

**THE MESSAGE
OF THE BIBLE
IS NOT BEING PREACHED!**

A call for a United Church based on the Message of
Jesus, the Messiah

Hugh J. Schonfield

Contents

Introduction	3
The Message in Outline	5
Unmasking the Villain	8
The Messiah-King	12
The Message and the Enemy	14
The Faking of Christian Doctrine	17
Learning the Biblical Language	21
Arenas of Conflict	24
The Message Confused	27
Has anybody heard of Jesus?'	30

Introduction

Would Jesus or Paul recognise in our modern churches the faith which they laboured to preach and teach nearly two thousand years ago? For the casual churchgoer, the faith has become little more than an acquaintance with a babe in the manger, whose name might just as well be John Smith for all the impact it makes on his life. An annual reminder of the crib in Bethlehem, and angels and shepherds, can hardly be reckoned as real involvement with the one who demanded uncompromising devotion from His disciples, and who also died for His faith.

Leaving aside the nominal Christians, what would Jesus and Paul make of a church represented by four hundred groups, some large and popular, others small and almost unknown, but all making the same claim to represent the faith of the Apostles? That state of ecclesiastical affairs is so absurd that the thought of it is seldom entertained by those professing to follow the founder of Christianity. Yet it is widely admitted that a divided church continues to be the most powerful barrier against effective evangelism in the un-churched community. A leading New Testament scholar put the point forcefully when he said: "Disunity is disobedience to the commandment of love, and is the same thing as unbelief. Church unity is not 'a desirable feature' in the life of the church; it is a condition of the church's existence, the test of whether the church is the church.

A divided church is a contradiction of its own nature as the church; it is witnessing to a falsehood. Its evangelism cannot be effective. Jesus prayed 'that they all may be one, even as you Father are in unity with me and I with you, that they also may be one in unity with us: that the world may believe that you sent me.' If we took the New Testament point of view seriously, we should expect to find that the single most serious obstacle to the evangelisation of the world is the disunity of the 'churches'. The problem posed by the scandal of a permanently divided church ought surely to engage the unceasing attention of the churches.

How can the one faith be proclaimed, when it is so obviously not one faith? Nor can it be argued that the differences between the groups concern the finer points of theological definition only. There are fundamental and long-standing issues at stake as is proved by the persistent failure of the denominations to settle their differences, despite sincere efforts to do so.

A supermarket issuing a single procedures manual for use in its four hundred branches would be astonished to find that its instructions were being implemented in four hundred different ways. The problem would suggest either a lack of clarity in the manual or a sad lack of attention in those claiming to follow it. A trouble-shooter would be dispatched to see where things had gone wrong. A close comparison between the manual and the practices of the employees would reveal how so many divergent procedures had arisen from a single blue-print. Might not a theological investigation likewise teach Christians where they have gone wrong? The task ought not to be impossible. The original faith has been carefully documented for us in the works of Luke, the physician, John the disciple whom Jesus loved, and Paul the intrepid convert who shook the Roman world with his preaching about a resurrected Saviour. Can it really be that the best efforts of those intelligent men to transmit to us the teachings of their Lord must founder in the chaos of four hundred versions of the faith?

Paul's incredulity at the contemporary religious scene must be measured by his horror at three conflicting parties within the church at Corinth: "I entreat you, my brothers," he wrote, "all to speak the same thing. I desire that there be no divisions among you, that you show perfect harmony of mind and judgement... There is one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith and one baptism, one God and Father of us all." His statement represents the simple ideal from which the churches have so sadly fallen. Has Christianity failed then, or has it perhaps never been tried? How much of the real Jesus is known in the Catholic and Protestant churches of our day?

It cannot be denied that from the one faith, many 'faiths' have sprung. Our investigation of the riddle of 'the many from the one' will entail a close look at the teachings of the Christian documents read as far as possible without denominational bias or traditional presupposition. We shall contend that subtle influences have worked to blur our vision of the original faith; that in the ensuing confusion the divided churches have lost sight of the central Christian Message. We do not believe it to be irretrievably lost; merely buried under the rubble of tradition and awaiting rediscovery.

The Message in Outline

The writers of the Old Testament were in no doubt that God had spoken. Not only had He created the heavens and the earth by the power of His Divine Word, but He continued to speak through certain carefully chosen agents, the prophets. In this way mankind was not left in the dark about the plan and purpose which God, who had made everything, was executing for the benefit of His Creation. The character of the God of Creation was summed up in His Divine Name which revealed Him as "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abundantly kind and faithful." The role of the prophet, as God's representative, was to make clear the direction in which men were to go in order to comply with the Divine Programme. Their compliance would be in their best interest, for to resist God was in the long run to court disaster. Men might appear to 'get away with it' for a time, but ultimate retribution would be swift and sure — and terrible. "It is a fearful thing," says the New Testament writer to the Hebrews "to fall into the hands of the Living God." The compassion of the One God of Israel was in no way inconsistent with the reality of His displeasure at wrong-doing. The judgement which the evil-doer brings upon himself is a constant feature of the biblical Message.

The diagnosis of the human sickness which in all ages was evident on every hand had been declared in the earliest documents of the Hebrew religion, A mysterious being, known as the Serpent (the definite article suggests that he was a well known figure) had questioned the truth of the Creator's Word and lured the first woman into disobedience, using a subtle appeal to her desire for wisdom. Thus tricked into disobedience — though they had been fully instructed in the Creator's will — the first pair were made to understand the gravity of their error by suffering the curse of banishment from the Paradise Garden of Eden. The supreme tragedy was that their potential for immortality was lost. For God will not grant endless life to any who have not proved by their conscientious obedience that they will serve Him alone. And this Adam and Eve had clearly failed to do.

Their situation was hopeless but for one redeeming feature. There was the promise given by the Creator that in later generations a descendant of the Woman Eve would arise to undo the catastrophic work of the Serpent and make possible the recovery of man's potential for endless life. Until that Saviour appeared, however, man must consider himself subject to inevitable death, the just punishment for his disobedience to His Maker.

Against this background there arises in the Hebrew Scriptures the fundamentally important notion of the Word or Message, a body of information about the Divine Programme for rescuing mankind from the consequences of his rebellion. In Adam and Eve the human race had become guilty of the ultimate crime, that of complying with the instructions of the Serpent whose clever lie had been more attractive than the Creator's Truth. Their error showed a careless disregard for the Divine will. Their failure to discern between Truth and lie was a poor recommendation indeed for candidates for immortality. A universe peopled by immortals unable to distinguish right from wrong would be unthinkable.

The way out of the impasse in which fallen man now found himself, and the way back to the tree of life is the subject of the Divine Message revealed progressively throughout the sacred writings. It is really the single concern of the whole Bible. The Message revealed

the solution to the terrible predicament now facing the human race. Like a beacon in a dark world, it held forth the hope of rescue from death — the attainment of immortality; and the restoration of Paradise on earth and harmony throughout the universe — Millennia had passed when the Divine Message was communicated to Abraham. His very name nominates him a founding Father, Even the opening letters of his name suggest primacy and foundation, like the beginning of the alphabet. 'Ab' is the Hebrew for father and Abraham means 'Father of a multitude'. Abraham began to express his faith in God by responding to the divine call to leave his native country and journey to a land unknown, which God would show him. Later, by a divine Covenant, the land of Canaan was promised to him and to his descendants — and, in a special sense, to his Descendant, in the singular. The suggestive term 'seed' to designate Abraham's offspring recalls the 'seed' promised to Eve. In Him the disaster caused by the Serpent would be reversed. The New Testament comment by Paul informs us that the great Descendant was none other than the Messiah Himself: the Deliverer of Israel and the whole world.

The Message which came to Abraham already contains all the essential elements of the Divine Plan, at least in embryonic form. A descendant of Eve and Abraham will one day gain possession of the land of Palestine 'for ever'. Abraham will share this inheritance, though during his life time he was to inherit nothing. The permanence of the arrangement at once raises the question of immortality. For what is the point of an endless inheritance for Abraham unless his life can be prolonged indefinitely to enjoy it?

Abraham died and slept with his fathers. A permanent inheritance can make sense, therefore, only, if Abraham can be brought to life again. We confront here the absolute necessity for resurrection in the Divine Scheme.

Generations pass and the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob grow into the nation of Israel. Emerging from their terrible slavery in Egypt, the people wander in the wilderness, guided by Moses, and enter the promised land under Joshua. Can this be the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham? Clearly not in its ultimate form, for Abraham has long since been buried and the promised seed, the Great Deliverer, has not yet appeared. The Message persists. Far from becoming obscure as time goes on, it gains a remarkable clarity in the life of the beloved King of Israel, David, son of Jesse.

The unimportant eighth son of a sheep-farmer, a mere shepherd boy with beautiful eyes, David becomes (next to Abraham) the most significant figure in the history of Israel and the development of the Divine Plan. He is distinguished by his whole-hearted devotion to God and he is equipped for his high office by the gift of Divine Spirit which marks him out as God's anointed king. Through Nathan the prophet the Message comes to David.

Once again there is the promise of the Seed who will one day establish for ever the Kingdom granted to David. In this Message of the Kingdom, David sees "a set of instructions, an oracle by which the destiny of mankind will be directed." The Message has become universal in its scope. The future of humanity is bound up with the promise of the Greater Son of David, the Messiah, whose Kingdom will provide the ultimate solution to the world's ills.

