THE EARLY CENTURIES AND THE TRUTH

STUART ALLEN

THE BEREAN PUBLISHING TRUST (CIO)

The Early Centuries and the Truth

Stuart Allen

An interesting examination of the teaching of the Fathers during the first three or four centuries, showing how quickly they had departed from the doctrine of the Apostle Paul. The partial rediscovery of the Truth by those nearer our day such as J.N. Darby is also touched upon.

THE BEREAN PUBLISHING TRUST (CIO)
52A Wilson Street, London EC2A 2ER
England

The Early Centuries and the Truth

By

Stuart Allen

Author of

Letters from Prison
The Unfolding Purpose of God
On Reading the Bible
The Interpretation of Scripture
The Lord Jesus Christ, God or only Man?
The Early and Pastoral Epistles of Paul
The Acts of the Apostles and Afterwards
The Kingdom of God in Heaven and on Earth

etc., etc.

© THE BEREAN PUBLISHING TRUST (CIO)

ISBN 0 85156 120 9

First published 1969
Reprinted 1985

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, without permission.

CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction, The Didache and 1 Clement	1
The Didache, or the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles	2
The First Epistle of Clement	4
The Epistles of Ignatius	7
The Epistles of Polycarp and Barnabas	11
The Epistle of Barnabas	14
The Shepherd of Hermas and the Second Epistle of Clement	16
The Second Epistle of Clement	20
The Teaching of the Apostolic Fathers - Conclusion	22
Factors leading to a Spiritual Revival	29
The truth of the Mystery as taught by early leaders of the Brethren Movement	37

FOREWORD

The Oxford Concise Dictionary gives the meaning of 'tradition' as "Opinion or belief or custom handed down, handing down of these from ancestors to posterity; doctrine etc., supposed to have divine authority but not committed to writing, especially (1) laws held by Pharisees to have been delivered by God to Moses, (2) oral teaching of Christ not recorded in writing by immediate disciples".

At the end of this Foreword a list of occurrences of this word in the New Testament is given. Our Lord Jesus Christ warns His hearers against the traditions of men, and in Mark 7:13 says to the Pharisees and Scribes (we might say the clergy of His day), that the traditions they have delivered to the people made the Word of God of none effect. In 2 Thessalonians Paul exhorts his hearers to uphold the tradition he has delivered (2:15; 3:6) either by spoken or written word. We need to know where the traditions we uphold have come from and whether they are based on the Word of God.

How important then is this short account of the early centuries; that is, say A.D. 70 to A.D. 400, when the canon of New Testament Scripture was in the making and a church organisation began to appear. If things went wrong then they may persist today. Come to this book with an unbiased mind and test how far your own church doctrine is based on the inspired Scriptures.

A concordance of the word "Tradition":

Matthew. 15:2,3,6

Mark.7:3,5,8,9,13

Galatians.1:14

Colossians. 2:8

2 Thessalonians. 2:15; 3:6

The Early Centuries and the Truth

Introduction, The Didache and 1 Clement

The subject of Church History is a vast and complicated one, which entails much study and research in order to get a good grasp of it. Yet a knowledge of this subject is necessary in some degree if one is to understand the set-up of modern Christendom. Of particular interest are the early centuries, the sub-apostolic age and those following it, which give us the reactions of the early Christians to the books and doctrine of the New Testament, before the Canon was fixed and afterwards.

As many will know, the fixation of the Canon took time to achieve, as there was much apochryphal and spurious literature among the churches, thus necessitating careful sorting out, and there is no doubt whatsoever that the Holy Spirit overruled in all this, thus ensuring that no uninspired writing was finally admitted to the New Testament Canon.

As long as the Apostles and their disciples lived, with their oral and written teaching, there was no need of a Canon and it is not until the end of the second century that the concept of a Canon began to reveal itself, and this was precipitated by controversy and heresy, such as that provoked by Marcion of Sinope, who broke with the church of Rome about A.D. 150. However, not yet were all the books now existing in the New Testament decided upon. Those accepted, generally speaking, were the four Gospels, the Pauline epistles (but not Hebrews), the Acts of the Apostles, some of the general epistles and after a period, the Revelation.

It was not until the fourth century that we find the New Testament as we know it today, finally fixed. In the east this was achieved in A.D. 367, as declared in the Thirty-ninth Paschal letter of Athanasius. In the west a similar point was reached at Carthage in A.D. 397, when the same list of New Testament books as those contained in the Athanasian letter was agreed upon.

However, from the age of the Apostolic Fathers, one or two of the Gospels were known, and the epistles of Paul, as a whole, although there were doubts about Hebrews. The important point is: did they understand the teaching of the Apostle, whose writings are the key to the truth for this age of grace? What actually happened after the martyrdom of the Apostle Paul? We do know for certain that the body of Truth given by revelation of the Lord Jesus to him, was passed on to his son in the faith, Timothy. What happened to Timothy? Alas, we cannot say, for the earliest Christian literature does not mention him. The later apostolic age to the great apologists of the middle and late second century has been described by historians as a "very ill-lit tunnel". We know little except that it was a period of persecution and pernicious propaganda. The earliest writings were those of the *Didache*, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, and those of the Apostolic Fathers; meaning men who had contact with, or who were appointed by the Apostles, although only for Polycarp is there real evidence of such contact. We can examine these writings fortunately, and come to a definite conclusion as to how the Truth was still regarded from approximately the middle of the second century onwards. We must bear in mind that by this time the churches were spread widely throughout the Roman Empire, and in the east, beyond it.

The Didache, or the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles

This was an early manual of Church instruction, claiming to give the teaching of the Lord as handed down through the twelve Apostles. It probably had as its basis Matthew 28:19, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe *all things whatsoever I have commanded you*". *The Didache* was discovered in a Greek manuscript at Constantinople in 1873, and published by Bryennius ten years later. It is apparently composite, and dates from the early part of the second century. An earlier Latin version has been discovered which Professor E. J. Goodspeed considers is separate from the work, a primitive form of it. The *Didascalia*, late in the third century, and the *Apostolic Constitutions*, late in the fourth, clearly made use of *The Didache.* We can say it is roughly contemporary with Ignatius, Polycarp and 1 Clement.

It evidently had the recent convert in mind, and presents the Christian life under the titles of the "Way of Life" as opposed to the "Way of Death", but when we step from the New Testament to this writing, it is like entering another world. Do we find set forth the "worthy walk" and the practical outworking of the Truth as set forth in the epistles of Paul? The answer is decidedly, No! We are back in a negative legalism, and one wonders whether the author or authors had the slightest understanding of the body of Truth given by the Lord through this great servant of His. When we remember how much Paul's indignation and wonder was evoked by the legalistic spirit that had affected the Galatians, we cannot help feeling that his cause for amazement would have been increased a hundredfold, could he have lived a half century or more later and read this document. One might be pardoned for looking on it solely as a Jewish writing, for there is strangely wanting the great characteristics of grace and love that permeate the Gospel of Christ as made known through the Apostle of the Gentiles; in fact the failure to distinguish between Law and Grace, Salvation and Reward is most characteristic, as the following quotations will show:

> "Do not keep stretching out your hands to receive, and drawing them back when it comes to returning. If *through your hands you have earned a ransom for* your sins, you shall not hesitate to give it" (4:6,7).
>
> "See that no one leads you astray from this way of the Teaching, for he teaches you without God. For if *you can bear the whole yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect*, but if you cannot, do what you can" (6:2).
>
> "Your fasts must not be on the same days as the hypocrites, for they fast on Monday and Thursday, but you must fast on Wednesday and Friday" (8:1).
>
> "So you shall take the firstfruits of the produce of the wine-press and the threshing floor and of cattle and sheep, and give the firstfruits to the prophets, *for they are your high priests*" (13:3).

One rubs ones eyes with amazement when reading these extracts, especially when one remembers that this was given out as Christian teaching less than a hundred years after the full revelation of grace had been given in the New Testament.

Moreover, the Person of Christ is not central, and there is no appreciation of the glorious fact that justification is the present

possession of the believer. According to this teaching, on becoming saved, a person must keep to the right way in order to attain salvation; in other words, salvation becomes a reward for righteous living. The word 'grace' only occurs twice, and then it is used as a kind of Divine force, added to that of the believer, to help him towards this goal. Under this teaching the believer sets out to perfect himself in the righteousness of the law, and when he fails, to make some kind of atonement by his own works, "through your hands you have earned a ransom for your sins" (4:6, 7).

Sometimes we see it argued, that the nearer one gets to New Testament times, the nearer one is to the primitive truth of the Scriptures. An examination of this early literature shows, alas, such an idea to be false. It is significant that this document goes back to the Twelve Apostles of the circumcision for the instruction of the church in Christian doctrine and living, rather than to the minister appointed by the ascended Christ - Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles (Eph. 3:1,2; Col. 1:24, 25).

The First Epistle of Clement

This epistle, apart from the New Testament, is probably the earliest Christian document that has come down to us. The writer is not named, but from ancient times it has been ascribed to Clement, who was bishop of Rome from A.D. 88-97. He seems to have had acquaintance with Paul's epistles and the letter to the Hebrews and 1 Peter. The date of 1 Clement could be around A.D. 90-95. It is found in Greek near the close of the Codex Alexandrinus of the fifth century and in the eleventh century manuscript found by Bryennius in 1873. Syriac, Latin, and Coptic versions have also come to light.

It was addressed to the Corinthian church, which at this time was showing hostility to the office of elder or presbyter, and its purpose was an attempt to correct this. When we study its theology what do we find? He speaks warm-heartedly about Christ, His death, and once actually speaks of "faith in Christ". However, when we examine the contents of these statements we find he expresses sentiments which clearly show that he never properly gripped the truth of salvation by grace, apart from works. Such faith, as he mentions, pertains not so much to the Person of Christ,

but to His precepts, the Lord Jesus to him was a preacher of the "grace of repentance". The Lord's death is said to procure, not atonement, but an *opportunity* to repent, and is brought in as an *example*, leading men to a strong desire to do good and to keep humble before God.

