING IT OVER

Two related but quite distinct subjects are involved in the process of thinking it over which has been occupying many Christadelphians in recent years. The first, sinful flesh, has generally been regarded as a rather perplexing but thoroughly scriptural doctrine and it has occupied an indispensable place in your faith. The second, substitution, has seemed to many to be somehow taught in Scripture but it has been rejected by the community as a misinterpretation because it was believed to be unjust. Our purpose is to explain why we think that you have been mistaken on both points. We believe you ought to reject your belief in sinful flesh and that any dread of the term substitution is founded upon a complete misunderstanding of what is meant.

Thinking things over on vital subjects is not likely to be an entirely painless process if at the end of it we find we have to recast some of our ideas, but a follower of Christ ought not to be afraid either to think or to examine the thoughts of others. We can never afford entirely to forget what Cromwell wrote to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1650, "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken." There is, of course, plenty of nonsense written nowadays and you may decide that this is adding to it; but you will not be able to judge honestly until you have read what we have to say.

When we have dealt with similar matters in the past we have sometimes been taken to task for quoting from the works of the early brethren as evidence of what Christadelphians believe. We realise that some changes have taken place, but consider such criticisms unwarranted because the writings of Dr. Thomas are still broadly the basis of Christadelphian belief and we ourselves both respect him and admire much of his work. But on this occasion we are able to deal with the opinions and explanations of a contemporary authority, the present editor of "The Christadelphian" given in the course of a review of a book by a priest of the Church of England, so we may take it that they fairly represent the official view of the community of which you are a member. Our present concern arises from the fact, that as former Christadelphians, who believe as you do in the Bible and look for the return of Jesus Christ to establish the Kingdom of God on the earth, we grieve to see brethren still defending a position which we believe to be dishonouring to God and to His Son and which we are convinced you would not tolerate if you fully appreciated its implications

I was recently approached by one who is now an Arranging Brother of an ecclesia and invited to a discussion of the reasons for our separation. He himself had read my "Too True to be New" several years ago and he told me he had expressed the same views in addresses he had given to his ecclesia. In his own words he was "in 100% agreement with us" and believed that so too were a large proportion of Christadelphians - certainly the younger element - insofar as they understand what they are supposed to believe. His only complaint against us was that we had withdrawn from the community and had thereby lost, in his opinion, the best opportunity of getting our voices heard and influencing the direction of belief and teaching from within. He earnestly entreated us to come to their meetings - to break bread with them and discuss our differences with them, and he sincerely believed that there would be no difficulty - that a few die-hard extremists would be overruled by a strong majority who would put true scriptural reasoning before the Constitution and the Statement of Faith - which latter, he affirmed, was virtually a dead letter. One could not help being touched by such genuine good-heartedness nor wishing that one could conscientiously fall in with such a proposal. It seemed churlish to have to point out that there would be an almost electric reaction from the Christadelphian "powers that be" once it became known that any ecclesia had tolerated for a moment the so-called Clean Flesh heresy.

Quite apart from that aspect, however, there is the far more important consideration that it would be unthinkable on our part to compromise our understanding of the principles underlying the sacrifice of Christ by joining in communion with those who nominally at least understand it on principles diametrically opposed to those which we believe to be the truth. I say "nominally" because in justice

to the brother in question, I am sure he does not hold the diabolical views of the unclean nature of Christ and the blasphemous reason for His death which we find in Christadelphian literature and I am prepared to believe that in fact neither do many, many other Christadelphians. But the fact remains - would to God it did not - that the fundamental basis of that community is the theory that the sin of Adam changed human flesh from the "very good" of creation into "sinful flesh, which gives to every man a bias in the direction of evil, makes it impossible for him to please God and brings about his final death." If this initial error stood by itself it might not seem sufficient to keep brethren apart; but it does not stand alone - it is in its impact upon Jesus and His place in the purpose of God that its real significance appears. This is the issue which separates us and which we believe justifies us in applying Paul's cautionary word, "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and the table of devils."

I have no doubt that those members who invited us so kindly to join their ecclesia were entirely sincere in their belief that the abhorrent ideas which our fellowship has been combating for so many years are no longer very prominent in their teaching, but they are still there and one only has to query a particular doctrine to see violent reaction in defence of the traditional Christadelphian view.

