

before contributing. Do they have an anti-Israel stance? Or do they exist, in part at least, to promote beliefs we do not agree with?

Some workers for 'Christian' charities may feel that the work they do could earn them salvation, and yet we know that in the judgement some will claim to have done good things in the name of Christ, only to be rejected by him. He said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father Which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto

them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mt. 7:21-23).

In all these considerations there is the need for a right balance. As has been shown in other articles in this issue, faith in the living God and in His precious promises is the basis of an acceptable approach to God, and we must live a life in keeping with that faith, despite difficulties and trials sent to test us. This faith in God, Who is generous and selfless towards His creation, and faith in His lovely Son who is our Saviour and example, then has its outworking in doing good to our families, our brothers and sisters in Christ and finally to others with whom we come into contact.

## "In the world but not of it"

Mark Vincent

*The title of this piece, though in quotation marks, is not, it turns out, a Biblical quotation at all. The phrase never occurs in the Bible in that form. It is instead a Christadelphianism, constructed through an extreme abbreviation of John 17:11-14.<sup>1</sup> Rather like the expression 'everywhere present by His Spirit', it is one of those phrases that is Biblical in the thought it conveys, but not literally so. We need to ensure, then, that our sense of what being 'in' the world but not 'of' it is, is Biblically grounded. That is the purpose of this article, as we attempt to lay out some principles that can be helpful in our necessary interaction with the world.*

**F**IRST, THEN, in what sense are we to be 'in the world'? This becomes clear from passages like those in the Gospel of John. Jesus was the light of the world while he was in it (9:5), during his ministry in other words. Now he has ascended to heaven, and that role falls to us, as he made plain in the synoptic Gospels; for example, Matthew 5:15,16 (cf. Jno. 17:18). Paul re-emphasised the point when he wrote that disciples are to "shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15).

### Lights and ambassadors

God does not require us to be ascetics, or to set ourselves so far apart from others that we have no ability to communicate with them or extend an influence. Fascinatingly, in Colossians 2:20, when

Paul is dealing with the temptation to be overly restrictive by denying oneself to an extreme and enforcing régimes of abstinence, he describes such initiatives as being characteristic of worldly people! We might think denying ourselves is spiritual, but it can, ironically, be a very worldly thing to do, pride-inducing and self-justifying as it can be.

We need to interact, then, with the world in which we live. If our light is to shine before other people, we have to be near enough to them so that they might see it. If we never even  *speak*  to our neighbours, for instance, we shall scarcely  *preach*  to them, and we shall hardly be living examples to them so that they can experience the love of Christ for themselves. God calls upon us to represent Him in the world and to make Him manifest; by our words, our example, and our behaviour and activities.

The notion of being a stranger and foreigner is helpful here. No one is a stranger or foreigner unless they are actually  *in*  the foreign land in question. We have to  *be*  there in the foreign country in which we live in order to be pilgrims and strangers. A stranger has a level of partici-

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1. Of course the expression may be used by other denominations also; I do not know.

pation in the foreign land, even though it is not full participation (he eats and sleeps there; he may work there; he may pay taxes there; he may make use of amenities there; but he does not have full title and rights). This notion of 'participation but reduced participation' is helpful. God clearly intended the metaphor of a foreign national living abroad as an important one for us to use as a model of discipleship. We are citizens of heaven, but we live on the earth; we need to remember this whenever worldly nationalism is in danger of pressing too heavily upon us.

Let's change and extend the metaphor. The concept of sojourning abroad can be elevated when we think of our role as *ambassadors*. We are not just foreigners living in an earthly country, we are *representatives* or *ambassadors*. Again, this requires a level of participation, and also a significant sense of non-participation, but it adds the notion of *responsibility* (think of the role of the German ambassador to France, or some such). Anyone who has lived in a foreign country knows that there goes along with it (at least for a while) a sense of freedom: diminished responsibility, in a sense, and the opportunity to do things one would not normally do and configure life in new ways. The shackles of one's old life are left behind. As *ambassadors*, however, we must be very careful with such a concept of freedom. We are *God's* representatives, always with the potential to be observed by others and judged on account of Whom we represent. People will make their minds up about God to some extent by what they see in us. This is indeed a high calling.

Although a high-ranking representative, an ambassador must also integrate. If the German ambassador to France constantly refuses to eat with, speak to, or attend functions that involve French people then little of his work will get done, and he should probably be relieved of his post. The French will come away with lower opinion of the Germans than might already be the case.