Words are inadequate to describe the feelings of the two women selected to bear the children in whom these mighty promises would come to fruition. Luke's account of the birth of John the Baptist and of his far greater and unique successor Jesus is alive with the thrill of Messianic expectation. Since the dawn of history the faithful in Israel had awaited the coming of the one who was to be empowered to reverse the tragedy which

had befallen Adam and Eve. This was the King, imbued with the Divine Spirit who would triumph over the spiritual powers of darkness which had enslaved mankind's first parents and their descendants ever since. The Serpent's devastating work was apparent everywhere in suffering humanity. But the Spirit of God in Jesus was stronger by far. The New Testament accounts of His Ministry describe a dramatic conquest of evil by means of the extraordinary Divine Spirit with which He was gifted.

Yet despite the majesty of His career in Palestine, a handful of people only responded to His Message. It was the exponents of traditional religion claiming allegiance to the same sacred writings as He, who joined the Roman authorities in consigning Him to a criminal's death on the cross.

And there, but for the supreme miracle of the resurrection, the story would have ended. Yet, in reality, it had just begun; for the resurrection of Jesus was only one of the stages in the Grand Scheme for the rescue of mankind. The failure of the divided church is that it has ceased to bear the Message onwards to its great climax. Uncertain about where it is going it cannot speak to the world with conviction. Something has happened to cast a smokescreen across the path which leads to the goal; a fragmented church is symptomatic of that loss of vision.

Fortunately we do not need to remain in doubt or darkness. The early Christians have bequeathed to us a fair warning about where the danger of blindness lies. The difficulty is that twentieth-century man in his wisdom, has scorned those warnings and does his utmost to explain them away as superstition. Something has to be done to break the vicious circle.

It is the function of the united Church to be custodian of the divine information which alone gives meaning to the universe in which man finds himself. She holds the Message by which the destinies of the human race are to be directed. The voice of God is heard in her proclamation. These are no empty theological platitudes. They represent the heart of the biblical heritage on which the Church must be founded, if indeed she is to be the Church.

The presence of many conflicting churches points only to "the urgency of the need to rediscover the Message and bring it to the world.

Unmasking the Villain

A large proportion of those who claim to "be followers of the Christian revelation have long since given up a belief in the reality of one of the principle figures in the "biblical record. His name is Satan, the Adversary. The New Testament and the earliest post-apostolic writings identify him with the Serpent who disrupted the tranquillity the of the Garden of Eden. His Hebrew name is linked with the word Seraph, suggesting his connection with the world of angelic beings. ' The New Testament Christians are very much aware of him. He is permitted to exercise an extensive influence over the affairs of mankind and is therefore the god of the current era of human civilisation (by which they mean the period of human history until the Return of Christ).

He is also the original liar. His work is aimed at obstructing and obscuring the Truth of the Divine Message; his methods are subtle and treacherous. As the enemy of mankind he would prefer to remain hidden. His work is more easily accomplished when men are convinced that he does not exist!

It was the common belief of the New Testament Church, including Jesus, that Satan is a fallen angel. Paul describes him as wearing the mask of an angel of light, implying that he is in fact an angel of darkness. John, the Apostle, states that Satan has the entire world in the grip of a deception. His programme of constant propaganda aims at getting men to believe his lies. Paul sees him as extremely active and makes no bones about labelling preachers of fake Christianity as his servants.

The New Testament makes it more than clear that Satan operates chiefly in religion. The Scribes and Pharisees, the representatives of the religious establishment, were seen as Satan's principal exponents. They were not, therefore, exempt from responsibility for what they taught. They had become 'servants of the Devil and Jesus was uncompromising in His condemnation of them. They were the target of His righteous indignation because their religious traditions were in conflict with the Divine Message and effectively kept the people in darkness.

It would be naive to think that established religion was the enemy of the Truth only in first-century Palestine. Both Jesus and the Apostles saw degenerate religion as a permanent, if not increasingly prevalent feature of man's failure to know God. In searching for the

causes of the divisions which "beset our contemporary churches, we must take full account of the way in which tradition, uncritically handed down from one generation to another, can make unbiassed reading of the New Testament documents almost impossible. A leading spokesman for evangelicals in England puts the point so well when he says: "People who adhere to 'Sola Scriptura' ('we follow the Bible only') - often adhere in fact to a traditional school of interpretation of 'Sola Scriptura'". It is rare indeed to find anyone who is willing to examine his beliefs in the light of the blue-print which he professes to follow. Most simply assume that their creed is based on what Jesus and the Apostles taught.

One of the most baffling examples of tradition versus the Christian documents is found amongst a small group of believers known as the Christadelphians. Their founder had come near to death in a disaster at sea and had Towed that if ever he reached land safely, he would thoroughly investigate the Christian religion. He then set himself the noble task

of scrutinising the Bible in an effort to recover the original teachings of Jesus. He was amazed to find that much of what went by the name of Christianity was based on traditions which had crept into the church some 150 years after the death of Jesus. In his zeal to oppose the popular errors which pictured Satan as a horned monster stoking the fires of hell, he maintained that the term Satan in the Scriptures denoted nothing more than the evil inherent in human nature. While it is true that most churchgoers probably think of Satan in impersonal terms, quite unlike the early Christians, it is astonishing to find that the Christadelphians, with their passionate devotion to the Bible, can continue to read the encounter between the Adversary and Jesus in the wilderness as the account of Jesus having a conversation with Himself!

It is one of the clearest teachings of the Bible that Satan is a personality external to man. A great deal of space is taken up by the New Testament writers to show that there is a world of unseen evil spirits as real as the angels. The conquest of these evil powers by

Jesus was proof to the disciples that the cosmic forces lying behind the visible evil on earth were being defeated. It was the superior energy of the Spirit of God invested in Jesus which enabled Him to accomplish the extraordinary miracles of exorcism and healing reported in all four accounts of His ministry. To deny the reality of Satan and the demons when the Christian writers labour to demonstrate their existence is proof indeed of the vice-like grip which tradition can exercise upon even the mind even of those whose devotion to the service of their faith is amply demonstrated by their exemplary lives.

Satan scored a notable victory when he succeeded in relegating "belief in him to a former and ignorant age — not least because Jesus and the Apostles were made to appear far less intelligent than sophisticated modern man. When Luke penned (what we call) the fourth chapter of his treatise on Christianity he described an encounter between the Devil and Jesus. The account is placed squarely in history. The scene was the wilderness of Judea and the episode lasted for a period of some six weeks. When Satan had completed his attempts to seduce the Messiah from His loyalty to God, he left Him, whereupon angels arrived to minister to Him — not a moment too early, since Jesus had not eaten for forty days. Satan's approach to Jesus — he came up to Him and spoke — was no less a solid fact of history than the approach of the disciples or the Pharisees. We misread the accounts badly if we think otherwise. We also overlook the remarkable parallel between the temptation records in Genesis and the Gospels. In the former the external tempter, the Serpent, approaches; in the latter, the external adversary, Satan. In Genesis the account concludes with the arrival of angels to guard the way to the Tree of Life. In the Gospels also, angels approach to minister to the triumphant second Adam, the Messiah Jesus.

In the Bible the reality of a person is not judged by his being visible. A popular school of contemporary theology would have us believe that the supernatural dimension in the New Testament should be erased from the record so that Christianity may be made palatable to twentieth-century secular man. This daring theory would, however, leave secular man as secular as ever. It would do nothing to involve him in the real world of the spirit, where alone the solution to all his ills can be found.

Thanks to the careful work of the biblical writers we are not left in the dark as to Satan's methods. He clearly understands human nature; he also knows his Bible. He is not above quoting it if it serves his purpose, and he is skilled at altering words here and there for effect.

As the Serpent in Genesis he was persuasive enough to lure Eve into fatal disobedience in two short statements, amounting to just twenty-six words. His technique included questioning what God had said, misquotation, an assertion which was true, followed by a flat contradiction. The performance created a sufficient confusion to prevent Eve from thinking clearly. The history of mankind, and especially of religion, is a testimony to his unceasing activity — never, however, outside the limits prescribed for him by the One who created all things for a very good purpose.

Next to the persons of God, the father and His Son Jesus, the Messiah, Satan is the most significant figure in the spiritual drama described by the New Testament. He is treated as a constant threat, especially to the progress of the Good News — the Divine Message. His design is to prevent the Christian from achieving his goal, which is to attain to the gift of immortality. The reality of Satan, should, however, be no source of terror to the properly instructed believer, who is more than conqueror through the infinitely superior power of the God who sustains him.

The activity of Satan is centred on a campaign to frustrate the progress of Christians, principally by confusing the Divine Instructions revealing the way to immortality. Satan has been quick to see that the Bible contains the 'secrets' by which the Christian venture may be undertaken with success. It is his intention to make those secrets unintelligible. A variety of avenues are open to him in this respect. One is to cast doubt upon the reliability of the documents which record the original faith. A large segment of the Christian world is no longer at all certain that it is possible to recover what Jesus actually taught. Another Satanic ploy is to accuse the original writers of being deluded about the actual facts of the life of Jesus. Their belief in the resurrection, he maintains, is explicable as wishful thinking, or perhaps hallucination. The effectiveness of these techniques is borne out by the widespread doubts among churchgoers about the resurrection of Jesus as a historical fact. By New Testament standards these would-be disciples are relegated to the ranks of unbelievers. Their position is sad indeed, since no one is likely to hold out much hope for his own resurrection if he doesn't believe in Christ's!