Let us look at the passage where he uses the expression "faith in Christ":

> "Let our children share in Christian instruction, let them learn what power humility has with God, what pure love can do with God, how good and great His fear is, and *how it saves those who live in it with holiness with a pure mind.* For He is the searcher of thoughts and desires. His breath is in us and when He pleases, He will take it away.
>
> *Faith in Christ confirms all this*, for He, Himself, through the Holy Spirit, invites us thus: "Come, children, listen to me, I will teach you to revere the Lord. What man is there that desires life, and loves to see good days? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from uttering deceit. Turn from evil and do what is good. Seek peace and pursue it. The Lord's eyes are on the upright and His ears are open to their appeal. . .'' (1 Clement 21:8-22:8).

It will be noted that Clement, after referring to faith in Christ, appears to be about to quote the Lord's actual words, but instead refers to Psalm 34:11-17 which of course has nothing to do directly with faith in Christ apart from works for salvation. In fact, both before and after using the phrase "faith in Christ", we have a stress on good works. Fear "saves *those* who live in it *with holiness and a pure mind*", and a carrying out in practice of Psalm 34 follows, which, to Clement, confirms what "faith in Christ" is. It is surely clear, that, in spite of his piety, Clement had never fully grasped the Gospel as proclaimed through Paul, of justification by faith in Christ apart from works, and the proper place that good works have of following and being the *fruit* of salvation, not the procuring cause. Other references make this abundantly clear:

> "Let us clothe ourselves with harmony, in humility and self control, keeping ourselves from all gossip and slander, and be *justified by deeds,* not by words" (30:3).

He goes on to quote the example of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob acting by faith, very much as Hebrews eleven, but he confuses the faith of the sinner in Christ that saves, with the overcoming faith of the believer pressing on to the goal. Other references are illuminating:

> "You see, dear friends, how great and wonderful love is, and there is no describing its perfection. Who is to be found in it, *except those whom God deems worthy*?"
>
> "How happy are we ... if we carry out the commandments of God in harmony with love, *that our sins may be forgiven through love*" (50:3,5).
>
> "Let us therefore *strive* to be found in the number of those that wait for Him, so that we may *share in the gifts He has promised.* But how shall this be? . . .*if we perform acts* that are in harmony with His blameless will" (35:4,5).

According to these statements, God's love is only for those He 'deems worthy" and this in spite of Romans 5:8, "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, *while we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us", and "there is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). "Sin being forgiven through love" may be very high sounding, but it is not New Testament truth nor the New Testament basis for forgiveness. Nor do God's "gifts" have to be "striven for".

To be fair, there is one passage where Clement seems to contradict all this:

> "So we too, who by His will have been called in Christ Jesus are made upright not through ourselves, or through our wisdom and understanding, or piety or deeds we have done in holiness of heart, but through faith, by which Almighty God has made all men upright from the beginning; to Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (32:4).

which only goes to show there was no *clear* unwavering conception in Clement's mind of the Gospel of God's grace, apart from human merit, as preached by the apostle Paul. It is one thing to quote the words of Paul's epistles; it is quite another to *understand them.* Clement's epistle on the whole looks on salvation, not so much linked with the Person of Christ, but as directly connected with the Father, Who, to him, is the Creator, and in the ultimate analysis, salvation relates to Him, the Father, Whom he describes as the "Father of the world", an unscriptural expression and quite contrary to John 1:10-12.

Only the redeemed can claim God and say "Abba", "my Father". Salvation, according to this writer, can only be had by obeying God, keeping humble, and doing His will. When we bear in mind that all this was written *within some 40 years* of the good

deposit of Truth being made known through the apostle Paul, we can surely see how quickly the fundamental Truths were lost.

The Epistles of Ignatius

Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, lived early in the second century. He was condemned to death and taken to Rome to be thrown to the lions in the Coliseum. As he passed through Asia, he was met by groups of Christians at Philadelphia and Smyrna, and the churches of Tralles, Magnesia and Ephesus sent delegations to greet him at Smyrna. To all these churches he sent letters of acknowledgement, urging them to avoid heresy and stand by their bishops. There are seven letters in all, which had a chequered history, having been reduced in Syriac to three greatly abbreviated ones, and, on the other hand, in Greek and Latin having been increased by the addition of six or more spurious letters. Eusebius the historian, in A.D. 326, gives the list of seven epistles, and these, it is generally agreed, are the original collection. Eusebius tells us that Ignatius was martyred in the Coliseum in A.D. 107-108, though modern scholarship gives A.D. 110-117, as more likely to be the true date.

Examining these writings from the standpoint of the truth as revealed in the Pauline epistles, what do we find? First of all, there is no doubt that Ignatius whole-heartedly believed the Deity of Christ:

> ". . . God became incarnate, true life in death, sprung from Mary and from God . .. Jesus Christ our Lord" (Ephesus 7:2).
>
> "For our God, Jesus Christ, was conceived by Mary by divine dispensation, of the line of David, and of the Holy Spirit . . ." (Ephesus 18:2, 3).
>
> "I extol Jesus Christ, the God Who has given you such wisdom" (Smyrna 1:1).
>
> "For our God, Jesus Christ, is more plainly visible now that He is in the Father" (Rome 3:3).

In one passage, he uses the striking phrase "the blood of God" (Ephesus 1:1) and for him, God can only be known through Jesus Christ:

"Jesus Christ will show you that I am telling the truth when I say this. He is the unerring mouth by which the Father has spoken truly" (Rome 8:2).

". . . that the disobedient may be convinced that there is one God Who has manifested Himself through Jesus Christ, His Son" (Magnesia 8:2).

Ignatius writes too to warn the churches of the error of Docetism.

This was one of the earliest of Satanic heresies, already combated by the apostle John in his first epistle (4:2, 3). It was the theory that Christ, during His earthly life, had not a *real* body but only an apparent or phantom one. It sprang from the idea of the impurity of matter and the impossibility therefore of God having direct contact with it, whether in a body, or in any other way. This was the basis, not only of Docetism but of Gnosticism, and if the Docetic idea was true, then it is evident that the Lord Jesus could not have really died on the Cross or rose again from the dead, with the consequence that the foundations of Christianity are destroyed. Ignatius takes care to expose this great error:

"For He suffered all these things for our sakes, in order that we might be saved. And He *suffered really*, just as He also really raised Himself; it is not as some unbelievers say that He suffered seemingly . . (Smyrna 1:2).

". . . he who . . . reviles my Lord by not admitting that He wore flesh and blood. Whoever does not say this has completely denied Him ..." (Smyrna 5:2).

However, when we come to the presentation of the Gospel, the doctrines of grace, eternal life, and the role that the church plays in the purpose of God, we find a veering away from the New Testament. He exalts the local church to a position it never had in the apostle Paul's epistles. In fact Ignatius conceives the church practically always in terms of the local assembly headed by the bishop, apart from which truth and salvation cannot exist, according to him. We give some examples:

"It is proper for you to run your race in harmony with the mind of the bishop . . ." (Ephesus 1:4).

"So it is clear we must look upon the bishop as the Lord Himself. .(Ephesus 4:1).

"I exhort you, be zealous to do everything in godly harmony, with the bishop presiding in the place of God" (Ephesus 6:1).

> "You must do nothing without the bishop and the elders" (Ephesus 7:1).
>
> "When you subordinate yourselves to the bishop as to Jesus Christ, you appear to me to be living not in the human way, but after the manner of Jesus Christ. , ." (Tralles 2:1).
>
> "In the same way all must respect the deacons as Jesus Christ, as they do the bishop, for he symbolises the Father and the elders as a council of God and a band of Apostles. Without these no body can be called a church" (Tralles 3:1).
>
> "You must all follow the bishop, as, Jesus Christ followed the Father ... let that be considered a valid thanksgiving which is held under the bishop or someone authorized by him ... It is not permissible to baptize or hold a religious meal without the bishop . . . It is well to recognize God and the bishop. Whoever honours the bishop is honoured by God. Whoever does anything without the bishop's knowledge is serving the devil" (Smyrnaeous 7:8).
>
> "It is right for men and women who are marrying to form their union with the approval of the bishop, in order that their marriage may be in accordance with the Lord's will and not to gratify desire" (Polycarp 5:2).

No less than thirty times in his epistles Ignatius expresses similar sentiments, so that it would appear almost an obsession with him. As far as he was concerned, practically all truth was expressed, at least symbolically, in the local church with its presiding bishop. It is noteworthy too that he always uses "bishop" in the singular, whereas the New Testament speaks of "*bishops* and deacons" (Phil. 1:1). Little did Ignatius realize that he was sowing the seeds of priestcraft and bondage to be expressed in Roman Catholicism later on. In his defence, it may be stated that he was living close to New Testament times, and the apostle Paul had already given instructions concerning the character and position of bishops in his first epistle to Timothy. At the same time it should be noted that Ignatius does not teach an *apostolic* succession of bishops. This was unknown to him and was a later misconception.

It is sometimes said that in 1 Timothy we have the church in *its rule*, whereas in 2 Timothy we have the church in *ruin*, with the forsaking of Paul and the truth given through him. From this we must not deduce that after the Apostle's time, local churches ceased to exist. The reverse is the truth, as church history makes clear. It may be that Ignatius knew of Paul's first letter to Timothy, but it is obvious that he had got it all out of focus. For him, the

guarding of the truth was to keep united to the local assembly and its bishop; in other words we have a doctrine of union with Christ *through the visible church, and from this logically follows the idea that repentance, spiritual* life and growth can only be experienced in the same way:

> "Now the Lord forgives all who repent, if in repentance they turn in union with God and the council of the bishop" (Philadelphia 8:1).
>
> "For all who belong to God and Jesus Christ are with the bishop ... if anyone follows a schismatic, he cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (Philadelphia 3:2, 3).

