

Report on Meeting with A Christadelphian Study Group

And subsequent correspondence

John Stevenson. Australia.

Dear friends in the Nazarene Fellowship,

Greetings in Jesus' Name. An interesting meeting occurred with a Bible study group from Bendigo recently. I will first explain some background to my involvement.

A hundred years ago, when my father was in his early teens, he and his family heard Robert Roberts who visited Melbourne. Consequently they all studied Christadelphian books and literature. Fifty years ago, Peter and Meryl Morgan knew my father and his brothers, and met and studied with them, along with many other Christadelphians. In their retirement, Peter and Meryl settled in a little country town north-west of Melbourne. In recent years they have contacted me several times, urging me to join up with Christadelphians and assist their activities. That is what made me redouble my efforts to renew contact with the Nazarene Fellowship. Although I explained to them the mistakes in Christadelphian belief, they did not seem to think they mattered, and did not seriously study the literature I gave them. They insisted that nowadays nobody takes Robert Roberts seriously, and made light of my objection that the B.A.S.F. preserves his mistakes. They believe that the B.A.S.F. is Bible-based.

I had given up on convincing them, but they had not given up on me, and invited me to one session of a regular Bible-study group at which Meryl's father, Arthur, was to speak on the atonement, and would welcome questions. He is a respected Christadelphian elder, over eighty, with solid Bible knowledge. Bendigo ecclesia meets in Bendigo, but the Tuesday night Bible study group meets at a member's home in Lockwood South, about fifteen kilometres south-west of Bendigo. The "Atonement" study took place on July 4th at 7.30, but most of us were invited to dinner at five. There were ten people present on this night.

After opening prayer, Arthur began by saying that two classes of people don't understand the atonement; those who admit they don't, and those who say they do. He maintained that there was so much to the atonement that you could not understand it completely with a lifetime of study. He said you can find the truth by listening to prophets and discerning whether they are of God by Bible criteria. Thus we know that the Scriptures are true, and in faith we must accept what the Bible says. "In six days God created the heavens and the earth" means literally exactly what it says. His discussion implied that many people interpret the creation days to suit their own theories. At this point I asked permission to ask a question, and enquired whether he meant that those who did not agree that the creation days were literal 24-hour days were therefore supposed to believe in evolution, as his statement implied. He replied that he did not actually say that, but some people play fast and loose in interpreting what the Bible says. I went no further with that, because an argument at this point would have diverted the discussion.

Arthur continued that, God created the first man, and from him, the first woman. Adam was given certain things by God, and we are the inheritors. All living things, both plant and animal were created mature, that is, full-grown, and containing the seeds of reproduction, and they were all in a dying condition. The fact that we sustain life by killing and eating living things, both animal and vegetable, has a symbolic reference to the atonement. Then he said "Dying dying" means the initiation of a slow process of death, and the condemnation of Adam in being expelled from the garden and barred from the Tree of Life, and having to till the cursed ground until he returns to dust, was the "Dying dying" sentence that God had passed upon him for the sin. He then read out clause five of the B.A.S.F.

At this point I challenged him and disputed these things. I pointed out that a few minutes ago he had argued that we should not play fast and loose in interpreting the Scriptures, but this clause five does exactly that. It is no-where written that Adam was adjudged unworthy of immortality, nor that the death sentence was a sentence to return to the ground nine hundred years later, nor that his defilement became a physical law of his being, to be transmitted to all posterity. However, I failed to convince them that the promised sentence "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die" was definitely not the equivalent of what actually happened after the transgression. I could see that they were all blinded by years of believing that they were equivalent. Another difficulty was that the older members emphatically refuted the term sin-in-the-flesh as a Robertism which does not occur in the B.A.S.F. and that Robert Roberts, with all his personality problems and prejudices, is long dead and gone, and what they were defending was the B.A.S.F. as resolved by Cooper and Carter, not Robert Roberts. I replied that the B.A.S.F. was drawn up by Robert Roberts, and its wording perpetuates his fallacies.

