

REVIEW.

"THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHRIST TO HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS"

We have been forwarded a copy of this booklet which is presently being distributed in Australia. It has been written against the background of the doctrinal differences between the Amended (Central) and the Unamended (Advocate) fellowships in North America. Its subject matter concerns the nature of flesh and the redemptive work of Christ. The booklet deals with matters which have not affected Central ecclesias in Australia, and its distribution may well give rise to further unnecessary controversy and misunderstanding among brethren in this country. Whilst we endorse and support attempts to show that the Unamended position in North America is unacceptable to the Central Fellowship, numerous conclusions presented in the booklet remain unsubstantiated or ambiguous, whilst others are certainly questionable. We therefore believe it important to make the following observations.

THE Preface, written by Bro. R. Stone, states that the author of the booklet, Bro. J. Hensley, had a "reluctance to publish anything which would hamper the reunion effort, which has been in progress for many years." For this reason, it is stated, "the compilation of the material in this pamphlet has been held in abeyance."

Surely one of the most effective means of assisting efforts towards reunion would be helped by a wide publication of *the Truth*, particularly in regard to a subject which is intimately related to the doctrinal differences between the two fellowships in North America.

There are, however, a number of concerns arising from the way in which this booklet approaches the matter of the sacrifice of Christ.

Punishment for Nature

For example, on page 3, the author states the belief of J J Andrew that "Christ had a violent death (such as crucifixion) legally coming to him because the sin of Adam was transmitted to Him" and that we are therefore subject to "punishment" because of our nature. We do not know of brethren in the Central Fellowship in Australia who teach any such thing. Why, then, is this controversial issue being introduced into Australian ecclesias through the circulation of this booklet?

It is stated (page 4) that Thomas Williams (Unamended) taught that "Christ inherited from Adam the legal condemnation incurred by him." The idea of "inherited legal condemnation" is as abhorrent to this reviewer as it is to all others who possess a sound knowledge of the Truth. Such doctrinal errors have never been a problem, so far as we are aware, within the Central fellowship in Australia. Why, is the controversy introduced now? Moreover, the division which caused the separation of the Advocate or Unamended fellowship resulted because brethren contended against the beliefs of J J Andrew and Thomas Williams in defence of the scripturally-based beliefs of brethren John Thomas and Robert Roberts. Examination of

this booklet reveals that it does not uphold the beliefs of the pioneers, as we shall show.

Can Animal Sacrifices Provide Forgiveness?

In the last four lines on page 6 (also p. 7) the author clearly implies that the "sin" of "Adam and Eve" was "covered" and "forgiven" through the wearing of the "coats of skins" from the animal which was slain in the Garden of Eden. This belief is more evidently stated on pp. 13, 14-15, 25 and 28. This is an intolerable doctrine. The scriptures teach that "it is *not possible* that the blood of bulls and goats [or any other animals] should take away sins" (Heb. 10:4; cp. v. 11). The full import of this erroneous belief will be further considered. In endeavouring to argue that Adam and Eve received only "moral" condemnation for their sin—something which could not be passed on by inheritance to their progeny—the writer of this booklet endeavours to show that *no condemnation* could be passed on, or "transmitted" to Adam's "descendants." Thus he makes no mention of *physical* condemnation, a "sentence which defiled and became a physical law of his being, and was transmitted to all his posterity" (BASF, clause 5). The truth is that Jesus Christ "was to be raised up in the condemned line of Abraham and David, and who, though wearing their condemned nature, was to obtain a title to resurrection by perfect obedience, and, by dying, abrogate the law of condemnation for himself and all who should obey him" (BASF, clause 8).

This fundamental teaching in scripture, and endorsed in the BASF, finds *no place in this booklet.*

Not Matters of Contention

On page 7 the author states that "Both J J Andrew and Thomas Williams believed that Christ was liable (or legally subject) to a violent death because of the hereditary sin of Adam. Robert Roberts did not." Who, within the Central Fellowship, would wish to argue with this obvious deduction by Bro. Roberts? Surely, no one. Similarly, at the foot of this page Bro. Roberts is again quoted: "The idea of imputing the sin of Adam to helpless babes is one of the oldest monstrosities of papalized theology..." Quite so. And again we ask the question: In view of the fact that these questions are *not* matters of debate or disagreement within the Central Fellowship in Australia, why are they now introduced, as though to imply that these are doctrinal problems in this country?