For Ignatius, a "schismatic" was anyone who had separated himself from the local church. If we search his writings for a clear conception of salvation by grace apart from works, we shall search in vain. He is fond of using the expression "reaching the presence of God" as the hope of the believer and the culmination of salvation, but this is to be attained by faithfulness and endurance. In other words, it is by *works* and *merit*':

> ". . . the Father. In union with Him, if we endure the ill-treatment of the evil genius of this world and escape, we will reach God" (Magnesia 1:2).
>
> "If you endure everything for His (God's) sake, you will reach His presence" (Smyrna 9:2).
>
> . . in order that, through your prayers, I may reach the presence of God" (Smyrna 11:1).
>
> ". . . if only through suffering, I may reach the presence of God" (Polycarp 7:1).

This explains why Ignatius forbad anyone trying to get his release and escape from martyrdom. He believed that only by suffering and faithfulness to death would he ever reach God's presence and so, rather than seeking to escape from the wild beasts at Rome, he seemed to welcome it:

> "Let me be eaten by the wild beasts, through whom I can reach the presence of God. I am God's wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, so that I may be found pure bread of Christ... If I suffer, I shall be freed by Jesus Christ and I will rise in Him, free . . . Fire and cross, and struggles with wild beasts, crushing of bones, mangling of limbs, grinding of my whole body, wicked torments of the devil, let them come upon me, only let me reach the presence of Jesus Christ" (Rome 4:1,2; 5:1-3).

These are the words of a brave man, who, as a believer, experienced this cruel death at Rome. How utterly pathetic that he apparently did not rejoice in the knowledge of the forgiveness of sins by grace alone, and the free gift and assurance of eternal life in Christ! As with all the Apostolic fathers he confused salvation by faith in Christ, apart from works, with prize and reward for faithful service. In other words, he never learned the New Testament teaching regarding the position of good works. He wrote to the Magnesians:

> "Those who believe with love, bear the stamp of God the Father through Jesus Christ, through Whom, *unless we choose to die in His suffering.* His life is not in us" (Magnesia 5:2).
>
> "Be sober as God's athlete; the *prize* is immortality and eternal life" (Polycarp 2:3).

We wish to make it clear that we are not dealing with the *character* of these early Christians, but their *doctrine and beliefs.*

They were men of the utmost courage personally, but as teachers, weighed in the balances of the Word of Truth, how often they failed to grasp its teaching, although living so near apostolic times!

The Epistles of Polycarp and Barnabas

With Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna (A.D. 70-155), we have a direct link with the Apostolic age and we can regard him as the chief depository of the primitive gospel tradition. Irenaeus tells us that in early life Polycarp "had been taught by Apostles and lived in familiar intercourse with many that had seen Christ" (3:3, 4). In words addressed to Florinus; Irenaeus informs us of Polycarp's direct contact with the Apostle John:

> "... I can even now point out the place where the blessed Polycarp used to sit when he discoursed, and describe ... the discourses which he delivered to the people, how he used to speak of *his intercourse with John and the rest of those who had seen the Lord*, and how he would relate their words. And everything that he had heard from them about the Lord, about His miracles and about His teaching. Polycarp used to tell us as one who had received it from those who had seen the Word of Life with their own eyes, and all this in perfect harmony with the Scriptures . . ."

Polycarp thus becomes a living link between the Apostles and the writers who flourished at the end of the second century, and from the standpoint of our inquiry, occupies a position of great importance. If the truth was passed down in all its purity, we shall surely find it in his testimony. That he was a Christian who stood high in the favour of his contemporaries, there is no doubt. Nor can one question his implicit trust in the Lord Jesus Christ throughout his long life. In his old age he was martyred, and his words to the Roman proconsul, who offered to set him free, if he would deny the Lord, are well known: "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He hath done me no wrong. How can I then speak evil of my King who has saved me?" And thus he went bravely to his death.

There are four main sources of our knowledge of Polycarp: (1) The statements of Irenaeus. (2) The epistle of Polycarp. (3) The epistle of Ignatius to Polycarp. (4) The epistle of the church at Smyrna to the Philomelians, which gives the account of his martyrdom. We are immediately concerned with Polycarp's epistle to the Philippians. Dr. P. N. Harrison has shown it is possible, originally, that this document consisted of two epistles, chapters 13 and 14 having been written at the time of the death of Ignatius, and chapters 1-13 written several years later, but for our purpose we shall use the accepted name of the *Epistle of Polycarp.* It is a sequel to the letters of Ignatius. When Ignatius had left Philippi for Rome, on his way to martyrdom, the believers at Philippi wrote, as he had suggested, to Polycarp at Smyrna, asking him to send them the letters of Ignatius that he had in his possession, and this he did with a covering letter, which we know as Polycarp to the Philippians. As we examine it regarding its doctrine, what do we find? That he knew the text of a number of New Testament books there is no doubt, but it is one thing to quote the New Testament, it is quite another to *understand its teaching*, and this is where so many of the Apostolic Fathers failed. Like Ignatius he made his stand against the early error of Docetism:

> "For everyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is an anti-Christ; and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the cross is of the devil; and whosoever perverts the oracles of the Lord for his own lusts, and says there is neither resurrection nor judgment, this man is the firstborn of Satan" (Philadelphia 7:1).

On the opening of the epistle we are encouraged to read:

> "... For you know that you have been saved by His grace, not by what you have done, but by the will of God through Jesus Christ".

Yet, a few verses further on we find the following:

> "He Who raised Him (Christ) from the dead, will raise us also, *if we do His will and live by His commands, and love what He loved, refraining from all injustice, covetousness, love of money, evil speaking, false witness*; *not returning evil for evil or abuse for abuse, or blow for blow, or curse for curse, but remembering what the Lord said when He taught*: '*Do not judge, so that you may not be judged*; *forgive and you will be forgiven*; *have mercy so that you may be shown mercy*'" (Philadelphia 2:2,3).

We rub our eyes as it were, and ask ourselves how Polycarp could have written this, had he really understood the doctrine of grace as made known in Paul's epistles? The answer is that he did *not* fully understand it. Actually he wrote:

> "For neither I, nor anyone else like me, can follow the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul, who, when he was among you, face to face with the men of that time, carefully and steadfastly uttered his teaching about truth . . (Philadelphia 3:2).

Here, indeed, is modesty, and also a confession that he had not fully grasped the truth given through Paul. Later on he states that "love delivers from death", which certainly is not New Testament teaching. For Polycarp, the death of Christ for our sins does not mean a forgiveness or justification that cancels the penalty and power of sin. Rather, by this act, Christ has set man on his feet again, as it were, and put him into a position where he can fully carry out his obligations to God in works of righteousness, in other words, can complete his salvation by his own acts. This kind of idea is common to all the Apostolic Fathers. There is an unconscious link with the pagan world that we must *do* something in order to be saved. This failure to grasp the real meaning of salvation by faith in Christ apart from works, is all the more startling when we remember the *direct links* that Polycarp had with the apostle John and possibly other New Testament Apostles. It makes one wonder just how much basic doctrine of the New Testament epistles was really perceived and witnessed for by those who succeeded the writers of the New Testament.

The Epistle of Barnabas

This is an anonymous epistle, probably Alexandrine, of the early second century, between A.D. 70 and 120, which has been attributed to Barnabas. It is very doubtful if he can be the companion of the Apostle Paul. Clement of Alexandria believed he was, but this was possibly an early guess. The internal evidence is strongly against it. The writer's attitude to the Old Testament is incomprehensible if Barnabas the Levite is the author, who had worked so closely with the Apostle Paul. In its original form the letter possibly stopped with chapter 17, as one of the Latin manuscripts does. After this, with a crude transition, it continues with more than fifty commands taken from *The Didache*, which we have already considered. In effect, it is an allegorical commentary on the Old Testament, concerning which we shall have more to say later on.

As with the letters of the other Apostolic Fathers, we search for its attitude to the basic truths of the Gospel and for any deeper truth. The writer refers often to the sufferings and death of Christ, but what place do these occupy in his theology? It must be said straight away, that he has no clear knowledge of justification by faith apart from works, as present truth for the believer in Christ. Justification for him is a possible future experience but nothing more. He writes:

> "Do not withdraw by yourselves and live alone, *as though you had already become justified*, but gather together and seek out the common advantage .. ." (4:10).

Forgiveness of sins was linked by him with water baptism. In other words he believed in baptismal regeneration:

> "But let us inquire whether the Lord took care to foreshadow the water and the cross. About the water, it is written of Israel how they would not accept *the baptism that brings forgiveness of sins*, but would build for themselves" (11:1).
>
> "Observe how He has defined the water and the cross together. For this is what He means: Blessed are those who have set their hope on the cross and *gone down into water* . . ."(11:8).
>
> "And there was a river flowing from the right hand and beautiful trees grew out of it, and whosoever eats of them will live for ever. This means that *we go down into the water full of sins and pollutions, and we come up bringing forth fear in our hearts and with hope in Jesus in our spirit*" (11:11).

Barnabas knows nothing of the death of Christ as an all-sufficient sacrifice for sin. Like the other Apostolic Fathers he blends works with salvation. He exhorts his readers to "Win salvation, children of love and peace" (21:9). Previous to this he writes:

> "It is well, therefore, after learning the ordinances of the Lord above written (the commands of *The Didache*) to live by them. *For the man who does so will he glorified in the kingdom of God* -, the one that chooses their opposites will perish with his works" (21:1).
>
> "This then is the way *of light*, if anyone wishing to *make his way to his appointed place, will be zealous in all his works*" (19:1).

Perhaps nothing is more revealing than the following:

> "Thou shalt remember the day of judgment, night and day . . . and by meditating how to save a soul by the word, or *by thy hands thou shalt labour for the redemption of thy sins*" (19:10).