Arthur then proceeded to discuss clause six for a rather long time. When he had exhausted the topic, he looked anxiously at me as if anticipating another argument. I simply said I had no quibble with that one. But then others in the class resumed discussion on the atonement and the fall, so that I was able to join in freely. I insisted that Jesus did not inherit defilement from Mary, but was born free of condemnation because he had no human father. Again, they could not comprehend this because they were all thoroughly soaked in Christadelphian doctrine. Two of the younger members were impressed and surprised that a different explanation of the atonement existed. One of them asked "Is that the clean flesh theory," to which I replied "Yes, that is it exactly." Maybe I should have explained that we do not use that term, just as they say they do not use the term sin in the flesh. I distributed copies of the booklet "The Gospel That Is Never Preached," of which I have a supply, and I think some of them will be open-minded enough to read it.

Years ago, Arthur was called to appear before a doctrinal committee, and he told them that he would answer questions on the Bible alone and on no other document. The result was that he heard no more from them, and evidently the inquisition was dropped, and Arthur is still in fellowship with the ecclesias throughout Victoria and Australia. Incidentally it seems that John Carter and Cyril Cooper did a magnificent job convincing Australian Christadelphians that the B.A.S.F. does not quite mean what it says, and that what it means is O.K.

On the subject of the creation week, I would never dispute anyone's right to believe that the days were literal 24-hour days, but personally I cannot accept that. Genesis 2 verse 4 concludes with the phrase "in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens." So was it one day or six days? And there are numerous other occasions where the word "day" is used to mean a period of time. I see no reason to refute the scientific evidence that the earth is millions of years old, and I can accept that the creation days could mean epochs. I have heard a Jewish argument that if God created a tree, and shortly afterwards a man cut it across and counted the rings and said "This tree is thirty years old," he would be incredulous when told that it was only half an hour old, but if he believed in God, he would accept it. While that story is plausible, I find it unconvincing because I cannot believe that God would mislead us by creating a universe six thousand years ago, and including in it evidence indicating an age of many millions of years.

In preparation for that meeting, I looked through several N.F. booklets in which I had underlined important points. Also I studied "The Atonement" a book from Logos Publications, full of perverted arguments and scriptural distortions, about half of which was from the pen of Robert Roberts, including his lectures "The Slain Lamb" and "The Blood of Christ." Thirdly, I studied the Netherton Debate from the N.F. Circular Letters, particularly to learn about unexpected difficulties one might encounter in a debate or discussion. I found that this preparation served me well on the night of this meeting.

I may not have convinced the others, but at least they could see that I knew my subject and they could not fault me. I plan to make a list of unscriptural phrases and sentences from the B.A.S.F. and

to challenge the Bendigo ecclesia to confirm them from the Scriptures. Whether that will achieve anything is in God's hands. I wish one or two of you were over here to assist me. I will report any developments.

Yours in the Love of the Lord, John Stevenson.

In response to the above Phil Parry comments as follows:

I enjoyed reading John Stevenson's letter and the account of his meeting with Christadelphians at their study group. Of course Arthur's statement about two classes of people who do not understand the Atonement - "those who say they don't and those who say they do," is based on his own experience and admission that during his own study of a probably long period as a Christadelphian he himself had not come to a complete understanding of its meaning and purpose. The Atonement being so important to man's salvation from under the Law of Sin and Death, such ignorance of its meaning would place any person beyond the pale of salvation and still in Adamic condemnation.

What a shocking position to be in when Christadelphians profess to have the Truth! Arthur's comments expose his own ignorance; the general ignorance of Christadelphianism; and that contained in their Clause V; the false theory that prevents their understanding of the Atonement.

I am not surprised that after John's commendable disputation concerning Clause V, Arthur gave a look of expectation of further disagreement from John about Clause VI, yet John said he had no quibble with that one. I can quite appreciate that on the surface the contents would appear plausible to a person who is not too well grounded in the Christadelphian erroneous belief that the Law of Sin and Death is a physical law of man's nature, and natural decay and death the penalty for Adam's sin also passed on to his posterity through physical descent. This is one of the greatest blunders made in Christadelphian history, for Clause VI denies any further hope for Adam and his posterity on account of Adam and his posterity partaking of a penalty which God had never set aside.

So therefore if we consider the Law of Sin and Death as a legal position, not a physical, then Paul's statement in Romans 8:1-2 makes sense of both his own position and that of Adam and his posterity, for in what way could the race be rescued from destruction if all died physically under the penalty as sinners?

In the words of Paul, Romans 6:1-2, how can any have died to sin if they are still under its penalty? Impossible. This Clause VI contains several references to Scripture and what God has done through His Son Jesus, but it bars to Christadelphians the Atoning work of God in Christ by the statement that God did not set aside the penalty Adam incurred by his sin for they die as sinners by physical descent from Adam (See "Natural Death & Judicial Death" – A commentary on Peter Watkins "Cross of Christ").

