

## THE DANGER OF INTERFAITH

**CHRISTIANITY is so fundamentally based and entrenched on established principles and doctrines that it cannot be blended or mixed with other beliefs without falling into the danger of corruption. This is what many people do not know.**

Interfaith is a mixture of beliefs – that is, people of different faiths coming together in a sort of union to worship.

### Ecumenism

Today the wind of ecumenism is blowing all over Christendom. There is a strong desire by many church denominations to unite with others notwithstanding their differences in doctrines and forms of worship. For this reason certain churches have relaxed their rules which hitherto strictly forbade their adherents from having any form of communion with others.

In pursuance of this same objective for church unity, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Geoffrey Fisher, and his successor, Archbishop Michael Ramsey, had paid visits to both the late Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI, respectively, at the Vatican City. As a result of the meeting between Pope Paul and Archbishop Ramsey, 10 Roman Catholic and 11 Anglican theologians met together at Gazzada in Northern Italy, in January, 1967. They made recommendations for joint action on practical ways of removing tension between members of the two churches. A communiqué was issued after the talks which were described as the "first formal steps towards unity between the two churches in more than 400 years". And the hopes of many people were raised!

But three days after the talks, Pope Paul stated that Christian unity "still presents grave difficulties, for concept of real unity is not clear to all people." He was speaking at his weekly blessing of pilgrims in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican City. He said, "Some people consider that charity-which is certainly necessary -is enough for this unity without adhering to the unique truth of the faith." *Daily Times*, Jan. 17, 1967)

### Catholic Idea

Obviously, the Roman Catholic idea of church unity is quite different from what others are thinking. While some are reckoning it on terms of equal partners, the other is hoping that it is the coming back of the "separated brethren" to the one fold of the "Mother Church".

A Roman Catholic newspaper, the *INDEPENDENT*, issue of June 25-29, 1968, published at Ibadan, Western State of Nigeria, presented the Roman Catholic view on ecumenism as. Follows: "*The word ECUMENISM is, it must be admitted, a rather difficult term for the ordinary Catholic to fully grasp or understand But we must be clear, first of all, as to what Ecumenism does not mean. It does not mean Eucharistic unity (i.e. we cannot regard the Holy Mass and a non-Catholic Communion Service as equal and interchangeable)...It does not mean a whittling down of Catholic doctrines to achieve a common faith with non-Catholics, for that would mean unfaithfulness to the Catholic Church as the 'pillar and ground of Truth',*" (Italics ours).

In answer to a question, the *INDEPENDENT* (June 20-27, 1964, page 5) stated: "Catholics ought not to attend non-Catholic religious functions. If they are present at public functions when non-Catholic prayers are said they ought not to answer 'Amen'."

There is every reason to regard all the noise about the unification of all the churches as a show of spiritual ignorance on the part of some and sheer hypocrisy on the side of others. We do not see how a genuine unity can evolve from the attempts being made when nothing is being done to remove the root of bitterness and the cause of the division among them.

In Amos 3: 3, it is written: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?", Certainly, they cannot. It is a known fact that great differences in doctrines, church organisation and worship, exist among the churches. These have always been the main cause of controversy. Any union formed by the churches, therefore, with eyes closed upon these facts, is a union of contraries-and it is unchristian.

### **Anglican Reply**

The Anglican Communion knows that the Roman Catholic Church does not regard it as an institution founded by God. The proof of this is evident from an Anglican reply to Roman Catholic arguments published in a booklet, the *INFALLIBLE FALLACIES*. The Anglican priests stated that some people of their parishes were being disturbed by the fact that the Roman Catholics regard them as non-Christians yet to be proselytised or converted and also by the repetition of untruths about their church. They added: "These untruths are part of the Roman Catholic campaign of trying to gain Anglicans for their own Church. Some of the most frequent of them are that 'Henry VIII founded the Church of England'; that 'Anglican bishops and priests are not real bishop!; and priests' and that therefore 'the sacraments administered in Anglican Churches are invalid!... We do not unchurch them, but they unchurch us. We regard the Pope as the lawful Bishop of Rome and their bishops and priests as properly consecrated and ordained, and their sacraments as valid. But they regard our bishops and priests as either deluded or deliberate impostors, and our sacraments as but imitations or mockeries of the divinely appointed channels of grace.'" (Page 4, emphasis ours).

No serious effort is known to have been made by the Anglican Communion to resolve or clear these GRAVE SPIRITUAL ISSUES before the efforts they are making WITHOUT REGARD FOR THE BIBLE -THE LAW AND GUIDE BOOK OF GOD-to get united with the Roman Catholic Church!

Importance of Doctrines Another evidence of how strongly some people feel about the importance of doctrines in the worship of God was manifested when the Bishop of Rome declared the "bodily assumption of Mary" as an article of faith in 1950. It was reported that "nine British protestants wrote to Pope Pius XII offering to become Roman Catholics if he could produce a scriptural proof of the bodily assumption of the Virgin Mary." (*West African Pilot*, Oct. 30, 1950).

So too, when the Swedish Church proposed to ordain women priests, the Church of England protested because it was considered to be scripturally wrong to do so. The then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Fisher, sent a "personal and confidential" letter to the Archbishop of Sweden

warning that "if Sweden ordains women priests, relations between the two churches will be broken off". (*Daily Sketch*, Jan. 15, 1959, published in England.)

Yes, Dr. Fisher was right, for God has never ordained women to be priests. Even in the church women are commanded not to speak, or teach but "to be under obedience".-1 Cor. 14: 34, 35; 1 Tim. 2: 11-14.

The point is that all these go to emphasise the awareness of some of the churches about the importance of the doctrines on which the Christian Faith is based. And that was why an Anglican Chaplain, Rev. R. Earnshaw-Smith said that "unification of Protestant Church with the Roman Catholic Church 'is impossible', because there existed a number of fundamental doctrinal differences between the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church' . He added, "There are such things as truth and error." (Nigerian *Daily Express*, May 16, 1962.)

Only of recent Pope Paul re-affirmed in his "Credo" the belief of the Roman Catholic Church in certain doctrines which have always been the bone of contention between them and others. The Pope stated: "We believe in the infallibility enjoyed by the successor of Peter... We believe that Mary is the mother, who remained ever a virgin,...preserved from all the stain of original sin and filled with gift of grace more than all other creatures. We believe that the mysterious presence of the Lord (in the Eucharist) is a true, real and substantial presence...the bread and wine has ceased to exist after the consecration so that it is the adorable body and blood of the Lord Jesus." (*INDEPENDENT*, July 21-27, 1968).

Now there are several church groups that do not believe in the bodily assumption of Mary, her being a virgin forever or the "Mother of God"; they do not believe in purgatory, the celibacy of priests, man-made saints, baptism of infants, the bodily presence of Christ in the bread and wine, or hell being a place of literal fire, and so on. But the Roman Catholic Church believes in all these and some others also believe in some of them.

The obvious fact is that all cannot be right while they are opposed to one another. So if the claims of the Roman Catholics are true in the sense that they are founded on the authority of the Holy Bible, which all accept as the Guide Book, then others who disagree with them are false, and *vice versa*. And if some are true and others false, then there is no basis whatsoever for real unity.

**Baptists' Stand** The stand of the Baptists is already known. Dr. William R. Tolbert, Jr., President of the Baptist World Alliance and Vice- President of the Republic of Liberia, stated: "Baptists are opposed to any church unity movement which would destroy their basic beliefs." He added that Baptists "would not associate with any movement to set up a hierarchy to control and influence individual churches." (*African Challenge*, No. 196, page 5).

Here in Nigeria, efforts are also being made towards a "United Church of Nigeria". The GKS is not a party to it PURELY on doctrinal and other scriptural grounds. And some church leaders of the orthodox groups have asked that their churches should be counted out too. It could be observed that all the obstacles undermining these efforts very well spring from the same variances in doctrines and methods of worship.

In the October issue of the *Spear* magazine in 1965. The views of some of the religious leaders were published. Arch-bishop John Aggey of the Roman Catholic Church in Lagos said: "There will be more confusion if the Roman Catholic Church joins the union now because we have certain beliefs different from those of other sects."

In the same issue of the *Spear*, Colonel John, the head of the Salvation Army in Nigeria, was quoted as saying, "We wish those who are planning to form the Union success. *H* they think that is the best thing for their churches, God bless them. The Salvation Army is not thinking about joining the Union at this stage because our constitution is different from those of other churches. For example, we have women as Ministers in our church while others don't..."

Now the Roman Catholic Church is not prepared to whittle down its doctrines and the Protestant groups also cannot buldge in their beliefs. So any union of all these in the face of the vast differences is but a marriage of convenience to please the world.

### **Bible Standard**

There is danger in interfaith because it is an evidence of apostasy or departure from the Way of Life on the part of the true worshippers of God. The Bible standard is that the true Christian Faith must not be violated or compromised.

Any church group that does not preach the truth faithfully as contained in the Bible is false. " He that hath my word, let him speak my word FAITHFULLY", said God, "What is the chaff to the wheat?"-Jer. 23: 28.

Concerning this atomic space age, St. Paul stated: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats..."-1 Tim. 4: 1-3.

For true Christians to pray together with people of various and wrong beliefs or have fellowship with those preaching the doctrines of devils is INTERFAITH; it is spiritual fornication; it is a sin.-1 Cor. 10: 21, 22; Matt. 6: 24; Jas. 4: 4.

### **No Compromise**

Jesus Christ whose example Christians are bound to follow (John 13: 15) did not compromise his faith with those of the Pharisees and other false religionists of his time. , Rather he exposed and condemned their errors and hypocrisy. He said: "... Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity..."- Matt. 23: 23-31.

Today, there are the counterparts of the Pharisees whose stock-in-trade is deceit: and hypocrisy - sometimes coined in a refined term as "religious diplomacy". 1 When the devil was to show up himself where Christ was doing the work of I God, he (Jesus) told his disciples: "...For the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me ...Arise, let us go hence." -John 14: 30, 31. Christ

did NOT COMPROMISE!

What is more, St. Paul stated: "DO: NOT UNITE yourselves with unbelievers; they are not fit mates for you. What has righteousness to do with wickedness? Can light consort with darkness? Can Christ agree with Belial, or a believer join hands with an unbeliever?. And therefore, 'come away and leave them, separate yourselves, says the Lord; do not touch what is unclean (*and lie is unclean being an abomination-Provo 6: 16-19*) Then I will accept you, says the Lord, the Ruler of all being..." -2 Cor. 6: 14-18, *New English Bible. It is on this Christian principle the God's Kingdom Society stands. Certainly, there is no agreement between light and darkness. Truth and falsehood can never harmonize. So we uphold the banner of truth at all times, and, like Saint Paul, "renounce the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of rod deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."* -2 Cor. 4:1, 2.

God from time has been against interfaith and has never tolerated it. The Jews who practised it were severely punished. The instance of Solomon is always remembered 'y serious worshippers of God. "Did not Solomon King of Israel sin by these things? 'et among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish (unbelieving, strange) women cause to sin."- Nehemiah 13: 26; I Kings 11: 1-14.

For the details of how the Jews practised interfaith and how they were punished, read Psalm 106: 13-46.

### **Peaceful Co-existence**

The GKS, though strongly opposed to interfaith, believes in tolerance and in peaceful co-existence with other religious groups until God's day of decision when the tares will be destroyed by Rim.-Rom. 12:' 17-21; Matt. 13: 1.-9, 36-43.

INTERFAITH IS DANGEROUS. Beware lest you fall a victim and end up in destruction from God. One becomes a victim when one believes in "the doctrines of devils" and unites oneself with those "who are not fit mates" Yes, God says "come away and leave them, separate yourselves".

## WHAT IS TRUTH?

**IT is a vital requirement of the Christian Faith that whoever will be saved must have the accurate knowledge of the truth. This is the will of God. (1 Tim. 2: 3, 4) The claim Christ and accepts him as his personal Saviour is not enough for salvation unless his belief is grounded on the truth.**

The word *truth* in the English language means that which conforms to fact and reality, or that which is not false or fictitious. So in this respect one can say the truth of a thing that happens either in the market or elsewhere, or the truth of what one has done, and so on.

But in the context of the subject of this sermon, the meaning is spiritual and it bears a connotation that is much wider than the ordinary usage.

In John 1: 17, it is written: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." The inquiring mind would want to know what this truth is.

When Jesus Christ was addressing the believing Jews during his first advent, he said: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the **truth**, and the **truth** shall make you free."-John 8: 31, 32.

That was not all. At the time he was arraigned before Pilate, the Roman governor, he again made reference to the truth. Said he, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered, to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.".. Pilate was rather curious about the claim of it Jesus Christ of having a kingdom, and so he asked: "Art thou a king then?" Instantly, Jesus answered: "Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice". It was at this juncture Pilate further asked, "What is truth?" -Read John 18: 36-38.

Whatever was the motive of Pilate in asking the question, it, is all the more interesting to note that it has turned to good in that the very question has been taken up with all sincerity by faithful Christian students of the Bible as a subject for diligent research into the spiritual import of the TRUTH.

Long before the human existence of Jesus Christ on this earth, it had been prophetically written in the Psalms that "truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven".-Ps. 85: 11.

### Word of God

In a nutshell, the TRUTH, for which Jesus Christ came to this world to bear witness, is the WORD OF GOD otherwise known as the "everlasting gospel" or the "gospel of peace".-Rom. 10: 15; Eph: 6: 15; Rev. 14: 6, 7.

The Psalmist said that the Jaw of God is the truth and that His word is true from the beginning. (Ps. 119: 142, 151, 160) Jesus him- self confirmed that the word of God is the truth. In his prayer to the Heavenly Father on behalf of his disciples, he said: "Sanctify them through thy truth: THY WORD IS TRUTH...And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through thy truth."-John 17: 17-19.

*It is abundantly clear that without the knowledge of the truth no one can practise the righteousness of God or obtain salvation. It is the truth that purifies as to make. One holy; the truth instils the fear of God in the believer; it gives faith; and it gives sound wisdom and understanding that enables one to distinguish between holy and unholy, or right and wrong.*

The fact that God's word, the truth, cleanses one from sin was further strengthened by Jesus Christ when he said to his disciples: "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you."

(John 15: 3) And St. Paul described the word of God as water when he wrote- as to how Jesus Christ gave himself, up for the church "that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word". (Eph. 5: 26) This is not the literal water used for baptism as some people think but the word of God, the truth.

Because the truth warns against sin and enjoins people to follow righteousness, anyone who believes in it and translates his belief into action will of necessity put away evil and do that which is good. It is in this way the truth sanctifies or cleanses one. That is the reason why it is written in Psalm 119: 9, to wit: "Wherewithal shall, a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy (God's) word." And the Psalmist added: "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee." (Verse 11).

It is because people disregard the truth and do not pay heed to the word of God that they continue to perpetrate wicked acts. They take pleasure in sin. When they do evil they have no prick of conscience because they are destitute of the truth and consequently, the fear of God which it instils in one and which makes one eschew evil, is not in them.

### **Pure Wisdom**

The wisdom which the truth imparts is far superior to any form of worldly knowledge. It is the wisdom from above which James the apostle described as "pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy". Yes, this wisdom found only in the Bible leads one to salvation.-James. 3: 17; 2 Tim. 3: 14, 15.

The truth is so forceful that it is able to change the whole character of a man from evil inclinations to godly thoughts and deeds. King David stated: "The Jaw of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right. rejoicing the heart: the command of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes...More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honey comb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward." Ps. 19: 7-11.

St. Paul who himself also derived great benefits from his knowledge of the truth, stated: "For the word of God is quick (alive)! and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intentions of the heart."-Heb. 4: 12.

It is all these wonderful, divine characteristics of the word of God that makes the Holy Bible, which contains it, the greatest book ever in existence in this world.

All through history men of high reputation whose sense of spiritual value was not beclouded by

devilish philosophies or evil propensities, had always acknowledged the truth of God's word, its goodness and irresistible force.

Concerning the Holy Bible, which contains the word of God, Abraham Lincoln had this to say: "In regard to this great book, I have but to say, it is the best gift God has given to men. All the good Saviour gave to the world was communicated through t his book. But for it we could not know right from wrong. All things most desirable for man's welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it."

And J. Edgar Hoover, a distinguished U. S. lawyer, said: "The Bible is the unfailing guide which points the way for men to the perfect life. The lessons of charity, justice, and equality which enrich its pages should be learned well by all men in order that greed, avarice, and iniquity can be blotted out."

The truth comprises doctrines, judgments, instructions and divine promises. The doctrines are the basis of Christian beliefs; judgments are for the discipline of the believers; the instructions are for the guidance of the Christians in following the path of life; and the promises give hope and comfort to the faithful.

The Psalmist described the word of God as a lamp to his feet, and a light to his path. (Psalm 119: 105) And King Solomon whose wisdom, as given him by God, was remarkable, stated: "For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life."- Provo 6: 23.

For the fact that Jesus Christ is the very embodiment of the word of God, and therefore the light-bearer, he declared: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John 8: 12) Again, he said: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."- John 14: 6.

Power of God. The importance of the truth, which is the gospel of Christ, cannot be over emphasised. St. Paul stated that "it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth...For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith".-Rom. 1: 16, 17.

To be ignorant or the truth, is to be under spiritual bondage. People in such a state can never know unless the scales of the blindness fall off their eyes, they even claim to be in the light but oppose the truth. The case of Saul, who became an apostle and was known as Paul, is a striking example. When he was professing Judaism-the Jewish religion-he persecuted the Christians but when he was converted and came to the knowledge of the truth, he confessed his ignorance. Said he of himself: "Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief."-I Tim. 1: 13.

Some people take offence when they are told the truth; such ones need prayer so that the devil may leave them. Those who WILFULLY oppose the truth, and persecute those preaching or spreading it are wicked, and God shall destroy them. Jesus Christ told such ones in his days: "And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." -John 8: 43-47. And St. John said: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life: but

the wrath of God abideth on him."-John 3: 36 See also Luke 10: 1,2,8-12, 16; Mark 9: 42.

### **Saving Gospel**

It is for the purpose of enlightening the lost sheep of God and giving them freedom from the bondage of Satan in order that they may be saved that Jesus Christ come to preach his saving gospel of truth. Concerning his mission Christ referred to Isaiah's prophecy which fulfilled on him, to wit: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised .."- Luke 4: 17-21; see also 2 Tim. 2: 24-26, and up till today, the gospel is being preached by those who know the truth in accordance with the command of Jesus Christ.-Matt. 24: 14; 28: 19.

The truth is very precious. It must not be adulterated by way of adding lie to it and mixing it with vain traditions of men.

The Bible says "no lie is of the truth", (1 John 2: 21). Anyone who believes in a lie is damned. Saint Paul made it clear that those who will perish would become victims of Satan's deceit "because they receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall bend them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."-2 Thess. 2: 10-12.