No one with the most elementary understanding of the basic doctrines of grace, apart from merit or works, revealed through the apostle Paul, could ever give expression to such ideas. Moreover Barnabas could not have believed that nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39), for he writes:

> "Let us never . . . fall asleep over our sins, and so the evil ruler will get control of us, and *thrust us out of the kingdom of the Lord"* (4:13).

We find with this writer what is perhaps the first treatise in post-apostolic times on the allegorical method of treating Scripture. This is a pernicious system of interpretation which is destructive of true understanding of the Word. It has done so much to veil the truth over the centuries, and is seen today in amillennialism and kindred doctrines, and much of the teaching emanating from the Roman Catholic church. Those who hold such ideas never seem to grasp the true position of the people of Israel in the redemptive plan of God, and in missing this, they lose the key that opens so much of Bible teaching. If we err here, it is more than likely we shall err everywhere else in our conception of the Divine plan of the ages centred in Christ Jesus.

Barnabas is strongly anti-Judaistic; in fact he goes so far as to assert that the people of Israel were never in real covenant relationship with God. He even goes so far as to state that circumcision was practised by them because they were deceived by an evil angel!:

> "He (God) has commanded that there should be a circumcision *not of the flesh*, but *they* (*Israel) disobeyed, for an evil angel deluded them* ..." (9:4).

He takes all the literal commands of the Lord and spiritualizes them. Commenting on the Divine regulations of diet he says:

> "This then is why he (Moses) mentioned the swine; 'You shall not associate', he means 'with *men who are like swine ...* '"
>
> "Neither shall you eat the eagle or the hawk, or the kite, or the crow. You shall not, he means, associate with or come to resemble such men as do not know how to provide their food by toil and sweat, but lawlessly seize what belongs to others".
>
> "You shall not eat, he goes on, sea eel or polyp or cuttlefish. You shall not, he means, associate with such men . . .who are utterly ungodly and already condemned to death .. ."
>
> "Moses received three decrees about food, and uttered them in the Spirit, but they (Israel) in their fleshly desire, *received them as having to do with eating*" (10:3-9). .

This is typical of the way this writer handles the Old Testament. Nothing means exactly what it says; some so-called spiritual interpretation must be found. What he did not realise, nor those who follow in his footsteps, that by so doing they are *opening the door wide to error* as there are as many different ideas as there are spiritualisers! If God does not mean what He says we might as well close the Book for all serious and practical purposes. This does not result in a wooden literality. Sound exegesis takes note of symbols and figures of speech. These have their place, but it is evident that God uses human words in their normal accepted meaning, otherwise how could He convey His truth to men?

The epistle of Barnabas shows two great flaws: (1) Failure to interpret the Word aright through extensive use of allegory. (2) Failure to grasp that good deposit of doctrine made known by the risen Christ to the Apostle Paul as the channel of Truth to the Gentiles, so fitting in this peculiarly Gentile age.

The Shepherd of Hernias and the Second Epistle of Clement

Among the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, perhaps that which makes the strangest reading to Christian minds today is *The*

Shepherd of Hermas. Hermas was a slave or a freedman in Rome, who lived somewhere around the last decade of the first century. In ancient times two opinions prevailed as regards his identity. Some held that he was the Hermas of Romans 16:14. Origen states this opinion (*Comment in Rom. lib. 10:31*), and it is repeated by Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl. 3:3*) and Jerome (*De Viris Illustribus c. x.*). The second opinion is based on the *Murastorian Fragment* on the Canon. This states "The Pastor was written very lately in our time, in the city of Rome by Hermas, while bishop Pius, his brother, sat in the chair of the church of the city of Rome". In view of conflicting evidence, it is not possible to be dogmatic as to who the author was, but it is certain that this writing is an early composition.

Hermas claimed to be a Christian prophet, and so the work begins a series of four visions emphasizing repentance, in which he has interviews with the angel of repentance, whom he calls the Shepherd. Three or four years later Hermas produced a larger work, the *Shepherd* proper, which begins with an apocalypse. Then follows a series of twelve Commands, showing how the truly repentant believer should live, and after this ten parables occur, setting forth the workings of repentance. Hermas was evidently concerned with the low standard of Christian walk in the Roman church and he sought, by his writing, to stir up believers at Rome and elsewhere. *The Shepherd of Hermas was* highly thought of by early Christians and was accepted as part of inspired Scripture by Clement of Alexandria towards the end of the second century, and by Origen in the third, Tertullian first accepted it, but later repudiated it. Eusebius, the historian, put it among the rejected writings. It stood at the end of the Codex Sinaiticus, about the middle of the fourth century. Athanasius (A.D. 367) recommended it to converts for private reading.

What is the true value of this work? It is a loose presentation in allegorical form of what the writer deemed to be Christian truth, but when it is brought to the test of the New Testament how far it falls short! To begin with, the writer has the extraordinary idea that only *one* sin after conversion can be forgiven by God. In the dialogue between the Shepherd (the angel of repentance) and Hermas, we find the following:

> "If then, sir," I said, "after the wife is divorced, she repents and wishes to return to her own husband, will she not be taken back?"

> "Certainly", said he, "if her husband does not take her back, he sins and involves himself in great sin. The sinner who repents, must be taken back, but not often, *for the slaves of God can have but one repentance*" (Command 4. 1:7, 8).
>
> "But I tell you", said he (the angel), "if after this great and holy invitation a man is severely tempted by the devil and sins, *he has one opportunity to repent*" (Command 4. 3:6).

Moreover, Divine forgiveness is not immediate. The Shepherd comments upon some who have repented of sin and says to Hermas:

> "I know that they have repented with all their hearts; then do you think that the sins of those who repent are immediately forgiven? *Not at all*! *But the man who repents must torment his own soul. . . and be distressed with all kinds of afflictions*" (Parable 7:4).

Here we have two cardinal errors (1) the failure to see that the forgiveness of sins by God to the redeemed covers *all* sins past, present and future, and (2) such forgiveness is an act of *grace* on the part of God and cannot be mixed with or dependent upon the believer's works, such as self-affliction, and torment etc.

Hermas knows nothing of eternal life as a free gift by faith in Christ. He is very fond of the expression "Living to God". It occurs many times throughout this writing, and in every case is connected with works and human merit of which the following is a sample:

> "Why, Sir" said I, "did you say of those that keep His commands, 'they will live to God'?". "Because" said he . .. "life with God belongs to those who fear Him and keep His commands. But those who do not keep His commands do not have life . . ." (Command 7:5).
>
> "But now I say to you, if you do not keep them (God's commands), but neglect them, you will not have salvation, nor your children, nor your family ..." (Command 12. 3:6).

It is quite clear that, for Hermas, salvation is only realised through the law. His one object is a personal striving for legal conformity. If he "refrains from every evil passion, he will make sure of eternal life" (Vision 3. 8:4). Grace, for him, is only an additional force to help him do this. The faith that he talks about, is not faith in Christ as Saviour, but faith that enables one to keep the commandments. Not only does this writer stress human merit, but also supererogatory merit. In fact we find the germ of later

Roman Catholic doctrine in more than one sense in *The Shepherd of Hermas.* Vision 3:7 indicates a similar idea to that later developed; in other passages we have the doctrine of penance in the doctrine of purgatory. In Parable 5. 3:3, we find the Shepherd speaking to Hermas:

> "I will show you His (God's) command, and if you keep it you will be pleasing to Him .. . and *if you do anything good beyond God's command, you will gain greater glory for yourself and be more honoured in the sight of God than you would have been*".

This is obviously the doctrine of supererogation in germ. If a believer does more than God ordains, he piles up for himself, as it were, a reserve of goodness and glory which, Romanism later asserted, could be drawn upon for others who were not so good! This is flagrant contravention of the New Testament.

Hermas not only knows nothing of salvation by grace apart from works, but he was ignorant of Christ as the one Mediator. For him, angels were the intermediaries through whom protection and revelation may be made. He believed that every man has two angels, "one of righteousness, and one of wickedness" (Command 6. 1:2).

Not only this, but he clearly held and taught baptismal regeneration. In Vision 3. 4:5, the woman who represents the church says to him:

> "Here then, why the tower is built on waters. *It is because your life has been saved and will be saved by water*".

And in Parable 9. 16:3, Hermas addresses the angel and asks:

> "Why sir", said I, "did the stones come up from the deep place, and why were they put into the building of the tower.. .?"
>
> "*They had to come up through water*" *said he,* "*to be made alive, for they could not enter the kingdom of God in any other way ... so the water is the seal. They go down into the water dead, and they come up alive*".

Even those who fell asleep before Christ must be baptised before they can enter the kingdom and the Apostles and teachers are represented as preaching the Name of the Son of God to them (9. 16:5). Not once do we read of salvation or atonement resting on the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is all self-justification, penance, and law-keeping. He even puts these words into the mouth of the explaining angel:

> "Listen", said he, "all who have ever suffered for the Name are glorious in the sight of God and the sins of all of them have been taken away, because they have suffered for the Name of the Son of God" (Parable 9. 28:3).

If this is not salvation by works and merit, what is it? Regarding cleansing, this writer apparently knows nothing of cleansing by the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7). Again and again, the reader is exhorted to "cleanse himself" to make himself fit for the kingdom of God.

This apostolic writing makes melancholy reading when one compares it with the clear and pure doctrine of the New Testament, and again one is forcibly reminded of how quickly must have been the falling away from the truth so faithfully made known by the apostle Paul and those associated with him.

The Second Epistle of Clement

The last of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers we shall consider is the second epistle of Clement. Strictly speaking, this is not an epistle at all, but a sermon, and has no connection with 1 Clement.