The truth is that Adam was rescued from destruction while in the Garden of Eden or he would not have continued to live out his natural span of life which in his case was 930 years. That rescue, correctly called Redemption, was the very means of existence for his posterity whereby a probationary life through introduction into Christ by symbolic death to sin's claim, they might by faith attain unto eternal life, not of works but by the Grace of God and the Gift of His Son who suffered in the place of Adam, the death required by Adam's breach of the Law, and under which God has legally concluded all on the Federal Principle.

Please note: I have not based my comments on the Carter/Cooper unity book though I understand it is the same doctrine of the original, dressed up in different language.

It is quite evident from the 1908 Amended Statement of Faith that Clauses IX and X are stark staring contradictions which speak of Jesus suffering two totally different deaths – the death required by the righteousness of God's law to Adam, Clause IX which Jesus evidently suffered in his stead by

the shedding of blood, and not as believed by Christadelphians, by natural means of decay and ultimately death and return to dust, passed on Adam and all men which Clause X states Jesus shared as a partaker of their nature.

Phil Parry.

Further letter from John Stevenson :-

I enclose a copy of my comments on the B.A.S.F. I sent copies to four of the Christadelphians in the Bible Study Group that I reported to you previously. I will let you know what develops from this.

You may notice that I have expressed myself rather too strongly, but that is my nature. May I suggest that you publish the comments, together with a request that any of the Nazarene Fellowship suggest additions, improved wording, or any amendments they think necessary to help me revise it so that it would be suitable for a booklet. I also would like criticisms; some brethren might see some comments to be irrelevant, e.g., my remarks on Clause 4, although I think they are valid. Scripture does not tell us exactly what was Adam's physical nature initially. I agree with those who believe he was created corruptible physically, like all the animal kingdom. I'm also looking forward to member's comments on the allegory I sent you recently... I look forward to N.F. literature and letters, they give me enlightening reading each time.

Love and Best Wishes to all, John Stevenson.

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Comments on The Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith

All man-made creeds purport to be Bible-based, though their partisan devotees rest assured of their integrity. The Nazarene Fellowship confronts the B.A.S.F. as a fallible and delusive human document.

Clause four states that Adam was placed under a law through which the continuance of life was contingent on obedience. Then follows a list of six scriptural references, none of which have any bearing on that assertion. Scripture clearly states that an abrupt death would follow disobedience, but no-where does Scripture say that continuance of life was contingent on obedience. You might argue plausibly that such was a reasonable deduction even though not explicitly stated. We of the Nazarene Fellowship would disagree on the basis that it is reading too much into the concise scriptural text. Whereas any brother or sister may maintain that unsubstantiated personal opinion, it is entirely inappropriate to insert that concept into a statement of faith.

Clause five begins with the statement that Adam, having broken the law, was adjudged unworthy of immortality. Precisely the same arguments apply here; it is nowhere stated that Adam was adjudged unworthy of immortality, and although individual brethren and sisters might argue that it is a reasonable deduction, it should never be inserted into a statement of faith. The fact is that Adam was granted a second probation. The next phrase asserts that he was sentenced to return to the ground. That erroneous concept comes from misreading the sentence passed, which is the sweat of his brow, and thorns and thistles. The allusion to returning to the ground is only a footnote qualifying the duration of the sentence. Returning to the ground can only be misread as the sentence if you entertain the concept, along with most Christian sects, that disobedience brought about changed physical nature. This is precisely the fundamental fallacy of Christadelphian belief, in common with the Roman Catholic and most Protestant sects. "A sentence which defiled and became a physical law of his being and was transmitted to all his posterity."

We of the Nazarene Fellowship perceive that disobedience estranged Adam from God, and brought a legal condemnation, which encompassed his posterity. This view is essentially disparate from Christadelphian concept of physical defilement which then became hereditary. Christadelphians generally state that the sentence changed Adam to mortal and began a slow process of ageing and death so that, over nine hundred years later, he returned to the ground from whence he was taken. This again is without specific scriptural support.

The Nazarene Fellowship say that the death sentence was suspended, and that a second probation began with the sacrificial death of animals and clothing of skins. We take this view because it is consistent with all other Scriptures, whereas the hereditary physical defilement theory is not. Once again, in the long list of Scripture references following this clause, few have any bearing on the issue, and those that do, support the Nazarene Fellowship view better than the Christadelphian view.