Today, in our age, some people and or churches teach traditions of men instead of God's doctrines 'in the Bible. It was because the Scribes and Pharisees acted contrary to the truth and followed men's traditions that Jesus Christ told them: "... Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, this people draweth nigh unto me (God) with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.-Matt. 15: 1-9. It is very important, therefore, that we look well before accepting and believing any teaching or doctrine from anybody no matter his religious claims, or social status, or scholastic achievement. We must be sure that anything we believe has the backing of the Scriptures, as the early Christians of Berea did, otherwise we believe or worship in vain.-Acts 17: 10- 12; see also Gal. I: 8, 9.

St. Paul admonished Timothy and said: "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine: continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thy self, and them that hear thee."-1 Tim. 4: 16.

Let us therefore cleave to the truth which is able to make us free from the bondage of Satan, deceits of false prophets, idolatrous commitments, superstitions and all other devices of the devil, so as to be saved by God through Jesus Christ our Lord into His perfect Kingdom of endless peace and happiness.

## CAN CHRISTIANS JUDGE ONE ANOTHER?

**THAT it is virtually impossible to preach the truth of the gospel of Christ without condemning evil or exposing falsehood is an indisputable fact. Any preaching, therefore, that does not come in conflict with the works of error is not the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

In any issue on which opinions of men differ from one another the reasonable thing to do in order to resolve it is to resort to an authority upon which all can safely rely. If it is a matter in a court of justice and a point of law is involved, a legal authority must be found in order to decide as to which of the divergent views is right. So too if it is a matter about the Christian faith, doctrine or principle, we must depend on the Holy Bible for a solution. The mistake many people make is that they are too prone to rush into conclusions on spiritual matter; about which personal opinions are of no consequence. They do not care to ascertain as to whether the view they hold is in accord with the Word of God. It was King Solomon who said: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes..." -Prov. 3.5-7.

The question as to whether Christians can judge or criticise one another is one of those issues about which people hold different views. Only last week, a friend told a member of the God's Kingdom Society: "I like the GKS because they are preaching the truth. But they should preach their own without criticising other churches." That apart, a certain clergyman, having received a copy of *The Weekly Sermon*, said a similar thing about the GKS but added: "The Bible says, judge not."

On this question of criticism or judgment, there is no support in the Scriptures for the view that Christians should not judge or criticise one another. Rather there is abundance of evidence to the contrary.

### The Text

The text often referred to by our critics is Matthew chapter 7 verses 1, where it is written: "*Judge not, that ye be not judged.*"

We agree that Jesus Christ made this statement. But the interpretation some people give to it is very wrong and misleading. Christ himself gave its interpretation in verses 2, 3, 4 and 5, but many people have not the patience to read these verses, let alone understand them. He did not mean that we should not judge or criticise at all. Rather, he meant that before we judge we should make sure that we are in a position to do so in the sense that we ourselves are free from the fault for which we judge others. For if we too are guilty of what we criticise in others, they also will in return point accusing fingers at us.

In verse 2, Jesus continued: "*For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*" This will happen when the person who judges another is equally guilty in that as he criticises or treats others so too they will do to him, he being not free.

And in verses 3 and 4, Jesus- Christ threw more light on the point when he further said: "*And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in*

*thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?"*

It is possible some may still be in doubt as regards the intention of Christ or misconstrue the whole illustration; so he reprimanded those who always see others' faults and not theirs, and positively stated what Christians should do, as it is written: "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye"

According to the whole tenor of his illustration there is no justification whatsoever for the conclusion that Christ is against criticism. Contrariwise, it is clear that we can judge others of their errors provided we correct ourselves and put away our own. By this standard a thief is not qualified to criticize another person who steals, and an adulterer is not in a position to judge another person who commits fornication when he himself has not fully repented otherwise he will be regarded as a hypocrite.

In support of this principle as established by Jesus Christ, St. Paul stated that whoever condemns sin in others and do the very same thing has no defence at all but condemns himself. He declares: "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judges; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things" – Rom. 2:1.

### **Character of Jesus**

When a thing is wrong Christians should have the boldness to say it is wrong; and when they see the truth let them say it and stand by it. This was the character of Jesus Christ when he was on earth. He criticized the Pharisees and Sadducees for their false claims and exposed their evil practices. When he crossed swords with the Sadducees on the question of resurrection, he told them bluntly: "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God." – Matt. 22:29.

On a certain occasion when Jesus censured the Pharisees and they took offence, his disciples asked him: "Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?" Christ answered at once: "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up, Let them alone: they be blind leader of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." - Matt. 15:12-14.

It is because people fear to say the truth or to condemn what they know to be evil that the world is sinking more and more in iniquity. Many religious leaders who claim to be vicars, apostles, bishops, chief imams, and so forth connive at the evil doings of their followers, particularly the nobles among them, because of their tendencies of seeking to please men rather than being faithful to God.

The tribulation in Nigeria today has been blamed on the excesses of politicians during the civilian regime. But when, among the politicians and others, there were glaring cases of oppression, bribery and corruption, adultery, mischief-making, deliberate falsehood, drunkenness and so on, what did their spiritual leaders do to rebuke their sins or evil deeds and warn them against the danger they were exposing the nation to, and God's judgment and punishment that

could eventually follow? And since trouble erupted it is these same religious leaders who adopted an attitude of dumbness over sin that are now most vocal, in their usual act of sanctimoniousness, in a frantic bid for prayers. Can God hear our prayers when we have not repented of our sins and are not sober? "Behold, the Lord's band is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot bear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you that he will not bear." -Isa. 59: 14.

However, we trust that the good Lord will for His name's sake spare this Republic so that His innocent children may have a free course to serve Him in love.

The stand of the GKS for the truth and righteousness of God is admired by many people, but some envy and oppose her. However, the truth always prevails.

It was interesting to note, as reported in the *New Nigerian* of August 24, 1966, 'that, the Anglican Archbishop C. J. Patterson "blamed religious leaders for their studied silence" over the situation in Nigeria. He was further quoted as saying in a circular letter to his fold: '-We are the devil by the weakness of our divisions which prevent us from speaking unanimously.'

We appreciate the Archbishop's courage for accepting blame but the excuse for too weakness is untenable. The divisions among Christians is DO justifiable around for any servant of Christ to refrain from discharging his spiritual functions creditably; Unanimity of speaking is not all that is important but rectitude, forthrightness and truth notwithstanding the voice of dissent.

### Teachings

We do not condemn personalities or individuals. We do not say that all those in other religious groups are devils, and those in the GKS are holy. What we criticize are the teachings and doings which we have found to be unscriptural and therefore erroneous.

For instance, some teach and make people believe in purgatory whereas Jesus Christ and his early apostles did not teach any such thing. Purgatory is not found anywhere in the Bible. There are those who teach that the soul can never die; but the Bible shows clearly that the soul can die'- Psalm 89: 48; Ezekiel 18: 4; Matt. 10: 28; Acts 3; 23, etc. Others also command their priests not to marry but the Bible says that "a bishop must be the husband of one wife". (I Tim. 3: 1, 2) Certain church groups baptise infants without scriptural authority. There are a lot more that are taught and done falsely in the name of God.

A teacher of lies is a great danger to human societies because they lead people at the instance of the devil to destruction. (Isa. 9:16; Jer. 14:14; Matt. 15:14) To say that the lies of bogus preachers should not be pointed out or criticized is contrary to the will of God. It is a duty incumbent on the true servants of Christ to warn people against false prophets. The encounter of St. Paul with Bar-Jesus, a false prophet, in his days is a case in point. St. Paul called him "the child of the devil" and "an enemy of righteousness" Addressing him St. Paul said: "Wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" The apostle then cursed him in the name and power of the Lord and the false prophet became blind. And when Sergius Paulus, a ruler, saw all that happened, he believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord" Read Acts 13:6-13.

If Christian must not judge one another, then those who say that the GKS is wrong for criticizing

others are equally guilty for judging the GKS.

However, the truth is that there is no church organization that does not judge others; otherwise there would have been no divisions among them. As reported in a Roman Catholic newspaper, the INDEPENDENT (Sept. 5-12, 1964, page 2) “Protestants of all kinds have strong doctrinal differences from Catholics and their orders are generally not recognized by the Catholic Church”.

Church history is replete with incidents of atrocities committed against people because of their Christian convictions by those who purported to be the “pillar of truth” in Christendom. Why were people like John Wycliffe, John Huss, Martin Luther and a host of others branded as heretics and some of them condemned to the flames?

Now, after hundreds of years, the Roman Catholic Church has come out to own its faults. In October 1964, the Vatican Council voted by an overwhelming majority that Roman Catholics should ask pardon from other Christians for their share in bringing about disunity. The text of a draft decree passed by the assembly by 2,076 votes to 92, called for “conversion of heart”. The text said: “All have responsibility in one way for the sins of disunity. Roman Catholics therefore ask for pardon of God and of their brethren...” *Daily Times*, October 8, 1964, page 7).

The point we are making is that other religious bodies do judge and some overstepped their bounds to condemn souls to death. But all the GKS is doing, and that with all sincerity, is that of showing the light so that the people may find the way to Christ. We will never go to the extreme of condemning people to death. God says, “Vengeance is mine” – Rom. 12:19.

### **Written Judgement**

The preaching of the gospel involves the pronouncing of the written judgements of God in the Bible in condemnation of all that answer to unrighteousness. Jesus said that the words he had spoken would judge men to the last day – John 12:48.

How can the words spoken by Christ nearly 2,000 years ago judge men in this last day? Yes, it is through the propagation of the gospel by those he has commissioned through the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, to pronounce the written judgement of God is the honour of the saints in particular, and it is also the duty of the saints’ companions who are partakers of their grace to rebuke sin. – Ps. 149: 7-9; Rom. 10:13-15; 1 John 2:27; 1 Cor. 6:1-3; Jude 14, 15:1 Tim. 5:20, 22; 2 Tim. 4:1, 2; Titus 1:4-9; etc.

Whenever the written judgement is preached, being the truth, it brings to light every false way and has a piercing effect against all on the side of error. St. Paul stated: “But we are sure that the judgement of God is according to truth against them which commit such things.” – Rom. 2:2 see also Heb. 4:12.

There is always a conflict between truth and falsehood. As light exposes what is hidden in darkness so too the truth uncovers or brings to view lies, hypocrisy and all other hidden things of dishonesty. St. Paul warned the Christians to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them”. He added: “But all things that are reprovèd are made

manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.” – Eph. 5:11-13.

For obvious reasons, evil men and those whose teachings are questionable do not want criticism. They always oppose and persecute those preaching the truth. That was why St. Paul said that they preached “the gospel of God with much contention” – 1 Thess. 2:1-4.

There are certain church leaders who warn their adherents not to listen to the lectures of the GKS, and some even dictate to their followers not to read publications of others. Such is an attitude of those whose doctrines are not true.

It is those who have something to hide that fear to come to the light. Jesus said: “For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” – John 3:20, 21.

Any church organization that is preaching the truth will have no cause to fear judgment. The truth is quick and forceful, and it can withstand any acrid test of criticism, and triumph over everything that rises against it by the power of God. Milton, the English Puritan poet, was right when he stated, "Truth IS as 'impossible to be soiled by any outward touch as the sunbeam". Also an erstwhile judge of the Supreme Court of the United States was once reported as saying, *"If a religious belief has substance, it can survive criticism, heated and abusive though it may be, with the aid of truth and reason alone;"* And Saint Paul in his characteristic straightforwardness wrote: "For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth." -2 Cor. 13: 8.

Criticisms aimed at correcting errors and reprov'ing evils are necessary for progress. "All Scripture is given by the Inspiration of God" said St. Paul, "and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for Correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." -2 Tim. 3: 16, 17.

The only thing is that our judgment must not be malicious or based on false premises but constructive and just. Said Jesus Christ: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." -John 7: 24.

On the whole, it has been established beyond all reasonable doubt that Christians can judge or criticise one another in accordance with the Holy Scriptures.

May God bless those who understand and appreciate the truth of His word when told whether in the form of correction, reproof or rebuke, criticism or judgment, advice or instruction. Amen.

## **ARE WOMEN ORDAINED BY GOD TO PREACH THE GOSPEL?**

**A WOMAN, by reason of her faith, knowledge and good understanding, can rise to a place of honour in the Church but there are offices and privileges which God never assigns to women.**

In certain church denominations women are allowed to stand in the pulpit before a mixed congregation to preach sermons or read out lessons, or say prayers on behalf of all others. When Dr. Billy Graham visited Nigeria some years ago, a certain woman mounted the pulpit at his campaign meeting at the Race Course, now Tafawa Balewa Square, Lagos, on Saturday January 30, 1960, and led, in an ill vocation or prayer, a vast congregation made up of bishops, apostles, evangelists, priests and so forth. However, in an open letter to the doctor evangelist published in the local newspapers then, the GKS showed from the Scriptures the impropriety of that practice.

There are those who send out their women to preach in the streets and from house to house. Some of these women do claim to have received the anointing of the Holy Spirit or to have been ordained by God to preach the gospel. Among those who regard themselves as prophetesses are some whose mission is to go along the streets ringing bells in the early morning to wake people from bed and shouting, "Wake and pray." in their tribal tongues. Thus we find that in certain church groups every other member is either a prophet or prophetess-and all claim to see visions and prophesy. So, people have been asking to know the true position of women in the Church.

We have often said that a number of wrong things are being done by many who claim to be Christians. This is so because the rules and doctrines of Jesus Christ as set out in the Scriptures are often relegated to the background and substituted with men's invented dogmas.

There is not a single instance in the Bible of a woman who was ordained by God as a prophetess to teach or lead His people.

### **Presumptuousness**

Some women were improperly called prophetesses in the Bible simply because they played some roles in the affairs of God's people. Nobody can prove that God ordained any of them. Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, was called a prophetess as recorded in Exodus 15: 20, just because she led the women of Israel (not men) in a victory dance after the Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea. To show that she was not ordained to be a prophetess, God punished her with leprosy when she joined Aaron to assume that God was also using them, and they murmured against Moses. They said: "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath he not spoken also by us? "Because of this God was angry, and He said: "If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream... Wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? And behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow..." (Num. 12: 1-15). It is worthy of note that Aaron was not punished-indeed he was ordained a priest but Miriam suffered for her presumptuous.

As regards men like Moses, Joshua, Daniel, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and a host of others, it is clearly shown in the Bible that they were ordained by God. But who can cite any instance to show that God appointed any woman at any time to lead or teach His people?

It is a shame for men to be led by women in God's Organisation, and above all, it is contrary to the will of God. Men ought to rule or lead women. It was when the Jews because of their sins were forsaken by God that women dominated them. And God said: "As for my people, children are their oppressors and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths." -Isa. 3:12.

The Roman Catholic Church is aware of the position of women, and they do not allow them to fulfil the functions of priests. Answering a question as to why Rev. Sisters are not allowed to say mass, the *Catholic Voice* of July 1956, stated among other things: "Since our Divine Lord chose only men as His Apostles so only men can become priests." And a Catholic newspaper, the *INDEPENDENT* of March 10-16, 1968, stated: "Men only can receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders: this is the Law of God. Christ called men only to the apostolate, and ordained men only to the priesthood..." Obviously, this is the truth and the Roman Catholic Church gets our support.

When the Church of Sweden proposed to ordain women priests, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Fisher, warned the Archbishop of Sweden that "if Sweden ordains women priests, relations between the two churches will be broken off." (Vide the British *Daily Sketch*, Jan. 15, 1959)

### **Foible of Watchtower**

In the Salvation Army, they have women ministers who perform the same duties as men. For this, they were severely criticised by the Watchtower Society. In the *Watchtower* magazine issue of Sept. 1, 1962, page 540, the Watchtower Society wrote: "An unusual feature of the organisation is the prominence accorded women...As a result; women have had much to do with the direction and policy of the Salvation Army, often taking the oversight of men. In fact, for thirty years Evangeline Booth served as the head of the Salvation Army in the United States, and for five years directed the entire world wide organisation. In granting women equal ministerial privileges the Salvation Army does not follow Bible precedent..." (*Emphasis ours*).

It can be recalled that the question of women claiming to be anointed or ordained by God to preach from house to house is one of the doctrinal issues on which the first President of the God's Kingdom Society, Brother G. M. Urhobo, disagreed with the Watchtower Society and for which he was persecuted and is still being slandered by those people who call themselves Jehovah's Witnesses. Many of their women claim to be anointed, and the latitude given the women had caused trouble in that organisation. In the book, *LIGHT* Book One, the Watchtower Society stated: "One of the original incorporators of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society was a woman, the wife of the president thereof, and she insisted on editing *The Watch Tower* and, being resisted, led other women to take a wrongful course against the Lord's work ... Even to this day the same influence attempts to interfere with the Lord's work ... The Lord had pointed out that the woman has her place in the church, but her place is not to teach man nor attempt to influence man in his rightful performance of duty as a servant of the Lord." (Pages 30-31,

*emphasis ours*) But we ask: If women are ordained by God to preach why should the wife of the President who claimed to be ordained be "resisted" for insisting on editing the Society's magazine when she was not proved to be inefficient? If the women receive the same anointing which the men have and which put both sexes on equal spiritual status as the Watchtower Society is teaching there should be no reason why the women should be prevented from discharging the duties for which they are ordained. Here lies the foible of the Watchtower Organisation!

### **The Law**

The truth, as the GKS has always maintained, is that God has never ordained or anointed any woman to be a preacher or teacher. If it were God's will that women should hold such a post in His organisation, Jesus Christ would have: shown an example by choosing one woman, at least, to be an apostle. But he did not, and even when he selected other 70 disciples whom he sent out, two by two, no woman was included. (Matt. 10: 1-7; Mark 3: 13-19; Luke 10: 1-17) Though Jesus Christ had many women disciples, he did not send any of them to go about preaching. It is contrary to the Christian rule for a woman to teach and lead men. St. Paul stated: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And A dam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety." (1 Tim. 2: 11-15) St. Paul did not say that women would be saved if they preached from house to house *or* in the street.

Women are described by St. Peter as "weaker vessels" and in modern terms they are known as the "softer sex". To send them to go from house to house preaching is tantamount to exposing them to temptations. Modesty will restrain us from going into the details of certain reports about some women that have come to light in connection with their house-to-house preaching activities.

For allowing Jezebel who posed to be a prophetess to teach and to seduce men to commit fornication, the Church of Thyatira was rebuked. The Lord said: "Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication..."-Rev. 2: 20-23.

The Watchtower Society's members cannot claim to be ignorant of these Bible facts. In their book, "*Equipped for Every Good Work*" (page 322), they commented on St. Paul's epistle to Timothy thus: "... The woman is not to usurp authority over the man, but is to learn in silence and not be suffered to teach in the congregation or assembly. This is the Theocratic order." (*Emphasis ours*) From this it would appear that they understand that women are not ordained to be teachers *or* preachers. But the practice among them up till today is quite the opposite of the "Theocratic order"!