There is eloquent proof of this in the November, 1962, issue of "The Christadelphian." The new editor, L.G.Sargent, reviews a book by the Rev. M.C.Burrell entitled "Christadelphianism," in which various aspects of doctrine are criticised, amongst them their doctrine of the Atonement, and it will be interesting and instructive to examine a few of Mr Sargent's observations. It appears that Mr. Burrell obtained his information as to what Christadelphians believe about the Atonement from questions put to the late John Carter and from the pamphlet "The Blood of Christ," by R. Roberts, which no doubt was supplied to him by the Office for the purpose. Since this was written, probably 70 or 80 years ago, it has been usually regarded as the standard work on the subject and is still published by The Christadelphian office. In my early years as a 'heretic' it was most frequently used and quoted against us and was regarded as the authoritative exposition of the subject. In "The Atonement" C.C.Walker says that the subject is:-

"more particularly treated of in other publications... amongst them 'The Blood of Christ,' 'The Slain Lamb' and Christendom Astray'."

These are all by R. Roberts but as "The Slain Lamb" is no longer listed and "Christendom Astray" does not deal in detail with the subject, one might reasonably suppose that "The Blood of Christ" would give a sufficiently complete treatment of the matter. It is therefore somewhat surprising to find L.G.Sargent referring to it in these words:-

"After fair summary of Robert Roberts' 'The Blood of Christ,' which we (Christadelphians) would regard as a valuable introduction to the subject of Atonement rather than a full treatise, Mr Burrell says Bro. Roberts 'refuses to see Christ as sin bearer or substitute.'"

If in Mr Sargent's opinion to-day "The Blood of Christ" is no more than an introduction to the subject we and many of his own brethren would like to hear from him in what respect he considers it incomplete or deficient and to know where we can find the "full treatise" to which it is as he says an introduction. Is he proposing to provide us with a full treatise on the subject, or is there something already in existence? Several other pamphlets have been written since "The Blood of Christ" but invariably the writer refers his readers back to that work as the authoritative exposition. If it is now superseded - or no more than a "valuable introduction," perhaps we should be told what has taken its place or where we can look for a definitive statement of current Christadelphian doctrine on the Atonement. In the same review Mr. Sargent remarks:-

"Bro. John Carter more than once spoke to the present writer of the inexhaustibility of the subject of Atonement."

This, of course, is quite interesting but unfortunately of no help to his readers in understanding the matter. If, when Mr Burrell approached the publishers of The Christadelphian to find out what Christadelphians believe on the sacrifice of Christ he obtained no more from John Carter than a copy of "The Blood of Christ" (which Mr Sargent now considers no more than an introduction), and the rather obvious remark that the subject is "in inexhaustible," it is hardly a matter for surprise that, as Mr Sargent says at the conclusion of his review:-

"Mr Burrell is evidently trying to be fair, but he has not got to the heart of our faith."

It seems to me passing strange! Here is a gentleman, a Rector of the Church of England at Kirkby Cane, obviously well-informed and a capable writer, setting out to write an informative account of Christadelphianism. He acknowledges the courtesy of the late editor in answering his questions and reads the various matter he is given and yet - according to Mr Sargent - he has not got to the heart of what they are supposed to believe on the one vital subject upon which he was making the investigation. It seems to me more reasonable that John Carter and L.G.Sargent found themselves incapable of giving him a cogent account of their belief than that Mr Burrell on his side proved incapable of comprehending it. He was certainly acute enough to discover some of the omissions from Elpis Israel and to observe that in their expectation of being justified by works Christadelphians have lost grip of one essential of saving faith. It has been the key-note of our contending with the errors in the Statement of Faith that the Christadelphian view of sinful flesh is logically and scripturally indefensible and that it is virtually impossible to explain it rationally; so that we are not surprised at Mr Burrell's failure. What puzzles us is how L.G. Sargent can hope to explain his concepts to ordinary people like those who listen to Christadelphian lectures and read his Magazine and to the young people who are joining them. If he is correct in thinking that any well-read Christadelphian should be able to answer Mr Burrell, one wonders why he failed to do so himself.

Let me now deal with two of the points specifically raised by Mr Burrell and with which L.G.Sargent attempts to grapple.

The first is substitution - He says,

"We (Christadelphians) would be willing(!) to render the Baptist's words, 'Behold the Lamb of God, the bearer away of the sin of the world' and to see in them an allusion both to the Passover Lamb and the scapegoat. But a substitute? No."