Clause eight states that Jesus Christ was raised up in the condemned line of Abraham and David, wearing their condemned nature, and was a representative of Adam's disobedient race. We of the Nazarene Fellowship find this wresting of Scripture not only fallacious, but also abhorrent. Jesus was representative of God's holiness and righteousness and love. He was born of Mary so that His physical nature was identical with ours. His Father was God so that He was outside the legally condemned progeny of Adam. And again, none of the twenty-nine scriptural references appended supports the Christadelphian theory against ours. Another objection to clause eight is that Jesus Christ obtained a title to resurrection by perfect obedience. What arrant presumption! We insist that Jesus was Divine Royalty, being Son of God; He did not have to earn anything.

Clause nine states that the miraculous begetting of Christ of a human mother enabled Him to bear our condemnation. Christadelphians support this by asserting that He inherited from His mother, Adam's physical defiled nature. We emphatically repudiate that concept. Jesus did not have to bear our condemnation; He did so by voluntarily submitting to public execution by the hands of the servants of the devil (I use "devil" in the Bible sense, although Christadelphians have falsely accused us of believing in a personal devil).

Clause nine goes on to say that Jesus, bearing our condemnation, rose after suffering death required by the righteousness of God. We cannot possibly condone the concept that God required Jesus to die because He inherited defiled physical nature. We see that as a grotesque repugnant concept, obverse to the fact that God does not wish that anyone should perish. Again, none of the scriptural references contravene our interpretation, nor substantiate the Christadelphian theory.

Clause ten states that Jesus suffered in the days of His flesh from all the effects that came by Adam's transgression, including the death that passed upon all men, which He shared by partaking of their physical nature. Surely it is palpably preposterous to argue that the inflicted death of Jesus by public execution is in the same category as Adam's death of old age nine hundred years after his transgression, which Christadelphians maintain was his penalty. We insist that Adam's penalty was the sentence of inflicted death which was then suspended (as judicial sentences often are), and that Adam's sentence was ultimately paid by Jesus voluntarily to the servants of the devil, and thus He redeemed mankind for God. Once again the scriptural references have no bearing on the difference. Scripture repeatedly asserts that Jesus was sinless, spotless, and undefiled but Christadelphians are teaching that Jesus had to die because He inherited a defiled nature through no fault of His own. That is not like God's justice.

In clause twelve, the B.A.S.F. extends the same concept, suggesting that the Jews and Romans were "but instruments in the hands of God" for the execution of Jesus as "representative of Adam's disobedient race" for the condemnation of sin in the flesh which God had aforetime determined to be done. All that is perilous heresy. It is untrue, it is unauthorised, it is treacherous, it is diversionary, it is an abhorrent caricature of the truth. Jesus, of His own volition, laid down His life as our substitute, to redeem us from Sin, and to present us faultless to His Father. Surely the uttermost ingratitude is to

allege that He had to die for His own salvation, because as clause twelve says, God had determined to condemn sin in the flesh. Shameful!

I will not just now enter into discussion of clause twenty-four beyond pointing out that a superficial reading of some of the scriptural references seem to agree with Robert Roberts' contention that the saints will be raised mortal to face judgment at the same time as the wicked, but it completely ignores those texts that unequivocally teach that the elect will be raised incorruptible.

The lists of biblical references appended to each clause look very impressive, but when they are perused they throw no light onto the defiled flesh controversy, and that fact should put believers on their guard against the B.A.S.F., a man-made creed. It should be publicised among the brethren, that regarding these disputations between Christadelphians and "clean flesh heretics" John Thomas never adjudicated, and his writings are inconsistent, sometimes supporting one theory and sometime the other. However, after his death, Robert Roberts stepped into his shoes and did adjudicate and drew up the B.A.S.F. as a test of loyalty, and began excommunicating brethren and sisters who did not "toe the line." Thus the Christadelphian Ecclesias descended to the level of other common Christian sects. It is deplorable that in Christadelphian circles, interest in these topics leads to summary expulsion and refusal to discuss. To counteract misleading rumours emanating from "The Christadelphian" and "Logos" offices, here is a list of what we do NOT believe, which should also help those who are sincerely trying to understand.