In such senses, then, we are in the world.

### **Everyday living**

We also have to earn our living in the world; it is part of the curse, and our responsibility to ourselves and our families, that we are self-supporting (Gen. 3:19; 2 Thess. 3:10). There are Scriptural examples where this has extended to significant levels of 'worldly' influence. We have only to think of Daniel and his friends, as well as Nehemiah, Esther and Mordecai, who all held positions of high office in the 'world' in which

they lived. As it turned out they were able to leverage these positions in critical ways to assist in the furthering of God's purpose and the protection of His people. If Daniel had refused the induction into Nebuchadnezzar's court because his high-flying 'hot-house university' was too worldly (Dan. 1), then there may well have been no image of Daniel 2 to talk about in our preaching lectures, and Bible exhibitions and ourselves would be much the poorer.

Furthermore, we have to be able to relate to other people. We can do this fundamentally because we are human too: we know what pain, sin, guilt, love, hate and so forth are all about. We know all too well the fundamental human emotions, and we can explain and understand them better than others who have no hope, because we have a spiritual framework into which to plug them and according to which they may be understood.

A classic passage here is Paul's 'all things to all men' rhetoric:

"For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you" (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Notice that he does not become "as a Jew" for any personal reasons (such as 'because it's fun'), nor does he become "without law" because it's 'liberating'. He does it *for the gospel's sake*. Everything is subsumed to his role as ambassador for Christ.

Taken in a more modern context, this principle might imply an awareness of worldly affairs (for instance, politics, local issues, etc.), even if we do not participate in them. It would involve an awareness of and concern for people's worries, needs and fears. It implies an awareness of current events, modern relationship styles, perhaps even some acquaintance with modern entertainments. We have to be able to relate to people.

Yet the principle is also a very dangerous one if we are not mature in our handling of it. We have

to be extremely careful how far we go down those roads; many have too naïvely assumed they were engaging in activities as preaching opportunities, only to discover that the pull of the world which they awakened within themselves was far stronger than they had appreciated. To use an extreme example to caricature the point: going to the red light district or to a gathering whose function revolved principally around drug-taking, for the purposes of 'research' or for preaching, would likely be a spiritually dangerous and foolish mission for a lone brother to attempt.

### **Exclusive**

It is interesting that both common ground and difference can create an opportunity. One might well imagine that a TV show that is really grabbing the public consciousness (and is not so morally bankrupt as to cause self-harm) might well come up for discussion at work or amongst friends. One might think that sharing such conversations can be a way of breaking down barriers and may even present a preaching opportunity. However, it is also true that being different by *not* having a TV (for instance) is also a preaching opportunity in a very different way. It can certainly be a talking point—and a positive one, if we handle it in a positive and non-superior way. We have to find levels on which to relate to people without wasting too much of our own time or becoming castaways ourselves.

I think it is worth saying that it will be hard to fulfil Paul's "all things to all men" maxim if we find no common ground with our acquaintances. If we come across to them as being people who appear defined by a list of 'don't's, it is unlikely to ignite a strong attraction to our faith. If we appear as freaks, then we shall prejudice our message before we begin.

To illustrate this, I recently came across a brief definition of Christadelphians on the [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) website which was encouragingly positive:

"Christadelphians aim to get as close as possible to the faith and practice of the early Christian church".

This is a pretty good definition for a non-Christadelphian website. I also noticed the definition of another group on the same site known as the 'Exclusive Brethren' (nothing to do with Christadelphians), which went like this:

"[Exclusive] Brethren keep themselves separate from other people (including other Christians) as far as possible, because they believe the world is a place of wickedness".

If these definitions were all someone had to go on (and if we can take them as representative of two approaches or two ways that people can come across), then it is pretty obvious that the Exclusive Brethren would start off at a fairly considerable disadvantage as far as preaching the gospel is concerned! On the basis of these definitions alone, being a Christadelphian feels like a much better place to be (as of course it is!).

What is interesting is that we agree with them that the world is a place of wickedness, and we should be separate from it in that sense. But if this is the first impression people get of us, then it will not help our ambassadorial work.

### **Participation with limits**

The example of Daniel is instructive because, although he participated in Nebuchadnezzar's education system, 'Babylonification program', and career ladder, he made a deliberate stand to create a significant distinction between himself and his peers. He participated in the program, but he made a stand about one issue—the issue of vegetarianism.