It is doubtless exceedingly generous of them to be "willing to allow" John the Baptist's words to mean what they say but the proof that the Atonement was a substitutionary sacrifice rests on far clearer evidence - firstly upon the words of Jesus Christ Himself, and secondly upon the factual evidence of scriptural history. I will refer to these later; meanwhile let us see how L.G.Sargent deals with the matter. He says:-

"Bulls and goats slain might in a sense be said to be substitutes for men - except that they did not in fact substitute them; they were only typical and temporary offerings."

This is giving with one hand and taking away with the other. If sacrifices can be said to be substitutes, why deny that they were in fact substitutes? Is it not a fact that a sinner who neglected to bring the appointed offering was to be put to death but that if he confessed his sin, laying his hand upon the head of the victim which was then slain, his life was saved? If so, was not the offering a substitutionary sacrifice? Did not the sinner thereby testify to the justice of the Divine Law that the wages of sin is death while at the same time thankfully accepting the Divine mercy which permitted a repentant sinner to escape provided he was obedient to the prescribed way? It is perfectly true that the sacrifices of bulls and goats were only typical and temporary, for the very obvious reason that the life of an animal could not be the strict equivalent of the life of a man; but this does not alter the principle involved - the innocent animal died, the guilty man lived; if this is not substitution words are meaningless. But even if words were meaningless or if the people concerned did not understand the

meaning of the words, the facts of the case are more than sufficient to teach the lesson and establish the principle. L.G. Sargent may be able to get away with a denial to Christadelphians that the sacrifices under the Law were substitutionary but he would not find it so easy to persuade a Jew who lived by the Law of Moses to agree.

When in discussion with those Christadelphians mentioned earlier, I enquired if they found any difficulty in the idea of substitution. "No indeed, what else could anyone believe," they replied; when once the true facts are accepted - that Jesus was giving His life to pay our debt, not that God was punishing Him instead of us - then substitution takes on a different aspect entirely and instead of being the bogey word of pharisaic self-righteousness it is seen as the simple but all-sufficient truth.

Now we return to L.G.Sargent's words (page 488);

"It was a Man who shared men's nature who had ultimately to die on men's behalf; and in the New Testament the preposition '*huper*', on behalf of, is consistently used of him."

The first clause of this compound sentence is true, but the second is false. The word *huper* translated generally as for, but also as for one's sake, in one's stead, and on one's behalf is frequently used in relation to what Jesus did for us, and as those who oppose the belief that Jesus died as a substitute so often point out, to do a thing for someone does not necessarily mean that they do it in one's stead; as when Jesus is said to have died for our sins He did not die instead of our sins but on account of them. This we willingly grant and have never disputed. But L.G.Sargent is mistaken when he says this word *huper* is consistently used of Jesus. If he honestly thinks his statement is true, he should be ashamed of his ignorance; if he knows the facts of the case he is a deceiver deliberately misleading his readers. There is another word *anti*, also generally translated for but having a very much more precise meaning than *huper* - it invariably means in place of or instead of and this is the word used by Jesus Himself when He gave His own explanation of His sacrifice. Matthew 20:28, "Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

This one simple statement from Jesus' own lips that He would give His life a ransom, *anti*, many shatters for ever the Christadelphian theory that Jesus died as a representative man of a family of men which included Himself. L.G.Sargent says:-

"Was He a substitute? No. The N.E.B. (he writes) helps again, "...crowned now with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by God's gracious will he should stand for us all." One representative of a race who "stands for all" is not a substitute - and this is the point of Bro. Roberts' argument."

It may not have occurred to Mr Sargent to wonder, when he finds the New English Bible "helps again" whether the fact is not more a reflection upon his own credulity and awe of scholarship than a justification for the assertion he has made. More than sufficient examples have been cited of the capricious and tendentious character of the N.E.B. to warrant its use in this way without the most careful consideration. The proper way for students to discover its true meaning is to compare Scripture with Scripture in the time-honoured way. If we do this when we ask the question, "What was the principle on which Christ died for the ungodly?" we shall get a very clear and unmistakable answer.

Jesus said that He was "to give his life a ransom for many" and we want to know what He intended us to understand by "ransom for many." Did He mean to say that He was dying as one who "stands for all" - as a representative - who shares men's nature and who must ultimately die on men's behalf? Or did He mean something quite different? We get our Young's Analytical Concordance and we write down every example of the use of the word *anti* = for:

Matthew 5:38, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."