What is "A Natural Death"?

A further point raised in page 7 should be questioned. The author states: "the death that passed upon all men was a 'dying thou shalt die,' or a natural death. It follows therefore, that Christ inherited a natural death..." What does this mean? Is the writer implying that man was *created* mortal? He by no means makes himself clear on this point. The truth is that man was *sentenced to mortality because of sin* (Rom. 5:12). To state that "Christ inherited a natural death" is not language that is in harmony with our *Statement of Faith*, which states that man became subject to a "sentence which defiled" and that Christ bore this same "condemned nature" (clauses 5, 8).

We are Not Guilty for Adam's Sin

Bro. Roberts is quoted on page 8: "God will keep no man in the grave because of Adam's sin..." Bro. Roberts simply means that God does not hold us accountable for what Adam did. Again, we are presented with a basic truth which is not disputed in this country; and yet repeatedly in this booklet the Roman Catholic doctrine of Original Sin is raised, as though it represents some sort of threat to the survival of the Truth. We are entitled to ask: What is the reason for this emphasis,

which apparently justifies distribution of this booklet throughout Australia?

Nature and Alienation

The writer speaks of us as inheriting "only the physical consequences of Adam's transgression..." (p. 9), but fails to describe these consequences in terms that are in harmony with the *BASF*.

Brethren of the Central Fellowship in this country are well aware that we are not "alienated" or "estranged" from God because of the nature we bear. Again we ask: Why is this controversy now introduced into this country? Is there some veiled implication that there are those in the Central Fellowship who support this doctrine, or support the position of the Unamended Fellowship of North America?

Why no Mention of the "Sentence"?

On page 13 the author again shows that he believes that "the coats of skins" provided for Adam and Eve were the actual means whereby their sins were covered. On this page he also states that Adam and Eve "came under the legal status of moral condemnation." No mention whatever is made of "a sentence which defiled and became a physical law of his [Adam's] being, and was transmitted to all his progeny" (*BASF*, clause 5). We do not find a single statement in this book in support of these vital clauses in the *Statement of Faith* which are intrinsically related to Christ's sacrificial death.

If Adam and Eve came only under "moral condemnation"—which cannot be passed on to others, or inherited—upon what grounds do newborn babes die, if they are not the inheritors of physical condemnation? As Bro. Thomas stated, our nature "is a misfortune, not a crime" (*Elpis Israel*, p. 129).

The author states: "Since he [Christ] did redeem himself from death, it would mean that he did not by birth inherit the position of Adam and Eve, nor does anyone else." What does the writer mean when he speaks of "the position" of Adam and Eve? If he means that neither Christ nor anyone else has inherited the "sentence" which "defiled" and became a "physical law" of Adam's "being" and "was transmitted to ALL his posterity," and described as "a condemned nature," his beliefs are in conflict with the *BASF* and the scriptural references appended thereto. In this regard we also endorse the scriptural teaching of Bro. Thomas in *Elpis Israel* (pp. 126-131), under the heading "*The Constitution of Sin*."

Throughout this booklet, devoted to the writer's understanding of the sacrifice of Christ, there is no mention of physical condemnation.

Reconciled Through Animals?

The author claims (p. 14): "But while still in the garden, coats of skins were provided for them to put on. After putting them on, they entered the third legal status, that of reconciliation." The author affirms that it is possible to become "reconciled" to God through the shed blood of animals! Thus, according to this belief, whilst they were in a state of "reconciliation" God "drove" the man and the woman out of the garden! (Gen. 3:23-24).

If we are able to become reconciled to God through the shed blood of animals, why was it necessary for God to provide His own Son, as a perfect sacrifice? If the blood of animals can provide "forgiveness," "covering," and "reconciliation," the entire Christadelphian conception of the atonement is false.

Additionally, where in scripture is there a reference to be found wherein Adam is said to have stood in a first "legal" status, a second "legal" status, and a third "legal" status? Such language is without scriptural precedent; it is both perplexing and confusing.