We do not believe in immortal souls, nor in hell or heaven-going, a supernatural devil, the Trinity, Christening, Original Sin, sin in the flesh, that people are born sinful, that Jesus died for Himself, that Jesus had divine nature, that Jesus existed before He was born, that the dead in Christ rise mortal.

The Nazarene Fellowship is purely Bible-based, and has no constitution, no man-made creed, no churches, and no official ministers, and is opposed to disfellowshipping and sectarianism. For any Christadelphian interested in biblical truth, abundant literature is available free, to show the biblical basis of Nazarene Fellowship interpretation, and the unbiblical basis of the Christadelphian concepts of human nature, the virgin birth, and the atonement.

I would be pleased to join in discussion of these topics if anyone so wishes,

Yours sincerely in the love of the Lord, John Stevenson.

The letter which follows addressed to John Stevenson, was written by Peter and Meryl Morgan, who have asked for comments from the Nazarene Fellowship if any wish to respond. John's reply follows their letter.

"Dear John, How are you? I am sorry it has taken so long to write this response to your comments about the B.A.S.F. I am assuming you have a record of your letter, so that I can reply without explanation.

Clause 4. Romans 5:12-19 is quoted in support of clause 3 and I believe that those verses do state that life was contingent on obedience, - i.e. sin, then death by sin.

Scripture does not clearly state that an abrupt end would follow disobedience. The precise tense used of the verb "to die" does seem unclear - see Oxford wide margin Bible (AV) and Cambridge AV with marginal references, to name 2 authorities who put Hebrew "dying, thou shalt die." To deny this possibility is necessary for the edifice that the Nazarenes construct. I don't see how they can be so confident when experts acknowledge the meaning includes a continuing tense.

Where is the quotation about “a second probation”? I know of none. If the Nazarenes hadn't added the idea of a “second probation” then no-one would decide to divide the sentence passed on Adam as you do part way through verse 19.

When you say that “disobedience brought about a changed physical nature” as if it was an added change to what scripture states I would disagree. The only change that came is described in Genesis 3 verses 17-19. That was Adam's punishment; all other consequences came from that sentence.

The Nazarene Fellowship finds it necessary to add an explanation. We do not.

Clause 8. Hebrews 2:14-18 seems to adequately explain what is written here. That is how I understand Clause 8. The word “earned” is advisedly not used. No-one denies the unique position of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nevertheless we know that He was less than perfect else Hebrews 5:8 & 9 would not have been written, neither Luke 13:32.

Clause 9. Again Hebrews 2:14-17 seems to explain that although He voluntarily fulfilled His mission to save sinners, it was necessary for Him to be like us. You comment on perishing as if it were the same as dying. I don't think it is. Perishing is everlasting.

Clause 10. Romans 5:12 says that Adam's sin resulted in his death. Romans 6:9 & 10 describes Jesus position. Jesus was sinless, but sin was not impossible for him.

Clause 12. Does not say that Jesus had to die for his own salvation. It says “as a propitiation... for the remission of sins.” I would never say that Jesus had to die for his own salvation. We are simply not told.

Clause 24. “Unequivocally” - not so, John 5:25-29; Romans 2:5-11; Matthew 25:31-46. Judgment at the return of Christ makes immortal emergence a difficulty. Passages that could be read that way, e.g. 1 Corinthians 15:52, Romans 2:6, should be considered with other verses.

John 5:24 if taken literally without intervening period understood would mean death has no effect on believers. 1 John 3:14 is similar. Thus I read 1 Corinthians 15:52 to include an interim state.

I know that you are not right about expulsion and refusal to discuss. I am not denying that some have been like that, but many do not think exactly as Robert Roberts' did and yet can confidently declare that they believe the B.A.S.F.

The Nazarene Fellowship is not “purely” Bible based. They have added their own theories about man's position after Adam's sin. I have yet to read any record of “judicial” sentences being suspended, or a “second probation.”

It is a temptation to add to the Bible's record of the fall. We should all be careful not to do so.

We are at some liberty to speculate and meditate on scriptures' implications, but not on first principles. Both Bro. Roberts and the Nazarene Fellowship have speculated on first principles. That has led to our present unhappy position. We should be in unity: that is how our Lord wishes us to be. That is what he died for as he says in John 17:21 & 22.

This comes with our loving greetings. Peter and Meryl Morgan.”

John replied as follows:

“Dear Meryl and Peter, Thanks for your comments on my letter about the B.A.S.F. I will endeavour to answer them comprehensively.