Matthew 17:27, "take, and give unto them for me and thee."  
 Matthew 20:28, "and to give his life a ransom for many."  
 Mark 10:45, "and to give his life a ransom for many."  
 Luke 11:11, "will he for a fish give him a serpent?"  
 John 1:16, "have all we received, and grace for grace."  
 Romans 12:17, "Recompense to no man evil for evil."  
 1 Corinthians 11:15, "her hair is given her for a covering."  
 1 Thessalonians 5:15, "See that none render evil for evil unto."  
 Hebrews 12:2, "Who for the joy that was set before him."  
 Hebrews 12:16, "Who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright."  
 James 4:15, "For that ye ought to say 'if the Lord will'"  
 1 Peter 3:9, "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for"

It will be seen that in every instance this word *anti* translated 'for' means to put one thing in place of another - it is not by any means the same as for used as a simple preposition in a sentence like "Member of Parliament for Liverpool," which is generally (but not always) the meaning of *huper*. When this word is used it could imply simple representation and if it were true as stated by Mr Sargent that this word is consistently used of Jesus there might be some substance in his argument, though nothing conclusive because in its context *huper* also can mean in place of as well as on behalf of. But when we find that Jesus used the special *anti* instead of the common *huper* in His statement "His life a ransom for many" it was without doubt because His life is set against the many as an equivalent, like one eye for another, like a fish instead of a serpent, like hair for a covering or one morsel of meat instead of a birthright, and so on.

If this were not conclusive enough there is one even more telling text. The same word *anti* also occurs in Matthew 2:22, "But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither." The four words, "in the room of" are a correct translation of the single word *anti*. If the scholars who made the A.V. had been as casual as those who made the N.E.B. they could have rendered it "Archelaus reigned in Judea for his father Herod" but they knew this would not be a correct translation because he reigned in the place of or instead of Herod - therefore they translated *anti* by giving its radical meaning "in the room of." We think therefore that when Jesus used this word *anti* in His own explanation of the reason for His death- to give His life a ransom for many, it was because He knew that in the Divine plan of Salvation it was necessary for someone to pay the debt incurred by Sin, otherwise humanity would have perished.

Now, we ask the question, how was it possible for the one life of Jesus to be the ransom price of the lives of many? Or we may equally well ask the question, whose life was it that the life of Jesus was substituted for? The answer is, the life of the whole human race, originally one life, given to Adam when he was created "a living soul," shared with Eve when she was created out of him and lost by them both when by the transgression of one clear Divine command they incurred the penalty of sin and died to Law. If God had exacted the penalty for their sin they must have been put to death in accordance with the law under which they had been placed - "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die;" in which case they would have perished and with them "the many" of the human race who share the life they were given. The fact that they did not die "in that day" but lived their natural span and reared their offspring can only be accounted for by the institution of the principle of sacrifice - innocent victims were slain in their stead. This is proved by the fact that they were clothed with the skins as covering - a typical redemption, not a forgiving, since the shedding of animal blood could not take away sin - it could only serve as a token or temporary substitution of life for life. The only way in which mankind could ultimately be saved and the forbearance of God in passing over sin justified while upholding justice was by the forfeit or payment of the exact equivalent of what had been lost. This of course was life - a man's life - the life which is in the blood. Who could provide such a life? Would the life of any ordinary member of the human race - supposing one could be found willing to sacrifice himself - would such a life suffice? Moses was a very great man but he was rejected on one occasion as a sacrifice for Israel. Supposing there had been an even greater man than Moses, one who never offended against God, one who was sinless; could such a man have made himself an offering

for sinners? He could not, because even though sinless himself, being a descendant of Adam his life was not his own to offer - he would share the condemnation which passed upon Adam because the life he inherited was a condemned life. So that even a perfectly righteous man who derived his life from Adam could not redeem even himself, far less others. It would be like a bankrupt man trying to pay someone else's debts out of a bank account which is already overdrawn.

