

## From the Editor's postbag

*It has been over a year since this feature has appeared in the Testimony, the reason being that for a time very little was received that could be used and several items that were received were used as the basis of monthly editorials. A recent influx of items of interest has enabled this feature to be revived.*

### Roman Catholicism and the Bible

**L**AST AUTUMN a reader drew my attention to an item appearing in the online version of *The Times*, written by the paper's Religion Correspondent Ruth Gledhill, and entitled, "Catholic Church no longer swears by truth of the Bible". Readers of this magazine will not need telling that much of Roman Catholic teaching is not in accordance with the Bible, but this story is to do with what is presented as a change in attitude to the Bible.

The story was triggered by the appearance of a document published by the Church for the guidance of its members, and entitled, *The Gift of Scripture*. The article says:

"The hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church has published a teaching document instructing the faithful that some parts of the Bible are not actually true. The Catholic bishops of England, Wales and Scotland are warning their five million worshippers, as well as any others drawn to the study of the Scripture, that they should not expect 'total accuracy' from the Bible".

The two areas highlighted as not being literally true are the early chapters of Genesis and the Apocalypse. We would agree that much of the latter is not to be taken literally, but the document says, "We should not expect to discover in this book details about the end of the world, about how many will be saved and about when the end will come". We could endorse only the middle one of those items.

In fact there is nothing particularly new in this attitude towards Scripture. The Roman Catholic Church accepted the theory of evolution years ago, and in so doing, of course, jettisoned a belief in the literality of the early chapters of Genesis. The document seems to be particularly aimed at Fundamentalist Christians, who regard Roman Catholicism as un-Scriptural, yet themselves accept many of its false teachings.

The article brought about a lively debate in Times Online, some welcoming the document, some defending the literal truth of the early chapters of the Bible, and others seeing it as a step in abandoning Christianity altogether. One writer makes the following important point:

"I agree that different genres of literature are present in the Bible, such as poetry, prophecy, genealogy, history, allegory and such. However, I am convinced that the first chapters of the Bible were clearly intended by its writers to be understood as history and not myth or allegory . . . It is patently obvious that the real reason scholars are labelling it myth is because they do not believe it is true,

not on the strength of proper textual criticism. Many evangelicals and fundamentalists (such as myself) accept it as true history; many atheists or followers of other religions accept it as false history, but a history nonetheless. The whole business strikes me as dishonest fence-straddling. Face it, how can you reconcile the idea that human death came about as the result of sin entering a perfect world with the imperfect world built from death and brutal trial and error posited by the theory of evolution?"

### Roman Catholicism and religious freedom

**A**RELATED point is made by a correspondent from the USA, apparently a Roman Catholic visitor to the *Testimony* website, who sent me an email opposing efforts by supporters of Creation to get intelligent design taught in schools as an alternative to evolution. He objects to this on the basis that it is an attempt to get religious ideology into schools. It all depends, of course, how intelligent design is presented. If it is simply on the basis that Genesis 1 is literal fact then he has a point. However, presenting intelligent design and evolution as two alternative ways in which life in all its forms has come about is surely not pushing religious ideology. One suspects that proponents of evolution are afraid of the weaknesses of their case being exposed.

Our correspondent goes on to cite Pope Benedict XVI in support of his views. He said in his first encyclical, "The State may

not impose religion, yet it must guarantee religious freedom and harmony between followers of different religions". Presenting intelligent design as an alternative to evolution is hardly imposing religion, however. Regarding the pope's statement, we would go along with it (assuming that "harmony" means no more than living at peace with others), since Christadelphians would not be tolerated in a country with a state-imposed religion. However, it is well to remember that for most of its history the Roman Catholic Church has worked with the State to enforce adherence to its teachings, and would do the same again if it got the chance.

### Catholicism in South America

There is no worse example of the imposition of Roman Catholicism upon people by priests in conjunction with secular rulers than the way it was imposed upon the native peoples of Central and South America by Spanish conquerors in the sixteenth century, following the discovery of these countries by Columbus and others. A South American reader, Brother Cástulo Martínez, has sent me a copy of a work entitled, *Believe, or Die: The Gospel in America before Columbus and Afterwards*, which shows the truth of the above statement. The following is an extract:

"To Spain fell the lot to play a dramatic part in the 'discovery' of the 'New World' in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries . . . With a crucifix in one hand and a sword in the other; with an eye on the gold, and the other on the silver that they found in their way; small in numbers but stubbornly determined, and

filled with the pleasant hope in the riches of this world, the Spanish conquerors of Mexico and Peru sacked the temples, robbed the dwellings, tortured and burned sovereigns and nobles, installed crosses and images of the Virgin in rooms dedicated to the pagan idols, they said masses to bewildered natives, whom they persuaded to submit themselves to the rite of baptism, to receiving the Eucharist, to making the sign of the cross and to bow to the Virgin. They even showed the cross to their victims to kiss it while they were burned tied to a pole accused of being pagans, infidels and heretics".

These Spanish conquerors were aided in their task by their possession of firearms, and also by the fact that in many places there were stories of past visits by white men, or one particular man, who taught them many things, then left. When the Spanish came they initially welcomed them as being these same people returned. Taken off their guard, they were easily massacred. I took the view in a two-part article, "Before the Flood" ([Jul. 2001, p. 291](#); [Aug. 2001, p. 330](#)), that these stories, along with similar stories from elsewhere in the world, preserve a memory of instruction given by angels, or survivors of the Flood, in far distant times.