Not all, however, can be so easily shaken from their faith in the Christian documents. For those who maintain a firm belief in the reliability of the Scriptures, a more subtle form of deception is required. They must be led to think that they have grasped what Jesus taught, while they are presented with a distorted version of His Message. Over a long period of time this will effectively induce a false sense of security from which, they will "be very unwilling to be shaken. The point must be emphasised: Tradition is Satan's great weapon. He knows that if men are brought up to accept a particular creed, a statement of faith assumed to be based upon the original teachings of the Apostles, very few will ever trouble to verify its truth against the New Testament standard. They will leave it to their leaders to do this for them, and they will not be much perturbed by the fact that leaders of conflicting groups, also claiming to be Christian, have come to quite different conclusions about the faith. In this way they will insulate themselves against the uncomfortable realities of a divided Christendom. Through tradition, tenaciously held, divided Christianity may be perpetuated ad infinitum.

Christianity without a well-developed sense of the reality of Satan has lost touch with its founding Fathers, and has also lost the battle against the Devil. It will inevitably adopt an uncritical attitude to what is taught as the faith, resting in the belief that all versions of the Christianity are valid in their way, since all are honestly held by sincere believers. The next step will be to adopt the conviction that all the world-religions are a valid means to salvation, since all promote the worship of the same God. It will not have occurred to

those holding a generous view of the divided churches to ask whether the Devil has not been extremely active in preaching a version or versions of 'Christianity' which hide some of the essential elements of the Divine Plan for rescue. In calling for a return to the Christian blue-print, the Apostolic Faith once and for all delivered to the Saints, we must insist that Christians recover a belief in the reality of Satan and the demons and their continuous campaign of deception. They must reckon with them as the the real forces behind the theological chaos represented by so many Christian groupings. In so doing believers will be enabled to enter the world of the early Church, rather than the world as presented to us by scientific humanism. It is the failure to understand the real enemy which alienates much of Christianity from Paul's classic statements that as Christians we are not wrestling against 'flesh and blood' but against the unseen world-rulers, the spirits of evil in heavenly places, led by the Prince of the power of the air, the god of the present era. The identification of the biblical Enemy does not exempt us from responsibility for our own errors. The tools for overcoming the power of Satan are at hand, if we will only reach out and grasp them. Moreover, the King has already defeated Satan, even though the effects of His victory are not yet fully apparent. The final victory must await the enthronement of the hero of the biblical drama, Jesus, the Messiah, the appointed Ruler of Israel and the world. And of His Government there shall be no end.

The Messiah-King

A learned American theologian of the last century was intrigued by the extraordinary capacity of the religious to read the Bible with the conviction that its message must be wrapped in obscurity. Words which under normal circumstances allow no room for misunderstanding seem in a biblical contexts to provoke complex problems of interpretation: "One of the strangest things in the world is the manner in which some people read the Bible. It would almost seem as if they turned it upside down and read it backwards. 'Eyes they have, but they see not'. They praise it and hold it in holy regard, and insist that everyone ought to have it yet they look into it only as some recondite volume, which is a good text-book for preachers, but is quite beyond the reach of their understanding... Many seem to view it as a sublime riddle-book, full of mystic poetry and unsearchable wisdom rather than as a plain piece of information and advice given by a Father to his inexperienced and exposed children. Many who sit down to write commentaries on it seem to be continually haunted with the idea that there is something recondite in every word, or that the real mind of the spirit is not to be found in the plain import of the letter, but in some abstruse or mystic analogy which it is their business to dig after. I hold that the Bible is a book for everybody, in which God speaks for the purpose of being understood by everybody; that its language is conformed to the ordinary uses of speech; and that it is to be interpreted in the same common-sense way in which we would interpret the will of a deceased father, or ascertain the meaning of a business letter. Its design is to instruct, and in the most familiar way to express to men the mind and will of God. When Christ speaks of the Son of Man He means the Son of Man and not the Roman armies. When He speaks of His Coming in the clouds of heaven, He means His Coming in the clouds of heaven, and not the sailing of warships on the Mediterranean, or the march of soldiers over the earth... Christ knew what He wished to say and how to say what He meant; and I feel myself bound to understand Him to mean just what He says."

There is much wisdom in the learned Doctor's approach to the Scriptures. Popular notions about the meaning of Christianity would undergo a radical change, if biblical statements were treated as language designed to be understood. If someone were to state that Prince Charles will one day assume the throne of his mother, Queen Elizabeth, and reign as King of England, no one would misunderstand. When a divine emissary announces to Mary that her son Jesus is to Inherit the throne of his ancestor David and reign over the people of Israel, the proposition is apparently fraught with difficulty. The need is felt for an army of learned expositors to assist with an interpretation. A large measure of Christian unity could be achieved overnight if Christians would read the divine Messenger's words as plain statements of fact and accept them as true. Firstly, it would be understood that Jesus was born for royal office, and secondly that David's throne must sometime be reestablished, so that Jesus can become King of Israel. If, then, the account of Jesus' life in Palestine were studied, it would be found that far from becoming King He died as a common criminal at the hands *of* the Romans. How Luke knew all this, for it had become history, by the time he wrote his report of the Angel's message to Mary (having gathered his information in all probability by talking to Mary herself). Luke, however, saw nothing at all problematic in Jesus having died without becoming King. It was clear to him that the first part of the Angel's message, given in advance of the conception of Jesus, had been amply fulfilled in the Saviour's birth at

Bethlehem. There was therefore not the slightest reason to doubt that Jesus would also become King over Israel. That part of the announcement had simply *not yet* come to pass!

An extraordinary confusion comes over the average mind when it is confronted with the proposition that Jesus is to reign over the House of Israel. The ordinary churchgoer has no difficulty with the historical narrative stating that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the days of Herod the King, but seems baffled by the prospect of His reign over Israel. In normal parlance we refer to the non-acceptance of clear statements as unbelief. Would this indicate that Christians have not yet become believers? The reception of Luke's simple piece of information about the career of Jesus would at once dramatically unite churchgoers under the banner of a brand new tenet — or rather, one discovered afresh after years of neglect. It would bestow upon them a single Hope. They would be enabled to proclaim with absolute certainty something of enormous significance for the future of mankind.

By comparison with the tremendous implications of Jesus' forthcoming Reign on the throne of David, arguments about episcopacy, communion, women-priests or baptism would rapidly pale into insignificance. The denominational barriers would come crashing down. Such a dramatic revolution, would in fact mean "only that the churches had come to accept Jesus as Messiah. Little do they seem to realise that their traditional teaching leaves little room for real conviction about His Messiahship. Their creeds have robbed Him. of His throne!

What has happened to render the simplest piece of information about Jesus obscure? How did His Kingship over Israel fade from the creed? As things stand, the great majority of churchgoers do not subscribe to the basic fact about Jesus which Gabriel, the Angel communicated to Mary, and which the whole New Testament embraces as the central tenet of the faith. Can the popular Jesus really be the Jesus of the Bible, when the biblical description of Him is so widely rejected? Would belief in a Charles who has no hope of becoming King of England be belief in the Charles who is heir apparent?

No doubt some will protest that Jesus has assumed His Kingship in heaven. The suggestion would not be taken seriously by the New Testament Church. For though they recognised that Jesus had been exalted after His resurrection to His Father's throne in heaven, nothing would have appeared more ludicrous than that David's throne had been relocated in a realm beyond the skies. David's throne never had been and never would be anywhere else but in Jerusalem. Countless prophecies had taught them to look forward to Israel's national Restoration under the Messiah; and it is clear beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus and the disciples, even after the resurrection, fully expected the Kingdom to be reestablished in Israel. After the Apostles had spent six weeks with their Risen Master, discussing the Kingdom of God, they were eager to know if the time was then ripe for the national Restoration of Israel. There was no hint that the Message of all the prophets and the hopes of generations of pious Israelites had failed. It was just that Jesus, as Messiah Designate, must be temporarily retained in heaven until the times of the national and universal Restoration on which the entire biblical heritage was founded. We may say, therefore, with all confidence, that unless the throne of David is reestablished under the Messiah, all the seers and prophets of the Old and New Testaments will have turned out to be frauds and their Message an empty dream. Jesus Himself will have been revealed as an impostor. Christianity must triumph in a renovated earth, and with the Messiah as universal King, or fail. There is no third alternative.

The Message and the Enemy

The promise of rescue for mankind had been handed down through, generations spanning many thousands of years. As time progressed the Divine Information conveyed to Adam and Eve had "been expanded to include the promise of both personal and national salvation. At the heart of the Message was the solution to the ultimate problem of man's mortality. Immortality was to be achieved, as the New Testament write: came to understand, when frail man received from his maker an imperishable body animated and driven by Divine Spirit. This information had by no means been the common property of all Israelites. The Divine Secret had been entrusted to Abraham and David and all the prophets, who had laboured to share their insights with any who were willing to receive them.

