

The Journal
of
The Church of England
(Continuing)

*Jesus Christ the same
yesterday, and to day,
and for ever. Heb. 13:8*



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The Association of the Continuing Church Trust. Registered Charity Number 1055010

CONSTITUTION

- 1 **Doctrine:** The doctrine of the Continuing Church shall be that of the 39 Articles of Religion understood in their original, natural and intended sense.
- 2 **Worship:** The worship of the Continuing Church shall be generally according to the Book of Common Prayer (1662).

The Authorised Version of the Bible shall be the only version used in the lectern and the pulpit and in public readings and expositions at all meetings of the Continuing Church.
- 3 **Ministry:** The consecration and ordination of ministers shall be according to the Ordinal of the Book of Common Prayer (1662). The Continuing Church believes in the ministry of women according to Scripture which does not permit them to teach or exercise authority, particularly as bishops, priests, and deacons.
- 4 **Discipline:** The church shall be episcopally governed. A general assembly shall be held not less than once a year consisting of the bishop and the ministers of the church and representatives of the local congregations to transact the business of the denomination and for mutual encouragement and edification.
- 5 **Membership:** New churches may apply for membership of the Continuing Church on the basis of their agreement with the doctrine, worship and discipline of that body.

Membership of the local church shall be on the basis of baptism and confirmation and approval by the local presbyter.

Any matters incapable of resolution shall be referred to the Ordinary.

The Continuing Church publishes a prayer letter, "Intercessions." It is available free of charge to those who would like to receive news and to pray for the various needs.

Please write to
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Would contributors please note that they can send their news via email, to
edward@macmail.com

Contributions toward postage costs are gratefully received.

From the Presiding Bishop, Edward Malcolm

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Dear Friends,

I expect you have sometimes wondered like I do, exactly what brought you to join the Church of England (Continuing). I do not know about you, but the Church of England, whilst it caused me much searching of conscience as it did so many unwise and wrong things, was my home. I expected to live and die a member of it. I had eaten its salt and still feel a warm attachment.

What drove me to take a stand was my conscience. I could not in honesty subscribe to what was clearly against the Bible. Nothing else caused me to act as I did. Most thought me mad—and still do. For my part, I cannot see how they square staying in with conscience. I have heard many try to square that circle to me. Others keep a prudent silence, not wanting perhaps to offend.

The Apostle said, when judged in Acts 24:16, “And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.” I live for the resurrection day, when I shall be judged for my most secret things. I live hourly to keep my conscience clear. So do you, and so you joined us.

Our Church is full of conscientious people, which has its dangers, both that our consciences do not always see eye-to-eye, and that we have the highest standards to maintain. We judged others and are smartingly conscious that we therefore open ourselves to extra scrupulous judgement by God. The Lord Jesus warned us that with the measure we measure, we shall be measured again withal.

Oh my conscience! Can I trust you? I read in my Bible you can be seared, full of sin and I not knowing it. You can be evil, leading me into evil things whilst I imagine that I am doing good. If so, I got you into that state. Let me obey you more carefully, and not harden you. I want my childhood conscience back.

Conscience, are you what the Bible calls defiled? Or weak, Just full of scruples rather than principles? Or unclean, never washed by the Word and obedience? How unattractive! Open my eyes, Lord, to the state of my conscience.

Or have I attained a pure and a good conscience? May it be so, but I cannot be

sure, nor can I rest here. There is what the Bible calls a 'beautiful' conscience. You may say, I have never read that, and I know my Bible well. Then look in Hebrews 13:18. That word 'good' is, as Griffith Thomas says, 'beautiful' in the original. That is, attractive to others, something lovely. A good man can be coldly and unattractively good. Again, purity is wonderful, but is a slightly negative virtue. Give me a beautiful conscience, kept pure by the blood of Christ by the Eternal Spirit (Hebrews 9:14), void of offence toward God and man, as Paul could say under accusation.

Your friend and bishop,



Edward Malcolm.

LATE NOTICE

We regret to announce the death of Mr John Turner, father of Alistair and wife of Annie Turner, in Boston, suddenly on Wednesday 16th July.

Your prayers are asked for the family. The funeral will have taken place at the Salvation Army in Boston on Friday 25th July at 1.30 pm.

John Turner was well-known locally. His death has come as a great shock to his family.

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THE SECRET OF VICTORY*

by David N. Samuel

Hebrews 13:7, 8: “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”

“What is the secret of a long life?” people ask. “What is the secret of a happy marriage?” These things are important; people want to know the answer. Is there some formula? What are the dos and the don’ts? Well, it is something like that that Paul is saying here. He is dealing with the question of perseverance, faithfulness, and consistency in the Christian life. What is the secret of it? How can it be achieved? The answer he gives is, Take special notice of your leaders, of the apostles and other ministers of God. Mark them well; follow their conduct and faith. Notice particularly what lies at the heart of all this for them. It is this: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”

There are three things here to note:

- 1) The centrality of Jesus Christ;
- 2) The identity of Jesus Christ;
- 3) The continuity of Jesus Christ.

Let me explain.

First, *The centrality of Jesus Christ.* We deal here with the very first part of our text – “*Jesus Christ*”. John, Peter, Paul, James, what was the secret of your faith, strength, perseverance, and victory over the world? They all answer with one voice, “Jesus Christ: He must be at the centre of your life.”

The secret of the early Christians’ *spiritual strength* was Jesus Christ. “The life which I now live,” wrote Paul to the Galatian churches, “I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” And again, he writes to the Philippians, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” What can you do, Paul? “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.”

* A sermon preached at the ordination of Peter Ratcliff at St. Mary’s Chapel, Castle Street, Reading, on Sunday 29 June 2003

Here is a very remarkable thing, for he says, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” And the secret of all this is Jesus Christ.

But Jesus Christ was also the secret of the apostles’ *evangelistic success*. We are told in Acts 8 that “Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them... And there was great joy in that city.” Samaria was not the easiest place to go to, for the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. Again, Paul says of his mission to the Corinthians, “I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” “My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom.” He did not engage in philosophy and speculation; the burden of his message was, again, Jesus Christ.

This was also the secret of their *victory over the world*. What do we read of the first martyr of the church, Stephen? “But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.” And John on the Isle of Patmos, where he had been banished on account of his faith, tells us at the opening of the Book of Revelation, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet... And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw... one like unto the Son of man...”

Isaac Watts has put it very well:

“I ask them whence their victory came;
They with united breath
Ascribe their conquest to the Lamb,
Their triumph to His death.”

Jesus Christ must therefore be at the centre of our life and faith today. Mere religion will not do. There is today the danger of a vague religiosity. You know the sort of thing—it doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you believe something, and as long as you are sincere. But that will not do! The content of our faith and preaching must be Jesus Christ. “We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:23, 24).