Women must not make speeches in the congregation or assembly of the Lord's people. Even if they have doubt on any issue, the law stops them from asking questions in the church. As it is written: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak;

but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: It is shame (or women to speak in the church." (1 Cor. 14: 34, 35) It was on the basis of this authority we criticised Dr. Billy Graham when he allowed a woman to lead a congregation of bishops, deacons, and so on, in prayer at his campaign meeting.

In violation of the law of God quoted above, the Watchtower Society allowed Miss V. Dougaluk, Miss M. Hinds and Miss R. M. Dreyer to address an international assembly of "Jehovah's Witnesses" at the Yankee Stadium, New York City, U.S.A., on July 23, 1953, This was published in the *Report of New World Society Assembly of Jehovah's Witnesses, Yankee Stadium-New York City, July 19-26, 1953* at page 29. In the same report it was published on page 77, that "U.V. Glass gave sound advice to the sisters"-female members. He said among other things that a woman should not be upset "when a brother tries to counsel her", He added: "She should comment at meetings, but should not try to be a 'one-woman meeting.' She will do better by giving others a chance to comment," Does this advice not run counter to the law of God as stated by St. Paul? The law says, "IT IS NOT PERMITTED UNTO THEM (women) TO SPEAK"! Why should she "comment at meetings"?

### **GKS Vindicated**

In a recent publication, *Life Everlasting in the Freedom of the Sons of God*, the Watchtower Society treated at length "The Places of Man and Woman in God's Arrangement", and therein they have come to agree with the GKS at last that women had never been ordained by God as priests, prophets, apostles or bishops. The following extracts from the book are quite explicit:

"The one whom Jehovah God raised up to liberate the twelve tribes of Israel from Egyptian slavery was a man, Moses the son of Amram. The ones whom God chose to do priestly service to him in behalf of the nation of Israel were men, the man Aaron and his sons...God made no arrangement for priestesses..."(Page 248).

"Then the time came for Jesus to pick out twelve workers to be with him all the rest of his earthly ministry, whom did he pick? Men, twelve of them, and he sent them forth as apostles, Likewise, when he sent out seventy additional evangelizers, it was men that he selected for this privilege of service. (Luke 10: 1-17) In such choosing Jesus was following God's pattern. Some women in proper circumstances enjoyed some privileges in connection with Jesus, but not those of the twelve apostles and the seventy evangelizers." (Pages 255-256, *emphasis ours*)

"It becomes plain that the Most High God Jehovah followed the same dealing with regard to the Christian Congregation of God, or spiritual Israel, as he did with regard to the Jewish congregation of pre-Christian times, or natural, circumcised Israel. That is to say, God gave the preference to the males, the men, as regards official responsibilities within the theocratic organisation. This fact is emphasised for us in Ephesians 4: 7-13... In that quotation from Paul's letters the words 'apostles,' 'prophets,' evangelizers,' shepherds and teachers are ALL in the masculine gender... In full accord with this, when the apostle Paul writes to Timothy about the qualifications for the service positions of 'overseers' and of 'ministerial servants' in the congregation, he specifically states that they must be

(1 Timothy 3: 1-10, 12)" (Pages 255- 256, *emphasis ours*).

Surely, the foregoing excerpts are a vindication of Brother Gideon Urhobo and the God's

Kingdom Society. And we thank God.

### **Good Works**

Although women have important duties to do in God's organisation, they must not be vested with authority to lead or teach men, neither must they be allowed to address the church.

The example of Jezebel is enough to warn any group of Christians to refrain from permitting their women to peddle with the word of God. There are other good works women should do in support of God's work so as to be saved.

In the days of Jesus Christ on earth, he praised very highly a certain woman for her good work when she poured very precious ointment on his head. The woman did not preach, yet Jesus said concerning her: "Verily I say unto you. Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her."-Matt. 26: 6-13.

We are not saying that a woman cannot talk God's word at all-either by teaching her child the fear of God or preaching to another woman. She can, and that does not make her to be ordained by God. St. Paul stated that the aged women should "teach the younger women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed."-Titus 2: 3-5. Note that St. Paul says that the women should be "keepers at home" and not house to house trotters. Rather, it is women who have cast off their faith that wander about. Concerning such women, St. Paul wrote: "And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not." (1 Tim. 5: 13) The apostle then advised: "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully." (Verse 14).

Some people think that it is by preaching only that one can be saved. This is very wrong and misleading. To put women forward, posing as having been ordained by God, to preach IS A SIN. We should learn from the fate of Miriam and Jezebel. As the Watchtower Society rightly put it in their criticism of the Salvation Army, "in granting women equal ministerial privileges the Salvation Army does not follow Bible precedent". And we add that any Church group which allows their women to preach in the streets and from house to house DOES NOT follow Bible precedent.

If we as Christians know that we are not to do our will but the Lord's, and if discipline and decency are to be maintained in the Church of God, it is very important that Christian principles and tradition as explained in his sermon must be adhered to. What is more, St. Paul says: "Let all things be done decently and in order." God is against lawlessness, presumptuousness and confusion.-1 Corinthians 14: 33,40.

## CAN THE LIVING TALK WITH THE DEAD?

**OWING to the frail nature of men, which always make them seek supernatural aid, they are easily influenced by beliefs most of which are misguided. One of such beliefs, which the devil has been using to hoodwink or mislead men, is born out of the idea that death is merely a change from a lower to a higher plane of existence.**

The belief that "the human personality continues to exist after death, and that it is possible for living persons to communicate with those who have died", is ancient and very wide spread.

In various parts of the world there are people who claim to have special powers by which they hold intercourse with the dead; they are known as spiritualists. And today, believers in spirits hold to it as a sort of religion, a science and a philosophy.

It is believed that a spiritualist can be a medium (which means a "go-between") through whom "the souls or spirits of dead persons" can send messages to living persons. Under the heading of SPIRITUALISM, the *Illustrated World Encyclopaedia* (volume 18) has this, among other things, to say: "Usually spiritualists assemble in a meeting called a séance. The medium goes into a trance or deep sleep. During this trance, the spirit of the dead person supposedly enters the medium's body and talks to living persons, or gives signs by knocking on tables or in some other way."

### Superstition

Many of the fears to which men have been subjected are either the figments of imagination or the devices of the devil aimed at alienating mankind from the purpose of God. One can but agree to a large extent with David Hume, a British philosopher, in his conclusion that "weakness, fear, melancholy, together with ignorance, are the true sources of Superstition".

Among many African tribes as well as some other nations, it is generally believed that as soon as a person dies he assumes supernatural powers which he can exercise for good or evil over the living. Hence there is the threatening statement by some people: "If you don't help me, I'll haunt you after my death."

There are people who worship their dead parents and pray to the dead to bless them with the good things of life even though they know that their parents in their life time; lived in abject poverty.

Some who claim to be Christians share some of these wrong beliefs and practices. When certain Galatians Christians turned to heathenish rites in the days of St. Paul, he warned: "Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?"-Gal. 4:8, 9.

### Dead Fathers

When some people find themselves in certain unfavourable circumstances, they develop a bad state of mind, and fear even their own shadows. For this reason they are prone to believe everything which seems to give them temporary relief or false hope and they seek aid from witch

doctors, magicians, dead fathers or relations and so forth.

There is a story of someone who was said to have struck a bargain with a spiritualist so that he could talk with his dead father. The spiritualist assured him that it was quite possible and that the venue would be at a burial ground. The man, as the story went, paid a handsome sum of money to the spiritualist. On the appointed day, both of them went to the burial ground where another fake posing to be the "dead father" had earlier gone into hiding. And it was about midnight. As soon as they arrived at the cemetery, and of course, the spiritualist having recited some incantations, the fake dressed in white flowing robes emerged with a cane. The man was so frightened that he was trembling as the whole thing looked like a nightmare to him. Worse still, his so called father came close to him and started to administer severe strokes of the cane on him. He screamed and ran away under agonising pain without getting his "father's" advice. The spiritualist blamed the failure of the mission on him for being unable to bear the strokes of the cane which were a prelude to the blessing the "father" would have bestowed upon him.

It is the stupid and simple folks that enrich the purses of quacks. The *Illustrated World Encyclopaedia* states: "Many people honestly believe in spiritualism. Unfortunately, there have been many professional magicians and others who use trickery to make themselves appear to be mediums." (*Emphasis ours*).

### **"Surely Die"**

Now, turning to the Holy Bible the belief that "the human personality continues to exist after death" and that there can be communication between the living and the dead, is without foundation; it is devilish, and true Christians discard it.

God commanded Adam in the Garden of Eden that he must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, "for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Gen. 2: 17) It is quite clear that to "surely die" means to cease to exist, pure and simple. But Satan, in his characteristic opposition to God, went subtly to Eve, Adam's wife, in the guise of a serpent and deceived her saying: "Ye shall not surely die". This was a blatant lie which gave "the mother of all living" a false hopes and led her to sin.

Concerning the devil, Jesus Christ said: "When he (Satan) speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8: 44) In his efforts to sustain his lie, the devil whose disposition for deceit had earned him the notorious title of SERPENT, has been influencing the thoughts of men into thinking and believing that when a man dies, he is not completely dead. Also to this end, he with the assistance of the demons has been working in men to event unfounded dogmas and warped notions about the dead, and to inspire bad dreams, false visions, hallucinations, and such like.

The truth of the Bible is that when a man dies, (the breath of life having left him) he is completely out of existence. He does NOT take any other form or shape nor does he go anywhere to live. He is absolutely unconscious and is turned to nothing: "Vanity of vanities," said the Preacher, "all is vanity." The next stage according to God's promise is RESURRECTION and then the dead shall be judged. Said St. Paul: "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."-Heb. 9: 27.

### **Abel**

Some people sometimes refer to St. Paul's statement about Abel at Hebrews 11: 4, that "he

(Abel) being dead yet speaketh". This does not mean that Abel was talking after his death. Rather the apostle was explaining how by Abel's illustrious example of faith, which made him offer a better sacrifice than Cain, he is being spoken of up till today as a righteous man to teach people about faith in God and the doing of things that are pleasing in His sight. The paraphrased epistles, *LIVING LETTERS*, by Kenneth N. Taylor, renders the text thus: "It was by faith that Abel obeyed God and brought an offering that pleased God more than Cain's offering did. God accepted Abel and proved it by accepting his gift; and though Abel is long dead, we can still learn from him about trusting God."

### **Witch of Endor**

Another account in the Bible often cited by certain people to show that the living can talk with the dead is the story at I Samuel 28: 3-25, about King Saul and the witch of Endor. At that time, Samuel the prophet was dead and had been buried in Ramath, his own city. And Saul the King drove out of the land all the witches and wizards.

But Saul because of his unfaithfulness was not in favour with God and the Philistines had marshalled their forces and were set to war against Israel. As Saul saw the host of the enemies, he was troubled in heart for fear. And when he enquired of the Lord there was no answer, "neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets". It was in this desperate state that Saul went to consult a witch. Shame to him! In order that he might not be recognised by the witch who was one of those ousted from Israel, he had to disguise himself by changing his royal robes. He went to the woman in the night; yes the dark night is most suitable for this sort of dirty, shameful and ungodly business.

Saul requested her to use her witchcraft power to bring up Samuel so that he might consult the dead prophet in regard to the war of the Philistines. When the woman under demonic influence divined, Samuel who was purported to have been raised was not seen by Saul. What he did was to ask the witch: "For what sawest thou?". And she answered: "I saw gods ascending out of the earth." (Verse 13) The dialogue continued. "And he said unto her, what form is he of? And she said, an old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself." (Verse 14)

It does not even require a specialised knowledge of the Bible for any clear headed person to know from the narrative that the whole affair was under the command of an enemy of God, Satan the devil. In the first place, Saul himself testified, "*God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams.*" (Verse 15) And secondly, by going to consult a witch he was contravening the law of God which said: "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God."- Lev. 19: 31; see also Deut. 18: 9-12.

### **Devil's Tricks**

Moreover, Saul did not see the so-called Samuel; he merely "PERCEIVED" from the woman's description that it was he. And the witch herself said that she saw "gods". How could Samuel alone turn to be gods? There lie the tricks of the devil, which are frequently manifested in the works of sorcerers and all kinds of demon possessed characters.

The fact is that it was not Samuel that came up but demons that put up the appearance of an old man like Samuel. They are also known as "seducing spirits", and it is they that impersonate the dead and make appearances or sounds that are seen or heard by spiritualists. St. Paul stated that Satan as well as his visible and invisible agents could change himself into an angel of light but that in the end all of them would get every bit of punishment their wicked deeds deserved. -2 Cor. 11: 13-15; see also 1 Tim. 4: 1; Rev. 16: 13, 14.

Since it was made clear that God had forsaken Saul and refused to answer to his inquiries either "by dreams or by prophets", there is no ground, therefore, to believe that Samuel, a faithful prophet of God who was already dead, could come back to be a party to the sins of the apostate Saul.

By the way, why is it that any communication between the living and the dead is never through any genuine prophet of God but through witches, wizards, occultists and what have you? The plain truth is that the idea or practice did not originate from God. And the Lord warned: "And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word (God's word), it is because there is no light in them."-Isaiah. 8:19, 20.

### **Christian Hope**

To show that the dead are absolutely unconscious and that they cannot be in communion with the living, the Psalmist declared: "For in death there is no remembrance of Thee (God): in the grave who shall give Thee thanks?" "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish."-Ps. 6:5; 146:3, 4; see also Ps. 30: 9; Isa. 38: 18, 19. What is more, King Solomon stated: "For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."-Eccl. 9: 5-6, 10.

We advise you, dear reader, not to go to those people who are parading themselves as diviners or spiritualists when you are in trouble or in need of anything. Please, turn to God Almighty and pray to Him. If you earnestly pray with faith, and exercise patience, God the Merciful and Gracious Father will certainly grant you the desire of your heart. (Proverb 10: 24; Matt. 21: 22; Phil. 4: 6) God Himself said:

*"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else."-Isa. 45: 22.*

On the whole, the highlight of the Christian hope about the dead is the consoling, divine promise of resurrection. And until the resurrection takes place the dead must remain silent and unconscious in the grave, and no one living can talk with them. Read Job. 14: 13-15; Ps. 115: 17; John 5: 28, 29.

## IS THE SOUL IMMORTAL?

**DESPITE the pains theologians, philosophers and anthropologists have taken in their researches concerning human nature, soul still remains a subject about which very many people have wrong notions and unfounded beliefs. The teaching that the soul is immortal has no basis in the Holy Bible!**

As to what the soul is, definitions have been offered by both men of secular and ecclesiastical learning. According to Plato, the Greek philosopher, "the soul is that uncreated, eternal, and immaterial spirit which, itself self-moved, is the source of all motion; it is the principle of energy and life which, in death, is released from its bodily prison-house to live as separate spirit until again incarnate in a living body". (*The American Peoples Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 17, page 609).

Rene Descartes (1596-1650), who is said to be the founder of modern philosophy, regarded the body and soul "as separate substances that interact by means of the pineal gland in the brain". But Baruch Spinoza (1632-77) in his own view denied interaction by any means and "asserted that soul and body are one and the same". Since then other secular thinkers have developed various concepts of the soul without arriving at one conclusive understanding that is acceptable to all.

As should be expected, none of the worldly thinkers including Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, Gottfried Wilhelm and so on, based his opinion on the word of God, and, therefore, true Christians do not rely on their views. We as Christians cannot accept anything, no matter how academicals it may appear to be, which is not consistent with the revealed truth of God as contained in the Holy Bible.

It was St. Paul who warned: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ"-*Col. 2:8*.

### Common Prayer

Turning to those who claim to be Christians it is sad to observe that the doctrines some are teaching concerning the soul are far from the truth. Among the Churches of Christendom it is believed that the soul is an immaterial thing in man that continues to live after a man's death, and that it can never die. In view of this understanding, these churches believe that when any of their baptised members dies his soul goes to heaven to be with God for the enjoyment of divine blessings.

In the *Book of Common Prayer* used in many Protestant Churches, "the Order for the Burial of the Dead" contains prayers in which their belief about the soul being taken to heaven after death is clearly expressed. At the burial of the dead, "while the earth shall be cast upon the body by some standing," the officiating priest would say: "Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God, of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear brother here departed: We therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust..." Another payer often said by the priest is this: "Almighty God, with whom do live the spirits of them that depart hence in the Lord, and with whom the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of

the flesh, are in joy and felicity..."

If it is true that the "souls of the faithful are in joy and felicity in heaven", church-goers should have been rejoicing when their fellow-members die rather than crying and mourning as they are doing. And in that case, of course, everyone would want to die so as to go to a happier life above. But it is ludicrous that the very people who hold to this belief religiously are among those who fear more than anyone else to die; and when they fall sick they strive tooth and nail-and are prepared to spend all they have to get themselves cured.

These are some of the things that give cause for' sceptics to jeer at religious beliefs, they themselves being unable to distinguish between genuine and nominal worshippers of God.

Let us take a look at the following questions and answers from *The Explanatory Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church*:

*Question 5: "How is your soul like to God?"*

*Answer: "My soul is like to God because it is a spirit, and is immortal"*

*Question 6: "What do you mean when you say that your soul is immortal?"*

*Answer: "When I say that my soul is immortal, I mean that my soul can never die." The catechism defines spirit as "an immaterial living being, having free will and understanding, as God, the Angels, our souls".*

It is a matter for regret that what the world has been pleased to refer to as "the Christian view" about soul, which millions have been taught to believe, cannot be substantiated with the Scriptures!

### **Living Soul**

Soul, according to the Holy Bible, means a living creature such as a person or animal; it also means life, and in either of the two senses it is not immortal.

The word *soul* first appeared in the Bible in Genesis 2: 7, where it is written: "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life: and man became a living soul." It is abundantly clear from this text that the man himself, which is made up of the dust of the ground and the breath of life, that is the "living soul".

This lucid account of the creation of man by God gives no idea that a soul was infused into the man. Rather it is the man that is a soul. That is why it is stated that those who went with Jacob to Egypt "were seventy souls", meaning 70 persons. (Gen. 46:26, 27; Exod. 1: 5) And in Numbers 31: 28, both persons and beasts are referred to as souls.

If the soul is a "living being" in man that continues to exist in heaven or elsewhere after death, then the man is not completely dead. This is precisely what the devil implied when he, in the guise of a serpent, deceptively told Eve: "Ye shall not surely die". (Gen. 3: 2-5) It is this devilish idea that is being subtly fostered by the teaching of the immortality of the soul.