Eusebius mentioned it doubtfully as the second letter of Clement in his Church History (3. 38:4). Its real author may have been Soter, bishop of Rome A.D. 166-174; it being sent as a letter to the church at Corinth and acknowledged by Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, in a letter preserved in Eusebius (Church History 4. 23:11). Dionysius says that the Corinthian church will preserve Soter's letter, and be able to draw advice from it, "as also from the former epistle which was written to us through Clement". This would explain how this sermon became linked with 1 Clement, both documents having been written from Rome and sent to the church at Corinth. They are both found at the end of the Codex Alexandrinus.

2 Clement gives us the earliest extant sermon of post-apostolic times and once again, we seek to weigh up its teaching in the light of the truth of the Holy Scriptures. In doing so, we find its theology running along the lines of the writings we have already considered, that is, that merit, repentance and persistent good works are the main factors in salvation.

It is significant that these ideas are central in all pagan conceptions of salvation. We must remember that the Apostolic Fathers were Greeks, their language Greek and their background Greek modes of thought, which their knowledge of the New Testament never completely eradicated. Max Muller is quoted in Moody's *The Childhood of the Church* as writing: "I have found the one key note of all these so-called sacred books, whether it be the Veda of the Brahmans, the Puranas of Siva and Vishnu, the Koran of the Mohammedans, the Zend-Avesta of the Parsees, the Tripitoka of the Buddhists - the one refrain through all - salvation by works. They all say that salvation must be purchased, must be bought with a price; and that the sole price *must be our works and deserving*". This idea, alas, runs through all the Apostolic Fathers who never really grasped the doctrine of grace. Even when they talk about the death of Christ, faith and grace, these are only means to help them keep the "commands of God", and only by so doing could they hope finally to be saved and enter the kingdom of God. The second epistle of Clement is no exception to this:

> "Therefore brethren, if we *do* the Father's will *and keep the flesh pure, and keep the Lord's commands we shall receive eternal life*" (8:2). "For as a recompense I ask you to repent with all your hearts and *give yourselves salvation and life . . . let us therefore practice righteousness so that we may finally be saved* . . . blessed are they *that obey these commands . . . they will gather the immortal fruit of the resurrection*" (19:1, 3, 4).

Even resurrection, therefore, is made to depend upon obedience, and the writer even thinks he can choose to be a member of the church:

> "So then, let us choose to be part of the church of life, in order that we may be saved" (14:1).

Not only this, but he has a completely unscriptural conception of almsgiving:

> "Almsgiving is good even as repentance for sins; fasting is better than prayer, but the giving of alms is better than both . . . blessed is everyone who is found full of these things, for almsgiving lightens sin" (16:4).

There can be no doubt that the writer rested upon self-justification for his salvation, and entry into the Kingdom of God was by his own efforts. "If we do righteousness before God, we

shall enter the Kingdom" (11:7). One cannot help wondering how it was possible for anyone to read seriously the epistles of Paul and hold such ideas, which only goes to show that it is one thing to read the words, but quite another to grasp the truth lying behind them. These Fathers unwittingly turned the Gospel into another law. It was Judaism and paganism in Christian dress. It seemed impossible for them to realise that God could justify and save a sinner apart from his works. They never learned the true New Testament position of good works as *flowing from* salvation, rather than being the *procuring cause* of it. They became thoroughly moralistic, drawing up codes and rules and represented salvation and the Christian life as doing one's best to carry these out to the utmost. They never grasped the supreme truth that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth

The Teaching of the Apostolic Fathers - conclusion

In summing up the teaching of the Apostolic Fathers, what do we find? One is surprised and even shocked to discover that none of them had a clear conception of the gospel of grace Divinely delivered to the apostle Paul and ministered by him. Romans 11:6, never really gripped them: "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work". They never realised that grace and works, grace and human merit, can never be blended as far as the gospel is concerned. Theirs was a legalism with a Christian veneer; a salvation by personal righteousness with grace thrown in, as it were, as an added power to help them keep the law. Repentance was not regarded in the New Testament sense as the work of the Holy Spirit, but rather an eternal principle of self-amendment before God, which they regarded as an adequate means for securing God's forgiveness and mercy.

This does not reflect upon their characters of course, for they were brave men, willing to suffer and to die for what they held to be truth, and they conducted a splendid fight against the evil inherent in paganism around them. It was not that they opposed the New Testament gospel of grace, but simply that they did not properly understand it and its implications. It seemed impossible for them to grasp that a God of grace could save a sinner, just as he

is, by faith in Christ's redemptive work alone, apart from works. For them, salvation was a life-long struggle with sin and failure, with the result that they were driven into legalism and formalism. Not only this, but their Christology was defective. The Person of Christ was largely pushed into the background, and His place was taken by God in the role of Law-giver, Judge and Creator. For them Christ's unique Mediatorial position was not grasped. Their chief concern was His teaching as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, and used as a way of living only, to be worked out by themselves as best they could. If they talked about grace, it was regarded as a special power given by God to supplement their own strivings towards self-justification. They were never able to distinguish between salvation, and prize or reward. Confusing these separate aspects of truth, as thousands have done since, and still do today, they were never able to appreciate properly the New Testament position of "good works". The apostle Paul summed this up very clearly in Ephesians 2:8-10: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: *not of works*, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *unto good works.* . .", good works being the *fruit* of salvation with a prize or crown in view, and not the procuring cause.

The early Fathers were ready to take up the cross and suffer for Christ, but they had the mistaken idea that this was the necessary pathway for salvation and ultimate forgiveness. This is seen most clearly in the case of Ignatius, with his eagerness to suffer martyrdom, that, by so doing, he might at the end be found worthy of salvation. Such confusion of truth is indeed tragic, when one remembers the lengths these early Christians were prepared to go to for their faith.

What is so startling is the fact of this landslide away from basic truth so soon after Apostolic times, that is, fifty years after the death of the last Apostle, John. How did this happen? There may have been more than one reason. The gospel of grace was new and revolutionary and this fact alone made its acceptance difficult, both to the Jew with his legal background, and the Gentile with his pagan Greek thought. But this of itself is not sufficient to account for such a slipping away from truth. We believe Paul himself has supplied the answer. In his last letter, writing to Timothy, he said:

> "This thou knowest, that *all that are in Asia turned away from me*, of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes" (2 Tim. 1:15 R. V.).

There are some who interpret this verse as though it read "those of Asia" and referred to certain Asiatic Christians who happened to be at Rome at the time of the Apostle's arrest and imprisonment, or who had gone to Rome for the purpose of bearing witness on behalf of Paul, but finding the extreme danger this would put them in by associating with him, forsook him and fled. Certainly in 2 Timothy 4:16, Paul's statement "At my first defence no one took my part, but all forsook me; may it not be laid to their account" (R.V.), must have referred to believers in Rome, but it is pure conjecture to link this with "all in Asia". Dr. H. D. Spence writes:

> "The simple and more obvious meaning is here to be preferred, and we assume as certain that the forsaking, the giving up St. Paul, took place in Asia itself. Large numbers of Christians, if not whole churches, repudiated their connection with the father of Gentile Christianity, and possibly disobeyed his teaching. What, in fact, absolutely took place in Asia, while St. Paul lay bound, waiting for death in Rome, had been often threatened in Corinth and other centres. Party feeling ran high in those days, we know; and one of the most sorrowful trials the great-hearted St. Paul had to endure ... was the knowledge that his name and teaching no longer were held in honour by some of those Asian churches so dear to him".

The argument that history records no large defection from Paul's teaching carries little weight when one remembers the scanty knowledge we have of sub-apostolic times. It seems evident that the Apostle lived to see a large falling away from the truth committed to him by the Lord Jesus and which he had so faithfully made known. No wonder he warned Timothy of those who would "turn away their ears from the truth and turn aside unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:4 R.V.). If they turned away from him whom Christ had appointed as the minister of the church which is His Body (Col. 1:24-26), and through whom the teaching was vitally connected and made known, then a forsaking of truth and apostasy was bound to result, the effect of which must have been felt at the end of the first century and thereafter. Had the truth for which Paul lived and died, been held faithfully by all the churches he founded and kept by the succeeding members, the ignorance of the basic teaching of the gospel of grace amongst the Apostolic Fathers would have been impossible.

We once encountered an objection to the doctrine of the Mystery in Ephesians and Colossians with the statement that if this

was true, it would be reflected in the beliefs of the early Christians. This sounds reasonable on the surface, but it fails to take into account the apostasy of 2 Timothy 1:15. As we have seen, there is not even a clear conception of *salvation by grace* in the earliest sub-apostolic writings, and *of the truth of the Mystery there is absolutely none*; nor could there be, for if the foundation was not understood, the topstone was impossible of comprehension or witness. Nor is the situation much improved when we come to the later and Greek Fathers. Augustine (A.D. 354-430) was probably the first one who had any real conception of grace as revealed in the New Testament, but he gives no indication that he knew or rejoiced in the glories of the great Secret of Ephesians 3. Outstanding man that he was, his conception of the church was always along the lines of the mediaeval identification of the kingdom of God with the outward ecclesiastical organisation and Roman Catholicism of his day, and he held there was no salvation outside it. His stress on sacraments as vehicles of grace, his belief in purgatory and the use of the relics, and his allegorisation of the Scriptures all combine to make the realisation of the Mystery impossible.

Paul's aim ". . . to make all men see what is the dispensation of the Mystery" (secret, Eph. 3:9 R.V.), was unknown to the early Christians. *Turning away from him, they lost the key to the truth for this age*, and until the last century, it has never been recovered in anything like its fulness.