The church today acknowledges that it lacks power, but it does not seek it in the right place. It turns to gimmicks and to market research, to worldly wisdom, and philosophy. It does not turn to the real source of power. “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth,” said Jesus to His disciples on the mountain of ascension. “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations.” That is the commission; that is the source of power. Again, Jesus said, “Without me ye can do nothing.” The

message is very clear – Jesus Christ is the secret of strength, evangelism, and victory, for the Christian and the church.

Bishop Ryle said of Daniel Rowland, the Welsh clergyman, who preached with such power in the eighteenth century, “The first thing I notice in the remains of Rowland is the constant presence of Christ in all his addresses. The Lord Jesus Christ stands out prominently in almost every page... The blood, the sacrifice, the righteousness, the kindness, the patience, the saving grace, the example, the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ, are subjects which appear to run through every sermon, and to crop out at every turn.” (*Christian Leaders of the Eighteenth Century*).

Or, as Charles Wesley put in one of his fine hymns,

“My heart is full of Christ, and longs
Its glorious matter to declare.”

That is the secret—Jesus Christ—the *centrality* of Jesus Christ, to the Christian, the Church, and the message.

Now, secondly, our text qualifies that in an important way: “Jesus Christ *the same...*” Notice that. What does the apostle mean? Well, he means the same Jesus Christ as the apostles preached, not another. That means for us the Christ we find revealed in the Bible, for the Scriptures contain the apostolic testimony. The Scriptures give us the only authentic portrait of Jesus Christ. If you want to know what Christ was like, study the Scriptures; that is where you find the real Jesus, and we are not at liberty to tamper with what we find there or to change it.

There was a time when the monarchs of this country were very particular about their portraits. An official portrait would be authorised and published and no one was at liberty to tamper with it. Queen Elizabeth I was very particular about these things and had very definite ideas about how she was to be portrayed. Only that portrait set forth by royal authority might be published and circulated.

So it is with Christ and the Bible. That alone is the true, authentic Christ that we find set forth and described for us there in the inspired word of God. All others are spurious.

This is very important, because there is always the danger of ‘another Jesus’. Paul himself warns of this very thing in 2 Corinthians 11:2ff. He writes to the church at Corinth saying, “I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so

your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached... ye might well bear with him.”

What Paul is saying is this. He tells the Corinthian church that he has preached to them the true Christ and Saviour, and they are betrothed to Him. But he is fearful that false teachers will draw them away from the true Christ, with the message of a false Christ, whom the apostles have not preached or set forth.

And he had reason to be concerned, because this was indeed happening. False apostles were preaching ‘another Jesus’, a gnostic Jesus, one who had not come in the flesh; a phantom Saviour who did not actually die upon the cross, who was no Saviour at all, because he was not the Christ of history.

This has always been so. Throughout the history of the church there have been false teachers, who have set forth ‘another Jesus’. There have been times when error has been adopted almost universally as the teaching of the Church.

For example, in the Middle Ages, Jesus was set forth as a Judge rather than a Saviour. You can see those depictions of Him in the medieval dooms that remain on the walls of some of our parish churches. The image of Christ was one of a severe, remote judge, the teaching that so terrified Martin Luther when he was a monk. If you wanted mercy and grace, you were directed to Mary, not to Jesus. Mary would intercede for you with her Son, and the saints would pray for you. It was ‘another Jesus’, not the Jesus of Scripture.

Luther was liberated from all this by reading the Bible, especially the Epistle to the Romans. There he found the true Jesus, who suffered and died and rose again for sinners; whose blood cleanses from all sin, and whose righteousness justifies the ungodly.

Then, again, there is the Christ of modern liberal theology – a mere man shorn of miracles, bereft of power; who died, but did not rise again; whose bones lie somewhere in Palestine. You may recall Bishop Jenkins, so beloved of the B.B.C., who was wheeled out every Easter Day ritually to deny the resurrection of Christ.

No, this will not do. The secret of the church’s power is “Jesus Christ *the same...*” The angels said to the apostles on the mountain of ascension, “This same Jesus... shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). “This same Jesus” must be at the centre of the church’s faith today, and the burden of its message to the world today, because it is that very identity of Jesus Christ which is the secret of power. As we affirm in the Creed: “Jesus

Christ [God's] only Son our Lord, Who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried: He descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

We believe in the apostolic succession, but we believe it is no mere tactual succession. We believe it must be a succession of apostolic teaching. We lay hands on a man as a symbol of that identity of teaching. The burden of his message must be apostolic and Scriptural. You heard Bishop Malcolm ask the candidate in this service the question in the ordinal: "Do you unfeignedly believe all the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?" And you heard the answer that is required: "I do believe them." That is the heart of the matter; "truth unchanged, unchanging"; the very message the apostles themselves preached, "Jesus Christ the same..." That is the only hope of the church, the only hope of the world. Ministers are stewards of the mysteries of God, and by that word 'mysteries' Paul means the teachings of Holy Scripture. "It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful"; that he hold fast and hold forth the true identity of Jesus Christ, according to God's Holy Word.

Thirdly, *Continuity, that is, "Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, and to day, and for ever."* The Lord Jesus Christ is always the same, throughout time and eternity. He is the eternal Son of God.

We live in a changing world. We often do not realise how changing it is! Heraclitus, an early Greek philosopher, said: "You cannot step into the same river twice." If you think about it, you can't. Everything around you is changing, you are changing, from moment to moment. "Change and decay in all around I see", as the hymnwriter has put it.

Until quite recently, people believed in absolute space and time, but Einstein came along and changed all that. There is no absolute standard by which to measure things. When we think like this we begin to feel dizzy and to suffer from vertigo. Where is there any firm ground for us to stand upon? The Bible gives it to us – "Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, and to day, and for ever."

Behind all the changing phenomena of life and the world is the *Reality* of Christ – the same always and forever. He is the Rock of Ages. Have you been near the sea on a rough and stormy day, and watched the waves pounding the shore? A great swirling, flux of waters; constantly moving and changing. But there in the midst of the raging waves is a great rock. It is unmoved. Its base is hidden deep in the foundation of the earth. You see the part that protrudes from the water, but its roots go down in the depths of the earth and are hidden from sight.

So it is with the Lord Jesus Christ. He appeared in time, amongst men, born of the virgin Mary, but He goes back into eternity. As the prophet Micah declared, “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”

Or again, as John puts it in those great opening verses of his Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” We need to lay hold by faith upon the eternity of “Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, and to day, and for ever,” for He alone can give us strength and stability in a changing, restless, fleeting world.

How can we be faithful in unfaithful times such as ours? What is the secret of strength, perseverance, and victory in the Christian life? This is a question not only for ministers, but for every Christian believer. The answer that our text gives is, follow the conduct, walk and faith of the apostles. They followed Christ. They reposed their trust and confidence in Him. Hold fast to the centrality, identity and continuity of “Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”

The Continuing Church has a new web site at
www.continuingcofe.org.