What God told Adam was quite clear. He said, "For in the day that thou eatest thereof (that is, of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) thou shalt surely die." (Gen. 2: 16, 17) There was no

point of another entity in man going to live elsewhere after death.

We agree that there is a spirit in man (Job 32: 8) but it is NOT a "living being, having free-will and understanding" as stated in the catechism. The spirit is the life or power of existence in the breath of man which causes the organs of the human body to function. The same thing applies to animals. Yes, both man and beast have the same breath and die alike; God said so through Solomon His prophet: "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."- Eccl. 3: 19, 20.

It is when the spirit or breath of life leaves a person that he dies, and when God gives him back the spirit at the resurrection, he lives again. As it is written: "Thou (God) hidest Thy face, they (the children of men) are troubled:

Thou takest away their breath; they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth Thy spirit, they are created: and Thou renewest the face of the earth."-Ps. 104: 29, 30; see also Job 34: 14, 15; Eccl. 12: 7, 8.

The ordinary breath or breeze does not make a man to live. For instance, if you pump air into a dead body, it cannot be resuscitated because that air is without life. What distinguishes the breath of life from the ordinary breath is the life. And it is the life that is sometimes referred to as soul in the Bible. We can better appreciate this from the exhortation of Jesus Christ to his disciples that they should not fear the devil and his agents who cannot destroy life. He said: "And fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."-Matt. 10: 28.

Jesus Christ made it quite clear here that the soul can die hence it can be killed in hell.

Rest in Peace? Some people often publish advertisements in newspapers in memory of their dead parents, husbands, wives, children, relatives or friends. In such publications they are fond of writing thus: *May your soul rest in peace*, or, *Eternal rest grant him O Lord*. They have formed the habit of saying the same thing whenever they get to the graves of dead persons.

Anyone who has a good understanding of the Scriptures knows that such prayers for the dead are unnecessary. The Bible says that everyone who dies, whether he is good or bad, goes to a state of rest or sleep and so to remain until the day of resurrection. (Read Job 3: 11-19; 17: 13-16.) To wish the dead man "eternal rest" in that wise is tantamount to begging that he should not be resurrected by God. You see the spiritual implication? Yes, people do many things because of ignorance arising from the misguidance of false teachers. -Isa. 9: 16; Hosea 4: 6; Matt. 15:14.

Moreover, no amount of prayer said on behalf of a dead man has any effect on him. God will deal with the dead ONLY when they are raised to life. And even then He will judge and reward everyone according to the works he did when he was alive. If any had done evil, God's verdict of guilt upon him can never be altered by the intercessions of men. This is why people should fear God and do what is right NOW that they are living so that they may be at peace with their Creator in the day of reckoning. -Eccl. 12: 13, 14; 2 Cor. 5:10; Heb. 9:27.

Some churches teach that the souls of the faithful at death are taken to heaven for their reward while those of the wicked go to hell for punishment. There is no place in the Holy Scriptures where it is so stated. What the Bible says is that the dead shall be resurrected in God's Kingdom and everyone good or bad shall be rewarded according to his works. Jesus Christ said: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which ALL that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (judgment)."-John 5: 28, 29.

Mortal Soul It is indeed very wrong to say that the soul can never die. David the psalmist and prophet, said that none of the dead "can keep alive his own soul". (Ps. 22: 29) And in Psalm 89:48, it is written: "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?"

What is more, God himself declared: "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sloneth, it s b a II die." (Ezek. 18: 4, 20) Some may argue that it is only the soul that sins that will die. But we will ask who among men is not a sinner? That apart, if the soul is truly immortal then it can never die whether it sins or not.

However, the truth is that the soul is subject to death. St. Peter stated that "every soul, which will not hear that prophet (Jesus Christ), shall be destroyed from among the people". (Acts 3: 23) Those who love the world and refuse to pay heed to the gospel of Christ shall lose their lives in that they shall not be saved. And Jesus said: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own Soul?" (That is, his life).-Mark 8: 36.

But those who are faithful and obedient to their Creator and who worship Him in truth shall spend their days in prosperity and their years in pleasures and, above all, everlasting life shall be their reward in God's Kingdom.

It is clear from the Bible truth expounded in this sermon that the soul of man is MORTAL IT DIES. Here again we have told you, dear reader, the truth which Jesus Christ says will make his sheep free.

## THE MARKS OF THE TRUE CHURCH

**THE Church of God, wherever it is established in any part of the world, is never divided but one in faith, fellowship, and love in preaching God's word, the truth. Jesus Christ was fully aware that Christian would in process of time be counterfeited by some people at the instance of Satan, the archenemy of God and man. And so, he did not leave his disciples without setting out the marks by which his true Church could be identified.**

In the first place, we wish to correct the wrong view of some Christians who refer to a building as a church. One of the definitions given by *The Catholic Encyclopaedia Dictionary* is that a church is "a place of Christian worship". Very often we come across publications stating that a certain amount of money has been earmarked or contributed for the building of a church. Or that the foundation stone of a new church to be built at a cost of £10,000 or so, has been or is to be laid by such and such reverend gentleman. Also, we find some people pointing at a building and saying, "This is our church."

The Bible does not refer to a house as church. Neither Jesus Christ nor any of his early apostles used the word to mean a building or place of worship. It is because of the continuous wrong usage of the word by priests and theologians that makers of dictionaries have also been biased to misconstrue it in that regard.

### Christian

According to the Scripture, the word *church*, which was translated from the Greek word *ekklesia* or *ecclesia*, means a congregation or body or an assembly of Christians. The word was first used by Jesus Christ as recorded in the eighteenth verse of the sixteenth chapter of the gospel according to St. Matthew. The occasion was when Jesus Christ asked his disciples certain questions, and Peter gave a correct answer. To Peter, he said: "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."-Matt. 16: 13-18.

That the rock upon which the church is built is not Peter but Jesus Christ who himself is the head of the Church (I Cor. 10: 4; Col. 1: 18) has been proved beyond argument in *The Weekly Sermon* (Vol. I, No.9) issue of November 3, 1968. The point we are now making is that Jesus Christ did not use the word *church* to mean a literal house or place of worship.

In the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 14, a lucid account is given about how Paul and Barnabas worked unitedly for the furtherance of the gospel of Christ. When they were come to Antioch as stated in verse 27, "and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles". The church that was gathered means the Christians, collectively, (not houses) that were assembled! When St. Paul said that "it is a shame for women to speak in the *church*" (1 Cor. 14: 34, 35) he was not making reference to a building set aside for worship but to a congregation of Christians

Furthermore, St Paul wrote in his epistle to the Romans thus: "Likewise *greet the church* that is in their house... The churches of Christ *salute* you." (Rom. 16: 5, 16) Can anybody show that the apostle was asking his fellow Christians to greet a house? How can a sane person do that? It is

unthinkable! Or can a house, an inanimate object, salute persons? It cannot, except a demon in it. This is just to show how ridiculous and meaningless it will sound if the word *church* is reduced to mean a place of worship.

By the clause, "the church that is in their house", St. Paul meant the Disciples of Christ that met in their house. And when he stated that "the churches of Christ salute you" he was referring to the congregations of Christian believers. See also 1 Cor. 16: 19.

It should be understood, therefore, that our reference to the "true Church" in the caption of this sermon, has to do with a group or body or a society of genuine Christians. The epithet *true* would have been superfluous if there had not existed groups of professed Christians which are counterfeit.

### **Denominations**

With regard to the number of church denominations in the world, it is difficult to speak with exactitude. They are very many, and new ones spring up almost everyday. In Nigeria, there were two in particular that did not last long: they were the "Do Me I Do You Church" and "Adam and Eve Church". The former was founded on the principle of retaliation as enunciated in the laws of Moses. Its members claimed that if they did not return evil for evil, God would be angry in that it was a sin. In the case of "Adam and Eve Church", nakedness was their doctrine and practice. There is a similar church in England known as "The Guild Church of the Naturian Kindred". (Vide *Sunday Pictorial*, May 19, 1957, page 15).

Considering the degree of variance among the churches in doctrines and methods of worship, it will be a very silly conclusion to say that all of them belong to Jesus Christ and are serving the one true God.

The Roman Catholic Church claims to be the only true Church, and mother of all others. In a pamphlet entitled, *Can I Change My Religion?* Published by the "Catholic Truth Society" in London, it is stated: "Catholics do not want to change their religion, because they are Quite sure that their religion is the true one you must accept everything that has been defined by her in the past, and be ready to accept without question anything that she may define in the future." (Pages 3-4).

Other church groups do disagree and pooh-pooh the claim of the Roman Catholics which cannot be supported with or proved from the Bible.

There are some groups in Nigeria and elsewhere whose members' activities, rather than turning men's minds to God, are causing some people to reproach Christianity. In some of the groups almost every other member is either an apostle or a prophet or prophetess. Some take pride in high sounding appellations such as "Senior Apostle", "Most Senior Apostle" and so on. They prophesy and see visions almost everyday. The visions do not concern the purpose of God and are not such that tend to lead to righteousness but visions about riches or of the men the "spirit" wants them to marry, or of who is a witch and what not.

It is a common knowledge that fornication and adultery are perpetrated in some of these mushroom groups where certain prophets can spend a whole day with women in private rooms under the cover of prayer! Some of these prophets take certain deluded women to rivers where they pretend to wash away their sins and to invoke angels through prayer to drive away devils or demons from them. It is frequently alleged that the prophets strip them stark naked and make immoral advances to them in "holy" water!

It was during one of their spirit vision expeditions that some of these prophets killed a certain poor woman in the Western State as published.

The other day one of their prophets claimed to have seen a vision that the Western State of Nigeria would sink if the people paid more than 7/6 per head as tax; he actually went out to spread this Satan inspired message. But on investigation, it was discovered that the anti-tax preacher had himself paid tax and kept his receipt quite intact. He was of course, justly convicted for 1"8 months. (*Daily Times*, February 1, 1969) Since Jesus Christ and his "disciples paid tax in his days, do we still need any more proof before we can know that the anti-tax gospeller is a fake?

### **Variance**

All the churches cannot be true while they are at variance on several points of doctrine, and divided in their methods of worship, we repeat. St. Paul stated: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be DO divisions among YOU; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1 Cor. 1: 10) The fact that some have deviated from the truth of God in the Bible and do not speak the same thing and are divided leaves no room for doubt that such ones only call the name of Christ in pretence.

### **False Prophets**

Jesus Christ knew very well that false prophets with their characteristic propensity for fantastic claims would proliferate in this age of the last day, and he warned against them. Said he: "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. For there shall arise false Christ's, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before." (Matt. 24: 11, 24-25.) Bible students are not surprised to see them and hear of them all over the world. It is a proof that the last day is here!

Within the past few years the rate at which false Christ's sprang up is fantastic. Like a shooting star, they appear suddenly in the mood of sanctimoniousness and, after a short while, fade away into oblivion. Where now is the "Jesus of Oyingbo" (Lagos)? Where is that of France who predicted that the world would end on August 15, 1954? (Vide the *Illustrated* of May, 1954) and where is that "Jesus of Ogbunike" near Onitsha? One of them claimed to be God and the very Jesus the Son of God, and at the same time he said he was Abraham. Yet some of those who had been stupefied with the strokes of his cane by which he "baptised" his adherents, believed everything he said. God said: "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it

so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?"-Jer. 5: 30, 31.

There is no doubt that Nigeria, and the world at large, is in danger of false prophets. They are dangerous because they lead people to destruction.-Isa. 9: 16; Matt. 15: 12-14.

When we examine the root of the encomium or praise and the credit given to certain churches for their achievements we find that they do not relate to the purity of doctrine or the reformation of character in converted souls. Rather, such a praise or credit is based on the number of schools, colleges or hospitals they have established or on the scholarships they have given to people. These institutions are not bad. But they are no standards or qualities by which genuine Christianity can be distinguished. The most important thing is the preaching of the truth of God's word the gospel to the sheep of God so that they may be free from Satan's works and be saved in God's Kingdom.-Mark 16: 15-16, 19-20; John 8: 31, 32, 36.

The pride of certain churches is that they have existed for a very long time. Because of this they regard others which are not as old to be false. On this, we also hold the view that it is not how long but how well. Jesus did say: "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first."-Matt. 19: 30.

In order to know which church is true and which is not, we must examine the doctrines and practices of the various groups using the Holy Bible as our yardstick. Jesus gave this warning: "Beware of false teachers, who come disguised as harmless sheep but are wolves and will tear you apart. You can detect them by the way they act, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit. You need never confuse grapevines with thorn bushes! Or figs with thistles! Different kinds of fruit trees can quickly be identified by examining their fruit. For a variety producing delicious fruit doesn't produce a kind that is inedible! And a tree producing an inedible variety can't produce what is good! So the trees having the inedible fruit are chopped down and thrown on the fire. Yes, the way to identify a tree, or a person, is by the kind of fruit produced." -Matt. 7: 15-20, *Living Gospels*.

The Authorised Version puts verse 20 thus: "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." Jesus Christ further said: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.-Matt. 7: 21.

It is wrong, therefore, to accept every church denomination as true and as belonging to Jesus Christ. We must follow strictly the guidelines given in the Scriptures in order not to be deceived especially in these days when many are claiming to be prophets, apostles and prophetesses who see spirits. John the apostle admonished: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone on into the world." (1 John 4: 1) And St. Paul also warned: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."-1 Thess. 5: 21.

To close our eyes to or ignore the reality of the presence of false churches among us is nothing but self deceit. Said St. Paul; "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of the men which believe and know the truth " (1 Tim. 4:1-5.) Just look around, it will not take you

any pains to find the church groups that come under the category of the apostle's predictive description.

### **True Church**

The fruit by which we can know the true Church is not the doing of wonders, seeing of visions, dreaming of dreams or the saying of many prayers but the preaching of the TRUTH in particular, and the showing of Christian love. (John 13: 34, 35) False prophets can do wonders, see visions and do some other things, but they CAN NEVER preach the TRUTH without adulterating it. (Matt. 7: 20-23) Once the doctrine of any religious body is tainted with a lie that group is not a true church. St. John stated "that no lie is of the truth". (I John 2: 21) It was on this ground St. Paul wrote to Timothy: "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of .men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself."-1 Tim. 6: 3-5.

The trouble with many people is that they take things for granted. They do not care to ascertain whether what they are taught to believe in the churches are in harmony with the Holy Scripture. For example, the teaching that St. Peter is the head of the church is not true; JESUS CHRIST IS THE HEAD. (Eph. 5: 22, 23) The teaching that the soul is immortal is wrong; the baptism of infants is un-Christian, and the teaching that baptism washes away sins is unscriptural; the teaching that women are ordained by God to preach the gospel is unbiblical. There are a lot of other false doctrines and beliefs which space will not permit us to mention here.

Any church denomination, or even an angel from heaven, that teaches any doctrine unsupported in the Scripture, has no right to claim to be the true church. Said St. Paul: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" -Gal. I: 8, 9.

The true Church, therefore, is the Christian Organisation in any part of the world that preaches the truth, nothing but the whole truth, as contained in the Holy Bible Jesus said to the Jews who believed on him: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8: 31, 32) It is the truth that will bring us the salvation of God, but the absence of it means the loss of everything good.

As we must be honest and true to ourselves and other persons of goodwill toward God, we cannot hide the fact that the God's Kingdom Society (GKS) is preaching the truth which has enlightened many people and brought them God's blessings; she is therefore like any other church organisation preaching the truth, the true Church of Christ. Some may frown upon this claim but the onus of proof rests upon them to show from the Scriptures (not their opinions) that we are not. And where they cannot let them say, as commanded by God, "It is truth."-Isa. 43: 9; see also John 8: 45, 46.

## IS THERE FIRE IN HELL?

**ONE of the doctrines that the clergymen of Christendom have given false colouring without restraint is that about HELL. Does the Holy Bible give a picture of hell as a place of literal fire where the wicked are tortured everlastingly? If it is so, why did Jesus Christ the righteous go to hell?**

*In the Explanatory Catechism of Christian Doctrine.* It is stated that hell is "the place where the devils and lost souls are punished". And *the Catholic Encyclopaedic Dictionary*, (Second Edition, Revised) states as follows: "HELL is the place and state of eternal punishment which consists, primarily, in the deprivation of the enjoyment and sight of God face to face (pain of loss) and, secondarily, the infliction of positive punishment by an external objective agent, called fire, which is a physical reality though unlike earthly fire (pain of sense). This punishment is not equal for all, but corresponds to the sinner's aversion from God and conversion to creatures it is of faith that their punishment will never end." (Page 226).

### Exaggeration

On the basis of this knowledge, several pictures of hell as a place of horrors have been painted in order to frighten the believers into subjection to the priests. Also, stories of unlimited exaggeration about hell have been invented and told from the pulpits, to the extent that the sermons have had more bearings on intimidation than exhortation.

The Rev. J. Furness, in his description of the lowest depth of hell, stated that "the roof is red-hot, the walls are red: the floor is like a thick sheet of red-hot iron". He further wrote as follows: "Listen to the tremendous, the horrible up-roar of millions and millions of tormented creatures, mad with the fury of hell. Oh, the screams of fear, the groaning of horror, the yells of rage, the cries of pain, the shouts of agony, the shrieks of despair, I from millions on millions.

There you hear them roaring like lions, hissing like serpents, howling like dogs, and walling like dragons. There you hear the gnashing of teeth, and the fearful blasphemies of the devils. Above all you hear the roaring of the thunders of God's anger, which shake hell to its foundations. But there is another sound. There is in hell a sound like that of many waters; it is as if all the rivers and oceans in the world were pouring themselves with a great splash down on the floor of hell. Is it then, really the sound of waters? It is. Are the rivers and oceans of the earth pouring themselves into hell? No. What is it then? It is the sound of oceans of tears running down countless millions of eyes. They cry for ever and ever. They cry because the sulphurous smoke torments their eyes. They cry because they are in darkness. They cry because they have lost the beautiful heaven. They cry because the sharp fire burns them." (*The World's Redemption*, page 343).

It is sad to note that certain people who parade themselves as the ambassadors of Jesus Christ and teachers of his word should be so shameless and lost to virtue in telling blatant lies even in the name of God! Has anybody ever gone to "hell" and come back to tell those dreadful stories? How do the clergy come about such ideas of hell? Was it by revelation from the Scripture or by dream?

We must admit that by the teaching of the clergy concerning hell, they portray God as a heartless

and cruel Father. No one can imagine how the Almighty God who is infinitely kind and loving and whose "mercy endureth forever" can keep human creatures to be tormented in sharp fire where the victims are "roaring like lions, hissing like serpents, howling like dogs and wailing like dragons" for eternity. The Holy Bible does not lend support to this bogus teaching.

The word *hell* is derived from the Hebrew word *sheol* and the Greek word *hades*, and it means the grave, pit, tomb or the condition of the dead. Another Greek word also translated hell in the New Testament of the Bible is *Gehenna*. It is a word with a historical background used figuratively in the Greek Scriptures.