*Believe, or Die* introduces a new slant on this. Apparently when the Spanish arrived in America they discovered people with beliefs and practices similar to Christianity, said to have been introduced by these white-skinned visitors. Roman Catholic priests either attributed this to the Devil instituting an imitation of Christianity mixed with

paganism, or said that the white-skinned visitors were some of the apostles. Regarding the first idea, we reject, of course, the idea of such a being; and regarding the second, there is evidence of belief in the false ideas developed by Christianity well after the time of the apostles, such as the Trinity, infant baptism and people going to heaven or hell when they die.

Brother Martínez advances the view that the white-skinned visitors were in fact Roman Catholic priests who came with early explorers from Europe, in particular from Scandinavia. There is good evidence that Viking explorers reached the northeastern coasts of America, and there are also stories of an expedition from Ireland that reached America. The suggestion is that these early seafarers reached Central and South America and introduced Roman Catholicism to its people. This does not necessarily rule out the idea of angelic visits, referred to above, since the two things may have become conflated, though it renders it less likely as an explanation for these mysterious visitors. One thing seems clear, however; the true gospel does not seem to have reached Latin America until very recent times, and, despite some areas of success, has been slow to spread compared with some other parts of the world.

Brother Cástulo Martínez has translated *Believe, or Die* into English from a longer work he has written in Spanish, entitled (translated into English) *The Discovery of America: Now the Voice of the Defeated*, and published in La Paz, Bolivia. He plans to make *Believe, or Die* available to readers who are interested; contact him at [casmar60@yahoo.com](mailto:casmar60@yahoo.com).

## The Third Epistle of Peter

**A**LTHOUGH these days quite a lot of attention is paid to non-Biblical works which have a Biblical person's name attached to them (for example, the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Judas), the Third Epistle of Peter is not such a work, but rather a piece of religious satire published in the magazine *The Christian Baptist* and thought to have been written by its editor, Alexander Campbell. At that time Brother Thomas was associated with the Campbellites and printed the Third Epistle of Peter in his magazine, *The Apostolic Advocate* (Jun. 1835, p. 43). The existence of this work was brought to my attention recently by a reader, and other readers may find it interesting.

The work is presented as being addressed by the Apostle Peter to the clergy, and is intended to contrast the first-century ecclesial situation with how things developed over the centuries under the supposed successors of Peter, the popes. Here are some sample quotes:

"Be ye not called as men are called; but be ye called Pope, Archbishop, Archdeacon, or Divine, or Reverend and Right Reverend, or some like holy name; so may you show forth your honour and your calling";

"Let the *houses* in which you preach be called *churches*, and let them be built in manner of great ornament without, and adorned with much cost within: with rich pillars and paints, and with fine altars and pedestals and urns of precious stones, and cloths and velvet of scarlet, and vessels of silver";

"Teach them to believe that you have the care of their souls, and that the saving mysteries are for your explaining; and when you explain your *mysteries*, encompass them round about with words as with a bright veil, so bright that through it no man can see".

The work was evidently known to nineteenth-century Christadelphians. In the *Christadelphian* of December 1876 Brother Roberts comments in reply to a reader, "We agree with you as to the unsuitability of a mere satire like 'The third epistle of Peter' for general circulation as a tract. The brethren who have published it evidently think differently. Our name appears on it without permission" (inside front cover). In January 1892 there is a reference to Bath ecclesia distributing it (p. 32).

In the *Ambassador of the Coming Age* (the predecessor of the *Christadelphian*) there is a similar satire entitled, "The sale of souls; an imaginary appendix to the Epistle to Titus" (May 1869, p. 135).

Readers wishing to read the Third Epistle of Peter for themselves will find it on <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/acampbell/tcb/TCB00.HTM>, a site on which Alexander Campbell's *Christian Baptist* magazine can be found. Search on 'The Third Epistle of Peter'. It was published in the July 1825 edition.

## This generation

**W**HEN the State of Israel came into existence in 1948 it was widely thought that the statement, "This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled", in the Mount Olivet Prophecy (Lk. 21:32) indicated that our Lord would come by

1988. This was on the basis that it took forty years for the wilderness generation to pass off the scene. This idea gained support from the fact that it was forty years from the time when Jesus uttered these words until A.D. 70. Jesus did not, of course, come in 1988, and nothing of particular significance seemed to happen then.

A reader has written to suggest that the correct period is seventy years, on the basis that Psalm 90:10 indicates this as the natural life span of man. This is the period between the birth of Jesus and A.D. 70. This would make 2018 the end of the period during which all will be fulfilled. This matches well with interpretations of Bible time periods that have expiry dates during that decade.

By coincidence, Pete Mercer, in reviewing the phrase "this generation" later in this magazine, mentions this period as a possibility (p. 171). 2018 seems a long way off, but it is only twelve years away, and much may need to happen before it can be said that "all [is] fulfilled". Some say that the words "*This* generation" limit the fulfilment of Luke 21:32 to the first century. It was pointed out to me some years ago that the Greek word translated "this" here does not indicate 'the generation to whom the prophecy was given' but 'the generation witnessing the signs of the previous verses'. Had the former been intended a different word would have been used. Concerns over the threat posed by the new régime in Iran (referred to elsewhere in this issue, in both the Editorial and News from the Nations) and the coming into power of Hamas in Israel are indications that we may be moving into a time of rapid development of events.

Tony Benson