When Adam and Eve were clothed in skins, it is generally assumed that the animals from which the skins were taken were ritually sacrificed in a manner foreshadowing the sacrifices later ordained under Mosaic Law. This assumption is not spelled out in scripture, yet it is accepted by the Nazarene Fellowship, Christadelphians, and many conventional Christians. Problems would be eliminated if every aspect of the Atonement were clearly spelled out in scripture, but they are not, so we have to use our God-given intelligence. Adequate information is available for clear understanding, if we seek it with sincere perception. Yet, ever since the church began, it has divided itself into hostile mutually-exclusive sects, each with its own system of dogmas by which they judge and denounce others, and excommunicate members who do not conform, and each blindly intent to rationalize and defend their own dogmas. So how does one find the truth? By seeking it with humility, prayer, and Bible reading, and by using respect and restraint in disputes and contention. We can only do our best, searching the scriptures to test each precept, and by discerning that every well established sect has its own hierarchy of blind dogmatists and efficient evangelising systems for indoctrination of their flock and proselytes in their true faith, but all notably lacking the authentic criteria stipulated by the Master in John 13:34 & 35, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

Genesis 2:17, "For in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." This means a summarily inflicted death, as you can ascertain by referring to every occasion that the same expression "dying thou shalt die" is used in the O.T. It does not mean a change of physical nature and the commencement of a mortal ageing process, as you and most of Christendom maintain. The fact that when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they were not caused to die that day, does not indicate that God was arbitrary or deceitful, but being a God of love and mercy, He contrived a plan of redemption, not only for them but also for their descendants (Genesis 3:15). Your authorities asserting that the tense is in some doubt, would have to account for all other usages of the same expression, before they could be cleared of bias towards the conventional theory of changed nature. It is not the Nazarene Fellowship who have constructed a false edifice but rather they have seen through the false edifice of mainstream Christianity and Robert Roberts and the B.A.S.F.

The scriptural basis for the concept of a second probation derives from the fact that Adam lived for over 900 years after his execution sentence was suspended. By insisting that we are "dividing the sentence" (verse 19) you are ignoring the real sentence (cursed ground, thorns and thistles, and sweat) and concentrating on the footnote about the duration as though that were the real sentence. Ask any Christadelphian or mainstream Christian what was the consequence of Adam's sin and the erroneous answer is returned: "Mortality," simply because the sentence is not studied carefully, and the footnote about duration is confused with the execution sentence "dying thou shalt die."

You say that I state "Disobedience brought about a changed physical nature, as if it was an added change to what scripture states." Wherever did you get that from? I do not state that, neither does scripture; it is Robert Roberts and the B.A.S.F. that make that unfounded statement; not only them but the whole of Christadelphia and mainstream Christendom. If you deny that concept, you are disloyal to Clause five. How can you say that the Nazarene Fellowship finds it necessary to add an explanation whereas you do not? On the contrary we simply refute your unscriptural added explanation about inherited defiled nature. You argue that it is consequent on the sentence; we insist that manifestly it is not.

The same applies to clause eight. We say Jesus was the spotless, sinless, undefiled substitutionary sacrifice. Where does the Bible say that Jesus wore condemned nature and died to abrogate the law of condemnation for Himself? Not only would that have disqualified Him from being our sacrifice and sin-offering, but it is contrary to every biblical reference to His sinless nature. Your reading of Hebrews 2 must not be stretched to defile the Holy Son of God. I also query the interpretation of the verses you cite to imply that Jesus was "less than perfect," but nevertheless those verses could never be wrenched to signify that He has a "defiled physical nature," which we find utterly abhorrent. Jesus refused to commit sin; to say that "sin was not impossible for Him" is irrelevant and pernicious.

Maybe you would never say that Jesus had to die for His own salvation, but many Christadelphian leaders have said so, and insisted.

We say you are wrong to accuse us of adding our own theories to the Bible story. The boot is on the other foot entirely; we adamantly oppose Robert Roberts' added theories, especially those in clauses five, eight, ten and twelve. It seems that your loyalty to the B.A.S.F. prevents you from trying to understand the plain statements of the Bible, untrammelled by preconceptions. The added theories of Robert Roberts cause difficulties with other parts of scripture, and endless strife throughout Christadelphia. Your accusation of our "speculation" being like Robert Roberts' is unfair and offensive; I am certain that Nazarene Fellowship people have never carried on like Robert Roberts did when his authority was questioned. We do not excommunicate, we do not shout abuse, we do not sulk, we do not prevent others from speaking. You imply that some Christadelphians are tolerant; but we say not the leaders, not the editors, not the arranging brethren.