The Bible is most practical in its analysis of the human problem. It recognises that death is the universal enemy from which we are utterly powerless to rescue ourselves. In God's mercy a Divine Plan for dealing with the problem of inevitable death has been provided. The plan of salvation makes no unreasonable demands on man. It calls upon him first to believe in God as Creator of all things, and secondly in His Messiah, Jesus, for it is He who has been chosen to pioneer the way of escape from death. Having Himself gained immortality, it is His task now to assist others struggling for the same goal. As the key figure in the Divine Scheme He has been selected to head up the entire divine operation, and this involves His appointment as King of Israel and His Reign over the world. This is to be a Reign without end. It forms the subject matter of the Christian Good News of the Kingdom of God.

The Christian records never for one moment suggest that Jesus actually became King of Israel during His ministry in Palestine. On one occasion an attempt was made to make Him King, but Jesus firmly rejected it. On another the crowds were convinced that the Reign of Messiah was about to begin. In the atmosphere of Messianic expectation which belief in Jesus as Messiah had generated, the slightest hint could be taken as a sign of His impending enthronement. On the occasion in question Jesus had remarked that the repentant Zachaeus had 'this day' come to a knowledge of salvation. Salvation had always been associated with the establishment of the Kingdom and mention of it was always likely to trigger an upsurge of Messianic fervour. The fact that Jesus was also approaching Jerusalem made it practically certain that this was the great moment for the re-establishment of the throne of David in the Holy City. Luke reports that Jesus dealt with the crisis by telling a parable. He compared Himself to a nobleman who was to depart to a far country to obtain his Kingdom and return to reign, a simple enough story and one which would quickly bring the churches together if they believed it. For it confirms in the most elementary terms that the promised Reign of the Messiah was not to begin until Jesus returned to the earth after an unspecified interval of absence. In the light of Jesus' subsequent departure after His resurrection, the disciples were quick to understand that they must transfer their Messianic hopes to a point of future time unknown — to His Return in glory. To this great event the entire early church, naturally enough, looked forward. Not for one moment did they suppose that the Messianic programme had been transferred to a locality away from the earth. It would have been quite as nonsensical to

imagine that the throne of David had been removed from Jerusalem as to think that the throne of England should be found in Moscow. Yet on that kind of absurdity much of contemporary religion rests its hope for the future.

The benefits of the Divine Programme could be appropriated by the individual believers only on condition that they expressed their faith in the purposes which God was working out. It was clear that humanity had fallen under the curse of disobedience. An essential element in the Divine Programme for rescue, therefore, was the sacrificial death of the Son of God, the Messiah, for the sins of the world. Prior to the crucifixion of Jesus in fulfilment of His destiny as the sacrificial Lamb slain, in the Divine Purpose, before the foundation of the world, the disciples had found this part of the Plan almost impossible to grasp. They were quite unable to reconcile a dying Saviour with the reigning Messiah. Yet contemporary believers, looking at the death of Christ as a historical event, have little difficulty in seeing it as the very heart of their faith. That Jesus is now alive, having been brought to life again by resurrection, has come to be much less acceptable even to churchgoers; indeed there are many, including professional theologians, for whom the resurrection of Jesus as a fact of history is simply incredible. Their view of the world as a 'closed continuum' forbids them to believe it. Yet they see no contradiction between this position and a profession of Christian faith. In the interests of clarifying the faith of the New Testament, it must be insisted that the early Church would have regarded non-belief in the resurrection simply as unbelief. No candidate for baptism would have been acceptable apart from a firm conviction that Jesus had assumed immortality by being raised from the dead. This was the heart and core of the Divine Message, without which the hope for the salvation of the human race would be reduced to an empty dream. It is well known that Paul was ready to abandon his entire mission, if it could be shown that the Christ was not alive!

Satan was well aware that belief in the Saviour and His Message of Salvation opened for the believer the door to the blessings of immortality. He understood that the prerequisite for incorporation into the Divine Scheme for the rescue of mankind from death was an understanding and acceptance of the scheme itself. That understanding was gained by contact with the information contained in the Good News Message which Jesus and the Apostles laboured to proclaim, and for which they died as martyrs. The process of rescue could therefore be most effectively frustrated by tampering with the essential information. A new 'set of facts' must be introduced in place of the real ones, and faith in these must be induced. In this way a hope of salvation would be offered as before; but because of the subtle twist which had been introduced into the Message, the proposition put before the potential convert would no longer correspond to the terms laid down by the Divine Architect. The essence of the Satanic plan would be to persuade the seeker for immortality that he had complied with the divine instructions, while these in fact would be hidden from him. . He would be offered a counterfeit good news which would not save him!

The central Truth of the Good News of the Reign of God was that the promised Saviour was ultimately to assume the reins of world-government and to introduce an endless theocracy. A share in that government, as a co-administrator with the Messiah, was offered as the reward to all who chose to become involved with Jesus' mission. As long as language is read straightforwardly and words retain their dictionary definitions, these facts will be found stated in the plains terms, and with complete unanimity by all the New Testament writers.

Abraham was heir to the world, the faithful were to inherit the earth, to administer the world as rulers, to reign with Christ to become Kings with Him on the earth. Language has no clearer way of conveying information about the future of the Church. It cannot say more distinctly than the Bible does that Christians are called to be the future rulers of the earth. Deafness and blindness alone could account for an inability to understand that the objective of the Christian venture is the overthrow of all human government in favour of the universal Government of the Messiah, Jesus, and His followers. That prospect is declared in the Message of the Good News of the Reign of God, the Christian Gospel. The entire New Testament is devoted to the development of that Message. Numerous sections of the Old Testament have it as their central theme. In it humanity is assured that beyond our present age, with all its intractable problems, there lies a glorious era of prosperity, " world-peace and justice for all mankind, under the Government of Jesus of Nazareth, God's chosen King.

Individually we must express our faith in that Government in advance of its coming. We are asked only to believe that the God who has promised it will stand by His Word. The summons to repentance is a challenge to admit our own helplessness and to accept what God has provided in His Messiah: His death so that we may be forgiven, His life that we may some day share His Immortality and reign with Him in a renewed earth, bringing countless others into the same fellowship. So much is demanded by the Messiah in His proclamation: 'Repent and believe the Good News!'

Division and loss of dynamic among the churches is traceable above all to the loss of that vital central Message. It is a loss of living faith and a loss of hope. It is also a defection from the Church's high calling to be the Messianic fellowship in training now, with the hope of fuller service to humanity in the Age of the Coming Kingdom. This is not to say that faith, and hope have not been expressed, but they have been stunted by the introduction of a very different goal, one quite foreign to the early believers. What to Jesus and the Apostles would have appeared as a meaningless prospect, utterly incompatible with the Hebrew tradition, came to replace the Hope offered by the Divine Message. The work, of the Serpent led to a wholesale shift away from the biblical Hope embodied in the Good News, and it occurred soon after the death of the Apostles. The Message was dealt a lethal blow when strange notions about an after-life as a disembodied spirit became confused with the

Christian hope of resurrection. The Serpent revived his favourite lie and worked hard to poison the church with it. The success of his campaign may be seen everywhere in contemporary churches.

It was Satan, subtle master of the half-truth, who soon after the death of the Apostles began a massive propaganda campaign to divert attention away from the Hope of the Good News to an objective which has since gained almost universal acceptance as one of the first principles of the Christian faith. A powerful influx of Greek "believers" into the church led to a radical shift in thinking amongst those desiring to attach themselves to the name of Christ. The result was a theologies take-over on a massive scale. The name of Christ was appropriated to a system of belief hardly recognisable as Christian by New Testament standards. The world of Greek and Roman philosophy invaded the church so successfully that the fundamentally different thought-system on which the Hebrew, biblical theology was founded was forced out of the church. "When Greek and Roman ideas came to dominate the church," says a learned scholar of the Church of England, "there occurred a disaster from which we have never recovered, neither in belief nor in

practice." Only when the scale of that disaster is fully recognised will serious steps be taken to repair the damage.

The Faking of Christian Doctrine

So one who has spent time with the letters of Paul can fail to notice the sense of earnest urgency which motivates him. He is quite obviously waging a campaign for a cause which he considers to be supremely important. He speaks of himself as having "been put in charge of a service which at all costs he must make available to mankind. The service is that of spreading the Message of Salvation which he sees as the only information having absolute value. Without it a man is perishing. With it he is on his way to achieving the purpose for which he was born — the attainment of immortality in the Kingdom of God.

The contemporary religious scene would appear nothing short of tragic to Paul. That the name of Christ could be appended to nearly four hundred different groups organised as separate fellowships would however confirm to him the remarkable accuracy of his own forebodings about the direction in which the church would go after his death. He had constantly warned of 'grievous wolves' who would enter the church and scatter the sheep, and of a wholesale departure from the Apostolic teachings, leading to a suppression of the faith which he had struggled to preach. Jude, the brother of Jesus, wrote a letter urging the Christians of his own day to contend earnestly for the faith which had been once and for all divinely communicated to the Christian, believers. If earnest effort was required then to preserve the faith, how much more two thousand years later! John, the Apostle, had written to a certain Diotrefes who refused to accept the admonitions contained in the letter, and was actually forcing the real Christians out of the church. A theological take-over was under way.