Please note that this replaces www.cofec.org, which has now lapsed.

It is hoped that the current site will be
expanded as soon as time permits.

WHO WAS AUGUSTINE?

by Edward J. Malcolm

The name of Augustine of Hippo, or Augustine the Great (to distinguish him from Augustine of Canterbury) is well known in the Western Church. Indeed, at the time of the Reformation both Protestants and Roman Catholics claimed his teachings as evidence of the rightness of their positions. If one has read much in the works of John Calvin, or his contemporaries and immediate followers, one will have come across mention of Augustine, or Austin, as he was sometimes known. It is clear that Calvin and many other leading Protestant theologians admired and built on Augustine's theology. However, it is likely that many of us know very little about him as a man, as a bishop, and as a theologian. This article will attempt to give a little information on these matters.

His Early Life

Aurelius Augustine was born in Tagaste, Numidia, towards the end of AD 354. Numidia is in Africa (modern Algeria), and so in a sense Augustine belongs neither to the Eastern or Western Church. However, because his language was Latin rather than Greek, he is accepted as being Western. His parents, Monica and Patricius, were very ambitious for their brilliant son academically, though different in their desires for his spiritual well-being. Patricius was a pagan who was only converted toward the end of his life, dying in AD 370. Monica, on the other hand, was a devout and godly woman. She had a deep concern for her son, and prayed much for his conversion. When she approached her bishop about her wayward son, seeking his counsel, he replied that he did not think that a son of so many prayers and tears could be lost. This would, in time, prove true. Yet it was to his education that his parents appear to have looked for religious benefit, rather than to any more obvious means. Augustine wrote,

Not those hopes of the future world, which my mother had in Thee; but the hope of learning, which both my parents were too anxious that I should acquire, he, because he had little or no thought of Thee, and but vain thoughts for me—she, because she calculated that those usual courses of learning would not only be no drawback, but rather a furtherance towards my attaining Thee. For thus I conjectured, recalling as well as I can dispose of my parents. The reins, meantime, were slackened towards me beyond the restraint of due severity, that I might play, yea, even to dissoluteness, in whatsoever I fancied. (*Confessions Bk II ch 3*)

Augustine goes on to talk of his love of theft—not for the object stolen, but for the love of the act. He was clearly caught up in sinfulness, and, having a conscience awakened by a godly upbringing, this had the effect of dulling the pleasure he might have hoped otherwise to gain from the act.

His Early Education

As part of his education, sponsored by a wealthy benefactor, he was sent to Carthage, “where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all around” him. He describes his condition there as being as one who is full of ulcers from a bad diet, and so unable to eat the good food that would bring relief. Yet he felt unfilled by the empty acts of sensuality in which he and all around him were engaged.

It was at this time that, as part of his studies, he read Cicero’s “Hortensius”. He said of Cicero that his language, unlike his heart, was admired by all. Certainly Augustine admired not only the high and rhetorical language but also the philosophical exhortations. At last he found something with which to fill his mind, and on which to spend his energies. Sadly, however, he sought immortality through knowledge, feeling that knowledge would bring him to God. He knew that philosophy was not the sole answer, and although he admired Cicero very much, and longed to enter into philosophical debate, yet he knew that this was not the way. The reason was simple.

...[the] name of Christ was not in it. For this name, according to Thy mercy, O Lord, this name of my Saviour Thy Son, had my tender heart piously drunk in, deeply treasured, even with my mother’s milk; and whatsoever was without that name, though never so erudite, polished and truthful, took not complete hold of me.” (*Confessions Bk III ch 4*)

So he turned to the Scriptures, but by his own admission his pride prevented him from humbling himself to their meaning. He had better Latin than the translators of his version, for one thing, and he could not accept the stories concerning the actions and morals of the patriarchs, for another. It would prove to be a long time before he would be able to read the Bible in a right way.

His Later Education

There was an opening for an individual with his intellectual powers in a sect called the Manichees. Manichaeism was an admixture of Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and Gnosticism. It was a calculated attempt to produce a truly universal religion that would appeal to East and West alike. The Gnostic element was seen in its dualism, the age-long struggle between Good and Evil, between the god who made the material world and the higher deity who made the spirit world. Adherents, or Hearers, would obey simple, moral rules in the hope of being reincarnated as Elect ones. By following the secret rituals of the

Manichees the Elect would seek to free the particles of divine light that were imprisoned within their material body as a consequence of the primeval conflict between Light and Dark. If they succeeded they would be freed from the eternal cycle, and would enter the perfect state. The body was seen as the creation of darkness, and the soul, the imprisoned particles of light, as the portion of an individual that could be awakened by *gnosis*, or knowledge. Augustine never progressed beyond Hearer, for he became disenchanted with the intellectual pretensions of the sect. His first reference to them shows what he came to think of them!

“...the Manichees, proud raving men who were most carnal and loquacious. In their mouths were the snares of the devil: bird-lime composed of a mixture of the syllables of Your name and that of Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost our Comforter.”
(*Confessions Bk III ch 6*)

He saw that they did not possess the truth he sought, though they claimed it exclusively.

Augustine and Ambrose

In AD 384 Augustine moved to Milan, and entered into a new phase in his life. He was engaged there as a teacher of rhetoric, having held similar posts in Carthage and Rome previously. In Milan, however, he came under the influence of Bishop Ambrose, and here at last he found an intellectually satisfying approach to the Christian faith. Ambrose was eloquent, which appealed to Augustine's soul; Ambrose was intellectual, which appealed to Augustine's mind. Furthermore, Ambrose used allegory to interpret the stories in the Old and New Testaments. In so doing he removed the necessity to concentrate on the apparent difficulties raised by, for instance, Judah's actions with his daughter-in-law. This approach helped Augustine to accept the Old Testament as valid. Augustine was influenced by the writings of Plotinus and Porphyry, both of whom were Neoplatonists. They succeeded, along with the preaching of Ambrose, to convince him to throw off the shackles of Manichaeism. They also convinced him that Platonic philosophy was capable of being the key that would unlock the mysteries of the faith. He resolved to travel upon the twin paths of reason and faith, through an ascetic lifestyle, and this he began to do, prior to his baptism, and afterwards back in Tagaste.