There is not a word in the account of the creation to show that God prepared a place with fire for the eternal punishment of sinners. In the first chapter of Genesis there is a comprehensive record of how the heaven and the earth, the sun, moon and stars and the seas were created. If there were such an important place of unquenchable fire where there are "millions and millions of tormented creatures", as taught by certain churches, it would not have been omitted from the inspired account of the creation.

When God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden, He told him definitely that if he (Adam) ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, death would be the penalty. (Gen. 2: 16, 17) So when Adam disobeyed the divine commandment the sentence of death was passed on him, and God said: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust (NOT FIRE) shalt thou return."-Gen. 3: 19.

If there were such a place of fire for the punishment of sinners, Adam through whose disobedience sin entered the world would have gone there. In fact, God would have given an indication to that effect at the time He pronounced His sentence on Adam. What He told Adam was that he (Adam) would die and return to the dust. And St. Paul stated: "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."-Rom. 6: 23.

Grave Hell is the grave, pit or heart of the earth where every kind of character good or bad goes after death. It is not meant for the wicked alone. Jacob was a godly man and it was through his twelve sons the nation of Israel came into being. When he received the news that Joseph his son, was dead (false it was though) he refused to be comforted and he said; "I will go down to my son into hell, mourning." (Gen. 37: 35, *Douay Version*) But the Authorised or King James Version renders the text thus: "For I will go down unto the grave unto my son mourning,"

It is the same Hebrew word *sheol* that is translated *hell* in the Douay Version (Catholic Bible, as some call it) and *grave* in the Authorised Version. *Did Jacob mean that his son Joseph was gone into hell as referring to a place of fire and that he too would go there? Why should they go to such a place if really it existed? Were they wicked? Of course, they were not the truth is that Jacob knew that the grave or hell is the place of the dead, and so he did not refer to a place of fire. When on another occasion Jacob was being persuaded by Reuben and others of his children to allow them to take Benjamin to Egypt, he told them: "My son shall not go down with you. His brother (Joseph) is dead, and he is left alone: if any mischief befall him in the land to which you go, you will bring down my gray hairs with sorrows to hell." (Gen. 42: 38, *Douay Version.*)* Hell here is the grave. Job the prophet of God showed clearly that hell or grave is a place of rest and hiding for both good and wicked people who die. During his troubles which the devil brought

upon him he cursed the day of his birth and said that it was better if he had died in the womb because then he would have lain still and quiet in the grave with kings, counsellors and princes. He added: "There (in the grave or hell) the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there; and the servant is free from his master."-Read Job. 3: 11-19. Furthermore, Job, in the bitterness of his soul, prayed to God: "O that Thou wouldest hide me in the grave ("protect me in hell"- *Douay Version*), that Thou wouldest keep me secret, until Thy wrath be past, that Thou wouldest appoint me a set time and remember me." (Job. 14: 13) If hell is a place of torment, why should Job who needed escape or relief from his anguish pray to be hidden there till God's wrath was over? There is also the instance of Jonah, the prophet of God, who called the belly of a fish. hell. When he was making a desperate attempt to run away from carrying out the Lord's message. he was thrown from a ship into the sea and was swallowed by a whale. "Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly, and said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and He heard me; out of the belly of hen cried I, and Thou heardest my voice." (Jonah 2: 1, 2) But was there fire in the fish's belly? No! Jonah called the fish's belly, hell because it was like a grave-in fact, there he would have breathed his last and remained buried if God had not been merciful to him.

There is no doubt that the wicked will be punished by God. The Bible states that when God will pour out His indignation upon them they would make every effort to escape and would even want to dig into hell for safety but all their efforts will prove abortive. As it is written: "I saw the Lord standing upon the altar: and He said cut them in the bead, all of them; and I will slay the last of them with the sword: he that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escape of them shall not be delivered. Though they dig into hen, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down..." -Amos 9: 1-4.

The point is that if hell is a place of horrible fire, why should anyone seeking refuge from trouble dig into it? That, of course, will amount to jumping from the frying pan into fire.

The Bible shows that all men are subject to death and that no one has the power to save himself from going into the grave. The Psalmist asked: "Who is the man that shall live, and not see death: that shall deliver his soul from the hand of hell?" (Ps. 88: 49, *Douay Version*) But in the Authorised Version the text is at Psalm 89:48 and it reads: "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?" From this again we see that hell is the grave and there is no fire in it.

There is one other striking instance to show that hell means the pit or heart of the ground. In the days of Moses the prophet, there was an occasion when he received stiff opposition from some of the Jews prominent among whom were Korah, Dathan, On and Abiram. They conspired and organised a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. God was not in their favour and they were justly punished. Moses warned the congregation to dissociate themselves from those wicked men. He said that if they died the common death of all men, then the Lord had not sent him but if the ground broke open, and swallow them then it should be known that they had provoked God. "And it came to pass, as he (Moses) had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up... They and all that appertained to them went down alive into the pit (inside the ground) and

the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation."-Num. 16: 1-4, 25-33.

The Douay Version renders the piece as follows: "And immediately as he (Moses) had made an end of speaking, the earth broke asunder under their feet; and opening her mouth, devoured them with their tents and all their substance. And they went down alive into hell, the ground closing upon them." This again confirms beyond doubt that it is a pit or inside the ground that is known as HELL.

## Gehenna

We stated earlier that the Greek word *Gehenna* also translated hell in the New Testament is a picture word with a historic origin. It has an entirely different meaning from *hades*. *Gehenna* is compounded of two Hebrew words, *Ge Hinnom* that is, "the valley of Hinnom" or "the valley of the son of Hinnom". It was a place on the out. Skirts of Jerusalem in which children were cruelly sacrificed by fire to Molech, the idol of the Ammonites. 2 Kings 23: 10; 2 Chron. 28: 1-3; 33: 1, 2, 6.

God condemned the Jews who committed the abomination of burning their children in fire. Said He: "And they built high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came in. to my heart."-Jer. 7: 30, 31.

The valley of Hinnom became a place for depositing refuse. All sorts of rubbish, dead animals and even corpses of criminals were dumped there. Worms were always around to consume the rotten things and there was fire underneath that kept burning, consuming the rubbish. This place was identified with the destruction of undesirables. It was against the background of this notion that Jesus in Mark 9: 43-48, used the word *Gehenna* translated *hell* or *hell fire* to symbolise the everlasting destruction of the wicked.

Among other things, he said: "And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the Kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire: where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." (Mark 9: 47-48) It is very wrong to interpret this text literally because it will mean that we should pull out our eyes if they irritate or itch us and so on. Christ used the eye to symbolise anything that is precious to us. So he used the hand, foot, and eye separately to illustrate the value of sacrifices we, his followers, should make in order to prove ourselves worthy of the Kingdom of God.

In other words, Christ was saying in effect that if anything very dear to us would cause us to go to everlasting destruction, it will be better to deny ourselves and forsake that thing even if it is as precious as an eye so that we may enter God's Kingdom.

The fire therefore is not a literal object but a symbol of the suffering or severe pain-"weeping and gnashing of teeth" which God would make the wicked taste while alive before they go to perpetual destruction which is also known as the "second death" that is, the death in which there is no more favour or chance of resurrection. After they have died, they do not suffer pain any more (Isa. 66: 15; Rom. 2: 5,6,8-9; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; 2 Pet. 3:7, 10; Rev. 21: 8).

Concerning the punishment of the wicked in the last days, St. Paul stated: "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."-2 Thess. 1: 7-9.

We must point out that the punishment of the wicked takes place when they are living-either. In this life or at the resurrection of the dead. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that the dead are unconscious and therefore they cannot feel pain. "For the living know that they shall die," said King Solomon, "but the dead know not anything"-Eccl. 9: 5, 6.

### **"Apostles' Creed"**

On the whole, let no one be deceived that there is a place of literal fire-"red-hot" as Rev. Furness without Scriptural proof said -where the wicked are being tortured forever. In the so-called Apostles' Creed of the churches it is stated that Jesus Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, "was crucified, dead, and buried: he descended into hell". If hell is for the wicked only, Christ would not have "descended" into it. He was not wicked.

Of a truth, Jesus Christ went to hell in fulfilment of prophecy and God raised him the third day from the grave. He himself said: "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."-Matt. 12: 40.

Concerning Christ's resurrection, David the Psalmist, stated: "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (sheol-grave) neither wilt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption."- (Ps. 16: 10) And St. Peter, dilating on the prophecy after it had fulfilled, said: "Men and brethren, let me freely speak. Unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell (grave) neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up whereof we all are witnesses."-Acts 2: 29-32.

Hell, we reiterate, is the grave, and it is from there both good and bad will come back during the resurrection. As it is written: "Wonder not at this; for the hour cometh wherein all that are in the graves (not fire or heaven) shall hear the voice of the Son of God. And they that have done good things shall come forth (from hell or grave, not heaven) unto the resurrection of life; but they that have done evil; unto the resurrection of judgment."-John 5: 28, 29, *Douay Version*.

What some people call limbo or purgatory exists only in the imagination of some teachers, and not in reality or in the pages of the Holy Bible. We shall go into details on this issue at another time. It is the truth Jesus said will make us free.

## WILL ALL FAITHFUL GO TO HEAVEN?

**THE teaching that all good Christians go to heaven when they die is one of the greatest errors of Christendom. From the Bible we know this. How many millions of people with all sincerity of heart had laboured assiduously to support their church organisations and died in the hope of going to heaven, which unfortunately is false, no one can know. It will turn to their great surprise when, on Resurrection Day, these godly minded but misled folks will find themselves not in heaven but here on earth! In any case, the fact that a few Christians the "Little Flock" will inherit heaven cannot be ruled out.**

There was an occasion when a Minister of the God's Kingdom Society (GKS) had a discussion with a certain gentleman on various issues of doctrine. When the Minister said that he knew he would not go to heaven and so it was his prayer that God might grant him the grace to be on earth in His Kingdom, the friend was enraged. Before the Minister finished the sentence, he exclaimed: "Good gracious! Are you not going to heaven? Why then do you go to church and what are you preaching for?" The gentleman added: "If you are not going to heaven, I am going!" He repeated it with greater emphasis: "I AM GOING!"

The Minister, who was cool and collected, chuckled. For the outburst of the friend had struck him as a manifestation of his ignorance. Yes, ignorance is the root of bitterness.

There is a saying that if wishes were horse's beggars would ride. It is very easy to say, "I am going to heaven". But how can you go when God does not call you or take you there? The aeroplane is not a means of transport to heaven and a spaceship, which before God is like a toy with which children play, means nothing. So better it is that people stop deceiving themselves or, in their own vanity, hoping against hope.

### Fables

Among the church organisations, and even in some other non-Christian religious bodies, the belief that heaven is their home is rife. In absolute disregard of scriptural facts, fables have been told from the pulpits to boost the faith of adherents so that they might do the works that would qualify them for heaven. Lessons in Bible correspondence courses and in the Sunday schools have tended to confirm the hope of believers that they will all go to heaven. And many of the hymns or songs are composed in such a melodramatic language with tender tunes to match as to stir the emotions of "church goers" old and young in anticipation of and aspiration after heaven. There is the story of a "woman who saw heaven" published by Prairie Bible Institute, Alberta, Canada, in their monthly magazine, *THE PRAIRIE OVERCOMER*, of January, 1953. The woman who was reported to have "died at three o'clock", woke in the death chamber at about sunset, and was quoted as saying: "I remember seeing all the family around me crying. Then the Lord Jesus came! Into the room and took me by the hand and said, 'Come with Me.' in a short time we were before a gate of pearl. It was the gate of Heaven. Angels opened it and we went in. I saw many beautiful house all of pretty colours..."

As we stated in *The Weekly Sermon* of October 13, 1968, the woman must have been a victim of evil spirits because her story is irreconcilable with the teachings of Jesus in the Scriptures.

Taking a look at one of the popular hymns we cannot but sympathise with those who are rather feverish over their desire to go to heaven. Here are the wordings of some of the stanzas in Hymn No. 509 in the *Hymnal Companion*:

Here we suffer grief and pain,  
Here we meet to part again;  
In heaven we part no more.  
Oh, that will be joyful!...  
All who love the Lord below,  
When they die to heaven will go,  
And join with saints above.  
Oh, that will be joyful, &c.  
Little children will be there,  
Who have sought the Lord by prayer  
From every Sunday school.  
Oh, that will be joyful, &c.  
Teachers, too, will meet above,  
Pastors, parents, whom we love,  
Shall meet to part no more.  
Oh, that will be joyful, &

There are several other songs of a similar tenor, especially, among those under "The Order for the Burial of the Dead".

### **Burial Ceremonies**

A number of texts in the Bible are often misconstrued or misapplied by priests to mislead the people. One of such texts is at Job 3: 17, and it reads: "There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest." They cite this verse in their sermons and songs to show that heaven is a place of bliss and comfort.

Thus Hymn No. 542 of the *Hymnal Companion* which is usually sung during burial ceremonies runs in part in this wise:

BROTHER, thou art gone before us,  
And thy saintly soul is flown  
Where tears are wiped from every eye,  
And sorrow is unknown.  
Thou art sleeping now like Lazarus  
Upon his Father's breast,  
Where the wicked cease from troubling,  
And the weary are at rest.

If the place "where the wicked cease from troubling" is heaven, does it not therefore show that there are wicked people too in heaven? And that they are made 'impotent and so cannot trouble? But have the priests any authority of the Scriptures to support this assumption?

The truth of this point is that *Job* was not referring to heaven but to the grave. Because of his tribulations he said that it were better if he had died in the womb without seeing the light of day

*for* then he would have been silent in the grave with dead kings, counsellors and princes of the earth. He added: "There (in the grave) the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest..."-Read Job. 3: 11-19.

The funny side of the whole show is that while during a burial ceremony the "church goers" are singing hymns and chants to show that their dead brother is gone to rest on the Father's breast in heaven where sorrow is unknown and where he lives in the glories and joys of eternity, they are at the same time wailing and lamenting for the dead. Some even continue in their mourning for a period of three months, some a year, after the burial. If the faith that the dead are enjoying bliss in heaven were genuine it would be foolish to weep and lament for the dead. In fact, if that were the case, everybody would want to die so as to go there quickly.

### **Reward**

Let us put away sentiments as well as prejudice and bitterness, and let us face the facts of the Scriptures objectively. That God Almighty promised to reward the faithful in His perfect Kingdom of endless peace, glory and happiness, is an incontrovertible fact, and that the place where, the faithful, with a few exceptions, will be rewarded is the earth, is also the revealed truth.

None of the holy men and women of old before Christ-from Abel to John the Baptist-indicated that he or she would go to heaven. They had the hope that they would be resurrected in God's due, time for their reward here on earth. Job under divine inspiration declared: "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that, he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God..."-Job 19: 25-27.

David was a great man. Not only was he one of the faithful patriarchs but was also an anointed king in Israel and a prophet of God. He said: "For evildoers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be; yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." -Ps. 37: 9-11. He did not say the meek shall inherit heaven.

What is more, King Solomon-the son of David who too was a prophet and the wisest of his days, stated: "Behold the righteous shall be recompensed IN THE EARTH: much more the wicked and the sinner." - Prov. 11:31.

Before we go further, we wish to emphasise on this salient fact that none of the holy men and women of old before Christ went to heaven or will ever go to heaven. This is a serious statement and we take responsibility for it. The promise of heaven affects only a limited few among the Christians or followers of Jesus Christ.

Some people cite the case of Elijah the prophet who was said to have gone "up by a whirlwind into heaven". (2 Kings 2:11). They conclude that Elijah as well as other righteous people is in heaven. This assertion is wrong. The Bible speaks of heaven, apart from being the dwelling place of God, as also referring to the cloudy region of the air above the earth where the birds fly. (Gen. 1: 20; Job 35: II) So the correct understanding and interpretation of the reference to Elijah,

is that he was carried by a whirlwind into the air out of sight and was turned to nothing. Like Enoch, God made him not to die the ordinary death. (See Heb. 11: 5) In the day of resurrection, Elijah, Enoch and all other ancient worthies shall come back to life on this earth made glorious. If Elijah and Enoch were in heaven, Jesus would have told us when he came to the earth. But he said: "No man hath ascended up to heaven..." -John 3: 13.

### **Lazarus**

Another instance some priests often cite to support their teaching about going to heaven is that of Lazarus, the beggar, as related in Luke 16: 19-31. In the first place, the account is a parable put by Christ, and should not be taken to be the story of a real literal event. The rich man in hell was said to have "lifted up his eyes being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom". It is also stated that he begged Abraham to send Lazarus "that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool" his tongue for he was tormented in the fire.

How is the distance between heaven and hell that the rich man in the midst of fire in hell could see Abraham and Lazarus in heaven? How can a tip of finger dipped in water in heaven be taken to a man in an "unquenchable fire" in hell without the finger drying up? By the way, is it literally possible that the water on a tip of finger can cool a man in such a big flame? However, where people interpret parables as literal things they are bound to err. We shall treat this in details in due course, by the grace of God.

In fact, the account does not state that Lazarus went to heaven; rather it says that he "was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom". (Luke 16: 22) Who can prove from the Bible that "Abraham's bosom" means heaven? How can it be heaven when Abraham himself did not and will never go to heaven?

If Abraham, Enoch, Elijah, David and other faithful of old were in heaven Jesus Christ, we repeat, would have told his disciples during his Ministry on earth. Rather he stated categorically that none of them was there as already quoted from John 3: 13.

Jesus did show that Abraham and others, would receive their reward in God's Kingdom on earth and then all opposers of truth and righteousness would gnash their teeth in punishment. He said: "There I shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the Kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the Kingdom of God."-Luke 13: 28, 29.

Some professed Christians believe that David is in heaven hence they often say: "David pray for us". But the Bible says quite the contrary. St. Peter, the apostle of Christ, under inspiration declared: "Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day...For **David** is not ascended into the heavens..."-Acts 2: 29-34.

### **Little Flock**

When Jesus Christ came to this world he gathered followers or disciples and divided them into two distinct classes. In Luke 6: 12, 13, it is written: "And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day,

he called unto him his disciples; and of them he chose twelve, whom also he called apostles." See also Mark 3: 13-19.

Not all the disciples were called apostles. The apostles were the first class of Christ's disciples and they were vested with greater authority and more privileges than others. (Matt. 10: 1-16; John 5: 7-10) It is the apostles and others of their class chosen afterwards that constitute the "Little Flock". Addressing them, Jesus said: "Fear not little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure I to give you the kingdom."-Luke 12: 32.

With regard to those disciples who are not in the class of the apostles, Christ said: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold (of the Little Flock): them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." (John 10: 16) From this we can see the clear distinction between the two classes of Christians. But the trouble with many preachers is that, because of lack of vision, they generalise everything and apply texts relating only to the "Little Flock" to all God's people without any mark of difference.