Going back to the first centuries, there is no doubt that the conversion of the Emperor Constantine who died in A.D. 337, played an important part in the evolution of Christendom. Up to his day the professing church had endured great persecutions, through which it had survived. The story of his professed conversion is well known. Before the battle of the Milvian Bridge, October 27th, 312 A.D. when he defeated Maxentius, he passed through a remarkable experience. The story goes that he saw in the sky a flaming cross with the inscription in Greek, "By this sign conquer". Whether this was an optical illusion, or even a legend, it is difficult to say, but something affected him deeply and through this he professed conversion. No one can say with definiteness that this was the real work of the Spirit of God. He afterwards retained some of his old superstitions, but certainly showed that he believed in the God of the Christians, and shortly afterwards he joined with the fellow-emperor Licinius in issuing a decree giving full tolerance

to the Christian faith, restoring to the churches all places of worship which had been confiscated, making good all losses; and giving unconditional religious liberty to all so that Christianity now enjoyed complete freedom throughout the Roman world. This was indeed a startling reversal of affairs, but while it was of great importance to the church, it was far from being an unmixed blessing.

Constantine maintained close contact with the bishops and did his best to settle the various controversies which arose at this time. This led to an intervention by the State in church affairs which proved disastrous later on to spiritual liberty. The Christian leaders allowed the Emperor to have more say in internal church affairs than was his due. The linking of political power with spiritual authority proved what has always been found to be true in experience — the corrupting tendency of power, so that two extremes began to emerge, viz: worldly, proud and domineering ecclesiastics, and on the other hand ascetism and monasticism. Spiritual liberty soon became restricted by an increase of centralised control and organisation which afterwards developed into Roman Catholicism.

Even worse was the influx of pagans into the church under the disguise of Christianity. In his *The Spreading Flame,* professor F. F. Bruce writes:

> "Constantine . . . showed clearly in a variety of ways that Christians enjoyed his special favour. Christianity thus became fashionable, which was not really a good thing. *It meant a considerable ingress of Christianized pagans into the church* - pagans who had learned the rudiments of Christian doctrine and had been baptized, *but who remained largely pagan in their thoughts and ways.* The mob in such great cities as Rome and Antioch and Alexandria became Christian in name, but in fact remained the unruly mob" (p. 295).

It is most important to grasp the implications of this, for it explains how, together with the falling away from New Testament truth that we have seen. Christianized paganism invaded Roman Catholicism at the beginning *and has remained ever since, infecting in some measure Protestantism as well.* Paganism at its source goes back to the book of Genesis with the founding of Babel by Nimrod and his wife Semiramis. All pagan legends can finally be traced back here as Hislop has shown in his book *The Two Babylons.*

This was the beginning of Babylonianism, the organised system of Satan which the New Testament describes as "the lie" and is the very negation of all the truth of God and the position and person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Such a system is all the more dangerous with a Christian veneer, for few seem to have their eyes opened to see it at its true worth. It is difficult to estimate its blinding power, operated by the god of this age over the minds of men. No wonder as this grew and held sway over the then known world the terrible darkness of the middle ages set in.

In A.D. 604 Pope Gregory the Great died and his reign marked a great step forward in the development of power of the Roman church and its erroneous doctrines, which is in such startling contrast to the truth of the first century. We now find papal claims to universal sovereignty, not only supreme over all other churches and bishops, but over kings and rulers as well, and Rome did not hesitate to topple thrones if it suited her purpose. The Lord's Supper began to degenerate into the Mass with Transubstantiation advocated in A.D. 831 and finally promulgated as a doctrine of the Roman church at the Lateran Council in 1215. This has enslaved millions from that time onwards. Purgatory had gained ground ever since Augustine had expressed his belief in its probability. This was a direct take-over from paganism when the belief in Purgatory was common. Prayers for the dead, indulgencies, and masses for the dead naturally grew up as the belief in Purgatory increased. Such prayers were officially recognised by Rome at the second Council of Nicaea in 787.

At the Council of Ephesus in 431, Mary was declared to be *Theotokos*, the mother of God. By the end of the sixth century, adoration was offered her and prayers were addressed to her. This, again, was paganism in disguise, for we find a similar practice with regard to Cybele, Demeter and others. Private confession of sin before a priest, at first voluntary, became compulsory around A.D. 765, thus increasing the power of the priesthood over the people. Places of worship became more and more ornate and by 814 the worship of images had become a scandal. Long before this the Muslims had begun to taunt the Christians with being idolators because of their image worship. The burning of incense was used at first only for the fumigation of Christian buildings and both

Tertullian and Lactantius refer to burning incense as pagan and not practised by Christians. Later this became a recognised part of the corrupt system of worship. Vestments seem to have first been introduced in the reign of Constantine and by the end of the sixth century had become an essential part of the priest's equipment. In the early centuries leaders had worn no distinctive clerical dress, nor were there such divisions as clergy and laity.*

Soon Rome's power, with its bondage and darkness over Europe, was complete. When we add to this the inability of the ordinary person to read and write, the fact that the printing press had not been invented, and practically all learning was confined to the monasteries, we have a state of affairs from a human standpoint which was utterly hopeless. The truth was all but swamped. How could it possibly flourish when the human mind was gripped as in a vice by the cruel bondage of Romanism and no possibility of any individual getting unrestricted access to or being able to read the Word of God? Occasionally there were stirrings as some, sensing the darkness and bondage, tried to revolt. But it was not until the events leading to the Reformation and the Reformation itself that this monstrous slavery was broken. It is surely clear that the special truth for this age, given through the apostle Paul, was forced underground during the terrible period of spiritual blindness covered by the Middle Ages.

* We strongly recommend our readers to obtain the paperback *Roman Catholicism* by Loraine Boettner, published by the Banner of Truth Trust and obtainable through any bookseller.

This is an up-to-date presentation of Roman Catholic doctrine, fairly expressed in their own terms. It is an eye-opener to all who read it, specially to any who are taken up with the fashionable ecumenical ideas.

Factors leading to a Spiritual Revival

Having considered the spiritual darkness and bondage of the Middle Ages, we now come to the means that were used by God to break through this terrible state of affairs. There were at least three:

(1) The Renaissance
(2) The invention of the printing press
(3) The Reformation and all that led up to it

The Renaissance (literally 'a rebirth') prepared the way for the Reformers by opening men's minds and leading them to a spirit of enquiry and thirst for knowledge. A new spirit was abroad of adventure and enterprise. In 1453 Constantinople fell to the Turks and as a result, many great scholars fled to the west, bringing with them treasures of Greek literature which had been carefully preserved. The use of the printing press spread knowledge among the masses as never before. At first several of the popes enthusiastically supported the new learning, not realising that this new spirit of independent enquiry would deal a deadly blow to the authoritarian system represented by Roman Catholicism and the papacy.

In addition to this, opposition arose within the Roman church with such outstanding men as Marsilius of Padua (1270-1342), a physician by profession. He maintained that the supreme standard was the Bible and protested against the power of the papacy and the priests. William of Occam (1280-1347) took much the same line. John Wyclif has been acclaimed as "the morning star of the English Reformation", and no wonder, when he declared that "the only Head of the church is Christ. The pope, unless he be one of the predestinate who rule in the spirit of the gospel, is the vicar of antichrist". He rejected Transubstantiation, denied the infallibility of the church of Rome, rejected auricular confession and belief in purgatory, pilgrimages, the worship of saints and the veneration of relics as being unscriptural. He organised bands of preachers who lived simply and went throughout the land preaching the Word at a time when the people were absolutely

uninstructed. His most important contribution, and of his followers, was the translation of the Vulgate into English - the first Bible in our language. As professor A. N. Renwick says:

> ". . . its effects were far reaching, for it brought home the truth to prince and peasant alike".

But it was the Reformation which gave the death blow to the domination of the Roman church over Europe and its apostacy. Martin Luther laid the axe at the roots of the whole papal system and brought freedom of conscience and liberty to all who would respond. The result of the work of the Reformers who followed was to bring back the basic truth of justification by faith in Christ apart from works or any visible ecclesiastical system. This was the first great step in the recovery of truth, and the pushing back of the darkness and bondage that had been rampant for so long. How sad it is to see many who profess to be believers, being willing to throw away this precious liberty so dearly bought for us by the blood of the martyrs, merely for an external unity between the sects of Christendom, including Rome, who basically has never changed, despite surface stirrings to the contrary. This is akin to Esau selling his birthright for a mess of pottage; such apparently are willing to risk going back to all the spiritual slavery of pre-Reformation days. Liberty is a plant of tender growth and does not survive automatically. Let us never forget that the price of Christian liberty, as of all liberty, is eternal vigilance.

As we have seen, there must have been a landslide from truth before the apostle Paul died, and through this the truth and the glories of the Mystery of Ephesians, and justification by faith, were lost, the early fathers giving no clear testimony to either of these precious doctrines. The literal Second Advent of Christ which was taught by all the Apostles, and His literal reign for a thousand years was held fast for some two centuries, but as the Lord tarried, the hope of His coming to set up the earthly Kingdom began to fade away. Not understanding the truth for the present age revealed through Paul's writings, *the key to this problem was lost as well.*

The only way out seemed to be to spiritualise the promises to Israel and the prophecies which deal with the setting up of the earthly Kingdom. The Roman church seized upon these promises to Israel and appropriated them to herself by spiritualising and regarding herself as the true Israel - the Israel of God, the only

visible expression of God's Kingdom on earth, disregarding the Scriptural fact that there has been only *one visible organised church on earth*, in the Scriptural sense, the literal nation of Israel. Alas, that many Protestant expositors continue with Rome's error of spiritualising and robbing Israel of her Scriptural place in the outworking of God's purpose for the establishment of His Kingdom in this world of ours.

After the Reformation, the truths that were made known through Paul's ministry slowly began to be recovered. To expect a recovery of all the "good deposit" at the Reformation is to expect too much. The wonder of it is that so much of the basic truth of the gospel of God's grace was brought to light again, when we remember the terrible spiritual darkness and bondage that had held sway for so long.