To begin with, the sermons of Ambrose did what many sermons have done to the heart and conscience of a hearer; Augustine was plunged into a deep spiritual struggle, involving much heart-searching. He began to study the Scriptures afresh. Ambrose advised him to read the prophet Isaiah, but Augustine admitted later that

“by letters I notified Thy bishop, the holy man Ambrose, my former errors and present resolutions, with a view to his advising me which of Thy books it was best for me to read, so that I might be readier and fitter for the reception of such great grace. He recommended Isaiah the Prophet; I believe, because he foreshows more clearly than others the gospel, and the calling of the Gentiles. But I, not understanding the first portion of the book, and imagining the whole to be like it, laid it aside, intending to take it up hereafter, when better practised in our Lord’s words.” (*Confessions Bk IX ch 5*)

Conversion

In 386, while in a Milanese garden in prayer to God for rest, Augustine heard a voice—that of a child reciting his lesson—saying “take up and read, take up and read.” The effect on Augustine was immediate. He reached for his New Testament, and it happened to open at Romans 13:13-14, which in our version read, “Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” The words spoke to his exact situation, and he was convicted and converted. His immediate reaction was to go to his mother, who had followed him to Italy, and tell her the good news. It must have been the most wonderful news to her, to know that the son for whom she had prayed so long was finally and soundly converted. He was baptized the following year, with his illegitimate son Adeodatus. His mother died the year after, AD 388, while they were at Ostia, preparing to return to Africa. Augustine returned, and set up an ascetic community at Tagaste, intending to devote his life to quiet and celibate service. But this was not to be.

Ordination

In AD 391, while on a visit to Hippo, Augustine was coerced into accepting ordination as a presbyter, in spite of his protestations and tears. His community followed him, and then in the year 395 Bishop Valerius had him consecrated as coadjutor bishop, and in this manner marked him out as his successor.

It is of some significance that ordination marked a change in Augustine. Both of his ordination sermons, which are preserved, are statements of his view of the preaching office. He held a high view of preaching, and was scrupulous in his attempts to attain the high standard he set himself. Following his ordination Augustine began to study the Bible very closely. Here the influence of Ambrose asserted itself, for Augustine followed him in using allegory in his exegesis of the Bible. It is something of a puzzle as to why Augustine should approach preaching quite as he did. Although he held a very high view of preaching, and although he could and did undoubtedly preach with great power and to great

effect, his practice was to enter the pulpit with no sermon prepared. A number of his sermons were copied down in short-hand. They are of varying length and quality, and one feels that it was the brilliance of the preacher's logical mind that prevented many of them from being complete disasters. One could speculate on what might have been if he had devoted himself to the preparation of sermons with the same energy with which he prepared his philosophical attacks on the Manichees and Donatists. All that aside, he is regarded as the greatest Latin preacher ever.

Controversies Old and New

As Bishop of Hippo Augustine was involved in a number of controversies. These included the Donatist and Pelagian heresies, which he answered very well. He continued his refutation of Manichean error, and wrote extensively, on 'The Trinity', 'The City of God', and his autobiography, 'Confessions', to name but a fraction. Many of his letters and treatises have survived, and from them it is possible to see that he was an able defender of the faith, both from the attacks of pagans without and heretics within the church.

The Pelagian controversy is one which has, perhaps more than any other, endured down the ages. It strikes at the very heart of the doctrine of sin and grace. Pelagius was a British monk, 'a corpulent dog grown fat on Scots' porridge' according to Jerome's tactful description. He was an ascetic, much like Augustine, and his own personal life and habits were above reproach. While in Rome he wrote a commentary on Paul's Epistles, and he did so for a reason. Even before coming to Rome he had taken offence to something Augustine had written, 'Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt'. He saw, rightly, that, according to Augustine, man can only obey God's commands if God grants obedience. To Pelagius this was wrong, because he had come to believe that a person might become acceptable to God through his own moral efforts. When he came to Rome he saw how corruptly the Roman church behaved itself, and so he set out his call for moral reformation in this Commentary. Augustine clearly knew the work, for when Pelagius came to Africa to meet him, Augustine wrote, "Pray for me, that God may really make me that which you already make me to be"—able to achieve a state of moral perfection before God.

In the view of Pelagius the Bible teaches that only Adam was injured by the Fall, and that he would have died regardless of sin. He taught further that all are born in the state Adam knew before the Fall, that both the law and the Gospel lead to the kingdom of heaven, and that there were sinless people before Christ came. This view, compounded by his belief that man has freedom of will, and that there is no predestination, brought him to a position in which the whole work of Christ was denied in its efficacy, and He is left only as an example of good living.

This view is common today among liberals. It also lies at the root of Rome's doctrine of confession and penance, in which a person is able to deal with their own sins, at least to some extent. It is bound up with an erroneous understanding of grace, both for Pelagius and for his modern-day followers.

Augustine's able defences of the faith stemmed from the understanding he had of the order of faith and knowledge. His early life had been an attempt to gain faith through knowledge. To that end he had studied philosophy, and been attracted to the Gnostic teachings of Manichaeism. But after his conversion he began to teach that we must believe first, and understand afterwards. This is an important point in all ages of the Church, for it is not possible, finally, to either convince another or be convinced ourselves, of the truth of the Gospel claims, in order that we may believe them. Rather, it is through faith that we come to knowledge.

Another area of Augustine's theology that is important is his view of the nature of the church. This lay at the heart of his controversy with the Donatists. Donatus was elected bishop of a group of malcontents in AD 313. These malcontents were grieved by the attitude of the church to those who had recanted in the Great Persecution of AD 303. When Caecilian was elected bishop in AD 312 he was accused both of being weak on the issue, and on having been consecrated bishop by a suspected recanter (or *traditor*). The Donatists sought to separate themselves from the Catholics, and claimed that they were the true church. Further, they took to rebaptizing Catholics who came over to them. When the Imperial power was turned to persecute them specifically, they began to teach something along the lines of church/state separation. However, they were also willing to appeal to Constantine for intervention in the theological dispute.

Augustine opposed them on a number of grounds. One was that they claimed to be the true church. He denied that the true church could claim to exist only in one place, and among such a small number of adherents. The very nature of the church, as declared by Jesus Christ in the Great Commission, meant that it should be sought throughout the world. Further, he argued that, since the true church is the body of Christ, grace exists only in and through the true, or Catholic (universal or worldwide), church. Thus it is not possible for grace to be limited to one small and comparatively insignificant geographical location.

As the controversy raged, and as opposition became more fierce on both sides, Augustine called on the authorities to use force to coerce the separatists to return. He justified this by appealing to our Lord's words to 'compel them to come in', an appeal that fails on exegetical grounds. However, the Donatists survived until the rise of Islam in the seventh century.

One of Augustine's best-known works is 'The City of God'. This treatise arose out of the accusations towards, and persecution of, Christians following the sack of Rome in AD 410. The pagans accused Christians of having angered the old gods, who had shown their displeasure by allowing this great calamity to come upon the people. Augustine began the work in 413, and did not complete it until 426. In it he argued that there are two cities, one of God, one of the devil, one eternal, one temporal. The citizens of the one may be intermingled with, and even mistaken for, citizens of the other. The tares are truly mixed with the wheat. The distinguishing feature of the two groups is love; what they love reveals where their citizenship is. Those who love the world, and the things of the world, are citizens of the temporal city. Those who love Jesus Christ and the Word of God are citizens of the eternal city.