It is only those of the class of the Little Flock that Jesus promised to take to heaven to reign with him as, kings and priest in Mount Zion, the capital of his kingdom. They are chosen and anointed with the Holy Spirit to be teachers and leaders through whom those of the "other sheep" are gathered to Christ. -John 15: 15, 16; 17: 8-21; 1 John 2: 27; Heb. 12: 22-24.

The anointed Christians are predestinated and called to be Christ's servants. As soon as they receive the ordination through the Holy Spirit, they give up all secular work and devote their lives fully and wholly to the preaching of the gospel. And one of the marks by which they can be identified is the preaching of the truth as contained in the Bible without adulteration. -Rom. 8: 29, 30; 10: 11-15; 1 Cor. 7: 20-24; Gal. 1: 11-17; 1 John 2: 27.

Jesus said to the apostles: "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you." (John 13: 33) Herbert Armstrong of the Ambassador College of America with a branch in England, often cites this text to show that even the apostles are not going to heaven. Christ did not say that they could not follow him to heaven at all but that they would follow afterwards, This is explicitly stated in verse 36, which Armstrong always loses sight of: "Simon Peter said Unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, whither go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards,"

Jesus Christ confirmed his promise to the apostles when he said: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also."-John 14: 1-3.

Before Christ was arrested, he again gave this firm promise to his apostles: "Ye are they which have continued with me in *my* temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as *my* Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Luke 22: 28-30) It is wrong to apply this text to all God's~

people because all-both men and women-are not ordained to be kings to sit on thrones. It is the anointed Christians whom St. Paul described as "Church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven" (Heb. 12: 22, 23) that are ordained to be kings. John the apostle who is one of them said: ' "And (Jesus) hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." -Rev. I: 6.

## WILL ALL FAITHFUL GO TO HEAVEN

**IF people have the knowledge of the truth that the Kingdom of God is purposed to be fully established not only in heaven but also on this earth, they will not scramble for heaven. In the Holy Bible it is revealed that the majority of the human race who will receive the grace of life shall be made to inhabit the earth in God's Kingdom while only a few Christians of a distinguished class will be in heaven. This is God's own arrangement, and it is not open to question.**

It is regrettable that many who profess to be Christian teachers take pleasure in feeding their flocks with stone instead of bread. They put aside the word of God in the Bible and go about preaching "the imagination and deceit of their heart". There is no iota of truth in the teaching that all good Christians go to heaven when they die.

Some teachers step further to add that even irresponsible, careless Christians and people from different walks of life and from opposing faiths, are all there in heaven. D.L. Moody, in his booklet entitled, *HEAVEN and how to get there!* Wrote: "Among the good whom we hope to meet in heaven, we are told, there will be variety of character, taste, and disposition... There are not only three gates on the north, but on the east three gates, and on the west three gates, and on the south three gates. From opposite divisions of the theological compass, from opposing standpoints of the religious world, from different quarters of human life and character, through various expressions of their common faith and hope, through diverse modes of conversion, through different portions of the Holy Scriptures, will the weary travellers enter the Heavenly City...Moreover, it seems highly probable, indeed I think it is clearly taught by Scripture, that a great many careless Christians will get into heaven." (Page 31- 32, 37)

### Sinful Mortal

Man being what he is, a sinful mortal, finds it easier to swallow false doctrine than to accept the truth of God. The reason is that false teachings agree with the sinful nature and carnal desires of men and therefore give them comfort and even the hope that in doing their own will, in worshipping other gods and serving divers lusts, they will still have a place in heaven! This is why false visionaries and prophets thrive-though only but for a time. (Prov. 12: 19, 22) God Himself said: "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof."-Jer. 5: 30-31.

To say that heaven is a place for people "from opposite divisions of the theological compass, from opposing standpoints of the religious world, from different quarters of human life and character" and so forth, is as irresponsible as it is unscriptural. Such a teaching presents the purpose of God as having no uniformity or harmony. Jesus Christ said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me." (John 14: 6) All those in the Way of Truth and Life are never opposed to one another neither are they divided in faith.

What is more, St. Paul stated: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism."-Eph. 4:4, 5.

## **Predestinated Christians**

We made it abundantly clear in *The Weekly Sermon* of last Sunday that it is only the anointed Christians who make up the Little Flock that will be with Jesus Christ in his kingdom in heaven. Such ones who are predestinated and called to be Christ's servants must devote their lives to the work of God.

## WHERE ARE THE DEAD?

**DEATH, according to the Scriptures, is the penalty of sin. Once a person is dead the human body is consigned to dust again, and all his opportunities of serving and glorifying God or of having any dealings with the living are terminated. Therefore if only all men had but understood the real state and place of the dead, some people would not have connected them with all sorts of superstitions often manifested in burial ceremonies.**

In different parts of the world peoples conceptions and beliefs concerning the dead are various. A great many are unanimous on the view that the dead have supernatural powers and continue their existence in the spirit world. This is strongly held as a matter of faith upon which have been built customs, traditions and modes of burial which are very inconsistent with the tenets of Christianity.

### Superstition

A careful study of the ceremonies that are performed during the burial of the dead by people in many nations, tribes and societies reveals a lot of things that can be summed up in this one word SUPERSTITION! In the main the customs originated from a desire of relatives, children, friends and yokemates to keep the "ghost" of the departed ones from returning; to facilitate his passage to another world; and to provide for his necessities when in that world so as to keep peace with the living.

As typical examples of the customs of people in this regard *JACK'S REFERENCE BOOK* gives the following:

(1) The Australian aboriginals take off the nails of the corpse and tie his hands to prevent it from digging its way out again.

(2) The Norse warrior had his horse and armour laid in the grave with him that he might ride to Valhalla in full panoply. (*Valhalla, according to the Scandinavians, is the final resting-place of the souls of heroes slain in battle.*) The Laplander placed beside the corpse flint, steel, and tinder to provide light for the dark journey.

(3) "In America the Indian hunter was buried with all the implements of the chase and other articles in daily use. In Egypt we often find the tombs filled with relics of the deceased. This notion that the dead may require things they were wont to use when alive, led in some cases to an attempt to provide them with the services of their former dependants by causing favourite horses and slaves to be slain at their death. In India, the widow was for the same reason, burned with the Corpse of her husband."

Of the many customs of the ancient Greeks and Romans relating to the dead mention may also be made of that of placing a coin in the mouth of the deceased to pay his fare to Charon, who, in classical mythology, was the ferryman whose office it was to convey souls across the Styx the chief river in the infernal region or "hell". And by the side of the deceased was placed a honey cake for Cerberus the dog which, according to them, guarded the entrance to hades or "hell", and which was usually represented with three heads, and with serpents round his neck.

Today, some of those ancient customs are still subsisting among the nations of the world but in divergent shapes and forms. Here in Nigeria the beliefs and customs of many of the tribes are similar to those already mentioned. A graphic description of the Yoruba's' beliefs about the dead and burial customs are given in the book written by Dr. J. Olumide Lucas entitled, *The Religion of the Yorubas*. The reverend doctor wrote: "The Yoruba's believe that a man's deeds in

this world will determine his fate in the next, as to whether he will become a *khu* or a *ba*. They also believe that unless the proper rites and ceremonies are performed the spirit will not be able to join the family spirit, but will be compelled to wander about without rest."

*Khu* is defined as meaning "a luminous spirit" and *ba* means "a mere disembodied spirit". A common salutation in Yoruba land, he stated, is "O ku" which means "May you become a Khu," that is, "a luminous spirit" after death. The " opposite o! .this good wish, he added, is the malediction or curse "Yio ba o" meaning "it will turn you to a ba", that is, "a mere disembodied spirit".

At the death of an aged person who is survived by one or more children, joy rather than sorrow characterizes the burial ceremonies. On this point, Dr. Lucas stated: "The reason why the funeral obsequies are more or less of a joyful character, marked with feasting and merriment, is that the spirit of the deceased has gone to join the great family of ancestral spirits. "In some cases the eldest son "sends for the babalawo, who will consult Ifa oracle as to whether the death is due to natural causes or to witchcraft, and if the latter is the case, to point out the culprit". The doctor continued: "If the oracle declares the spirit of the deceased to be in danger, the babalawo performs two important ceremonies. He sacrifices a goat or a sheep, and causes the carcass to be carried outside the town and deposited at a junction of several roads, the idea being that the evil spirits endangering the spirit of the deceased will thereby be dispersed in different directions. The babalawo also performs a ceremony of purification, sprinkling the corpse, the room and the spectators with the fluid he had prepared with water, shea butter and edible snails. After this he exorcises the spirit of the deceased from the house, bidding it proceed to its destination in peace."

Among the Edo's, Urhobo's, Itsekiri's, Ijaw's, Efik's, Ibo's and other tribes in this country customs and practices similar to those of the Yoruba's are also prevalent.

Today, burial of the dead has become an occasion for vainglory and extravagance. There is hardly any feeling for the departed ones reflected in the character and doings of some people. All they are concerned with are food, drink, dance and firing of volleys of cannon shots. These excesses sometimes result in tragedies.

Take for example the case of one Nwanze Eseanobi, who injured himself with a gun which he shot to announce the death of his brother according to native law and custom, "But he misfired and inflicted severe injury on himself," This incident was reported in the *Midwest Echo* of March 26, 1960.

In Urhobo land there is a set time when male ancestors are served and their spirits invoked so as to give blessing and protection to everyone in their families. The services usually include the offering of sacrifices to the ancestors. The bony framework of a goat's head after all the flesh and the eyes have been removed with some pieces of yam and plantain is always the portion of the dead father while the , people eat the best parts of the palatable meals, and drink their fill.

It is a pity that certain so called Christians take part in these pagan ceremonies. All worshippers of the true God, Jehovah, are warned to refrain from heathenish customs and practices. As it is written: "Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain..."- Jer. 10: 2, 3.

## **Sentence of Death**

The account of the Holy Bible concerning the dead is quite clear. The sentence of death pronounced upon man by God is, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."-Gen. 3: 19.

Our emphasis is on the clause: "Unto dust shalt thou return." Man was made out of the dust and he returns to dust at his death. The dust therefore, is the place of the dead, and it is the force of this divine sentence that works in men to bury the dead in the grave, tomb or sepulchre where they turn to dust again. True worshippers of God do not practise cremation-the burning of a corpse to ashes, neither do they dispose of the dead by exposing them to the ravages of birds and beasts as certain tribes do.

Concerning human beings, King Solomon stated: "I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. For that which befallerth the sons of men befallerth beasts; even one thing befallerth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."-Eccl. 3: 18-20.

The Bible does not indicate that people who return to the dust are still conscious, rather it states without ambiguity that they are in complete silence having been turned to nothing, knowing not anything and having nothing to do with the living. And so in that condition they can no longer praise God. The Psalmist declared:

"For in death there is no remembrance of Thee: in the grave who shall give Thee thanks?" (Ps. 6: 5) Again he said: "The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence."-Ps. 115: 17.

The Spirit of God never contradicts itself, thus Isaiah the prophet under the inspiration of the Almighty also stated: "For the grave cannot praise Thee, death can not celebrate Thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise Thee, as I do this day "-Isa. 38: 18, 19.

We can see how unscriptural it is for men to believe that the "ghost" of a dead person goes to another world to continue existence from where it can wield power over men on earth. Those who have developed fear for the dead or who do service to them are victims of superstition. Some people say that the members of God's Kingdom Society do not perform burial ceremonies. This is little blatant lie calculated by our detractors to put the Society in a bad light so as to scare away people from her. We do bury the dead but we always make sure that we are not drawn by unbelievers into doing anything in violation of the Christian faith. So we object to or abstain from ceremonies which do not conform to the principles of Christianity.

## **Second Burial**

Another detestable practice among many tribes in Nigeria is that of according a dead person a second burial some even go to the extent of the third and fourth. This is pagan and unscriptural.

It was never done by the true worshippers of God, and a true Christian must keep away from it. With the Christians, interment for a dead person takes place but once.

The custom of second burial is a waste of time, waste of energy and a waste of money—all in a Vanity Fair. What they do is very ludicrous indeed. When a person dies he is interred quietly, or as it were in secret—without great noise. Then the members of his family set about preparing for the second burial which is usually boisterous taking the look of a carnival. They gather much money and some even owe debts for this purpose in order to gratify the lusts of carnal men and earn worldly praise.

On the material day of the occasion they carry about, sometimes along the streets, in a vain show, a richly decorated coffin known to everyone to be containing mere relics along with an effigy. But the bearers sometimes gyrate as they go along and pretend to be acting under the power of the spirit of the dead in the coffin. The coffin is then buried and this *is* followed by feasting in an elaborate scale with a view to exhibiting the wealth of the family. The only reward they can get from this exercise is nothing but the praise of men which brings no blessing.

Apart from the spiritual aspect of these unnecessary obsequies which makes them abominable, it is sometimes observed that while all the money is spent for these ceremonies there are children in the family who for lack of funds could not be given good education or put in some trades.

Those who are thinking that their ancestors are in a position to bless or protect them are living in false hopes. God moved the Psalmist through His Spirit to say: *"Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth, in that very day his thoughts perish."*-Ps. 146: 3, 4.

As soon as a person gives up the spirit, he loses all senses of consciousness and feeling. That is why those of us who are living are counselled to make the most of the opportunity of our existence by serving God faithfully and zealously. Said King Solomon: "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the Sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."-Eccl. I: 5, 6, 10.

The custom of cutting hair off the head or chin or putting marks on the skin and so on for the dead is also pagan. The law of God to the Jews says: "Ye shall not round the corners of your heads; neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard. Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD,"- Lev. 19: 27, 28; see also Deut, 14: 1.

### **Sanctimonious Rites**

Certain church organisations also indulge in unnecessary formalities and sanctimonious rites which are spiritually meaningless. Christian burial is defined in *A Catholic Dictionary* as "the interment of a corpse according to the church's funeral rites in consecrated ground, if the grave is in a non Catholic Cemetery it is to be blessed at the time of the burial." (Page 63) In the Roman

Catholic Church funeral rites are elaborate. The priest, vested in a black cope, sprinkles the coffin with, "holy water" at the gate of the churchyard while the body is being conveyed to the cathedral. The *Catholic Dictionary* states: "After entering the church the responsory *Subvenite* is sung with its verse, and if the Office of the Dead and requiem Mass are to be said or sung, they immediately follow... The priest sprinkles the body with holy water and incenses it, thrice on each side; he then says a prayer for the deceased, that he may have everlasting joys." (Page 204). Some other denominations also do like the Roman Catholic Church. When Sarah, Abraham's faithful wife died, her grave was not blessed with "holy water" before she was buried. The ground accepted her corpse quite all right. Abraham, David, Lazarus whom Christ loved and Jesus Christ himself were all buried when they died without "holy water" being sprinkled on their bodies and without their graves being blessed!

The practice of blessing the grave, sprinkling the coffin or corpse with the so called holy water and incensing it are acts of sanctimoniousness which do no good to the dead and which have no foundation in the holy Scriptures, Wherever a person is buried even if the corpse is eaten by carnivals or devoured by animals or the person gets drowned in the sea in the day of resurrection God through Jesus Christ will certainly bring him back to life according to Revelation 20:12, 13, The blessing of the grave is a useless exercise. Sprinkling of water serves no spiritual purpose either. With regard to the use of incense, there is no precedent laid down by Christ or his apostles. Since the apostate Jews misused it, God condemned the use of incense. The Lord said: "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me..."-Isa. 1: 13.

Moreover, prayers said on behalf of the dead have no effect. No amount of, prayer can reverse the judgment of God I in favour of the wicked neither can prayer make Him punish the righteous. God is going to deal with ever} one on resurrection day according to the works he did when alive.-Eccl. 12: 13, 14; Isa. 3: 10, 11; Rom. 14: 12; 2 Cor. 5: 10.

It was sin that brought death into the world. (Rom.5:12; 6:23.) But Jesus Christ who was not a sinner died in order to redeem sinful mankind from the clutches of sin and death according to God's purpose. (Rom. 5: 17-19; Heb. 2: 9, 14-15; 1 Pet. 2: 21-24) So there is the hope of resurrection for the dead and it is this understanding that makes true Christians not to be overwhelmed by sorrow or to mourn for the dead as non-believers do. St. Paul in his epistle to the Thessalonians said: "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."- 1 Thess. 4:13-14, 18.

In concluding, we must warn that sumptuous feasting, heavy drinking and dancing at funerals are all unnecessary exercises and they are pagan. Therefore true Christians must not do them.- Eph. 5: 7-11.

An occasion of the burial of the dead ought to be one of soberness when everyone should reflect upon the vanity of man, and think of himself recalling to mind that he, like the deceased, will one day go the way of all flesh except he is specially favoured by Jesus Christ by reason of his faith (John 8: 51; 11: 25, 26) to pass through this old evil world to the new WORLD WITHOUT END.

## LAZARUS AND THE RICH MAN

**THE blessedness that would mark the end of the faithful and the hopeless future of the unfaithful, notwithstanding their worldly and material achievements, were depicted in the parable concerning Lazarus and the rich man. This was one of the famous parables of Jesus Christ in which he expressed vital truths and taught important lessons, and by which he also distinguished himself as a teacher of great intelligence and perfect wisdom who came from God.**

In the first place, it will be necessary to reproduce, word for word, Luke's account in regard to what Jesus Christ said about Lazarus and the rich man. It is recorded at Luke 16: 19-31, as follows: "There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores." And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. "But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence. "Then he said. I pray thee therefore father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, they have Moses and the prophets; let them bear them.

"And he said, nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither wilt they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

The foregoing passage is given a literal interpretation in certain religious circles. They hold the view that it is not a parable. Therefore their priests and other preachers cite the "experience" of the rich man to back their teaching that the wicked, after death, are tormented everlastingly in the "fire" of hell. They also make reference to the case of Lazarus to give solace to the poor among their adherents giving the impression that poverty is a passport to heaven!

Rev. C. I. Scofield, D.D., was of the opinion that the passage is not a parable. Commenting on the text he stated in his revised marginal renderings in *The Scofield Reference Bible* that verses 19-31 of Luke chapter 16 "are not said to be a parable". He added: "Rich men and beggars are common; there is no reason why Jesus may not have had in mind a particular case"

### Parable

We must express our disagreement on biblical grounds, with the view of Rev. Scofield though it is widely shared, believed and taught in Christendom. If the passage is taken to be a narration of a particular incident, then there are a number of things in it that cannot be reconciled with the

revealed truth of the Scriptures. And Jesus Christ, in all fairness, would never subscribe to anything that contradicts the word of God.

Now let us consider certain Points which we are going to raise in the light of the Scriptures, and the unreasonableness of interpreting the passage literally will at once become clear.