Bro. Roberts is again quoted on this page, in relation to Christ: "Possessing sinful flesh WAS NO SIN TO HIM..." Bro. Roberts simply means that being born of sin's flesh did not make Christ a sinner or a transgressor of God's law. Bro. Roberts was well aware of such scriptures as 2Cor. 5:21, etc. We know of none in the Central Fellowship in this country who speak of "the penalty for sin nature" as though Christ was "punished" for inheriting human nature. Why, then, are we, by distribution of this booklet, being warned against the teaching of such absurd notions? *If these are matters that relate to the North American situation, why have they been brought into Australia, adding confusion to the Australian scene in regard to the atonement?*

On page 17 the author claims: "Since Christ never sinned, he could not be represented as an antitypical leper or the antitype of a cured leper." This is a standard position taken by proponents of the "clean flesh" doctrine, who repudiate clauses 5, 8, 9, and 12, in the *BASF*. No spiritually enlightened person would refer to Christ as though he had been leprosy; yet the types in scripture cannot be denied. That "leprosy" is used in scripture to represent corruptible, death-stricken human nature is undeniable. It is equally irrefutable that the same word used consistently in the Old Testament to represent leprosy—occurring no less than 46 times in Lev. 13—is also used of the Lord Jesus Christ. It occurs in the following passages: 2Sam. 7:14, where it is rendered "stripes"; Isa. 53:8, rendered "stricken"; Psa. 38:11, rendered "sore." Hence, Bro. Thomas shows in *Elpis Israel* that "the word *sin* is used in two principal acceptations in the scripture. It signifies in the first place, 'the transgression of the law;' and in the next, it represents that physical principle of the animal nature, which is the cause of all its diseases, death, and resolution into dust" (p. 126).

Again we emphasise that no person of sound knowledge would ever allege that Christ suffered actual leprosy. Yet it is equally evident from the scriptures quoted above, that, under the law, "leprosy" is revealed as a type, not only for sin (as the transgression of God's law) but also for the nature which produces it. In Christ's case, whilst he could never be accused of being a sinner, he most certainly bore the fallen human nature which is the sole source of sin (Heb. 2:14-17, etc.). It is therefore sadly evident that the author of this booklet denies the scriptures in regard to this matter, thereby giving his readers the distinct impression that he does not believe that, since the Fall, the flesh suffers inherent defilement, quite apart from actual transgression of God's commandments. False belief in regard to this question leads, in turn, to a denial of the *BASF*, in particular clauses 5, 8, 9 and 12.

Why a Sacrificial Death?

On page 17, under the above heading, the author states: "We now approach the center of the controversy. We will note carefully the questions that J J Andrew put to Robert Roberts." The word "carefully" hardly applies, as the author is most selective in his choice of questions; he should more correctly state: "We will note some of the questions..." We suggest that our readers "carefully" consider all questions 695 to 724 in the *Debate* (see *The Atonement*—Logos Publications). The answers Bro. Roberts gives to these questions show beyond doubt that he believed that Christ died for himself as well as for us (715); that by his own blood he obtained eternal life himself, that he might be able to save others (712). *These beliefs espoused by Bro. Roberts are quite contrary to the beliefs expressed by the author of this booklet.*

On page 18 the author quotes from Bro. Roberts in *The Law of Moses* (p. 181) concerning the Mosaic patterns (i.e., the things associated with the tabernacle): "All were both atoning and atoned for (Lev. 16:33)." Endeavouring to explain these

words, the author states: "But what Bro. Roberts meant was that Christ needed a physical purification from his physical nature..." We must ask: *Why?* From what was he to be "purified"? What was *wrong* with his nature, since this booklet claims that "condemnation" came upon man only in a "moral" sense? We look in vain for the answer to this question in this booklet. However, had the author quoted the next paragraph from *The Law of Moses* he would have provided the answer from the pen of Bro. Roberts: "There is no counterpart to this *if Christ is kept out of his own sacrifice*, as some thoughts would do. He cannot so be kept out if place is given to all the testimony—an express part of which is that, as the sum total of the things signified by these patterns, he was 'purified with' a better sacrifice than bulls and goats—viz., his own sacrifice (Heb. 9:23, 12). If he was 'purified,' *there was a something to be purified from*. What was it? Look at his *hereditary death taint*, as the son of Adam, through whom death entered the world by sin, and there is no difficulty" (our emphasis).