It is not difficult to see that New Testament Christianity was under constant attack from false religion. There were ministers masquerading as agents of Christ. Individuals were upsetting the faith of inexperienced believers by proposing radically new teachings calculated to obscure the genuine faith. In Paul's own time, the majority were already falsifying the Message, principally to satisfy the demands of those who would not tolerate wholesome teaching, but chose to "wander off after man-made fictions." Jesus was no less preoccupied with the dangers of false teaching. He expressed doubts as to whether genuine Christian belief would be found anywhere on earth by the time He returned. He envisaged a situation, at His Return to establish the Kingdom, in which many would suffer a bitter disappointment. There would be many who would protest that they had been fully committed members of what they thought was the Christian Church only to find that their work of preaching and even their performance of miracles in the name of Christ had never been recognised by Jesus. This aspect of the teaching of Christ is designed to be disturbing. It tells us in no uncertain terms that God means to be taken seriously. He will not accept intellectual or moral carelessness from those who profess to follow Him. He has declared the Faith through His agents,-the prophets and Apostles, and expects every professing Christian to pay close attention to what He has said. Worship based upon human tradition has been pronounced invalid. No one therefore should risk taking his faith on trust from the denomination in which happens to be born, without careful inspection of its sources. The New Testament warns constantly that traps are laid for the Christian on every side. The picture of a world peopled with preachers

who are wolves in sheep's clothing, and with Satan's agents in the guise of angels of light and masquerading as ministers of righteousness, may seem fanciful in the twentieth century. But it cannot be denied that that is the environment in which the New Testament says a Christian must survive. Our failure to see the point of the biblical warnings may only be a measure of our blindness to the danger.

There are obvious indications in the New Testament that the Apostles, and Jesus Himself, expected a large-scale departure from the original faith to occur in the generation subsequent to their own. They give no promise whatever that the faith would become comfortably settled. Rather, they envisage an apostasy continuing unabated. The Apostolic view of the future is "telescoped", in the sense that it gives prominence to the principle events which are expected to occur, without clarifying the span of time needed for their fulfilment. The arrival of the Messiah to reign with the Church is, of course, the dominant expectation of the early Church, but comparable in significance is the expectation of a widespread departure from the Truth of the Divine Message and the appearance on the world scene of a human individual in whom all the characteristics of false religion are concentrated. He is pictured as a dreadful character of the Messiah Himself. He arrogates to himself the divine titles, establishes himself in a Temple and claims to be God. His sudden appearance as a Messianic pretender, is accompanied by delusive miracles, supernatural feats calculated to fool those who have not come to understand that Satan is able to ape the very power of God. The success of his mission to deceive will be a just judgement upon those who have not previously come to love the Truth of the Divine Message. They will therefore be lured into believing the lie. It is the Garden of Eden tragedy all over again! Paul could have given no greater reason for grasping the Truth while there is yet time.

The propagation of lies has been Satan's chief aim. The appearance in history of a major shift away from the teachings of the founders of Christianity provides evidence of the success of his campaign to mislead. We have referred to the disaster which overcame the Christian Church when Greek ideas were mixed with doctrinal tenets taught by the Apostles. That this occurred is admitted on all sides. The facts of church history are unmistakable. What is seldom noticed is the effect which the alien ideas have had on the preaching of the Good News Message, to say nothing of their presence in the doctrinal systems of nearly every contemporary church. It is in this direction that we should look for the underlying causes of a divided church.

One thing is certain from the writings of Paul. It is that the content of the Message of Salvation is sacrosanct. Nothing must be permitted to interfere with it. Nothing must be added or taken away. The preaching of "another Gospel" or the preaching of "another Jesus" invites the divine curse upon any who would dare so to teach. Paul says so twice to the Galatians and the curse is clearly no empty imprecation. For Paul the perversion of the sacred Message is the ultimate horror.

The relevance of all this to our contemporary religious scene may be tested by inviting the average churchgoer to say what he understands as the goal of the Christian life. The question will not be designed to catch him out, but simply as a test of contemporary doctrine. It will be most unusual if his answer does not contain some reference to "going to heaven at death". Suppose now that he had given this answer in the middle of the second century, a little more than a hundred years after the death of Jesus. We have some very good evidence of the reaction that it would have provoked in one of the staunchest exponents of the Christian faith at that time. In a treatise on the faith, Justin Martyr wrote: "If you have fallen in with some who say they are Christians and who deny the

resurrection but who say that their souls when they die are taken to heaven, do not imagine that they are Christians". The statement may appear baffling, but it proves that at early Christianity rejected as a dangerous heresy the notion that at death the soul of the believer departs to heaven. Yet this will be found as the common tenet of millions of adherents to Christianity in the twentieth century, and it has been so for many generations. These remarkable facts demand an urgent investigation.

The radical shift in thinking which has obviously occurred can be traced to the fusion of Greek philosophy with the biblical faith. The process was a subtle one and the design behind it was the promotion of the very same lie which Satan had foisted upon the unwary Eve. The Serpent had flatly contradicted the Divine warning that disobedience would result in death. Now he appears as a preacher of Christianity to announce that man is by nature immortal, that he cannot die! It will not be difficult to see that this idea is devastating to the Divine Message that man has fallen under the death penalty, and that there is absolutely no prospect of his gaining immortality apart from incorporation into the Divine Plan through Christ. The introduction of the Greek idea that the soul of man means a part of him which survives death at once created an entirely new meaning for death. It no longer meant the cessation of the whole conscious personality, but rather his survival as a disembodied soul in another realm. A man with an immortal soul "cannot surely die"!

The Hebrews to whom the Divine Message was entrusted had been taught to believe that man was an animated being sustained, like the animals by the breath of life. When he died he returned to the grave and the dust from which he had been formed, and consciousness ceased at that moment. The only hope of further life would be through a resurrection from the state of death. The Divine Message had from the start made it clear that Abraham, David, the prophets, and all the faithful must rise from their graves to share in the promised inheritance. Even if resurrection had not been spelt out in detail, it was logically necessary, since everyone knew that the patriarchs had died without having inherited their Kingdom. They must therefore reappear by resurrection from death to join the company of all the faithful in the Reign of Messiah.

What Satan achieved in the second and third centuries was the suppression of the biblical doctrine of man as needing to attain immortality through resurrection, as a gift from his Maker. The biblical teaching was made to appear nonsensical, if, as the Greeks thought, man was already by nature immortal. The tragedy is that the church was so slow to see that its trump-card, the Divine Message, was being fatally undermined by a system of thought which taught that the Christian goal was survival as a disembodied soul in heaven, rather than participation in the Messianic Kingdom on earth. The prospect of a harp-playing home in heaven is largely inconceivable, and it most effectively diverts attention, away from the real biblical goal: the Return of Jesus Christ to administer the world in righteousness in company with His followers.

The Greek doctrine of the survival of the soul separated from the body has so permeated the churches that its members are committed to believing and teaching the falsehood that the dead are really alive in heaven, an idea which is absolutely foreign to the Bible. Plain statements by leading New Testament theologians that "heaven in the Bible is nowhere the destination of the dying" and that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is diametrically opposed to Scripture seem to make no impact whatever on what is taught in Sunday schools and pulpits throughout the land. The traditional mistake is simply too deeply entrenched and means to stay. We constantly comfort the bereaved with our cherished traditional teaching, never having given serious thought to its origin. In so

doing we become the dupes of Satan and we exclude ourselves from the blessings of the Good News. For the promised Kingdom of the Bible has nothing whatsoever to do with life as a disembodied soul or spirit in a realm beyond the sky.

It is a commonplace of the Divine Scheme that the dead must be resurrected from the grave to join the Messiah in the Kingdom which He will inaugurate at His Return. It is only at the resurrection that the faithful will be made alive. They must therefore remain dead until then. The illusion that the dead are already alive with Christ reduces the future resurrection to an afterthought. "Tell me, wrote the great Reformer, William Tyndale, "what cause is thereof the resurrection if the souls be in heaven?... In putting departed souls in heaven you destroy the arguments by which Christ and Paul prove the resurrection". By a strange paradox the work of Wycliffe and Tyndale (and a host of other distinguished scholars) is held in high esteem, while their teaching, which is in direct conflict with the popular tradition about the afterlife, remains quite unacceptable!

The Kingdom which Jesus is to establish has in popular thinking been removed from the earth. It is generally believed that He is now reigning with the Saints in heaven. The traditional scheme has deprived the Messiah of His Reign on the throne of David and the Christians of their hope of sharing that inheritance with Him. These stark facts must be squarely faced by the divided church. The Divine Message has become hopelessly muddled by the mixing of two conflicting worlds of thought; the Hebrew view of the Divine future cannot be reconciled with Platonic Greek philosophy.

Our safety lies in a personal re-examination of belief in the light of the biblical documents; for if the New Testament says anything, it promises a resurrection to glory to those only who have expressed their faith in Jesus by repentance, baptism as responsible adults, and belief in the Divine Message of the Kingdom as presented by Him and the Apostles. Salvation is offered on no other basis. The matter is one of life and death.

Learning the Biblical Language

If the message of the divided churches has become a feeble echo of the vibrant proclamation of the New Testament Christians, it is because tradition has interfered with the Divine Message which the Church is commissioned to preach. The intrusion of Greek concepts which cannot be reconciled with the Hebrew thought-world of the Bible has made it difficult for the reader of Scripture to understand the Apostles. A breakdown in communication has occurred. Even our translations of the Bible have played their part in the conspiracy to conceal the Truth. For though translation enables the early Christians to speak to us in our own English tongue, their words have been mediated to us by translators who were themselves steeped in the Greek tradition.