(1) what sins did the rich man commit that made him deserve to be punished in an eternal fire? Was it just because he in his lifetime enjoyed good things or is it an offence to enjoy good things of life? There was no evidence that he maltreated or oppressed the poor beggar. Who among bishops and pastors will allow an ulcerous beggar to sit by him at his dining table that while eating he would be inhaling the obnoxious odour emanating from his sores? And on the other hand, what good works or righteousness did Lazarus himself do that qualified him to go to heaven? Was it because he was a poor beggar with sores being licked by dogs?

(2) If Lazarus had gone to heaven as certain churches are preaching why did Jesus Christ himself say, "And NO MAN hath ascended up to heaven", as recorded in John 3: 13? The Bible shows that nobody would ever go to heaven before Christ had ascended up there, and it is he (Christ) whom the Almighty Father has commissioned to raise the dead saints and to take them to heaven. And this work Jesus was scheduled to do at His second presence. He told the apostles: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14: 1-3; see also. I Cor. 15: 50-55; 1 Thess. 4: 16, 17; 2 Tim. 4: 7, 8,) How could Lazarus go to heaven when Christ had not gone there to prepare the place nor returned to receive the dead saints to himself?

(3) Christ did not even say that Lazarus went to heaven but that he was carried by angels to "Abraham's bosom." And some churches preach that "Abraham's bosom" is heaven but Christ did not say so. *Bosom* means a person's breast or the enclosure formed by breast and arms. How then could Abraham's bosom accommodate all the righteous?

(4) What authority of the Scripture can the clergymen cite to show that a person in hell can see or converse with a man in heaven and vice versa? The heavens are higher than the earth (Isa. I, 55: 8, 9) and are very far away from hell. How can a finger tip dipped in water in heaven be taken to a man in the devastating, unquenchable flames in hell without the finger tip drying up? By the way, is it possible literally for a drop of water to quench the thirst of a person in torment in such a consuming fire?

(5) Moreover, the Bible makes it quite plain that a person who is gone to hell is silent and unconscious, and therefore he cannot see or speak. The Psalmist said; "Turn to me, O Lord, and deliver my soul: O save me for Thy mercy's sake. For there is no one in death that is I mindful of Thee: and who shall confess I to Thee in hell?"- (Ps. 6: 5-6; *Douay I Version*; see also Job 3: 11-19) And King Solomon said: "For neither work, nor reason, nor wisdom, nor knowledge, shall I be in hell, whither thou art hastening." . -Eccl. 9: 5, 10, *Douay Version*.

Since according to the Scripture just r quoted, one cannot confess God or confess to Him in hell; and since one in hell cannot "reason", how could the rich man I have begged for the quenching of his thirst, and pleaded that his brethren on I earth be warned so that they might not go to that place of torment?

In fact, it is impossible for people who do not pray for understanding, and who are not led by the Spirit of God, to understand the parables of Christ. When his disciples asked him why he spoke to the people in parables, he answered: "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given... Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand..."-Matt. 13: 10-15.

### **Interpretation**

The truth with reference to Lazarus and the rich man is that Jesus Christ was speaking parabolically, and that is why a literal interpretation of the passage is very wrong and spiritually absurd. It is necessary to make a brief review of Luke chapter 16. This particular chapter opens with the parable of Jesus Christ concerning a certain rich man and his unjust steward. He taught his disciples a good lesson from that parable as to faithfulness in the service of God, and he warned: "Ye cannot serve God and *mammon*."-verses 1-13.

The Pharisees who were notorious for their hypocrisy and covetousness heard all what Jesus said to his disciples and they (the Pharisees) held him in derision. But Christ told them: "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." (Verses 14, 15) He further told them of how everyone was laying claim to the kingdom of God and then showed the genuineness of the unfailing law of God. (Verses 17, 18) It was in continuation of his address to the Pharisees he spoke the parable of Lazarus and the rich man.-verses 19-31.

We have made this brief review of the whole chapter so as to show that the parable under reference has relevance to the Pharisees who arrogantly claimed to stand in a better position before God than everyone else a holier than thou altitude and who went beside themselves to deride Jesus Christ the righteous. Today, in these last days, there are in existence the counterparts of the Pharisees, and so we are going to dwell on the major aspects of the parable as they apply to religious people in our time.

The *rich man* in the parable represents false religious leaders-the antitypical Pharisees-who are materially very wealthy and who also claim to be the custodians of the Law of God but who in actuality do not possess the TRUTH of God or good doctrine that is necessary for salvation. Their end, according to the Scriptures, shall be bitterness and anguish-and that will be at the time of God's visitation which is impending.

Concerning such false religious leaders God said: "As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich. They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge. Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end therefore?" (Jer. 5: 27-31) About lying religious leaders and their followers Jesus Christ said: "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."-Matt. 15:

14. It is a known fact that some religious bodies are even richer than Governments of the day and they are so absorbed in the politics of the world and other secular affairs that they devote less time to things of the Spirit. Worst of all they do not give the spiritual food, the truth of Christ, that can nourish the people so as to obtain salvation.

For the fact that they lack the truth of God, the false prophets, regardless of their material possessions, are adjudged spiritually as poor and blind; and that bespeaks the misery that shall mark their end. To them, what Christ said as recorded in Revelation chapter 3, verses 14 to 18, is applicable. Said he: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

### **Poor in Spirit**

The name *Lazarus* means, God's help. In the parable *Lazarus* represents all the: people of God lovers of truth and righteousness who need the help of God. Unfortunately, these people of goodwill toward God found themselves under the dominion of bogus religious shepherds who fed them but with untruths symbolised by *crumbs* in the parable. Jesus warned his disciples to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees". And they understood "that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." (Matt. 16: 6-12) Christians of today are also warned *to* beware of and to examine in the light of the Scriptures, the teachings of their religious leaders.

*Death* in the parable means a change of condition-Lazarus from poverty to glory and comfort, and the rich man from "glory" *to* shame, torment and disfavour. Thus the *death of Lazarus* bear the sense of the change that came in the lives of the lovers of truth through the grace of God in that the time came when they were delivered from the errors and the vicious powers, of counterfeit prophets and priests *to* the light of Jesus Christ where they are fed with the truth that gives spiritual nourishment, comfort and satisfaction. Indeed, God is the helper of the poor and needy. Said the Psalmist: "But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me: Thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God."-Ps. 40: 17. ,

And Jesus Christ said; "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled."

-Matt. 5: 3, 6; see also James 2:5; Rev. 2; 9.

*Abraham's bosom* signifies the Lord's side of favour. To be in Abraham's bosom is a clear evidence of God's love and favour for one. This we can appreciate the more from the practical example of I Jesus Christ and one of his disciple whom he loved and who was leaning on his bosom or breast.-Job 13; 23; 21; 20.

And so when Abraham, the friend of God and the spiritual father of the faithful, will be resurrected with other ancient faithful on earth, not in heaven, those who are in favour with God, the faithful Christians at that time, will associate with him in God's Organisation but the false prophets shall be cast out only to be covered with shame and to suffer pain of mind. Hence Jesus Christ said; "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and

shall set down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last. "-Luke 13; 28-30.

It is the state of restlessness and shame weeping and gnashing of teeth-in which false religionists shall find themselves when their errors, devilish doctrines, and hypocrisy are exposed and become known to the people that is parabolised as *the rich man's torment in hell*. There is a prophecy showing that the prophets who are preaching lies in the name of God and seeing false visions shall cease to put on their so called religious or holy garments when people shall have known them to be charlatans. They win because of shame even hide their identity. As it is written; "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive; but he shall say, I am no prophet, I am an husbandman; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth. And one shall say unto him, what are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends."-Zech. 13: 4-6.

This prophecy has already begun fulfilment that is why the respect many religious leaders were commanding in time past has been on the wane. The claim of some of them to being in the main stream of orthodoxy cannot help them out neither can it stem the tide of their counterfeit glory from receding.

But the faithful Christians that are preaching the truth and who in time past were despised and treated as mediocre or the filth of society continue to shine in the light of Christ reflecting the glory of God. -Isa. 60: 1-3, 14-17; Matt. 5:14-16.

And there is a *gulf* which in the parable means the division between truth and falsehood or light and darkness, and/or the separation between those on the side of truth which belongs to God and those on the side of falsehood which is of the devil. The false prophets may seek for compromise and will want the truth to be preached in a soft manner so as to avoid the piercing judgment of God's word that exposes their hypocrisy and lies. (Isa. 30: 9, 10) But this will not be possible since the truth cannot be compromised, and since light and darkness have no communion. (2 Cor. 6: 14-18) There is, however, room for tolerance and peaceful co-existence.

We do not intend to go into further details but from the explanation contained in this *Sermon*, the truth of the matter is already made bare. Let no one deceive himself as to think that he will go to heaven by lending support to false doctrines or by being literally poor. And let false prophets and faked visionaries beware! What is important is the doing of righteousness or God's will. Jesus said: "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven."-Matt. 5: 6, 20, *R.S.V*

## THE ACT OF GOD

**IN sacred history we find occasions when the Almighty God took measures to punish men for their sins while He placed under His refuge His faithful worshippers. Any of such doings was an act of God. However, what may appear in the eyes of many people in the world to be an act of God may not in reality be so. It requires divine knowledge and spiritual understanding to know what truly is an act of God.**

According to *JACK'S REFERENCE BOOK* the phrase Act of God is used by lawyers to indicate “a direct, violent, sudden, and irresistible act of nature, which could not, by any reasonable care, have been foreseen or resisted”. This is said to be “one of the few defences open to a common carrier who fails to safely deliver goods; he is always freed from liability if he can show that an act of God... proved the sole, direct and irresistible cause of the loss”.

*The American Peoples Encyclopedia* states: “**ACT OF GOD**, as a legal expression, signifies any occurrence not caused by human negligence, or intervention; such as storms, lighting tempests, the consequence of which no party under any circumstances (independently of special contract) is bound to make good to another. The chief applications of the term are in insurance, where Act of god is an exception to the insurer's liability; and in the law of contract, where it often excuses from performance.” (Vol. 1, page 129).

From the interpretation given the phrase *act of God* as a legal expression we can rightly judge that the ordinary understanding of the makers of the law could not be much different from what many people think up till today as regards an act of God. We agree as legally defined that unforeseen, sudden and violent occurrences caused by spiritual forces cannot be humanly resisted. But is it correct to say that ALL such occurrences are from God? Considered from a religious or scriptural standpoint, certain occurrences such as those under discussion, which have been passed by English law as acts of God, do not really proceed from God Almighty.

### Misfortune

Now, when a calamity or misfortune befalls some people they often say that it is an act of God. In 1959 a tragedy struck Japan as a result of a violent hurricane and many people died. The incident was reported by Reuter and published in the *Daily Service* (Sept. 28, 1959) thus: “Typhoon ‘Vera’ killed at least 852 people, injured 3,937 and made more than 318,000 homeless when it raged the length of Japan's main island... Another 1,462 people were missing as rescue workers toiled throughout the night and day recovering bodies from rivers, harbours, collapsed buildings and landslides. Damage to communications described as the worst since the Pacific war, make any accurate estimate of the disaster toll impossible.” Some people said that the disaster was an act of God.

As a matter of fact the history of the human race is filled with sad events of this nature. We can recall the incident of the earthquake which in 1960, shattered the Moroccan port of Agadir in which 12,000 were reported killed! There were instances in which storms caused rivers to rise and canoes or boats were capsized resulting in the loss of lives and property. Only last week the *Sunday Post* (Sept. 7, 1969) carried the news that “at least 38 people have died as the tail end of

hurricane Francelia brought torrential rain and floods to low-lying areas of Southern Mexico. More than 50,000 people were left homeless as rivers burst their banks.”

Sometimes trees fell and killed people. And not long ago, a gentleman in Warri was struck to death by lightning. For all these things and other similar ones which occur among men from time to time, some people charge God for being responsible.

A certain woman who lost her daughter in a canoe disaster sometime ago, said while wailing that she did not know why God always afflicted her. She believed that it was God that caused the trouble. In fact, many people always think that God is responsible for their sufferings, poverty and misfortunes. This attitude of men is borne out of ignorance concerning the purpose and ways of God.

It is our aim in this *Sermon* to make people of goodwill understand what actually, according to the Bible, an act of God is so that they may disabuse their minds of whatever bias they might have developed against God consequent upon any past bitter experience.

### **Acts of Satan**

The Holy Bible clearly shows that Satan the devil is responsible for many things such as those mentioned earlier in this treatise. But he makes people believe that God is the cause of their ills and thereby influences them to reproach their Maker. There are people who because of what they have suffered in life have developed hate for God and refrained from worshiping Him. The devil is always pleased with such people for having deceived them to achieve his objective even if only for a while.

We have a great lesson to learn from what happened to Job in his days at the instance of the devil. Job was a man who was perfect and upright in heart and one who feared God and eschewed evil. The devil boasted before God that but for His protection over Job, he (Satan) could make him (Job) to curse God to His face. But God said to Satan: “Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand.” – Read Job 1:1-12.

It is recorded that Satan went forth from the presence of God and persecuted Job. He caused the loss of Job’s oxen, asses, sheep, camels and even servants with such a stroke as was capable of breaking the heart of any man. Moreover at that time of those heart rending incidents, one of Job’s servants brought to him the most tragic news saying, “Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house: and, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.” – Job. 1:18, 19.

But did Job blame God for his troubles as some so-called Christians do today? He never did. Rather he worshipped God and said: “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; **blessed be the name of the LORD.**” And it is written: “In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.” – Read Job 1:20-22.

The faith and understanding shown by Job was exemplary. When he said that God gave and He had taken away, he did not mean that it was God who killed his cattle, servants and children but that God allowed the tribulations to come to him hence the devil had his way.

Yes, God allows such things in order to test the faith of His worshippers. And where they prove steadfast and faithful He showers blessing upon them. Job had this understanding; that was why he did not charge God foolishly but blessed Him and maintained his integrity till the end. “So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning.” – Job 42:12-17; see also James 5:10, 11.

However, the point we are making is that those troubles of Job were caused by the devil and they were therefore acts of Satan. But today similar things that happen to people are termed, ignorantly of course, acts of God.

Satan is the author of confusion. He is known as “the prince of the devils”. (Mark 3:22, 23) Jesus Christ called him “the prince of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30). St. Paul referred to Satan as “the god of this world” and “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” which makes them stubborn and rebellious.

2 Corinthians 4:3, 4; Ephesians 2:2.

The devil has power to cause storms or violent winds and other things purposely to do havoc as in the case of Job’s children whom he killed with a storm. He did similar things in the days of Christ on earth but Jesus showed his superiority over him by commanding his storm to calmness. As it is written: “NOW it came to pass on a certain day, that he (Jesus) went into a ship with his disciple: and he said unto them, Let us go over unto the other side of the lake. And they launched forth. But as they sailed he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy. And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm. And he said unto them, where is your faith? And they being afraid wondered, saying one to another, what manner of man is this! For he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him.” – Luke 8:22-25.

### **Finger of God**

It has been made plain enough that the incidents which some people describe as acts of God are in truth acts of Satan. But the question that still remains is, what is an act of God, and how can it be known?

In the first place, we must point out that God does not act without first giving warning to the people. And when He acts He does not punish indiscriminately by getting the just and innocent ones involved. He warned the Jews saying: “The innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked.” – Exodus 23:7; see also Proverbs 17:26.

In the genesis of the human race when the population of the earth was growing dense, God found that wickedness had become the order of the day. Every imagination of the thoughts of the hearts of men was evil continually, and so the Great Creator decided to put an end to their iniquities by

destroying them. Nevertheless, Noah, whom God found righteous, was sent to warn the inhabitants of the earth against the consequences of their sins and the impending destruction.

And because the people paid no heed to the voice of God represented in Noah's preaching but continued in the pleasures of sin, God caused the historic Deluge to destroy the world. But He saved Noah and his family of seven by means of the ark which He provided. The full account of this ancient event is recorded in Genesis chapter six verses eight. And St. Peter stated that God "spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bring in the flood upon the world of the ungodly". (2 Peter. 2:5) This was an act of God pure and simple.

Another example is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in which Lot, who was a just man, with his daughters was delivered by God. – Genesis 19:1-30; 2 Peter 2:6-8.

Furthermore, mention can be made of the plagues with which the Egyptians were punished in the days of Moses the prophet, as acts of God. Those wonders were as distinctive as of divine force that the magicians of Egypt were compelled to confess to pharaoh: "This is the finger of God." (Exodus 8:16-19). And when the Israelites on their way to Canaan were being pursued by the Egyptians with a sinister motive, God destroyed them (Egyptians) in the Red Sea. Then the children of Israel under the leadership of Moses sang saying, "I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea..." – Exodus 14:5-31; 15:1-13. This again is an act of God.

Concerning those happenings, Moses later told the Jews: "...For I speak not with your children which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the Lord your God, His greatness, His mighty hand, and His stretched out arm, and His miracles, and HIS ACTS, which He did in the midst of Egypt unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and unto all his land... **But your eyes have seen all the great acts of the Lord which He did.**" – Deuteronomy 11:1-3, 7.

### Strange Act

The prophecies of the Bible point to this our age, the last days, as a time when the most terrible of the acts of God will take place for the destruction of Satan and all wickedness. It is shown that it will be preceded by what is described as the "strange work", which is the preaching of the gospel for the exposition of all works of error and darkness, and for the showing of the light of Christ to guide the sheep of God to salvation. This work of vital importance is now in progress. Isaiah's prophecy says: "**For the Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, He shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that He may do His work, His strange work; and bring to pass His act, His strange act.**" – Isaiah 28:21.

The strange act is not international wars but the great tribulation and battle of the great day of God Almighty, the like of which has not been seen or known in ALL world history. Concerning it, Jesus said: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." (Matthew 24:21) And in Jeremiah it is written: "And the slain of the LORD shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of

the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung upon the ground.” – Jeremiah 25:33.

On the strength of the explanation we have made in this *Sermon* from the Bible point of view, it will be wrong to regard every operation by forces beyond human control as an act of God knowing that there are also evil forces under the command of Satan. The incidents of storms, hurricane,s typhoons, lightnings, floods and so on, in which people, good and bad, die in different parts of the world are the works of the devil who knows that he now has but a short time to live.

Let no one therefore blame the cause of his ills upon God for He is not responsible for our temptations. James the apostle stated: “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man.” – James 1:13.

However, be it known to everyone that the day of the Lord’s strange act, which is going to be the greatest catastrophe of all time, is drawing near. It is those who serve God faithfully and in truth that will be fully protected and delivered at that time by His grace and power.