Thus we come to the reason for the unique circumstances of Jesus. His nature was identical with ours. His gestation, birth, growth and experience were the same as other men's. The difference was that the natural process which produced Him was initiated by a miracle, so that His life was a new life, direct from the Source of life and not a portion of the life given to Adam and from which the human race is derived. This distinction of origin between Jesus and the rest of humanity is the key to an understanding of the Atonement. The fact that Jesus was a new life did not make Him different in kind or nature, since we know from the facts of His birth and the testimony that He was a human being who developed and grew in the same way as all others. The fact that He was miraculously begotten gave Him a different status and relationship which qualified Him, if He so chose, to make Himself the Saviour of Man. The way in which Christendom has confused itself and its people by confusion on this point is one of the tragedies of history. There may have been a measure of excuse in years gone by but there is very little to-day. When the only theory of substitution to explain the death of Christ was that the punishment due to guilty sinners was inflicted upon the innocent Jesus in order to assuage the wrath of God, one could understand that men found it difficult to accept and that many in fact rejected it. But the alternative which Christadelphians adopted is at least equally abhorrent. To regard Jesus as a representative and therefore personally unclean and defiled and His death a righteous judgment upon Him personally, seems to this writer if anything worse, in "The Blood Of Christ" R. Roberts says:-

"It pleased God to require the ceremonial condemnation of this sin-nature in crucifixion in the person of a righteous possessor of it, as the basis of our forgiveness."

There are no words really adequate to express the horror we experience in reading these words. If our forgiveness were indeed conditional upon the acceptance of such a basis we should wish to be without it, for if our God were such an One as could require the ceremonial crucifixion of a righteous man because He was the possessor of the only sort of nature a man can have, what possible trust could we have in Him, in His faithfulness, in His justice, in His mercy, and how could we possibly love Him? I think the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ is not such an One. And I think further that those who believe or defend such a blasphemous travesty of His purpose do not know either Him or His Son.

If L.G.Sargent truly considers that the above statement fits into "a valuable introduction" to the subject, we should like him to expound it fully. We think that if he made the attempt, honestly and without bias from Christadelphian tradition, he would find himself, like us, abandoning the thought of a Saviour "who had ultimately to die on men's behalf" - from which death, because of His nature, there was no escape, and gladly accepting the truth that there was indeed no need for Him to die except His willingness to offer Himself as a voluntary sacrifice to pay the ransom or redemptive price to deliver those who were both by law and transgression under the condemnation of sin.

Because of their basic error that human flesh is by its composition full of sin and incapable of obedience, they deduce that Jesus must have been sinful in nature. In his reply to Mr Burrell, who correctly affirms that apart from the wrong translation of Romans 8:3, there is not one single text which gives any evidence for the "sinful flesh" concept, Mr Sargent is puerile enough to write:-

"Surely it is implied in the Temptation of Jesus. There could be no temptation without a nature capable of responding to it, and no victory over temptation without a dedicated will which thrust it aside."

Any child could understand that one could not experience temptation unless our senses were capable of responding, but this no more proves that flesh is full of sin than does the reverse argument, when one resists or does not respond to temptation prove that flesh is full of righteousness. Flesh as such is neither full of sin nor full of righteousness. If it is full of anything at all it is of life. But it is completely foolish and unscientific to speak of flesh impersonally. Normally flesh is in the form of men and women and they are capable of responding to all kinds of outside influences and internal feelings. Wherever these are exercised and enjoyed in accordance with law they are harmless, but if they are exercised or followed regardless of law then they can result in sin. That L.G.Sargent is hopelessly wide of the mark is seen immediately if we take him back to his own theory of sin. He thinks that to experience temptation proves that sin is in the flesh. He thinks that sin first came into the flesh because Adam disobeyed God - that is, succumbed to temptation. Very well. Now let him answer the question: How was it possible for Adam to experience temptation before he had sin in the flesh?

The fact of the matter is that the temptation of Jesus proves the very opposite of what Christadelphians maintain. The fact that Jesus was made in all points and tempted like us proves that there is no such thing as sinful flesh which causes us to sin. It proves that it is possible to overcome temptation, because Jesus did it. It proves that flesh is not the cause of sin in us because it was not the cause of sin in Jesus. Since He overcame we conclude that if we tried as hard as He did, we could. We agree that we do not. What does that prove? Not that God made us sinful and therefore we cannot help ourselves, but that we do not try as hard as we ought. If we put this point to Christadelphians they say, "Oh no, the reason Jesus could overcome where we cannot is because He was the Son of God." And thereby they dishonour God and defame Jesus Christ. They cannot face the facts; they want a representative with their own supposed sinful flesh but combined with a quality of divinity which enabled Him to keep it in check and save Him from sin. And therefore they have invented the God-man of their literature who in this connection bears little resemblance to Jesus of Nazareth.