Christ Cannot be Separated from his Work

It is clear from the words of Bro. Roberts, quoted under the heading "WAS CHRIST REQUIRED TO DIE FOR HIMSELF?" (pp. 18-19), that he would not accept that Christ's sacrificial death could be comprehended if the Lord was separated from the work he was to accomplish. We endorse Bro. Roberts entirely in this regard.

However, the author states that "Christ 'came into the world to save sinners' (1Tim. 1:15). To save sinners he had to submit to a sacrificial death on their behalf. God gave His Son in this respect into the hands of sinners or transgressors, to die the kind of death meted out to transgressors." Such terminology savours strongly of the doctrine of substitution. In any event, this language, indeed, separates Christ from his work, and indicates that the author is at odds with Bro. Roberts in his answers to questions 715 and 712, referred to above.

In returning to questions and answers (p. 22, from the Andrew/Roberts debate, the author omits 715, and then leaps from 716 direct to 723. To demonstrate the significance of these notable omissions, we reproduce hereunder the following questions and answers:

715. **JJA:** How could Jesus have been made free from that sin which God laid upon him in his own nature—"made in the likeness of sinful flesh"—if he had not died for himself as well as for us? **RR:** HE COULD NOT.

716. **JJA:** Then he offered for himself as well as for us? **RR:** CERTAINLY.

717. **JJA:** Is it not clear then from this that the death of Christ was necessary to purify his own nature from the sin power? **RR:** CERTAINLY.

718. **JJA:** That was hereditary in him in the days of his flesh? **RR:** NO DOUBT OF IT.

We urge our readers to "carefully" read and meditate upon *all the questions and answers upon this issue, particularly, as stated above, from 695 to 724.*

Was the Crucifixion Essential for Christ's Own Redemption?

The author states on p. 23: "It is never affirmed that Christ had to be crucified because of what he personally inherited." This statement is a fundamental belief of proponents of the "clean flesh" doctrine (see Rom. 8:3; Heb. 2:14; 5:1-3; 7:27; 9:26, etc.). It is true that Christ "was brought into existence to die a sacrificial death for us," but to be satisfied *merely* with this definition is to accept the standard teaching of apostate christendom, who believe and teach precisely this. Christ can not be separated from his work—which the above statement from the author certainly does. Christ's purpose was to declare the righteousness of God (Rom. 3:25), and

only upon this basis was he able to be "set forth a mercy seat" where God could meet with man, to bring eternal redemption to the human race, *of which our Lord was a member* (Heb. 2:17; 9:12). Hence, Bro. Roberts wrote: "He was made sin for us who knew no sin; and does not sin require an offering?" (*The Christadelphian*, 1875, p. 139). Bro. Carter also wrote: "That there was a sense in which he must offer for himself would appear from the fact that Aaron had so to do before he offered for the people... All the sacrifices of the law meet in him, including that which Aaron offered for himself as well as that which he offered for the people" (*The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 81).

The author of the booklet continues: "The atonement effected by Christ benefits sinners, both morally and physically... Christ needed his mortal sin-nature replaced with an immortal nature controlled by righteousness. And the **only way** he could obtain this was by offering himself as a sin offering on behalf of others." These additional comments are certainly in harmony with those quoted above ("It is never affirmed that Christ had to be crucified because of what he personally inherited").

Statements We Do Not Believe

Page 24 lists a number of nonsensical phrases, which the author describes as "absurd." Some of them are: "Christ had crucifixion coming to him legally..." "He had to pay for being born mortal..." "He inherited crucifixion..." "Christ deserved to be crucified for something he could not help..." "Would He [God] then penalize Christ for being as He made him..." None of these erroneous statements are taught within the Central Fellowship in this country, so far as we are aware. Why, then, are such grotesque—and to some, bewildering—ideas set before brethren and sisters in this country? What of the possible influence of these expressions upon "*young people*," to whom, in the accompanying *Foreword*, this booklet is especially recommended?