It was the recognition of the dispensational principle of interpretation of the Scriptures that played such a large part in bringing back the deeper truths, culminating with the high water mark of revelation - the truth of the Mystery connected with the joint-Body of Christ. This has not been without misunderstanding and opposition, as we well know. The critics, who have never really grasped the New Testament meaning of the word dispensation and its practical outworking, charge this principle with being new-fangled, divisive and destructive of the unity of the Bible, a product of Dr. E. W. Bullinger, Dr. C. I. Schofield and Charles H. Welch.

They invent such terms as 'Bullingerism' and many who do so have no first-hand knowledge of Dr. Bullinger's writings. The charges they make are completely false and unworthy of anyone who professes to be saved and a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, as we shall show. Even if it could be proved that dispensational teaching began only recently, that would not of itself prove it to be wrong. As Dr. C. C. Ryrie rightly says in his *Dispensationalism Today*, "the fact that something was taught in the first century does not make it right (unless taught in the canonical Scriptures), and the fact that something was not taught until the nineteenth century does not make it wrong unless, of course, it is unscriptural. Non-dispensationalists surely know that baptismal regeneration was taught in the early centuries and yet many of them would not include that error in their theological systems simply because it is ancient and historic. After all the

ultimate question is not, is dispensationalism - or any other teaching — historic but, is it Scriptural?

Some of the following facts we owe to Dr. Ryrie's researches, but we absolutely reject his conclusions regarding what he is pleased to call *ultra-dispensationalism* (pp. 66, 67). He points out that the charge of newness was levelled long ago at the doctrine of the Reformers. Calvin answered it with characteristic straightforwardness. He wrote:

> "First by calling it 'new' they do great wrong to God Whose sacred Word does not deserve to be accused of novelty ... that it has lain long unknown and buried is the fault of man's impiety. Now when it is restored to us by God's goodness, its claim to antiquity ought to be admitted at least by right of recovery" *(Institutes of the Christian Religion*, prefatory address to King Francis, p. 3).

Sometimes it is alleged that dispensational teaching originated with the Brethren movement and is linked with the witness of J. N. Darby. This, too, is untrue and not according to the real facts. We can see its beginnings in the writings of the early Fathers, although none of them developed it into a system of interpretation. Irenaeus (130-200 A.D.) wrote concerning the four Gospels:

> ". . . and the Gospel is quadriform, as is also the course followed by the Lord. For this reason there were four principal covenants given to the human race; one prior to the Deluge, under Adam; the second, that after the Deluge, under Noah; the third, the giving of the Law, under Moses; the fourth, that which renovates man . . . raising and bearing men upon its wings into the heavenly Kingdom" (*Against Heresies* III, XI, 8).

While he does not call these dispensations, he often speaks of the dispensations of God and of the Christian dispensation. Here is an attempt to "try the things that differ" (Phil. 1:10 marg.) which plays a vital part in true dispensational teaching. Clement of Alexandria (150-220A.D.) distinguished three Patriarchal dispensations (Adam, Noah and Abraham). Augustine wrote the following:

> "The divine institution of sacrifice was suitable in the former dispensation, but it is not suitable now. For the change suitable to the present age has been enjoined by God, Who knows infinitely better than man what is fitting for every age . . . There is no variableness with God, though in the former period of the world's history He enjoined one kind of offerings, and in the latter period another, therein ordering the symbolical actions pertaining to the blessed

> doctrine of true religion in harmony with the changes of successive epochs without any change in Himself... if it is now established that that which was for one age rightly ordained may be in another age rightly changed - the alteration indicating a change in the work, not in the plan of Him Who makes the change . . .” (*To Marcellinus* 138:5,7).

We do not suggest that the church Fathers were dispensationalists as the word is used today. But some of them saw Scriptural principles which later developed into dispensational concepts. The Reformation, as we have seen, was largely concerned with bringing back the *basic* truths of Christianity and not until Bible students began to be once more concerned with prophecy and eschatology, did dispensational truth begin its part in Scriptural understanding.

Coming to the end of the seventeenth century we have *Pierre Poiret*, a French philosopher (1646-1719), whose major work *L’ Economie Divine* was first published in Amsterdam and then translated into English and published in London in 1713 in six volumes. His viewpoint is premillennial and dispensational. His scheme is as follows: (1) Infancy - to the Deluge. (2) Childhood - to Moses. (3) Adolescence - to the prophets (about Solomon’s time). (4) Youth - to the coming of Christ. (5) Manhood - some time after that. (6) Old age - the time of man’s decay. (The latter two seem to be the beginning and end of the Christian dispensation). (7) Renovation of all things - the Millennium.

Ehlert’s comments are as follows:

> “There is no question that we have here a genuine dispensational scheme. He uses the phrase ‘period or dispensation’ and his seventh dispensation is a literal 1000-year millennium with Christ returned and reigning in bodily form upon the earth with His saints, and Israel regathered and converted. He sees the overthrow of corrupt Protestantism, the rise of Antichrist, the two resurrections, and many of the general rise of end-time events”.

John Edwards (1639-1716) published in 1699 two volumes entitled *A Compleat History or Survey of All the Dispensations*, in which he attempted to show God’s dealings from Genesis One to the end of the Revelation. He set out the following:

(1) Innocency- Adam created upright.
(2) Sin and Misery - Adam fallen.

(3) Reconciliation - or Adam recovered; from his redemption to the end of the world.
   A. Patriarchal economy (Antediluvian, Noahic and Abrahamic).
   B. Mosaical.
   C. Gentile (concurrent with A and B).
   D. Christian (infancy, primitive period, past, childhood present period. Manhood, future (Millennium). Old age, from the loosing of Satan to the conflagration).

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) was a famous hymn writer and there is scarcely a hymnal that does not contain some of his hymns. It is not generally known that he also was a theologian. He wrote a 40-page essay entitled *The Harmony of all the Religions which God ever prescribed to men, and His Dispensations towards them.* He writes:

> "The public dispensations of God towards man, are those wise and holy constitutions of His will and government, revealed or some way manifested to them in the successive periods or ages of the world . . . the dispensations of God may be described more briefly, as the appointed moral rules of God's dealings with mankind, considered as reasonable creatures, and as accountable to Him for their behaviour . . . each of these dispensations of God may be represented as . . . different forms of religion, appointed for man in the several successive ages of the world" (Isaac Watts *Works* 11. 543,625).

He sets out the following scheme:

(1) The dispensation of Innocence (before the Fall).
(2) The Adamic Dispensation of the covenant of grace (after the Fall).
(3) The Noahic Dispensation.
(4) The Abrahamic Dispensation.
(5) The Mosaic Dispensation.
(6) The Christian Dispensation. He did not regard the Millennium as a separate dispensation.

Coming to the beginning of the Brethren movement, it is sometimes asserted by the opponents of Dispensational Truth that this originated with this movement. This is not true, as the above facts show, but there is no doubt that the witness of some of the founders helped forward a great deal the study of the Scriptures along dispensational lines, and also brought forward the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ as the hope of the believer. One of

the first things these writers did was to get the proper Scriptural position of the nation of Israel. This is an absolute essential if the Divine purposes revealed in the Word of God are ever to be understood. Once get this clear, and the doctrinal position of the church, the Body of Christ, will fall into line; but if we err here, we shall err everywhere and only get a distorted view of the purposes of the ages. B. W. Newton in his commentary on Romans eleven writes:

> "Circumstances however occurred, that led me to consider with care the eleventh chapter of Romans. I could not close my eyes to the fact that the future history of the *literal* Israel was there spoken of; and it was put in marked contrast with the history of those who are at present being gathered out from the Gentiles during the time of Israel's unbelief ... I saw also that Israel when nationally converted, are not to be merged in the present Gentile church, for then they would have been represented in this chapter as graffed in upon the Gentile branch . .

He distinguishes three periods in Israel's history:

(1) From Nebuchadnezzar to the dispersion by the Romans in A.D. 70, a few years after Acts 28.
(2) The present period of their dispersion during which there is a pause in the historic detail of Daniel.
(3) The yet future period of their national re-establishment in unbelief. The calling out of the Body of Christ obviously takes place during (2).

J. N. Darby (1800-1882) promulgated a dispensational scheme as follows:

(1) Paradise to the Flood.
(2) Noah.
(3) Abraham.
(4) Israel: (A) under the Law, (B) under the Priesthood, (C) under the Kings.
(5) Gentiles.
(6) The Spirit.
(7) The Millennium (see his *Collected Writings* 11. pp. 568-573). He writes:

> "This, however, we have to learn in its detail, in the various dispensations which led to or have followed the revelations of the incarnate Son in Whom all the fulness was pleased to dwell . . . but

> the dispensations themselves all declare some leading principle or interference of God, some condition in which He has placed man, principles which in themselves are everlastingly sanctioned by God, but in the course of those dispensations placed responsibly in the hands of man . .(1. 192,3).

The closing words of his *Synopsis* on Acts 28 show that he believed in the setting aside of Israel here, and then he states believers enter into “another sphere on other grounds”.

The truth of the Mystery as taught by early leaders of the Brethren Movement

In 1870 Richard Holden, a leader in the Brethren movement, wrote a work entitled "*The Mystery, the Special Mission of the Apostle Paul, The Key to the Present Dispensation*". In it we find the following:

> "To make all see what is the dispensation, or in other words, to be the divinely appointed instructor in the character and order of the present time, as Moses was in the dispensation of law, is that special feature in the commission of Paul in which it was distinct from that of the other Apostles ... If then it shall appear that, far from seeing 'what is the dispensation of the Mystery' (Eph. 3:9 R. V.) the mass of Christians *have entirely missed it*, and, as the natural consequence, have almost completely misunderstood Christianity, importing into it the things proper to another dispensation, and so confounding Judaism and Christianity in an inexpressible jumble; surely it is a matter for deep humiliation before God, and for earnest prayerful effort to retrieve, with God's help, this important and neglected teaching".