In His redemptive work, Jesus never saw Himself as the representative of our race and acting the part of a leader - saving Himself at the same time as He saved us. Though of identical nature, flesh and blood, the Son of Man, He is for the purposes of salvation a new creation, a man apart. Think of a few of His words; "I am the Good Shepherd," "I am from above, ye are from beneath," "One is your master, all ye are brethren," "The Son of Man is Lord also even of the Sabbath day," "For as the Father hath life in Himself, even so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself," "For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world," "I live by the Father," "I proceeded forth and came from God."

Anyone who will honestly compare these claims of Jesus with the account of Him given by Robert Roberts in these words must be struck by the contrast:-

"(Jesus) bore our condemnation on his own person as much as any of us, necessitating his death before he could be purified from the curse.-- Begotten of God in the channel of Adamic and Mosaic condemnation, he died on our account, that we might escape, but on his own account as the first-born of the family as well."

Who could fail to realise that these are not two aspects of the same truth but two utterly different and contradictory descriptions. The first is that of Scripture - Jesus' own words - the second is Christadelphianism - R. Roberts' words.

It is not within our province to apportion blame for the position which prevails, but one cannot fail to wonder how it can happen that a community of people very much above the average in intelligence, professed lovers of truth and dedicated Bible readers should cling so tenaciously to a theory like sinful flesh which outrages reason and is impossible to sustain by any undistorted exposition, while at the same time rejecting another - true substitution, which is both explicit and implicit in literally scores of passages. In our view this truly tragic situation has persisted not because

the Christadelphian doctrinal position carries conviction to-day as it once did - many realise it does not: but the existence of an authoritarian creed (the B.A.S.F.) has obliged each new generation to defend the errors made by earlier ones, the facts are distorted to make them fit, are never fairly placed before the meetings and the whole subject comes to be avoided as too deep and difficult for ordinary people.

The consequence is seen in the steadily decreasing love of truth for its own sake and the increasing concentration upon social, welfare and missionary activities.

Until the leaders of the Christadelphian community find the courage to admit that in regard to the nature of man they have inherited from the 39 Articles the lie of Original Sin and that upon that false foundation of inherited sinfulness has been built an even worse imposture, a condemned Christ dying for Himself, they have no right to claim to have the Truth. The generation which is growing up will not be satisfied with the remnants of the heathen superstition which charges God that after having made man in the glory of His own image with a free will He changed him into a miserable creature with a nature biased towards evil and deserving of death irrespective of his character - for this is what is affirmed even of Christ, God's own Son. Given that this is now rarely preached, it still lies at the heart of their faith as the explanation of the Atonement, and unless it is frankly and fearlessly brought into the light and renounced, they are doomed to lose still further their grip upon the Hope of Israel and become no better than any other of the many sects to whom tradition means more than truth.

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## **SPECIFIC POINTS OF DOCTRINE**

Following are explanations and answers under various headings to questions and difficulties often raised.

### **HUMAN NATURE**

We of the Nazarene Fellowship are reputed to believe in clean flesh in contrast to your belief in sinful flesh. In fact both terms are misconceived. Flesh is simply the corruptible material of which we are formed and as such it can be neither sinful nor righteous. From the actions of the majority of men we may say, loosely, that they are sinful (but cf. John 15:22) but this is not because their flesh is full of sin. If we see men doing nothing but good we should say they are righteous, but their flesh is the same as that of a sinner; we may never have had the fortune to meet such a person but they do occur and there are plenty of examples in Scripture.

If there were any commandments of God which it was impossible for us to obey because of our nature, it might seem reasonable to deduce that our flesh or nature was sinful, but no, there is not one. Men can therefore reasonably be held guilty for not keeping them; they could not justly be held responsible for developing bad characters if they were born with sinful flesh. Men become defiled not by being born in sin but by the things which they allow to proceed out of their hearts. "Evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, blasphemies - these are the things which defile a man."