On page 25, under the heading "UNCLEAN SIN NATURE," the author records statements which show that he rejects clauses 5, 8, 10, and 12, of the *BASF*. All these clauses deal with the nature and sacrifice of Christ, and are commonly repudiated by those who endorse the doctrine of "clean flesh." For example, speaking of his heading (Unclean Sin Nature), the author states: "This is one of those manufactured expressions designed to show that sin-nature is unclean, and that which is unclean must be cleansed, or atoned for." Whilst he states that the Lord Jesus, before his birth, was described by the angel as "that holy thing," he ignores the fact that Christ bore the same nature as all Adam's progeny, and that his nature was therefore "sin's flesh" (Rom. 8:3), and that God "*made*" him to be "sin for us, who knew no sin"—that is, he was, by nature, "*made*" "like unto his brethren" (2Cor. 5:21; Heb. 2:17).

Under the heading "A SACRIFICE FOR SIN" the writer refers to "one under the law of Moses procuring an animal as an offering for sin..."—which is the same line of error as stated on pp. 6, 13, 14-15. The blood of animals *cannot take away sin* (Heb. 10:4, 11). It requires the element of faith in the divine provision to make such offerings efficacious.

On page 27 it is stated: "He [Christ] had to die as a sin-bearer for others in order to obtain his own release from the grave." We trust that the author does not mean what he says in this place, for the wording conforms to the apostate teaching of christendom, in proclaiming the doctrine of *substitution*. Christ did not die as a substitute for us. The *BASF* states (supported by more than twenty scriptural references) that Christ "though wearing their [Abraham and David's] *condemned nature*, was to obtain a title to resurrection by perfect obedience, and, *by dying*, abrogate *the law*

of condemnation for himself and all who should believe and obey him.”

The writer states on page 28 (alleging that these words represent the beliefs of Bro. Roberts): “Offspring of Adam born while Adam wearing skins of reconciliation. A covered or forgiven sin cannot be transmitted...” Bro. Roberts did not believe that men could become “reconciled” to God through the blood of slain animals—nor did he believe that which is implied in the latter part of this statement: the insinuation that when Cain and Abel were born they did not inherit a “condemned nature” (clause 8, *BASF*), and must therefore have stood before God in a “very good state” until they committed their first transgression. If they did not inherit a “defiled” nature (clause 5) from their parents, is it being inferred here that their nature was, in some sense, “clean” or in a “very good” state, at the time of their birth? (See Job 14:4; Psa. 51:5; John 3:6, etc.). To imply that Bro. Roberts believed as this author suggests, is a grievous misrepresentation.

Conclusion

Under the heading “SUMMATION” (p. 31), the author states: “**Not being a sinner** or transgressor, himself, it would do Christ an injustice to say that he **inherited** this **kind** of a death legally coming to him, simply because he was born mortal. Man would hardly treat a dog or wild animal the way Christ was treated. Can it be thought that God considered Christ as **deserving** of such treatment? Was the beloved Son of God, in whom He was well pleased, **worthy** of an ignominious death with all its indignities such as he suffered?” Such language is difficult to understand in the Australian context of the Truth. We know of no one in the Central Fellowship in this country who would speak of Christ in such terms; i.e., that “he inherited this kind of death legally coming to him...” However, we are left with the question: Is the writer trying to tell us that it was *not necessary* for Christ to die *in the manner in which he did* because of the nature he bore and the necessary demands of his mission? If so, let the reader consider Psalms 22; 38; 69; John 10:17-18; 3:14; cp. Num. 21:5-9; Acts 2:23; 1Cor. 1:23; Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20; 5:24, etc.

Much more could be written concerning the faulty and erroneous reasoning presented in this booklet. Some sections are somewhat nebulous, but sufficient of the clarity of the argument has been reviewed here that readers will be left in no doubt as to the fundamental views set forth therein. Apart from the question of doctrinal unsoundness, it is most unfortunate that some have seen fit to spread abroad throughout Australia a publication related to controversial issues in North America which can do nothing other than add confusion to the present situation within the Central Fellowship in Australia.

That some in this country have seen fit to describe the booklet as “a gem in our literature” compiled “with the skill of a sagacious lawyer” (as described in the foreword), is quite beyond our comprehension. — *John Ullman.*

A CONTINUING CONCERN.

“No doubt you are acquainted with the progress of the ‘Clean Flesh’ theory in Australia—the followers of it maintain that Christ had no reason to die for himself, only for the sins of others, and that the condemnation of sin in the flesh was his obedient life only. It is surprising the amount of error that is going about concerning the sacrifice of Christ.” — *from a letter to Bro. Jannaway in 1933.*