This writer evidently saw clearly the distinction between Israel and the great Secret made known by God through the prison letters of the apostle Paul concerning the Body of Christ. Would that the present-day followers in this Movement could see things so clearly and give such a testimony!

Perhaps the most striking of all of the original founders of the Brethren is the witness of C. H. Mackintosh. In the last chapter of volume five of his *Miscellaneous Writings* (This has been republished by Loiseaux Bros, of New York and is obtainable now in this country and the following quotations are from this edition). He gives a remarkable testimony to the revelation given through Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for us Gentiles (Eph. 3:1), as follows:

> "*Every system of doctrine or discipline which would connect the Church with the world, either in her present condition or her future prospects, must be wrong and must exert an unhallowed influence . .*

the doctrine of the Church's heavenly character was developed in all its power and beauty by the Holy Ghost in the Apostle Paul. Up to his time and even during the early stages of his ministry, the divine purpose was to deal with Israel . . . the thought of Jew and Gentile, 'seated together in the heavenlies', lay far beyond the range of prophetic testimony . . . John the Baptist . . . told the people what they were to do in that transition state, into which his ministry was designed to conduct them, and pointed to Him that was to come. Have we anything of the *Church* in all this? Not a syllable. The *Kingdom* was still the very highest thought".

Coming to the ministry of Peter to Israel in Acts three, he quotes the exceedingly important speech recorded in verses 19-26 and then writes:

"Have we here the development of the Church? No, the time had not yet arrived for this. The Church as seen in the opening of the Acts exhibits but a sample of lovely grace and order . . . but not anything beyond what man could take cognizance of and value. In a word it was still the Kingdom, and not the great mystery of the Church. Those who think that the opening chapters of Acts present the Church in its essential aspect, have by no means reached the divine thought on the subject".

Coming to Peter's vision recorded in Acts ten he comments:

"Here we are taught that the Gentiles, as such, are to have a place with the Jews in the Kingdom. But did the council at Jerusalem apprehend the truth of the Church, of Jews and Gentiles so truly formed in the one Body that they are no more Jew and Gentile? I believe not . . . Peter never received a commission to unfold the mystery of the Church. Even in his epistles we find nothing of it. .. it was reserved for the great Apostle of the Gentiles, to bring out, in the energy and power of the Holy Ghost, the mystery of which we speak".

Commenting on Acts 28 and Paul's gathering together the chief of the Jews at Rome, and giving them a last opportunity to respond, he writes:

"He (Paul) found himself in the midst of the wide Gentile world - a prisoner at Rome and rejected by Israel... he must therefore set himself to bring out that holy and heavenly mystery which had been hid in God from ages and generations - the mystery of the Church as the Body of Christ united to its living Head by the Holy Ghost . . . Thus closes the Acts of the Apostles which, like the Gospels, is more or less connected with the testimony to Israel. So long as Israel could be regarded as the object of testimony, so long the testimony continued; but when they were shut up to judicial blindness, the testimony ceased".

He goes on:

> "Let us see what this 'Mystery' this 'gospel'. . . really was, and wherein its peculiarity consisted. To understand this is of the utmost importance, what therefore, was Paul's gospel? Was it a different method of justifying a sinner from that preached by the other Apostles? No, by no means . . . the peculiarity of the gospel preached by Paul had not so much reference to God's way of dealing with *the sinner* as with *the saint*; it was not so much how God justified a sinner as what He did with him when justified. Yes, it was the place into which Paul's gospel conducted the saint that marked its peculiarity . . . Paul's gospel went far beyond them all (i.e. other servants of God). It was not the Kingdom offered to Israel on the ground of repentance, as by John the Baptist and our Lord; nor was it the Kingdom opened to Jew and Gentile by Peter in Acts 3 and 10; *but it was the heavenly calling of the Church of God composed of Jew and Gentile, in one Body, united to a glorified Christ by the presence of the Holy Ghost*".
>
> "The epistle to the Ephesians fully develops the mystery of the will of God concerning this. There we find ample instruction as to our heavenly standing, heavenly hopes and heavenly conflict . . . 'He hath raised us up together and made us *sit together* in heavenly places in Christ Jesus'. It is not that He *will* do this, but 'He hath' done it. When Christ was raised from the dead, all the members of His Body were raised also; when He ascended into heaven, they ascended also; when He sat down, they sat down also; that is, in the counsel of God, and to be actualised in the process of time by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven . . . Believers did not know this at the first; it was not unfolded by the ministry of the twelve, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles, because the testimony to Israel was still going on, and so long as earth was the manifested scene of divine operation, and so long as there was any ground of hope in connection with Israel, the heavenly mystery was held back; but when earth had been abandoned and Israel set aside, the Apostle of the Gentiles from his prison at Rome, writes to the Church and opens out all the glorious privileges connected with its place in the heavens with Christ".

C. H. Mackintosh goes on to comment on the fact that so few believers have had "eyes to see" and ability to grasp such exalted and wonderful teaching. The blinding power of tradition and the pull earthwards of the senses all combine to prevent this:

> "We have seen how long it was ere man could take hold of it... and we have only to glance at the history of the Church for the last eighteen centuries to see how feebly it was held and how speedily it was let go. The heart naturally clings to earth and the thoughts of an earthly corporation is attractive to it. Hence we may expect that the truth of the Church's heavenly character will only be apprehended

and carried out by a very small and feeble minority ... to understand all this requires a larger measure of spirituality than is to be found with many Christians".

". . . Those who will maintain Paul's gospel find themselves, like him, deserted and despised amid the pomp and glitter of the world. The clashing of ecclesiastical systems, the jarring of sects, and the din of religious controversy will surely drown the feeble voice of those who would speak of the heavenly calling and rapture of the Church. ... I am deeply conscious of how feebly and incoherently I have developed what I have in mind concerning the doctrine of the Church, but I have no doubt of its real importance and feel assured that, as the time draws near, much light will be communicated to believers about it. At present, it is to be feared, few really enter into it".

We make no apology for these lengthy quotations from this remarkable chapter. They are so true, and in some respects prophetic. The writer sees clearly the dispensational character of the Acts, with the people of Israel coming first right up to the last chapter. He realises that the truth of the great secret (Mystery) revealed through Paul the prisoner for the Gentiles was not known or commenced at Acts 2. Neither is the ministry of Peter or the Twelve connected with it. Rather the first unfolding of this Divine secret is after Israel's rejection at Acts 28, and made known in the first epistles written after that event, namely those to the Ephesians and Colossians. It is all the more remarkable when one remembers that this was written and taught a hundred years ago. How comes it then that this teaching is dubbed as ultra-dispensational by many of the present-day followers of the movement to which C. H. Mackintosh was attached, and looked upon as a concoction of Dr. E. W. Bullinger and Charles H. Welch? If any belonging to this same movement happen to be reading these words, we earnestly ask them to consider these things afresh, earnestly and prayerfully. Either one of their much loved and revered leaders was hopelessly wrong and teaching error, or he was ministering supreme truth; there can be no half-way position. For ourselves we have no doubt as to the answer.

Knowing something of the activity and devices of the evil One, who, as the god of this age, blinds the minds of those who do not believe, lest the light of the good news of the *glory of Christ* should shine upon them (2 Cor. 4:4), we are not surprised at what

followed after such a clear-cut testimony to the riches of this heavenly Secret. He, Satan, came in as the divider of the brethren, split the movement, and thereby prevented any united testimony to the highest and most favoured of all callings of the redeemed.

We are sometimes asked the question "If what you teach is truth, why is not generally known amongst Christians? We hope our short survey of the early centuries and afterwards has made this quite clear. The answer is perfectly simple; it was largely lost before the one channel through whom it was made known, died, namely the apostle Paul, and it has never been recovered in anything like its fulness till comparatively recently. Even now we do not profess to have the last word on it, but enough of its glories and spiritual riches are seen to make us feel humbled and utterly thankful, and at the same time to feel the responsibility to make it known to others. The great Apostle's aim was to "enlighten all" as to what is this dispensation of the Secret (Mystery Eph. 3:9 R.V.), and Colossians 1:27 informs us in addition that *God wishes to make it known*, with its riches of glory relating to Christ among us Gentiles, who once were outcasts, aliens from Israel's commonwealth and strangers from the covenants of promise, now so exalted in Christ Jesus, that God sees us as seated together in Him in the heavenly places where He is enthroned in the glory. Who wants to explore and apprehend something of this spiritual wealth? A hundred years ago, C. H. Mackintosh lamented that only few responded to such teaching, and those who held to it faithfully and sought to make it known would be despised and deserted. He was to a great extent right in his forecast. What amazes us is that so many of God's people are content with so little, when all these riches are waiting in His Word of Truth to be explored and appropriated by faith. History informs us that generally speaking, it has always been so. In Old Testament days only two out of the thousands of God's earthly people, namely Caleb and Joshua, were ready to believe *all* that God had revealed of the riches of Canaan and were ready to go up, explore, and possess the promised land. The rest not only refused to believe their testimony but were prepared to stone and murder them.

What of us who profess to have had the necessary enlightenment of the Holy Spirit regarding this heavenly and holy

calling? We need to be delivered from any complacency and any tendency to be secret disciples, which is largely due to the fear of man that bringeth a snare. We need to manifest the same missionary spirit to testify to this truth as the apostle Paul did in his day. We need believers, specially the young, who have been given a glimpse of this heavenly "promised land", and who are prepared to fully dedicate themselves to the Lord and to this "good deposit" of truth. They must be ready to take time and effort to get grounded in it; to be alert to every opportunity for witness; to have wisdom and patience in presenting it to others and to back it up behind the scenes with persistent labouring in prayer and intercession for all, such as Epaphras did (Col. 1:24-29; 4:12). Only in this way can we discharge our responsibilities to the Lord Who has showered upon us such riches of grace and glory. The days darken as the age gets nearer its close. The challenge and the need is great. WHO ARE READY AND WILLING TO RESPOND?