Jesus said we should know what people are by their fruits and he made abundantly evident the foolishness of laying the blame upon human nature - "Either make the tree good and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt and his fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by his fruit." At least, He implies, be consistent. "A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." (Matthew 12). When, denying the evidence of their own eyes and reason, the Pharisees attributed Jesus' good works to the Devil, He indicated that they were guilty not only of folly and wilful blindness but of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. In our opinion Christadelphians are guilty to almost the same degree in their doctrine as

expounded by writers like A.D.Norris when he writes on “Understanding the Bible,” “When Jesus died upon the Cross... the devil hung there dead.” This is still perhaps the most incredible example extant of a reckless premise carried to a fatal conclusion, but it serves well to prove how utterly and terribly wrong is the theory of sinful flesh which by a kind of logic leads to it.

## **SIN**

What is it? Can it be in any sense literally in human flesh? Emphatically no. Sin is transgression of Law. Is then temptation sin? Again, no. For unless man had been created with lusts (which are not necessarily evil, though the word has come to have that connotation) or propensities capable of responding to temptation it would have been impossible for him to develop character. Does temptation prove that flesh is sinful? Certainly not, for temptations can be resisted. It simply proves that man has natural inclinations and needs which can be satisfied either lawfully or unlawfully. But until law is transgressed there can be no sin (Romans 4:15). A statement by W.F.Barling in “Redemption in Christ Jesus” to the effect, “For Christadelphians this means that human flesh is wholly evil” is in our view most shameful and disgusting nonsense and only fit to be put alongside A.D.Norris’s “devil on the Cross.” It is simply amazing that a community can tolerate such teachings in its name.

## **SUFFERING FOR SIN**

It is quite understandable that thoughtful people should reject the explanations of the death of Christ which involve the idea of vicarious punishment and that they should look for something which does not outrage our sense of natural justice. For centuries it was supposed by Christian apologists that the wrath of God against sin and sinners had to be appeased by the suffering inflicted upon Jesus. Such a view is indefensible and horrible in the extreme and we do not hold it. It is, however, very strange that although Christadelphians profess to reject this doctrine, which is what they understand as substitution, exactly that principle underlies their own theory of the Atonement. This is easily proved. The explanation given by Robert Roberts in “The Blood of Christ” expressly affirms that it was because of the pleasure God derived from the infliction of suffering upon His Son that He was willing to forgive us. Do you doubt this? Here are his actual words:-

“Wrong was not done when he was impaled upon the Cross. It pleased the Lord to bruise him. Would it please the Lord to do iniquity? Nay. Therefore it was right. But how could it be right unless he were the very condemned stock.”

This is a culpable misuse of the phrase from Isaiah 53; no right-minded person could possibly imagine that the words, “Yet it pleased the Lord” can mean other than that this was God’s will having in view the Salvation of Man which was to be accomplished. To suppose there is the minutest suggestion that the Father of our Lord Jesus derived pleasure from His sufferings is horrible in the extreme - it is an even worse example of what L.G.Sargent describes in his December issue as “one of those dreadful perversions of Scripture.” How could there be a worse perversion of Scripture than the explanation of the sacrifice of Christ given by R.Roberts in these words, already quoted,

“It pleased God to require the ceremonial condemnation of this sin-nature in crucifixion in the person of a righteous possessor of it, as the basis of our forgiveness.”

Only the need to defend the tragic misconception of God's purpose which he had developed could possibly have led Robert Roberts into making such a palpably mistaken application of Isaiah's heart-rending words. Similarly, only the need to defend the tradition built up could drive men like those quoted above into their equally mistaken but more blameworthy positions to-day. Within the

lifetime of most who will read these words we have seen the wise of this world, scientists and technicians, develop devilish skills beyond what seems to be man's proper sphere. They did not anticipate that the results of atomic research would be to fill the world with fear, to poison our food and the very air we breathe, making possible weapons which probably will destroy the present order. People should beware of too great cleverness. These crackpot brains, technically so brilliant yet so utterly lacking in true wisdom, are paralleled in the Christadelphian world by those products of the same schools and universities whom we have mentioned. They have surpassed their predecessors and split the atom of their cosmos by proving, to their own satisfaction, that it was just and right for Jesus to be put to death; that the devil was in Him and therefore He had to be impaled upon the Cross for their own deliverance from sin. Can they possibly realise what they have in fact accomplished? Or the enormity of their crime? With satanic scholarship they have succeeded in poisoning with Sin the Bread of Life; they have defiled the blood of the Covenant, turned the truth of God into a lie and almost certainly robbed both themselves and those who trust them of Everlasting life.