Where Augustine is perhaps somewhat surprising in his theology of citizenship is over his understanding of the role of secular government. Its purpose is not to promote true religion—that is the church's role. Rather, it is, at best, to curb and limit sin, especially in its excesses. A Christian ruler has further responsibilities as a Christian, but finally there can be no theocracy. The rule of Christ on earth is not to be sought in a chiliast, or millennial reign, but in the new heavens and the new earth. One consequence of this is that the church cannot, finally, be populated only by citizens of the heavenly city, while it is on this earth. It is only in the age to come that such purity will exist. Until then, the church must accept that it is mixed, and one result of this must surely be that the Gospel is preached to those 'within' as well as to those 'without'.

The advent of liberalism has meant that Augustine has fallen out of favour with many in the Protestant churches. The Calvinist doctrine of Predestination is rooted in Augustine's work, though developed more systematically by Calvin. Luther and Calvin both benefitted from Augustine's thinking, and it is not surprising that those who reject Augustine reject the reformers also. Modern liberals reject Augustine's preoccupation with man as a fallen and corrupt creature, preferring instead to concentrate on the example of Jesus Christ. To Augustine, Jesus Christ alone is able to bring hope to sinful man, and if man is not conscious of his sin he feels no need of Christ. Modern liberalism is most illogical in its approach to the Person of Jesus Christ.

Final Days

The Vandal conquest of Gaul and Spain brought them to the Straits of Gibraltar. It did not take them long to cross, and to begin to slash and burn their way eastward. In those days it was believed that sin committed after baptism was unforgivable, so a person received baptism on their death-bed. Thus, when the invader came, presbyters had to remain with those who could not flee to administer the rite. Augustine called on those affected to draw lots to see who

would remain. He chose to remain in Hippo, and in AD 430 the Vandals laid siege to the city. Augustine had been ill for some time, and in August, before the invaders broke through, he died.

His work did not die, for through his writings and through the influence he had been able to exert during his lifetime, his theology continued. The rediscovery of the ancient writers at the Renaissance led to a renewing of interest in his thinking, and was an aid to the reformers in their doctrinal controversies. God raised up a remarkable man, and through his conversion gave the church a legacy the benefit of which is still to be felt in our day.

Augustine was not without fault. He entered the ordained ministry with an optimistic view of human nature; pastoral involvement with people shattered this. He wrote a book of Retractions in later life, withdrawing earlier statements he had come to reject. He was not a proud man. One example is his understanding of Romans 7. In his earlier days he believed and taught that this is a description of a person who is under the law, who has not come to Christ. He came to see later that it is actually a description of one who has already come. The use of the allegorical method in preaching weakened the effectiveness of his exegesis, and his Neoplatonic thought-model caused him to say some wrong things regarding the Person of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, there is ground for saying that his appeal to Plato has had an adverse effect on Western Christianity ever since. But let the last word be his.

“Great art Thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Thy power, and of Thy wisdom there is no end. And man, being a part of Thy creation, desires to praise Thee, man, who bears about with him his mortality, the witness of his sin, even the witness that Thou ‘resisteth the proud,’—yet man, this part of Thy creation, desires to praise Thee. Thou movest us to delight in praising Thee; for Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee.”
(*Confessions Bk 1 ch 1*)

A BIBLICAL ROAD MAP: FROM HERE TO ETERNITY*

Based on 2 Peter 3:3-14

By David N. Samuel

Introduction

It is very helpful when we are on a journey to have a map, and to see where we have come from, where we are now, and where we are going. The theme of this passage is the end of the world and the consummation of all things—a vast and awe-inspiring subject, painted here on a large canvas. Peter introduces this subject with some words about the ‘last days’, that is, the period leading up to the end of the world and immediately preceding the Lord’s return. What will be the nature of those times? The ‘last days’ can be used to describe the whole of the Christian era, from the first to the second coming of Christ. That is how the phrase is used in Hebrews 1:1, “God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.” So in that sense ‘the last days’ are gospel times. But that does not seem to be how Peter is using the expression here. He is rather applying it to the time immediately before the end of the world, as Paul does in 2 Timothy 3:1, “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come”. Or rather, it is perhaps more true to say that Peter is speaking here of the end, not of the world altogether, but of this present world order, to be superseded by another world order which will be brought in by God and Christ. These are his words, “But the heavens and earth which are now... [are] reserved unto fire... (i.e. they will one day be dissolved in a great conflagration)... Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth”, (which will be fashioned out of the ruin of the old), in which the righteous shall dwell.

He then gives his grounds for this assertion, namely, that the heavens and earth that were of old likewise perished, “being overflowed with water.” The antediluvian world passed away in a great ruin, as a consequence of the flood, but out of the ruin God made a new heavens and earth, the one which we now inhabit. But this world will also pass away, not this time by water, but by fire, and will be replaced in its turn by a new earth and heavens in which the saints, the righteous will dwell. In destroying the present world and fashioning a new one, God is not doing something entirely unprecedented. It has been done before, and therefore we have perfectly good grounds for believing what God has declared in his Word he will do again.

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Scoffers

Nevertheless, despite all this, and the solid grounds we have for believing it, there will come “in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts”, that is, people who dismiss all this as myth and fairy stories, and who prefer to follow their own inclinations and prejudices. They will pour scorn on any such idea as the end of the present world, and will deride the teaching of the Bible on the second coming of Christ. These are men who will have no time for anything but their own views, theories and prejudices, and will treat the Bible with contempt.

Now Peter is not speaking here simply of unbelievers in general, for there have always been such people. There were such men in the days of the Psalmist, who wrote of them, “The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God” (Psalm 53:1). There were those, also, who mocked Paul at Athens, and said, “What will this babbling say?” There have always been such people, who have rejected the Christian faith in a general way. But what Peter means here is that these mockers will be specially prominent in the last days, and the particular target of their scorn and contempt will be the promise of Christ’s second coming and the end of the world. They will be specially incensed by those particular teachings and will make them the object of their ridicule. The scoffers will be specially active and reject out of hand the very notion that the world could come to a sudden end, and that the Lord could come again, as impossible.

The Nature of Unbelief

These men, says Peter, will walk “after their own lusts.” That means they will follow their own ideas and desires. They will regard themselves as free spirits, free-thinkers, not bound by any religious teachings, particularly those of the Bible, but free to follow their own thoughts and reasonings, unrestrained by the Word of God. They will consider that they are the men, and that wisdom will die with them, as Job said.

And this will be their downfall, because such a spirit of autonomy in man blinds him to the truth, and cuts him off from reality. “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God,” and they shall know the truth that shall set them free. Knowing the truth is not simply an intellectual attainment, or purely mental thing, as many suppose, but it depends upon the right moral attitude, upon a certain humility and moral disposition. But these men, of whom Peter speaks, have not got that, and are therefore blind and cannot see the truth.