This is not the place to get into depth on this, but I am inclined to see the meat as a token issue that Daniel selects as being representative of his refusal to let Nebuchadnezzar truly 'own' him and make him Babylonian (both parties needed to see and understand this). It was not that there was anything intrinsically wrong with the meat (I suspect Daniel knew that 'an idol is nothing'). Daniel chose it as being representative of the Babylonish system. He had to participate in that system, but he would not swallow everything, as it were. He refused to feed himself on what the king and his men sustained themselves with. His diet was symbolically and literally different; he was energised and motivated by something else.

Similarly, disciples today, participating as they do in so much of the world's education, work and entertainment structures, need actively to choose to make a difference according to their conscience. They may choose things that are symbolic, representative or speak powerfully to them, just as Daniel did. This can help to establish spiritual boundaries in one's life, to know that one is making a sacrifice and for what reason. We need to know that we are different even while we are having to learn and do a lot of the same things as other people who have no hope. Every disciple needs to consider what sacrifices there are of this type that can be made.

## Not 'of' it

Finally, then, we come to those senses in which we are not connected to the world at all. The world is full of the lust of the flesh, of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 Jno. 2:15,16); it has been corrupted through lust (2 Pet. 1:4); and if, in times past, we had our manner of life there, we do so no longer, for we know the types of works the world produces (2 Cor. 1:12).

Although we are "in the world" (Jno. 17:11), then, we are certainly not "of" it (vv. 14,16), for we are 'of' God. Being 'of' something speaks of ownership, belonging, origins, motivation. In John's polarisation, we belong completely to God. We do not belong to the world, and therefore we should not be motivated by worldly lusts or worldly objects. Now our citizenship and our manner of life is to be heavenly rather than earthly (Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:1-3). We should not be "of" the world.

There are many passages that define what worldly behaviour is like (Rom. 1:29-32; 2 Cor. 12:20,21; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 4:25,26,31; 5:3-5; Col. 3:5-9; Tit. 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:1), and many of these forms of behaviour (murder, adultery, for example) we have renounced. There are others in those lists that we may still need to work on, however. As Paul puts it in Romans, we must be transformed, not conformed (Rom. 12:2); we do not belong to that camp of worldliness and worldly behaviour, so we must try to renounce all such temptation.

I want to quote just one passage, from Romans, which I consider to be particularly challenging. Having laid out the patterns of wicked human behaviour, Paul tirades:

*"[Such people] knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (1:32).*

As we await the glorious appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, we are to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world" (Titus 2:12-13). We have not, therefore, the licence to imitate the world in its tastes and pleasures. "Pure religion" entails keeping oneself "unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). Friendship with the societies of this world, however congenial and harmless they might appear, is declared to be "enmity with God" (James 4:4). The true Christadelphian will feel strange in the company of the alien and will seek instead the company of those of "like precious faith". He will not be found at the world's entertainments, its sports, its cinemas etc. Rather he will lend his support to the activities of the ecclesia "which is the house of God . . . the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). He will find pleasure in the company of those who are likeminded and will not forsake the assembling of himself with his brethren, but will do so more earnestly as he sees the day approaching (Heb. 10:24-25).

*"Do all to the Glory of God"*, Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, p. 4

In a world in which so many things are done passively (specifically, the consumption of media), the notion of taking pleasure in the wickedness of others is particularly important. Where is the place for us for vicarious satisfaction from violence and adultery? Just what do we laugh at if we enjoy comedy (see Ephesians 5:3-5)? Some rude jokes may well be funny, so what does one do? Pretend not to laugh? There is a real challenge there for us to take ourselves out of the environment, because otherwise we shall be in an awkward position. To what extent do we condemn ourselves for being 'of the world' by those things we 'take pleasure' in?

## Enmity and tribulation

These are challenging questions, and to many of them (such as the extent of participation, media consumption, etc.) there is not necessarily a single right answer. We need to consider personally and deeply the issues and principles involved. Of course the works of the flesh still rear their ugly head. We feel the enmity within our own bodies as we fight against sin, and we feel the animosity of the world when it looks at us and sees us as misfits because of our differences. Both Jesus and Peter spoke of these 'afflictions' and 'tribulation' (1 Pet. 5:9; Jno. 16:33).

But Jesus asked for God's blessing to be upon his servants who participate in this struggle. He asked that we should be 'sanctified' and 'kept from evil' (Jno. 17:11,15,17). We know that our Saviour overcame the world, and we are left with this assurance from the Epistles of John:

*"greater is He That is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 Jno. 4:4).*

So the battle can be won, and the world transcended, even while we live and witness within it.