Of all forms of commentary on the Divine Word, a translation is the most subtle; the translator stands between us and the original Message of the Apostles. It is possible that he will fail to transmit the Message faithfully. Unless we scrutinise the original we may never know. Fortunately the tools are available for us to do this, and we need examine a handful of words only in order to rid ourselves of the misleading impressions we have gained from our versions, and arrive at the heart of the original.

The trouble begins early on in the Divine record. Satan has done his best to prevent us knowing who we are. We get off to a poor start unless we fully grasp the account of the creation of man. We are concerned above all to track down the meaning of the word "soul". Without any kind of formal instruction we seem to imbibe the notion that "soul" must mean an immortal part of man which survives death. Nothing could be further from the biblical Truth.

Unfortunately our King James version of the Bible conceals the proper understanding of "soul" most effectively, and prevents us from seeing that "soul", far from being the possession of man alone, belongs in fact equally to all the animals. Here is what the biblical text really says:

"And God said, 'Let the waters teem with swarming creatures, *living souls*...' And God created great whales and every *living soul* which moves, with which the waters teem... And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth the *living soul* after its kind, cattle and creeping thing and living creature of the earth, after its kind... And the Lord God formed man dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul... And out of the ground the Lord God formed every living creature of the field and every fowl of the air and "brought them to Adam to see what he would call them and whatever Adam called each *living soul*, that was its name." Later, the account of the flood has the following:

"And God said, "This is the sign of the Covenant between me and you and between every *living soul* which is with you. I will remember my Covenant which is between me and you and every *living soul* of all flesh."

And in the Proverbs:

"The righteous man cares for the soul of his beast". No wonder that the New Testament speaks of sea creatures having souls! (REV.8.9)

These simple facts establish at once that "soul" is the common designation of man and animal. They are equally conscious beings, "souls". The Hebrews might also say that man and animal have conscious being, "soul". In neither case is there the slightest hint that soul has anything to do with immortality. The very opposite is true; for at death the man who is formed from the dust of the ground returns to the dust, and at the flood "all in whose nostrils was the breath of life died", man and beast alike. The fundamentally important implication of our discovery is that immortality is not something we possess. It must be acquired; and it can be gained by no other means than through resurrection. Once we establish this fact we shall begin to read the New Testament with clarity. The Greek view of man's innate immortality must be banished once and for all, before the Hebrew view of man's destiny, on which the teaching of Jesus is founded, can be grasped. When we see that the death of man is the death of his whole person, the cessation of his consciousness, our minds will be turned towards our only hope — the hope of resurrection. We shall learn next that resurrection is to be an event of the future and that it is to occur when Christ comes back to rule on earth. Our hopes will inevitably be directed towards that Great Event. The futile prospect of life as a disembodied spirit will be replaced by the glorious expectation of receiving a body empowered by Divine Spirit, one which cannot die. We shall also be inspired by the Hope of a glorious future for all mankind.

The first task for the immortals thus created through the resurrection will be to rid the world of the nightmare of nuclear war. It is reported that the world now spends every two weeks on weapons of mass destruction what it spends in a whole year on feeding, housing, clothing and educating the population of the world. Facts like these can only mean that the world has come to the end of its tether. Nothing could be more lunatic than the squandering of such massive resources to threaten the lives of Russian men, women, and children (as well as those unborn), whom we have never met and whom we bear no personal grudge. The crucial question facing the churches is their relationship to the war machine. They will sooner or later have to face the uncomfortable fact that participation in war must involve the destruction not only of their enemies but their fellow-Christians (who may well be non-combatants). In war the church will be (as it often has been) divided against itself, killing its own members. As long as Christians are committed to a policy, inevitable if they bear arms, of destroying their own brethren in enemy lands, they continue to demonstrate their belief in the priority of the national state over the Christian state. The international Christian nation — the Israel of God — is supposed to be the nucleus of the disciples of the Messiah preparing for service in the Coming Divine Rule. The present participation of the church in a war is a denial of her role as a world-community, the microcosm of the Divine Kingdom. The churches should consider very seriously the fact that there is no instance of a Christian bearing arms for the first 170 years of Christian history.

There are two other familiar New Testament phrases which stand in the way of a clear view of the Christian destiny, as the Apostles understood it. The first of these is 'everlasting' or 'eternal life'. That is not exactly what the early Christians had in mind when they described the ultimate purpose of the faith. The phrase 'for ever' in the Hebrew Old Testament was understood to refer to a period of time in the remote future. With that period of time the promises contained in the Divine Message to Abraham and David were associated. When Daniel put on record his vision of the end of the current era of history, he described the resurrection of those who were asleep in the dust of the earth as an awakening to 'everlasting Life'. Once again our translators were thinking as Greeks, not as Hebrews, when they gave us that rendering. A Hebrew would have looked

forward not to 'everlasting life' but to 'the Life of the Coming Age' The whole hope of the prophets was based on what would one day come to be on earth, an age of universal peace under the Messiah. Appropriately, the Old Testament writers had used a particular word to describe that future era; the word was 'Olam' — the remote and hidden future Age. Thus it was customary for Jesus and His contemporaries to contrast the present age (olam) of human government with the future age (olam) of the Messiah and His Kingdom. Thus when Daniel describes the resurrection of the faithful at the end of the current age, he sees the dead receiving 'Life in the Coming Age'; that is what every devout Hebrew desired.

The early Christians were no less eager for the Return of the Messiah to introduce His Universal Kingdom and they speak often of the Age to Come and even more often of the Life of that Coming Age. The translation 'everlasting life' is not entirely inaccurate, for the life conferred in the Coming Age will indeed be life without end. Nevertheless, the Hebrew term is much clearer, since it conveys vital information about when and where that life will be attained. This will be in the Messianic Age to Come.

Our versions render us another disservice when they speak of the 'world to come', instead of the Age to Come. The 'world to come' gives scope for the non-biblical idea that there is a realm to be entered at death, Such an idea is dangerously misleading; it draws a veil over the biblical goal — the Hope of the Divine Message — which is the arrival in history of a glorious Golden Age which will supersede the current age of human misrule. It is to that Age that the Christian aspires. In that Age he will receive the Life of the Coming Age. It will be most revealing for readers of the King James Version to read the Life of the Coming Age or Life in the Coming Age every time they encounter 'eternal' or 'everlasting' life. In this, way the atmosphere of the original faith may be recovered.

By a strange irony the otherwise divided churches are united in their view of the Christian hope as a departure to heaven as a disembodied soul. This basic tenet is in fact shared in some form by all the world faiths. There can be no more salutary shock than to awake to the fact such an idea is utterly inconceivable to the Hebrew writers of the Bible. So say also our best scholars, of whom we quote just two examples: "Paul could not have conceived of any kind of existence without a body"; "The idea of a disembodied person is repugnant to the Hebrew mind." How long shall we continue to comfort ourselves and our children with a hope for the dead so utterly incompatible with the Bible — and all in the name of Christianity? The recognition that a large quantity of Greek philosophy has been imported in to the faith and forced on to the New Testament records will be the first step to the recovery of apostolic Christianity.

Arenas of Conflict

Sooner or later the churches must awake to the fact that a radical paganisation has occurred somewhere in the history of the faith. The denial of the Messianic Kingdom and the substitution of a reward in heaven at death point unmistakably to the influence of Greek philosophy in conflict with the Hebrew doctrine of the future. The situation will remain confused as long as the tensions created by competing thought worlds continue unresolved. At present 'orthodoxy' battles hard to defend its traditional positions. Apparently the prospect of having to renounce some of its cherished dogmas is too unsettling. Yet while this attitude prevails there can be no hope of unity.

The chief area of conflict is naturally enough in eschatology, the doctrine of things to come. A most sensitive battlefield is centred around those few passages of the New Testament which taken alone and without reference to their wider context stand the best chance of being forced into line with the Greek thinking which has buried the Message of the Hebrew prophets. Paul never comforted the bereaved, as we do, with the assurance that the dead were really alive with Christ in heaven. Our description of death as 'passing on' or of the dead as having 'gone home', betray the paganism which has entered the faith. For Paul and the other Apostles, and for Jesus, the dead are simply dead awaiting the resurrection of the last day. The fact of a future resurrection is demanded by God's being the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The patriarchs are now dead. They must therefore rise.

With their predecessors of the Old Testament the early Christians describe the dead as having joined their fathers in the sleep of death, as sleeping in the dust until they rise in the resurrection. The 'mechanics' of death are spelt out with crystal clarity by Jesus when He raised Lazarus from death. After saying that he is asleep in death, he calls him forth from the tomb. He does not call his 'soul' back from heaven! Again, Paul insists that the dead have simply perished unless there is to be a resurrection. This is patently not true if in reality their souls have survived in another world. The whole matter is so very simple once the Greek dualism of body and separable conscious soul is erased from the mind. For while it is true that a man's animating energy — his spirit — is committed to God at death, it is equally clear that the man himself falls into unconsciousness. The notion of a surviving spirit deprived of a body belongs in Scripture to the world of evil spirits, never to man. This would suggest that Christianity has absorbed a doctrine of demons as a central belief.