Now the nature of their scoffing will be this: “Where is the promise of his coming?” that is, where is the fulfilment of his promise? Where are the signs and indications that it is going to be fulfilled, and that Christ will come again? They are not asking, “where in Scripture is the promise of Christ’s return?” They know that is what Christ said, and that it is recorded in the Bible. But they are mocking

this and saying, “You see, there is nothing in it. It will not stand up to examination. It is a vain hope that Christians have. Where is the evidence? What do you base your faith in it on? You are simply clinging to an empty promise and vain words. Your belief in Christ’s return is no more than a dream.” And they said all this not in a spirit of genuine enquiry, but in a mocking, scoffing tone of disbelief. It is not merely a simple denial.

Uniformity of Nature

The reason they feel so confident in their rejection of the second coming of Christ is this: “Everything”, they say, “has remained the same since the foundation of the world.” There will be no sudden, cataclysmic end of the world, because “since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” The course of nature and the world, they say, has been uniform and unchanged. Nature is fixed and settled. The world is stable and goes spinning on its way. Therefore, the predictions and prophecies of an impending end of the world are false. The sun rises and sets as it has always done; the tides ebb and flow, and one generation succeeds another. Everything is predictable, therefore there is no substance in the promise of his coming.

Now since the nineteenth century and the rise of evolutionism there has been a growing confidence in this way of thinking. Darwin wrote at the end of the ‘Origin of Species’: “As we look back at the development of living things on earth from the earliest times, and from, perhaps, one or a few forms, we may feel certain that the ordinary succession by generation has never once been broken, and that no cataclysm has desolated the whole world. Hence, we may look with some confidence to a secure future of great length.” Everything, he argued, will gradually go on to ‘perfection’.

Many today share that outlook having been indoctrinated with that teaching. It is the ‘comfort blanket’ in which people wrap themselves against the cold winds of reality. Evolutionism, and all that it implies, is taught universally in our schools and universities. It is the current orthodoxy. Sometimes it takes ridiculous and risible forms, such as the BBC’s series, ‘Walking with Dinosaurs’, and its sequel, ‘Walking with Cavemen’. It leads directly to the rejection of any notion of the intervention of God in his creation, and of a sudden, imminent end of the world. But, as we have seen, it is not an outlook which is new, but is in fact, very ancient. It is identical with the view of the scoffers to whom Peter refers in his second epistle.

Peter’s Counter-Argument

We come now to Peter’s counter-argument, and it is this: These scoffers are wrong on a simple matter of fact, which invalidates their whole position. It is not true that the world has always gone on in an even, predictable and uniform way.

In this respect the scoffers are “willingly ignorant”. By that he means they are not just unaware of this fact, but that they deliberately shut their eyes to it, and refuse to accept it. They adopt this position of wilful ignorance because it does not fit in with their ideas and presuppositions about the world and human life.

The great historical fact that they refuse to accept is the universal flood recorded in Genesis. They refuse to believe that “by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished” (2 Peter 3:5, 6). This great historical upheaval is meticulously recorded in the Bible. We have the history of Noah and his family, of the building of the ark, as he was instructed to do by God, of the great cataclysm itself when the rains fell and the waters of the abyss rose and overwhelmed the land. But all this they refuse to believe. They reject it and remain *wilfully* ignorant.

But not only do they reject the testimony of the Bible, they also reject the evidence of the flood in the world about them. This world is now the ruin that the flood left behind. The hills and rugged mountains, the caverns and gorges all testify to that great upheaval that took place. The sedimentary rocks with their strata are a great charnel house of the remains of the creatures that perished, all precipitously, in the flood, for only so could such thicknesses and layers of rock, which were once mud, have been laid down.

The World Before the Flood

Peter is very exact in his description of the old, antediluvian world. He says that it existed by the Word of God; “by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth...” That is, the world was originally formed by Divine power, by Divine decree or *fiat*. It emerged out of a chaos of waters, as we read in Genesis 1:2, “The earth was without form and void: and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” This corresponds to Peter’s description, “The heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water.” This is a difficult expression, and has presented a problem to translators. The word *sunestw~sa*, translated here, “standing” means, in fact, “consisting of” and the literal translation would read, “the earth consisting of and by water”. This presents a difficult problem, and translators have tended to cut the knot rather than untie it. The truth is, however, exactly what Peter is saying, viz., that the world that passed away in the flood was different from what we now know. It was a terraqueous earth “consisting of and by water”, i.e., formed over a great abyss of water; as the Psalmist expresses it, “He hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods” (Psalm 24:2). So that when the earth ruptured, the fountains of the great abyss overwhelmed the whole earth, as indeed we are informed in the Genesis account of the flood.

The Power of God's Word

This serves to remind us that the world was not only created by the Word of God in the beginning, but has been sustained by it at all times, and is so today. Men ought to have respect not so much to what they call the uniformity of nature, (which is only the product of observation and carries with it no guarantee as to the future), but to the Word of God, that is, Christ Himself, who is back of all things and by whom all things are upheld (Hebrews 1:3).

This, then, is a complete refutation by Peter of the argument of the scoffers and sceptics. Christ will, indeed, come again, because he has said so, because the Word of God declares it, and that is what counts, that is the fundamental reality undergirding all things, and which determines everything else that happens in the world. The so-called uniformity of nature cannot prevent it, because it is itself dependent upon the Word of God. The great facts of the flood and creation show that to be the case. The ancient world that existed before the flood passed away when the time came and God passed judgment upon it. The world that then was perished, and a new and different order and economy was introduced, viz., “the heavens and the earth which are now.” But we must never forget that this order also is upheld and sustained only by the Word of God. There is no such thing as autonomous nature, independent of the sustaining Word and will of the Creator. “But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment...” (2 Peter 3:7). They are preserved or reserved, as the Scriptures have it, against the last time, when the present order of the world will be destroyed also and replaced by another. How conscious ought we to be of the direct will and keeping of God. Every moment, every hour we, and the entire world in which we live, are sustained by Him—kept in existence by his Word. Not a sparrow falls to the ground, “without your heavenly Father”, that is, without his permission. How oblivious people are, in general, of this fact, and go on day after day taking life and the world for granted. They fail to see that they are kept from utter annihilation only by the Word and decree of Almighty God. “I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety” (Psalm 4:8). Let us always remember this, that we are kept by the power of God. Whether it is common grace, which applies to all men, believers and unbelievers alike, making life in general possible in the world, and granting such conditions as we require for it to be carried on; or whether it is special grace, which is given to the Christian believer and preserves him in the way of life and salvation, it is all ultimately traceable to the will and purpose of God. It is God's Word that ultimately upholds the world, till the time comes for his ending it (Hebrews 1:3).