You say that many Christadelphians disagree with Robert Roberts but accept the B.A.S.F. We insist that you cannot do that. The heresies and errors and prejudices of Robert Roberts have been set in concrete in the words of the B.A.S.F. and anyone who accepts the latter is stuck with Robert Roberts with his divisions and strife and false teachings. You would have to deceive yourself to imagine you could have a B.A.S.F. constitution but reject its author. It is an immense tragedy that the valuable foundation work of Dr. Thomas was later largely wrecked by Robert Roberts, but perhaps that is how the Lord separates the wheat from the tares. I enclose a copy of a booklet "Christadelphians - Their Dilemma Exposed" with an earnest request that you study it soberly, because of its relevance to fundamental principles.

I send you loving greetings in the Hope of Israel.

John Stevenson,

Reply from Russell Gregory:

Dear Peter and Meryl, Greetings in Jesus Name.

I feel John has answered your letter very well and with much patience and there seems little else for me to say. However, as you have invited comments from others of the Nazarene Fellowship I thank you for this opportunity of expressing a few observations of my own.

In several places you misunderstand and misuse Scripture. In the first instance you say Scripture does not clearly state that an abrupt end would follow disobedience and you quote your authorities. Nevertheless, there are about ten or twelve parallel cases in the Bible where the expression "dying thou shall die" is used and in every case it can be nothing less than a judicial putting to death. It is not something the Nazarene Fellowship has needed to invent, but by comparing Scripture with Scripture one is left with no alternative.

Clause 5. John said that the notion that disobedience brought about changed physical nature is the fundamental fallacy of Christadelphian belief and I note you do not accept that physical flesh was changed, for you quote Genesis 3:17-19 where no physical change is mentioned. How then can you accept the B.A.S.F.? It is the very concept of changed flesh which prompted Robert Roberts to draw up the Statement of Faith in the first place in order to oppose Edward Turney, who believed the change was in our relationship to God - a legal change - and not a physical one. To say that man's nature was changed to defiled nature has never been proven, and that statement cannot, therefore be used to prove anything else.

Romans 5:12-19 does not refer to natural death but judicial and when and where applied to the sinner it is everlasting. Verse 10 tells us that Paul is talking about being saved. Saved from what?

Not natural death, for many die natural death who will be raised to life everlasting, but saved from perishing.

The fact that Adam was not put to death in the day he sinned did not mean that God changed His mind but that He had a plan of salvation which He had not revealed until it became necessary; a plan of salvation by a loving, compassionate, merciful and all-providing God who was not willing that any should perish. Adam had been put on probation and failed. The sentence of death due to him was not carried out though the condemnation remained, and we, his descendants, having received our lives through him are born into that same condemned state. Jesus Christ did not receive His life by descent through Adam but received uncondemned life direct from His Father through the virgin birth. Jesus was the “second Adam,” and whereas the first Adam failed, the second Adam did not. We are offered life through Jesus Christ and to obtain this life we need to leave the first Adam from whom we received our condemned life and join the second Adam through baptism, by which we die to sin and rise to newness of uncondemned life in Jesus Christ. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ.” Had Jesus life come through the line of Adam, Abraham and David, there would be no point in our baptism into Him as we would then still be in Adam - and in Adam all die. But now, all who are in Christ do not come into condemnation.

Jesus Christ, as Son of God had an inheritance of life from His Father and this had nothing to do with His death. His life was His own and to say “He was to obtain a title to resurrection by perfect obedience” is a misleading assumption, and your observation that “earned” is advisedly not used in place of “obtain” is surely a quibble.

Jesus Christ, as the second Adam was placed on probation and could have lost His inheritance through sin, but He did not sin. No law demanded He lay down His life, but after remaining righteous and well pleasing to His heavenly Father He then offered His natural life in the place of Adam’s natural life which had been forfeited in Eden but never taken from him. That is to say Jesus Christ took Adam’s place and died in stead of him.