### **AN OBJECTION**

Some Christadelphian friends wrote to me recently saying that while they completely understood and accepted our view that it was because as God's Son, Jesus was legally free and therefore in a position to give His own life instead of the life of the world lost by sin, yet they felt there was some force in the objection that because He was a man He would ultimately have died anyway even if He had not been crucified and therefore, in that sense at least He had to die.

Our reply to this is that men do not necessarily die ultimately anyway. Most do, but there are several examples of men who have not died and there will be more. Enoch walked with God 365 years and was not, for God took him; Elijah, a man subject to like passions as we are, went up by a whirlwind into heaven; we do not know what happened to Melchizedec but it says he was without beginning of days nor end of life so presumably he did not die. Who could deny that Jesus, the Son of God and without sin had a better title to translation than any of these? We are told that "when the time came that he should be received up (as Elijah was) he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem." Why? Because He knew that His mission would fail unless He sacrificed Himself. When He said "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified" it seems evident that He knew that He had successfully passed through His probation for life and was entitled to His personal reward. But He went on, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." It would have been sad for the world if He had chosen to abide alone, but it would not have made Him a sinner for there is no law or commandment which obliges a man to lay down his life even for a good man, far less for a sinner! We cannot therefore deny that He had the right to choose; that His sacrifice was a voluntary offering of Himself and that had His courage failed He was entitled as of right to enter into life alone. We know the possibility occurred to Him for He prayed, "Father if it be possible let this cup pass from me" - that His soul revolted from the suffering He foresaw and His natural inclination - "My will" - was to avoid it. The spirit indeed willing but the flesh weak - not sinful or evil but in natural revolt against pain and death. Jesus was corruptible, but it no more follows that He was ultimately destined to die than does the fact that we who are also corruptible mean that we are obliged to die - for if in the mercy of God we are indeed His children and the day of the Lord comes while we remain alive, we shall be changed in a moment to incorruptibility. So that death is not the only escape route from the bondage of corruption.

### **SUBSTITUTION**

Because, as we have shown, some people have adopted a wrong conception of substitution we must not make the mistake of concluding that there is no true and unexceptionable way of understanding it - of going to the extreme of "ceremonial condemnation" or "ritual destruction." Indeed, if anyone can read the single passage in which Jesus speaks of Himself as the Shepherd (John

10) and deny that He explicitly affirms that His sacrifice was the substitution of His death for our life he must be indeed a hardy adherent of a false theory.

“I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep... Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”

These words of Jesus ought to have put to silence for ever those Christadelphians who dare to affirm that Jesus’ death was for Himself first, because He had sinful flesh and was under condemnation or that His own deliverance from the power of sin and the grave was conditional upon His dying upon the Cross. The only explanation which meets the facts is the principle of ransom - that Jesus voluntarily chose to pay the sinner’s debt by the forfeiture of His own life. If, as L.G.Sargent stated in his reply to the Rev. M.C.Burrell, Jesus had ultimately to die on man's behalf, i.e., that He had no choice because He had man’s nature, he is charging Jesus with misrepresentation because if that were so it was not a voluntary sacrifice - He should have said, “I lay down my life for myself.”

No one could be blamed for not at once realising how or in what sense He laid down His life for His sheep and no doubt many who have accepted His words in simple faith will be saved by their faith, but anyone who, for dread of the term substitution is so misguided as to declare that Jesus’ death was required for His own salvation is casting His words in Jesus’ teeth and deserves not to benefit from the sacrifice He made for them.

Let us be quite clear about it. The Christadelphian view is;-

- (1) that Jesus died for Himself - (Statement of Faith),
- (2) that wrong was not done when He was impaled upon the Cross - (R.Roberts),
- (3) that there was no violation of justice in His death - (W.F.Barling),
- (4) that Jesus was sin - (A.D. Norris),
- (5) that He had ultimately to die - (L.G.Sargent).

One short extract from the address of one who, were he alive to-day would have to be disfellowshipped as a heretic will suffice to answer these lying tongues:-

“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain... Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of Life.”

Reader, think it over. Whose word will you accept? Compare what your leaders and teachers say with what Jesus Himself and His apostles say and then search your conscience for a true answer.

Ernest Brady.  
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