The Passing Away of this Present World

Now Peter tells us that this present world will also, in God's time, pass away as did the previous one—the world that existed before the flood. The difference,

however, will be that, whereas the former perished by water, the present world will perish by fire, in a great conflagration. “The heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire” (2 Peter 3:7). “The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10). That does not mean that the whole universe will perish, but that part of it which we immediately perceive. By the heavens is not meant the starry heavens, but the frame of things immediately around us on this earth. There will be a great conflagration embracing the whole planet.

Such destruction of the elements could not occur without “a great noise”; a noise like the whizzing of an arrow, as the expression implies—a great whoosh! like a devouring flame. The word today is ‘fire-ball’. It is interesting that the ancient philosophers said that the world would be destroyed by fire. Where they got it from we cannot tell. Fire and water are the two unruly elements, and have been spoken of as alone capable of destroying the world. They are also means of cleansing and purifying. The Stoics preserved a doctrine of conflagration which they got originally from the Eastern philosophers. But the testimony of Scripture is paramount. “The heavens shall vanish away like smoke” (Isaiah 51:6). “Heaven and earth shall pass away” (Matthew 24:35). “The fashion of this world passeth away” (1 Corinthians 7:31). St. Paul also speaks of the Lord being “revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire” (2 Thessalonians 1:7). The prophet Malachi declares, “The day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble” (4:11) and so on, in many other parts of Scripture.

Modern Knowledge

Our modern knowledge of the world makes such a consummation more, not less feasible. All the elements of the world are combustible. By ‘elements’, of course, St. Peter meant all the things contained in the world, in the heavens and the earth. He did not mean what we mean by ‘elements’. The ancients in that sense thought of four elements—air, earth, fire and water. But it means that all things in the world will be burnt up and consumed by fire. All things are combustible, once the heat reaches a certain intensity; even water is highly combustible being composed of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen. But Peter means also all the things that are in the world—all the works of nature and art; all the things that man has made, that seem so lasting and secure and enduring. The whole mineral, vegetable and animal creation; all towers and bridges, palaces and productions of genius.

There is a sense in which the world is already poised over such a general conflagration. The centre of the earth is a mass of molten, liquid fire. The deeper you go into the earth the more intensely the heat is felt. This fire occasionally breaks out in the form of volcanoes, which act as safety valves. Such fires are

only restrained by the Word of God, as Peter says. The great conflagration of the last day could burst out, rising from beneath the surface of the earth, like the great flood of waters, when the fountains of the great deep were broken up.

Every so often the watcher of the sky sees a distant world burst into great brilliance, shine brightly and then go out in darkness. What is happening? A world is on fire. And according to Peter, that is what will happen when the Day of the Lord comes.

And when that happens, all things shall be dissolved. The elements shall melt with the intense heat and dissolve. And that is precisely the correct term; for fire, in fact, destroys nothing. We speak popularly of fire destroying, but in fact nothing is destroyed, but only dissolved and reduced to another form. Fire transforms solid matter into liquids, and liquids into gasses. But nothing, in fact, is lost of the sum of the total matter. Only God can destroy in that ultimate sense, and annihilate by an act of ‘decreation’ or ‘uncreation’. And so what the fire of the Day of the Lord will do is to change the creation and transform it into “new heavens and a new earth”.

The First State of Creation

The present world will, therefore, be dissolved by fire, just as the ancient antediluvian world was by water, and another world will be prepared to take its place; one which will be fashioned out of the fiery destruction and ruin. The first state of the world was that of paradise and innocence, a perfect world peopled with perfect human beings. But that first state did not last, for sin entered and mankind was ejected from the Garden of Eden. Nevertheless, the world was not at that time destroyed, and the conditions that prevailed, prior to the flood, were more congenial and propitious to life generally than those which followed that universal cataclysm. This we can conclude from the fact that human beings lived for much longer periods of time before the flood. It would appear that a new course of nature was ushered in after the flood. Prior to that there was no rain upon the earth, but instead “there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground” (Genesis 2:6). There was no rainbow until after the flood, when the first rain had fallen upon the earth (Genesis 9:13). Nature had a wild luxuriance at first, and all life must have benefited from the favourable conditions which prevailed.

Man’s Astonishing Powers

But not only was the earth more clement and hospitable to life in general prior to the flood, but the people were superior and more advanced than they have been since; the very opposite in fact of the now familiar myth of the ‘cave man’ and the sub-human forms that populate the imagination today. They were, of course, the same species as ourselves, but with enormously enhanced powers that we have since lost.

Not only did they live much longer—seven, eight, and nine hundred years in many cases—but they were capable of exercising greater powers of mind and soul. It is recognised that the powers of the human brain are far greater than the uses to which we now put it. It is as if great areas of this marvellous organ, the human brain, are shut off or closed down, and so are no longer accessible to us, as they were to Adam at the beginning. “God created man in his own image”, male and female, and commanded them to be fruitful, to subdue the earth, “and have dominion” (lordship) over every living thing in it. Adam named, classified, all the creatures that God made. That is a most astonishing feat. The nomenclature and classification of all species of flora and fauna is a vast scheme which is still incomplete. Yet one man was able to comprehend the whole of it at the beginning. Man was originally god-like. “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness”, said God. Such is the high-calling and the astounding powers that God gave to man originally. But the fall of man stripped him of most of those powers, and the realm of nature itself has also suffered as a consequence of the fall. It is subject, says Paul, to vanity, futility (Romans 8:20); that is, frustrated in that it cannot fulfil its original purpose. So we see what a terrible catastrophe the fall of man was for himself and the whole natural world. It affected not only him but the whole creation.

The Restitution of Creation

But the promise that runs through the Scriptures is that God will restore both man and the creation. As Paul puts it, the creation was made subject to vanity (i.e. futility, corruption, and ruin) not willingly, not of its own inclination or tendency, but because God for the sin and rebellion of man had cursed it. But the redemption of man holds forth the promise and hope of the restoration of the creation also, and of its eventual deliverance from futility and corruption. The creation will, when Christ returns and the redeemed are manifested with him, be restored to that condition of liberty which it had lost.

Paul describes the whole creation groaning and travailing in expectation of this deliverance, and of its restoration. And the redeemed themselves live also in earnest hope of it, for they have an earnest or guarantee of it, the first fruits of the Spirit in themselves. They therefore groan within themselves, waiting for their deliverance and for the new heaven and earth which God will recreate.

It follows from this that all merely human ideas and hopes of creating a perfect world and a perfect society are illusory and vain. They are literally utopian, in that they can have no place or reality in the present state of the world. They spring from human pride, and from sin and rebellion against God. As often as men aspire to them, they end in ruin and despair. The age of reason, the French Revolution, all ended in despair and chaos, as have the more recent attempts to establish Communism.