Jesus Christ said He gave His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28) and it is reluctantly acknowledged by some Christadelphians that this Greek word “anti” translated “for” means “instead of” as we see in “an eye for (anti) an eye and a tooth for (anti) a tooth,” that is, one in the place of another. Jesus gave His life as a ransom for (anti = in place of) Adam’s life and the sparing of Adam’s life led to the many lives of Adam’s descendants. Our natural life, here and now, is our redeemed life. Our redemption took place on the Calvary’s cross. All who wish for eternal life can seize the opportunity held out to them. Jesus says “ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you,” and this is our present position in Him. This is scriptural and the Nazarene Fellowship has added nothing to it. To jeopardize this position in any way would indeed be foolish.

It is said that Christ dying instead of us would be unjust for why should the innocent be punished and the guilty allowed to go free? We wholeheartedly agree that this concept of substitution would be a cruel and gross injustice, but what do the Christadelphians put in its place? Is Clause 12 better? “...He was put to death by... instruments in the hands of God...”! In whatever way these words are couched they are a gross perversion of the truth and it beggars belief that a man purporting to be a follower of Jesus Christ could malign God in this way. The words of Jesus Christ on the Cross, “Father, forgive them...” gives the lie to Clause 12. Imagine someone saying to Jesus Christ while He was dying in agony, “Sorry, Lord, but you’ve got it wrong; these men are but instruments in the hands of your Father. It is your Father you should be forgiving. Perhaps, Peter and Meryl, you have never seen Clause 12 in this light before, but it is there and it amazes me that it has been allowed to stand for all these years. Whenever will someone have the courage to vote for change? It is little wonder that John cries “Shameful!” in his comments on the B.A.S.F.

The best definition I have ever come across for “the devil” is that it is ‘the personification of man’s will when opposed to God’s will’ - and Jesus Christ was put to death by the devil, not by God. Even Pilate said “I find in him no fault at all,” and knew He ought not to be crucified, but no, the B.A.S.F.

makes out that God put His Son to death because He was sinless, which makes Pilate more righteous than God!

For God to make His Son of sinful flesh and then have Him crucified for it does not show God's righteousness and neither is this the way Jesus fulfilled His mission to save sinners.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul uses the illustration of sin being a slave owner to whom the human race has been sold." "Sold under sin," we read in Romans 7:14, while in chapter 6, verse 16, he writes, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness;" so when Adam sinned in Eden he sold himself to sin and became the bondservant of sin; and we, his offspring, are born into that same bondage, and this is what we understand by 'being under condemnation.'

Our position is also vividly illustrated in the Law of Moses where provision is made for bondservants, for if anyone in Israel fell on hard times, the law allowed that man to sell himself to a wealthy neighbour and become his bondservant, or slave; his wife and children also being taken into bondage. This was done in order that the poor man and his family might have some means of livelihood though lacking the freedom previously enjoyed. The law also made provision for the bondservant to redeem himself if his circumstances should by some means improve sufficiently for him to buy his freedom. If this should prove impossible then all was not lost if a near kinsman should come forward who was both willing and able to pay the redemption price. Such a relative was not bound by the law to pay the price of redemption, but he had the legal right to redeem, and it was up to him to exercise that right if he so wished. Most certainly, if the near kinsman had love and compassion for his less fortunate relatives it would give him great joy to see that family freed from their bondage.

This was Jesus' position. He was our near kinsman. He was the only one both willing and able to redeem Adam and his family (the human race) from their bondage to sin; for being born of a woman He was the near kinsman required by the law, and as Son of God He was born free of the imputed sin of Adam. It was for this very reason that Jesus Christ was the Son of God by begetting; He had a life direct from His Father and was in a similar position to Adam in the Garden of Eden, but with a right to eternal life as His inheritance provided He remained sinless. He did not forfeit His right by transgression at any time and so never came into the bondage of sin. Jesus Christ was made under the law (Galatians 4:4) and never broke that law, for we read in Galatians 3:10 "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," and as Jesus Christ did continue in all things that are written in the book of the law, then the curse was not on Him. He was the only man who had the power to retain His life or give it as the ransom price for the sin of the world, as He said, "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." (John 10:18)."

I will not deal with any more points in your letter as John has already shown plenty of grounds for rejecting the B.A.S.F., except to mention the subject of resurrection - this has been well covered in our literature and rather than repeat those arguments here I will send you a copy of "Progressive Revelations as to The Millennium, The Resurrection, and The Judgment" by H.Grattan-Guinness,

With Love in the Lord, Russell Gregory.

The above events and correspondence took place
July to September 1995