In two passages only, Paul seems to speak of an immediate presence with Christ at death. On both occasions he contemplates the sleep of death for himself; and anticipating the death experience he naturally envisages being immediately 'at home with the Lord' or 'with Christ'. This is simply because in sleep there is no awareness whatever of the passage of time. *In that sense*, to fall asleep in death is to wake up in the resurrection, even though millennia may elapse before the dead are called forth from their graves. It is not that the dead have passed out of time; they are simply not conscious of it.

Paul himself shrank in horror from disembodiment, as any Hebrew would. Throughout the whole New Testament there is no single reference to Christians surviving as spirits deprived of their bodies, much less of their having passed into the heavens. For that reason the favourite text "absent from the body and present with the Lord" ought no longer to be read through Greek spectacles as if Paul meant 'at home' as a disembodied

spirit. Throughout his writings he knows of only one home-coming. What he longed for was the new body and the life to be gained through resurrection. The plan for resurrection he had already laid out to the Corinthian Church, as an essential part of the Divine Message.

The other notorious battleground is the millennial vision of Revelation 20. So many Bible students prove themselves to be the fiercest opponents of the Old Testament prophets when they deny the reality of the coming Messianic Kingdom, which is the single great theme of the biblical seers. Satan has so successfully put about the falsehood that Jesus came to remove the scene of the prophet's vision to another realm, far from this earth, that many devoted students of Scripture are persuaded that the hope for an earth filled with the knowledge of God and for Messiah enthroned as King cannot be taken, as was intended, as a simple but sublime prediction of the destiny of our world. The Rule of the Messiah and all His Saints is beautifully portrayed in the Revelation in a passage immediately subsequent to the passage describing the arrival of the King. The period of the Divine Reign follows the banishment of Satan "so that he can no longer deceive the nations".

The attempts which are made to avoid the future millennial Reign are amongst the sorriest in the history of exegesis. The confusion of heaven with earth is so deeply engrained that it has become almost impossible for Gentile-orientated churchgoers to read the words of John in sympathy with his thoroughly Messianic perspective. The conflict is best illustrated by citing the words of the compiler of a well known Bible commentary. He rightly charges Augustine and his many followers in the evangelical world with "dishonest trifling, playing with terms" when they suggest that the Reign of Jesus and the Saints, seen by John in vision, has been in progress ever since the resurrection. This would mean that Satan has already been bound "so that he can no longer deceive the nations". That men can be persuaded to believe that points only to the effectiveness of the Satanic deception! John had already assured us that Satan is now "deceiving the whole world" It should be clear that the period of time in which his international deception ceases must lie in the future!

Unfortunately the critics who rightly understand that John had in mind a millennial Messianic Kingdom of the future come no nearer than many evangelicals to believing in the reality of the Coming Reign. Scholarship dismisses the whole millennial vision as a piece of "Jewish speculation foisted upon Christianity" It is common practice for the critics to dismiss as Jewish those parts of the Christian revelation found to be unpalatable to the minds of those unsympathetic to the spirit of Hebrew prophecy.

There are two further areas of misunderstanding in which traditional thinking must yield to the original intentions of the New Testament writers if the biblical teaching about Jesus as the Messiah is to be recaptured. One concerns the notion of judgement, the other the meaning of the term 'Word of God'.

Our creeds mislead us when they teach us to believe that Jesus is coming back to 'judge'. Our Western concept of judgement as being primarily to do with sentence and punishment hides from us the Hebrew mind of Scripture. For the biblical writers judgement implies a much wider activity. It means administration, the exercise of every aspect of government: that is to be the function of the Messiah and His elect. The essence of the Divine Message is that "God has appointed a day in which He will administer the world with justice." This is the heart of Messianism, which is only a synonym for Christianity.

The concern of the early Christians to convey the essential information about man's personal and collective rescue is obscured as long as we continue to read the 'word of God' as simply a synonym for the Bible as a whole. The standard versions use of 'word of God' should always be understood to mean the Message of God, or more fully the Message of the Good News of the Reign of God. It is to that very specific corpus of information that each individual must respond for his personal rescue from death. Yet his private involvement in the Message of the Kingdom is never separate from his Hope for the salvation of humanity at large and the establishment of peace on earth. The Divine Politics implied by the Kingdom of God have everything to do with the future of our world.

The Message Confused

The arrival of Jesus in (Glory to establish the Kingdom will mean the transference of power to God's chosen King. It will also mean the ruin of the one who now holds the entire world under his deceptive sway.

The work of Satan has ever been to hide from the human heart the reality of the Coming of the Messiah to overthrow the Kingdom of darkness. The main thrust of the Satanic argument has been to pretend that the Kingdom of God has no relevance for the future of this planet earth. By an astute piece of verbal juggling he convinced the believers that they possessed innate immortality and could never die. The biblical doctrine of Resurrection was thus seriously undermined. He then struck a death blow at the Hope of all the prophets and the Covenant made with Abraham and David by removing the Kingdom from the earth. Thus while Jesus is rightly said to be now with the Father on His (the Father's) throne, no prospect is seen of Jesus occupying the throne of David—His own throne, the gift of His Father. The churches have thus become committed to a doctrinal system which effectively denies the Christian Hope and the Messiahship of Jesus.

The signs of the Satanic propaganda are found in Paul's accounts of his struggle with the powers which aimed to distort the Divine Message, Above all, the power of darkness worked to obscure the vision of coming glory which gave to the Divine Message its impact upon the hearts of men.

In Paul's teaching, it was the Hope which stimulated faith and love. Indeed a firm grasp of the Hope conveyed by the Message was an essential condition for gaining salvation. Satan knew that he could most effectively veil the Kingdom by advancing the daring theory that the Kingdom was fully present at the (first) Coming of Christ. If the future could be moved into the present, the future would be no more. Thus he worked to destroy hope. Finding the partial truth more effective than the out and out lie, the Devil built his erroneous teaching on scripture, turning the Truth into a lie by telling only part of the story. It is true that the Kingdom of God is present in the Ministry of Christ in Palestine. The King is there exercising the power of the Kingdom in the expulsion of the demons and the healing of disease. And yet in a primary sense the Kingdom of God was never established by the Ministry of Jesus, for the simple reason that Jesus was never made King. He never assumed the throne of David to rule as all the prophets had declared He must. An investigation will show that the New Testament references to the future Kingdom outnumber the references to the Kingdom as present in the Ministry of Jesus by about seven to one. Yet so effective has been the Devil's propaganda that when the average churchgoer thinks of the Kingdom, he thinks of it as "within you". Very seldom does he think of it as countless New Testament passages do, as the Divine Rule to be established when Christ returns; and this despite the constant repetition of the prayer "Thy Kingdom Come!" which is simply repetition for the coming transfer of world power into the hands of the Messiah.

Paul fought hard to resist the inroads of the Satanic propaganda. He had firstly to contend with forged letters, bearing his name, spreading the insidious notion that the promised Day of the Messiah's Reign was *already* present. Such an error would lead to the confusion of the Divine Plan, for it would foster the idea of the Kingdom of God on earth without the actual presence of the King. It was exactly this mistake which later

gained almost universal acceptance and formed the basis of the medieval conception of the church as the Kingdom of God. Of this the expositor C.F. Cranfield rightly says: "The identification of the Kingdom of God with the church made by Augustine, which has become deeply rooted in Christian teaching, is not true to the teaching of Jesus." What is untrue yet deeply rooted in the church ought to be expunged from the church's teaching. That these fundamental errors persist almost unnoticed merely proves how lukewarm we have become.

Paul waged a constant battle against the Devil's efforts to interfere with the central Christian doctrine of resurrection. Greek converts needed firm instruction in the Christian hope of rising from death; there was always the danger that they would revert to their native convictions about the immortality of the soul. Some of the Greeks in the church at Corinth were ready to abandon the hope of resurrection altogether. Paul made it clear that the faith itself was lost if such an idea were embraced. In Thessalonica, there was uncertainty about the future resurrection of those who died before Christ returned. In his exhortation to Timothy Paul mentions by name two trouble makers, Hymenaeus and Philetus, who were causing confusion among the believers, by teaching that the resurrection had *already* taken place. The common factor in all these threats to the faith was the attempt to destroy or confuse the hope of resurrection.

The creeds of contemporary churches pay lip service to the resurrection, though the doctrine of the survival of the soul, a denial that the dead are dead, renders the resurrection superfluous without actually saying so. Only a firm restatement "by all the churches of the central hope of resurrection for the whole man from the sleep of death will unite believers in a common conviction about the future. The nature of the error which has become enshrined in the creeds is a most subtle one. Week after week churchgoers affirm their belief in the 'resurrection of the body, leaving room for the traditional idea that the *soul* is already somewhere else. Such language is strangely unbiblical; for the Scripture knows only of a resurrection of *whole people* to the Life of the Age to Come. Paul's discussion revolves always around the resurrection of the dead, not of dead bodies as opposed to souls. It is then quite proper for him to ask: With what body do they (the dead persons) come?

Satan continues to fight his battle on two major fronts. At all costs he must disturb the doctrine of resurrection and the knowledge of the Coming Kingdom. When in the nineteenth century a powerful revival of interest in the Coming of Jesus brought long forgotten passages of the New Testament into the limelight, new schemes had to be devised.