The Christian hope transcends all this. As Peter puts it, “We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness”, or in which the righteous dwell, since righteousness is a quality that only exists amongst people, not things. After the great conflagration that will attend the second coming of Christ, the righteous will inhabit the new earth. The renovation of the natural world so as to become the dwelling of the righteous is spoken of frequently in Scripture. Jesus declared, “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.” That clearly is not the case at present, nor has it been in past ages. It has been, and is, the great ones and the tyrants who partition the earth amongst themselves. The same words are found in the Psalms, “But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Psalm 37:11). Also in Hebrews we read of “the *world* to come” (Ojiko umevnhn), which means the *habitable* world in which all things are subject to the Saviour, the representative or proper man. This will be the reign of Christ and his saints in a new, restored earth. The marks of that reign will be justice, peace and the Divine Presence. Our Lord bade his followers pray, “Thy kingdom come ... in earth as it is in heaven.”

Peter spoke, when preaching on the day of Pentecost, of this new heaven and earth as the “restitution of all things” (Acts 3:19ff). “Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” This restitution of all things is the physical and moral regeneration of the creation, which Peter later speaks of, in his second epistle, as the new heavens and the new earth. Since all the prophets testify to this and Peter appeals to them, let us look briefly at their testimony.

The Testimony of the Prophets

We must not imagine that the prophets wrote like the poets, and dreamed up an idea of a romantic state of things, that never was, nor ever will be, only to please their fancies, or credulous people. What they speak of is no insubstantial thing, nor is it the state of heaven and eternal life, which is to come afterwards. What they foretold was the restoration of the natural world conjoined with the regeneration of its inhabitants. Thus Isaiah 65 joins together the renovation of the natural and moral world. “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.” Having set down the natural characteristics of that new state as being rest, longevity, ease and plenty, the prophet then describes the moral character of it, such as, divine favour and such a particular protection that the inhabitants are heard before they pray. And, lastly, he describes it as a state of universal peace and innocence. “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy

mountain, saith the Lord” (v. 25). This state of peace, justice and innocency is again fully described in Isaiah chapter 11. “But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth... the leopard shall lie down with the kid... And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” It is impossible to understand this state of things as applying to any order that has been or is. It can only refer to the restitution of all things, which also is the subject of Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, and more fully expounded in the passage from 2 Peter that we are considering. It is that state of things also to which our Lord referred when he spoke to his disciples of the regeneration of all things: “And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Matthew 19:28). *palingenesis*/ means ‘rebirth’, a renovation or renewal of the original state. Our Lord is saying that the earth will be restored to its original, pristine state, and the disciples will have a share in the rule of that regenerated state of the earth. This state of things is foretold in Micah 4:1-4. “The mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains...” The nations shall flow to it, and they will beat their swords into ploughshares, and there will be universal peace.

This is what is meant by the new heavens and the new earth “in which dwelleth righteousness”, to which Peter refers, and which will emerge from the great conflagration of which he speaks, which conflagration will herald the Lord’s return. It is both a fearful prospect and yet, at the same time, one that holds out the great hope for the world and humanity.

Conclusion

Finally, since all these things will take place, says Peter, what sort of people ought we to be? (v. 11). That is the great question with which Peter concludes his second epistle. What sort of people ought we to be in all holy conversation, that is, in our faith and the practice of it; loving God and walking closely with Him, in holy living and behaviour towards others, both inside and outside the church; seeking their spiritual welfare and salvation.

The value of this survey of things through which Peter has conducted us in the closing chapter of his second epistle is, that it gives a grand sweep of events; we see what has gone before, where we are now, and what is to come. A road map is essential when we are on a journey. We can trace our journey so far, and see how much we have yet to go. Without it we are lost, we haven’t a clue. A biblical road map does exactly that for us in spiritual terms. It shows how the world God created was once a perfect world, formed and fashioned by Him out of nothing originally,

and out of chaos. But because of the sin of man that primeval world perished in a flood of waters, under the judgment of God. The world we now see and inhabit is not the world God originally created, but the ruin of that world, and will itself, in God's time, perish by fire, and be replaced by a new heavens and earth in which the righteous shall dwell. A world that will be ruled not by angels but by the Son of God himself and by his saints. "For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak... But we see Jesus..." (Hebrews 2:5ff).

I imagine that many people when they utter the Lord's prayer, and say "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven," have very little idea what exactly it is they are praying for. They might be thinking of this present world getting better and better; of society being improved by social legislation; and people becoming better behaved, and of growing prosperity, until some kind of perfect world is achieved. That, I think, is how popular thinking goes, following the evolutionary thought of the nineteenth century, and which is still current today. It is strange how much of this has rubbed off on the church so that its thought is not merely coloured, but actually controlled by it. But the Biblical picture—the road the Bible maps out for the future kingdom of God—is quite different; and that is because it also has a different view of the past. The whole biblical viewpoint is at variance with worldly wisdom.

Now, seeing all these things we have described will take place, or as Peter himself puts it, "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved," that is, the present earth and heaven will be destroyed and re-created in the way he describes; "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" What ought we to be doing? and how ought we to be living? I conclude with these practical remarks:

1. Look to the end of things; only so can we get matters in their proper proportion and perspective. It is like the mathematical point outside the picture that gives the picture its perspective, because all the lines converge upon it. We have to look to the end of all things in order to understand the present and be able to order our lives accordingly. People today think very little about the end of the world. They live in and for the present; for the passing moment and the fleeting pleasure. They do not like the long view of life. But this is what we are called upon to do. "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be...?"
2. It should make us more diligent and faithful, so that we keep close to God and look constantly to him. "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." (v. 14).

3. It ought to make us less anxious about the material and temporal things of this world. Seeing there is nothing that is permanent, and all its works will pass away—the gold and silver will melt and dissolve; all that the world counts dear will perish—let us not become too attached to them, and build our hopes upon them. Let us “use this world as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away” (1 Corinthians 7:31).
4. It should give us a strong attachment to the things of the Spirit—to the Scriptures, which tell us the truth about all these matters that concern us and our eternal salvation; which inform us of the will and purposes of God, who created all things, and the purpose for which He created them and us. “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” (Colossians 3:2, 3). “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:18). Thus, by doing this our natures will be refined and purified, and we shall be made “heavenly minded”.
5. It will give us a serious frame of mind—a mind which is able to judge and discriminate and sift the wheat from the chaff, the gold from the dross, the precious from the vile.
6. And, finally, it will make us more dedicated, more zealous, to work while it is yet day, to husband our time and opportunities, and to exercise a faithful stewardship of that which has been committed to us.

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A number of the congregations within the Continuing Church are in the habit of recording sermons onto tape. These are available to readers of the *Journal* who may wish to hear sermons in this way.

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**MATERIAL FOR DECEMBER ISSUE OF *THE JOURNAL*
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St. John's Church, South London. Meeting at the Shaftesbury Home, Trellis House, Mill Road (off Merton High Street), Colliers Wood, SW19, for 11.00 am Morning Prayer and 6.30 pm Evening Prayer. Midweek as intimated. *Enquiries* Rev Peter Ratcliff, 01737 241135.

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