Our present century has seen the emergence of new, hitherto unheard of "interpretations" designed to confuse and divide. The first of these has gripped the minds of the group known as the Jehovah's Witnesses. Having fallen into the trap of setting a confident date for the Second-Coming, they proved unable to extricate themselves, when Jesus did not return in 1914. They effected an apparently, irreversible separation from their bewildered fellow-Christians by asserting that the Messiah did actually return in 1914! The movement thus joins ranks with Hymenaeus and Philetus by saying that the resurrection has already taken place. Once more the biblical vision becomes blurred.

A more recent attempt to disrupt the simplicity of the biblical Message appeared in the form of a new version of the future resurrection. Arguing from the premise that the church ought not to have to undergo the severe time of trouble due to precede the establishment of the Kingdom, exponents of the new theory proposed that Christ would

return before the time of distress to remove the church to heaven. (The possibility of escape on earth does not seem to have been considered). He would then return again after the time of trouble to inaugurate the Kingdom. The theory having been found acceptable, it was quickly "found" in the New Testament with the help of some exegetical sleight of hand. Along with the new scheme goes a whole 'dispensational theory' which may be embraced in a number of forms. Much is made of the King James Version's exhortation to 'rightly divide' the Word. This is taken as a carte blanche

Has Anybody Heard of Jesus?'

Any plan for the uniting of the churches misses the point unless it concerns itself first with the recovery of the Divine Message in its Apostolic form. A Catholic writer senses the weakness of schemes aimed at revitalising the churches, apart from a clarification of the Good News: "The main thrust of renewal in the church has proceeded on the basis of presupposing that the basic Christian Message has been effectively appropriated by the Christian people." It has been too hastily assumed that the Gospel has been understood; the possibility of "another Gospel, another Jesus, and another spirit" being presented as Christianity has not been taken seriously. As long as the subject-matter of the New Testament Good News is in question, all other considerations are peripheral. An equally fundamental question is whether the Jesus of the contemporary churches bears much resemblance to the Jesus described by the Christian documents. Another Catholic writer goes to the heart of the problem when he states: "Christians have largely lost the sense of Jesus' Messiahship. And they have largely lost the Messianic vision. The Greek name 'Christos' means 'the anointed one' and is the literal translation of the Hebrew 'Mashiach' — Messiah... Christians who think or speak of Christ almost forget the Semitic word and the ideas which this name translates; in fact they forget that Jesus is primarily the Messiah. The very idea of Jesus' Messiahship has passed from their minds. Having lost the original sense of the word 'Christ', Christians (or to be exact most of them) have also lost the Messianic vision, i.e. the expectation of the divine future, the orientation towards what is coming."

An analysis of this kind has close links with the warnings of the New Testament. Of all Satan's attempts to corrupt the Christian faith, none could be as insidious as the plan to replace the Jesus of the Good News with another Jesus. History records that this very method was tried on the church at Corinth. It was effectively thwarted when Paul unmasked its exponents as ministers of Satan masquerading as ministers of Christian Truth. Serious thought ought to be given to the possibility that popular preaching may have succumbed to Satan's devices.

If we ask a man to believe in John Baker, we give very little idea of what that belief entails. If, however, we urge faith in John, the Baker, we have given a much clearer definition of the object of belief. Similarly, it will be quite ineffective to invite belief in Jesus Christ unless a full account is given of the term 'Christ'. Otherwise we shall not know whom we are being asked to believe in!

The confirmation of Peter's discipleship depended on this very point. The test question was: "Whom do you say that I am?" And the answer which proved the soundness of his faith: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." In Peter's mind the name Messiah was invested with a rich complex of associated ideas drawn from the Hebrew Scriptures. The Messiah was to be the last in a long line of divinely anointed priests, prophets and kings. In him alone the ideal of Kingship would be fully realised. The claim of Jesus to be the Messiah was based on His identity with the promised Messiah. This is shown repeatedly in the New Testament by Jesus' constant reference to the fulfilment of the sacred writings in Himself. It is therefore utterly impossible that He could have made a valid claim to Messiahship on any other basis than the one outlined by the Hebrew

Bible. A claim to be a Messiah different from the one upon whom the whole Divine Plan was built would have been patently false.

If as our quotation suggests "Christians have forgotten that Jesus is primarily Messiah, the very idea of Messiahship has passed from their minds", we must ask whether they can truly be called Messianists, and since Messianists is only a synonym for Christians, whether indeed they are Christians in the New Testament sense. The question is of first importance, since all are agreed that salvation is possible only by belief in the Jesus, the Messiah. If Jesus has been replaced by another Jesus, the real Saviour will not be preached and the whole process of salvation will have been rendered ineffective.

In the minds of many in our time the prospect of the Return of Jesus in glory sounds like a piece of science fiction; and this we rate with popular light entertainment, having little to do with the real world. Much of contemporary theology, seeing the difficulty, proposes that whatever does not make sense to modern man can be dropped from the Christian records, or at least be disregarded as belonging to the superstitions of a former age. So, it is believed, Jesus personal battle against the unseen but for Him very real forces of Satan and his demons must not detract from our acceptance of His central Message. As for His promise to return as King and Judge, that can be satisfactorily explained away as the invention of His over excited followers. The idea cannot have originated with Him. All we need to do is to reinterpret what we call the primitive beliefs of the first century disciples in the light of our vastly superior understanding of the twentieth century.

The notion that we are reinterpreting the New Testament when we discard the teaching about the Second Coming disguises the real fact that we are abandoning faith, in Jesus Christ altogether. We are losing sight of the central proclamation of the New Testament that Jesus is the Messiah, the promised King, in whom alone the chaos of the present world system can find its solution. The preaching of Jesus as Saviour, without reference to His appointment to reign over a renewed earth, is simply the preaching of another Jesus. If the churches are to unite it can only be on the basis of a recovery of the Messianic Vision, the expectation of the divine future. The Church has been placed in the world to offer to struggling humanity the prospect of better things to come, the guaranteed triumph of good over evil. But a solution to be realised in some far off realm is no solution at all. Apart from the Messianic Kingdom, the Kingdom on earth of God on earth, there is no hope.

The well known translator of the New Testament, J.B. Phillips, says that he has been shocked by the hundreds of conversations he has had with men of the highest intellectual calibre "who quite obviously had no idea of what Christianity was about. I was in no way trying to catch them out; I was simply and gently trying to find out what they knew about the New Testament. My conclusion was that they knew virtually nothing. This I find pathetic and somewhat horrifying. It means that the most; important Event in history is politely and quietly by-passed. For it is not as though the evidence has been examined and found unconvincing; it has simply never been examined."

From a study of the New Testament documents, it will not be difficult for anyone to ascertain that:

Jesus is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. He is the expression of the eternal Divine Plan for the creation of a New Race of Immortals, and a harmonious universe. Coming as the servant of mankind, having been uniquely born under the influence of Divine Spirit He gathered around Him a group of followers, believers in His Messiahship. In His Message of the Kingdom of God the promises and Covenants of the

Old Testament were confirmed and the Divine Future was declared. He suffered the death penalty at the hands of his unbelieving compatriots whose traditional religious systems had blinded them to the Truth of His teaching. The Roman authorities were also glad to be rid of one claiming to be King. The Resurrection was proof of His appointment as God's Messiah, and creation now awaits His manifestation in power to assume the Royal Office for which He has been destined. Associated with Him in His royal administration will be those who have believed in His Messiahship and followed Him at all costs. Those who survive until the moment of His Coming will be immortalised without dying. Those who have died will awake from the sleep of death and share Immortality with the whole company of believers. The challenge to every man is to believe that in Jesus the One God of Israel has spoken; to believe in the Divine Plan for rescue, and in Jesus as Messiah; to repent and be baptised, trusting in the sacrificial death of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins; and, within the power of Divine Spirit, to live worthily of the high calling to the Kingdom of God.

If such were taken to be the faith of the early church and the faith of all ages, disputes over premillennialism versus amillennialism would not need to continue. The prospect of the Reign of Jesus and all the Saints, described in Revelation 20 must lie in the future (as the entire early church believed) for the simple reason that the Saints who have died cannot possibly now "be active in the Messianic Reign. They must therefore come to life in the Resurrection to take their place with all the Saints in the Divine Kingdom of the Coming Age. This is exactly what Revelation 20 describes, and it is one of the astonishing phenomena of contemporary evangelical theology that there could be any doubt on the question. Theories about the validity of prayer to the saints or to Mary would be seen as empty fictions, once it is grasped that no New Testament Christian held that the dead were really alive. The gullible would also be protected from the cults of spiritism, which early Christians would have viewed simply as demonism. All such errors connected with the 'departed soul' would have been avoided as long as the biblical Hebrew view of the nature of man was maintained. The introduction of the notion of the separable conscious soul, unable to die, must be seen for what it is: The disaster from which the churches have yet to recover, and a fatal distortion of her Prophetic Message. The banishment of Greek philosophical speculation from the creeds will quickly put the resurrection and the Second Coming back into the central position they enjoy in the New Testament writings. Along these Lines the way back to the Divine Message will be found and the way forward for the united Church be made plain. In this way, also the Jews who do not believe in Jesus may be persuaded to accept their Messiah and the Christ-who do not believe in the Messiah may be united with them.