## WHAT DOES HARVEST MEAN?

**ONE of the greatest periods in the history of the world is that parabolically referred to by Jesus Christ as HARVEST. And it is in the context of that parable of our Saviour, which has relation to the gathering of the sheep of God into His Organisation, that harvest is of significance to true Christians. But the pity of it is that, today, some people who profess to be the disciples of Christ have redefined harvest in tendentious terms of commercialism in the name of God.**

Harvest means the reaping in of grain or other farm products; or the season for doing this. It is used both literally and figuratively in the Scripture.

Many people have been asking to know why the God's Kingdom Society does not hold harvest thanksgiving services as some churches do and whether it is commanded in the Holy Bible that harvest should be observed by Christians.

Without mincing words and without fear of criticism we must say that harvest festival is not a Christian institution neither are Christians commanded to celebrate it. That apart, the way the churches observe it is very unscriptural. **There is nothing wrong in devising ways and means of making collections for the upkeep of a church organization but this must be done without the appearance of sin and must be in accordance with the Scriptures as ordained by God.**

In certain church organizations, harvest is observed annually as a church festival during which money, flowers and fruits are brought to church services as thank-offering. Harvest festival is regarded as an occasion for raising of funds for church denominations. Special envelopes are printed and given out to members and non-members to solicit for donations. Such envelopes are also sent to the known wives of their polygamous members whom they do not allow to participate in the holy communion. In view of their tendency to get much money, bazaars are commonly organized to form part of the celebrations. Goods are sold at grossly excessive prices. For example, a tuber of yam costing about three hundred naira may be offered for sale at an unduly high price of ten thousand naira or more. An orange of fifty naira may go for five hundred naira and so on.

The pastors or catechists or some other prominent church-men often act as salesmen on such occasions. They describe the goods being sold as having special blessing of heaven so that they are worth more than any amount of money anyone can offer for them. It is usually a time the rich make a parade of their wealth because the occasion in most cases take the form of an auction where the articles are sold to the highest of successive bidders.

A poor man may offer a hundred naira for a bunch of banana, the salesman holding an auctioneer's mallet will not let his hammer go down until someone else has offered five thousand naira and sometimes a third person takes it up with an offer of seven thousand naira and perhaps a fourth person, wishing to show himself as a man of substance and in order to earn the praise of men, will wade in with an offer of fifteen thousand naira. Of course, with such an exorbitant

offer the hammer or mallet quickly goes down. And the poor man, though a faithful worshipper, is made to feel that he is not serving God or helping the church, all because he is poor!

Under such circumstances, the poor people are not happy being obsessed with inferiority complex. Granted that those articles have divine blessing, why should they be dispensed in such a way as to deprive the poor of them – the poor who are more often than not richer in faith?

This in truth is far from being a Christian practice. There is a clear case in the Scriptures of a poor widow who gave a farthing and earned more praise and blessing than the rich when offerings were made in the days of Jesus. This was so, because, judged spiritually, the poor widow gave more than the rich. She gave ALL she had while the rich only gave insignificant portions of their abundance. - Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4.

There are instances too where certain church groups on the occasion of harvest festival, sponsored and organized ball dances; and the proceeds went into the coffers of the churches. It is most disappointing and very bad indeed that a church organization should sponsor a ball dance and give occasion for immorality to be practiced. What some people do with married and unmarried women on such occasions are a common knowledge and they are a transgression of Christian principles. In such places too people drink and get drunk and there can be nothing in such things that could tend to give glory to God and Christ. Yet these things are done in the name of God so that the churches may get funds!

But St. Paul said: “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” – 1 Corinthians 10:31.

### **Profiteering**

No language can be too hard to be used in condemning the sale of articles at extraordinarily high prices under the auspices of a church organization. If individuals do what the churches are practicing they will definitely be guilty of profiteering and we do not see how the churches can be absolved from such guilt. In fact, with a church which is identified with the name of God and which should be a shining example to the believers in the practice of righteousness, it is even worse.

From the law of God concerning usury in the days of old, Christians can understand how to deal among themselves in a righteous way. The law prohibits the imposing of any interest on a loan, whether in money or in wheat or other commodities. As it is written: “Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury” (Deuteronomy 23:19; see also Exodus 22:25 and Leviticus 25:36, 37.) and in Proverbs 28:8, it is stated: “He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor.”

There is no doubt that a gain of two thousand, two hundred and fifty naira on a tuber of yam costing only three hundred naira is excessive and most unjust. Moderation is a Christian virtue. And St. Paul admonished: “Let your moderation be known unto all men...” – Philippians 4:5.

Another detestable aspect of the whole show is that of the playing of games of chance for money. Such things as bagatelle, “lucky-dip”, raffle and so on, are done some as a part of harvest festival in order to swell the purse of the Church! No faithful, true worshipper of God takes part in gambling because it is known to be unscriptural. (Proverbs 28:20, 22; 20:21; 1 Timothy 6:6-12,17-19) And so the doing of it under the auspices of a church must be condemned without reservation.

The early disciples of Jesus Christ did not organize bazaars at any time to raise funds to carry on the work of God. The Jews who carried trade into the house of God in the days of Jesus Christ had an experience which should serve as a lesson to church groups that luxuriate in the exercise of buying and selling as a part of harvest thanksgiving.

Reporting the incident, St. John stated: “And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise...” (John 2:13-17) It is sometimes said that it is because of what Christ did that certain people do not now make their bazaars inside their church buildings. But the question is, did Christ command them to do so at all?

### **Harvest Festival**

The feast of harvest, we agree, was one of the festivals God Almighty commanded the Jews through Moses to observe. It was also called the feast of weeks and it was connected with the agricultural season of the Jews. The law says: “Thou shall keep the feast of unleavened bread... and the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field...” – Exodus 23:15-19; see also Deuteronomy 16:9-12.

The law further states that the people should not appear empty-handed but that “every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which He hath given thee.” (Deuteronomy 16:16,17) There was no provision that the produce from the farms should be auctioned at exorbitant prices as the churches are doing.

The point which we must bring to light is the fact that there is no instruction that the harvest festival should be continued in the Christian era. Jesus Christ did not observe it and his apostles never did either.

To all true Christians what harvest means is clearly indicated in the parable of Jesus Christ concerning the tares and the wheat. As it is written: “Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the

tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.” – Matthew 13:24-30.

Jesus Christ did give the interpretation of the parable to his disciples. As it is written: “Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.” – Matthew 13:36-40.

### **Spiritual Harvest**

It is of great interest to Christians to know that we are now in the harvest age and God is already gathering His sheep, the children of the kingdom, into His fold through the preaching of the gospel. This work will continue until the end when God through Jesus Christ and his angels will take vengeance on the devil’s children, the tares. On this score, Jesus said: “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” – Matthew 13:41,42.

The fire is a symbol of the torment and anguish the wicked shall suffer at that time as a reward of their sins before they shall die and go to everlasting destruction. And St. Paul said: “But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile.” (Romans 2:8,9). It is not after death they would be cast into the symbolic fire but in their life-time because after death a man does not know anything neither can he feel pain. – Psalm 146:3,4; Ecclesiastes 9:5,10.

But concerning the children of God who believe and obey the TRUTH and have been gathered into His Kingdom organization, Jesus said: “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” – Matthew 13:43.

It is the spiritual harvest – the gathering of God’s children in this age – that is of importance to Christians. People who have this understanding must endeavour to be diligent in the studies of the Scriptures so as to acquire the knowledge that will enable them to serve as fitting vessels in the Lord’s field service. Despite the deteriorating state of the world in spiritual and moral values, there are millions of people who are yearning for the truth of Jesus Christ. But those gifted with the power of the gospel in the true sense of it are very scarce indeed.

This, as a matter of fact, is no surprise since it goes to fulfil the words of our Lord and Saviour: “...The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.” - Luke 10:2.

In the light of the foregoing, it will be wrong for Christians to continue to celebrate harvest as an occasion for bringing to church services money and other products, and for engaging in profiteering or in unjust commercialism in the name of God. The harvest that Christians should concern themselves with is not that of material things but the one that has to do with the salvation of the righteous in this last days of the present evil world that is now racing at a terrific speed to its destruction.

## WHOM DID CAIN MARRY?

**THAT Cain married his own sister is a fact, which, up till today, remains a mystery to some. The marriage of Cain is not of any particular significance in the Holy Scriptures but it has become topical because sceptics use it as a point of argument in creating doubts in the minds of some people about the truth of God's word.**

Cain was the firstborn of Adam and Eve; he was the elder brother of Abel, and was a farmer by trade. In Genesis 4:1-2, it is written; “And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.”

### Retribution

**The history of Cain is not one that gives inspiration. But the lesson we can learn from it is that wickedness, whether it is done in secret or in the open, does not profit; for it must certainly go with divine retribution.**

Cain brought the produce of his farm and made an offering to the Almighty God. For the fact that his heart was not right and that he did not do well, his offering was rejected. But the offering of Abel who was a keeper of sheep was accepted by the Lord. Cain became envious and was very angry. And so in a fit of jealousy he pounced upon his innocent brother, Abel, and killed him. - Genesis 4:3-8.

After this gruesome incident of the first murder in human history, according to the Bible, Cain was caused to face the grim consequence of his sin. “And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?” (Genesis 4:9) What an impudent criminal Cain was! He had not the least grain of human touch and showed no penitence at all for the atrocity he committed. Rather he had the devilish guts to ask God whether he was his brother's keeper. Such is the attitude of hardened criminals.

God has an effective way of bringing die-hard offenders or sinners to justice. There is nothing anyone can hide from the Most High, and so the iniquity of Cain was clearly open to Him. He said to Cain: “...What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.” – Genesis 4:10-12.

It was at that crucial moment Cain knew that he was in real trouble. He therefore pleaded that his punishment was greater than he could bear in that anyone who found him under that curse would slay him. However, God in exercise of His infinite mercy mitigated the punishment and set a mark on him so that anyone who found him might not kill him – yet he was still under curse.

### Object Lesson

Before proceeding to touch on the core of the subject under discussion, we cannot fail to bring to a clearer view some of the object lessons that Christians must learn from the matter of Cain and

Abel. The rejection of Cain's offering is a pointer to the fact that not all services of those purporting to be worshippers of God are acceptable to Him. So it is that not everyone who calls himself a Christian is truly a disciple of Christ. Evidence of true discipleship must be seen in the practice of love and godly works to justify the claim.

Jesus Christ said: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21) Again, he told his followers that it was their strong love for one another that would prove that they were truly his disciples. He declared: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. **By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.**" - John 13:34,35; see also Romans 13:10.

If we want our services to receive God's approval, we must always endeavour to maintain a clean heart-condition and do things sincerely and with an unalloyed faith in Jehovah, the Most High. It was the high standard of faith exhibited in the offering of Abel that earned him all the credit of righteousness in the sight of God. And St. Paul stated: "By faith Abel offered a sacrifice greater than Cain's, and through faith his goodness was attested. for his offerings had God's approval; and through faith he continued to speak after his death." - Hebrews 11:4, *New English Bible*.

Moreover, the punishment of Cain serves to warn Christians against the dangers of envy, malice, hatred and unjust anger which were the vices that led him (Cain) to commit the heinous crime of murder. And by that he identified himself as a child of the devil. John the apostle of Christ exhorted the Christians to love in truth, unlike Cain who murdered his brother. He stated: "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." - I John 3:10-12.

After the curse had been pronounced on Cain, he went away. And the Bible states: "And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch." - Genesis 4:16,17.

The argument of some people, especially the secularists, is that the land of Nod was a city inhabited by another race of people who were not the descendants of Adam and Eve; and that it was from among those people Cain married his wife. Their aim in advancing this point is to dispute the Bible account of the creation, and thus bring the Book of books into disrepute.

A point the sceptics always stress is that Cain and Abel were the only children of Adam and Eve, and that since Cain alone was left after the death of Abel, it would not have been possible for Cain to get a wife if other people who did not spring from the loins of Adam and Eve were not in existence. This argument seems to be reasonable but in point of fact, it has no substance or any iota of truth.

### **Wandering**

In the first place, we wish to point out that "nod" was not the name of a person neither was it the name of any existing city to which Cain went. *Nod* is derived from a Hebrew word meaning "wandering". Thus the land of Nod in actual fact means the land of wandering. It was so

described because it was there Cain, after he had been cursed to be a fugitive and a vagabond, ended his journey or wandering and settled. It was a virgin land on the east of Eden and there were no people in it when Cain arrived. And it was he himself who founded a city in that land and called it after the name of his son, Enoch. – Genesis 4:16,17.

The statement of the Bible that “Cain knew his wife” does not connote that he recognised or met his wife for the first time as some wrongly interpret it to mean. Of course, that interpretation does not make sense. How can one marry a woman and yet not recognise her? And the statement does not show, too, that he took a wife to himself in the land of Nod.

The word “knew” in the context has to do with sexual relation. So, the statement that "Cain knew his wife", means in effect that he had carnal knowledge of his wife. And what was the result of that particular “knowledge?” The Bible states: “And she conceived, and bare Enoch.” If it were a matter of mere recognition, conception would not have followed.

**With regard to the issue as to the woman Cain married, the Bible gives no other understanding than that he married one of his sisters.**

The opinion that Cain and Abel were the only children of Adam and Eve is scripturally unsustainable. It is a clear manifestation of the ignorance of sceptics and of those unskilled in the revealed word of God. The Holy Bible shows that after the death of Abel, Adam and Eve were blessed with another male child whom Eve named Seth. As it is written: “And Adam knew his wife again (had sexual dealing with her again); and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.” - Genesis 4:25.

Apart from Seth, Adam had other children - sons and daughters. The account of the Bible about this is quite plain. For it is stated: “And the days of Adam after he had begotten Seth were eight hundred years: and he begat sons and daughters: And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died.” - Genesis 5:4,5.

At the beginning of the human race there was no law against the marriage between brothers and sisters; and it was not therefore an offence to do so. Even Abraham, the faithful servant of God, married his own half-sister, Sarah, the daughter of his polygamous father.

Concerning her Abraham told Abimelech, king of Gerar, “And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.” (Genesis 20:12).

It was in the days of Moses the prophet, God enacted laws against incest, and since then it became a sin for closely related persons to have sexual intercourse. These laws are recorded in chapter 18 of the book of Leviticus; see also Matthew 5:17-20.

### **Genealogy**

Considering the fact that apart from Adam and his family there was no other race of people in existence, there can be no doubt that Cain married one of his sisters. The genealogy of the human race as outlined in the first book of the Chronicles in the Holy Bible begins from Adam as the ancestor. (I Chronicles chapter one)

In all of history no other name than that of Adam as being the ancestor of the human race has ever been known or can even be acceptable. **Any talk about the evolutionar**

More light is thrown on this point in the account of Luke concerning the genealogy of Jesus Christ. He wrote thus: "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli..." This was traced down to Noah, Seth and to Adam as follows: "...Arphaxad, which was the son of Sem, which was the son of Noe, which was the son of Lamech, Which was the son of Mathusala, which was the son of Enoch, which was the son of Jared, which was the son of Maleleel, which was the son of Cainan, Which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God." - Luke 3:23-38. We can see that the whole genealogy ends with Adam who was "the son of God". No room is given for any suggestion of another race aside from the only one that sprang from Adam. It is for this reason the whole of mankind inherited the sin of Adam. St. Paul said: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" – Romans 5:12; see also 1 Corinthians 15:22. On the whole, there is nothing at all in the account of the marriage of Cain that should give anyone cause to be confused about whom Cain married. The truth of the matter has been explained enough in this sermon beyond all argument.

## **CAN PRIESTS MARRY**

## FACTS ABOUT CHRIST'S COMING

**THE restoration of all things in accordance with the divine purpose to the pleasure of the Almighty Father forms the very central part of the second coming (arrival or presence) of Jesus Christ. This task of vital importance with which he has been entrusted would certainly occasion the doing of a lot of things not only those that would give everlasting joy to the faithful but also those that would bring tribulation and anguish to all evil-doers.**

In the last week's issue of *The Weekly Sermon* it was made abundantly clear that Jesus Christ would never appear physically or in the flesh for all men to see any more; and it was proved beyond every shadow of doubt that he has already come but in spirit in fulfillment of his promise. As a matter of fact, the purpose of his second coming does not at all call for his taking again a human nature of flesh and blood.

The reason why Christ came into this sinful world in a human body or was made flesh during his first advent was made quite clear by St. Paul in this vein: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Hebrews 2:14,15) Jesus did shed his blood to redeem mankind only but once. As it is written: "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool." - Hebrews 10:10-13.

That the age of the second presence of Jesus Christ is the most significant in all periods of the history of the world is an indisputable fact. It is the time when Christ whom the Father has commanded to rule in the midst of his enemies would fulfil age-long promises.

### **Times of Restitution**

Addressing the men of Israel in the apostolic age, St. Peter said: "But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began...Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days." - Acts 3:18-24.

The apostle's description of the period of Christ's presence as the "times of refreshing" or "times of restitution of all things" explains the purpose of his second coming. It is to restore all things to perfection according to the will of God Almighty. And this work of restoration is bound up with other important duties such as the gathering of his sheep-thus setting up God's Kingdom, judgment of the living and the dead, the glorification of the Church, the reward of the Saints, the resurrection of the dead, the destruction of all the forces of unrighteousness and the deliverance of God's people. These were the things the holy men of old saw with eyes of faith and which the

early disciples of Christ were given to understand that aroused enthusiasm in them and made them look to or earnestly hope for the return of the Lord.

In Matthew 16:27, it is written: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." The first class of people to receive their reward are the saints who constitute the "Little Flock" or "Church of the Firstborn" who are all anointed. (Luke 12:32; Hebrews 12:22,23.) The twelve apostles were the foundation members of these anointed ones. To them Christ said: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also." - John 14:1-3.

It is a revealed truth of the Bible that Jesus Christ has already come to raise the dead saints-the dead anointed ones of the Christian era - and to choose from different parts of the world through his angels the remnant of the saints or anointed Christians to preach the gospel of his kingdom to all nations. - Matthew 24:14,31; Acts 15:6-17.

The Bible shows clearly that while the resurrected saints are changed to spirits to meet Christ in heaven those living on earth (the remnant) will continue to champion the cause of truth and righteousness until they will in due course be changed as well to meet him above. To men, especially the carnal ones, these things are mysterious and "unbelievable" but they have been revealed through the Holy Spirit to those who serve God with faith, understanding and humility. And St. Paul said: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep (or die), but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we (the anointed ones) shall be changed." (1 Corinthians 15:51,52) And concerning this wonderful event scheduled to take place at Christ's return, the apostle Paul further wrote: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." -1 Thessalonians 4:16,17.

St. Paul was fully equipped with the knowledge that they (the saints) would receive their reward at the second presence of the Lord. And so he wrote to Timothy when he had accomplished his mission: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." - 2 Timothy 4:7,8.

The establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth is one of the important things Christ has come to do. This is also shown in the second epistle of St. Paul to Timothy. He wrote: "And so I solemnly urge you before God and before Christ Jesus - who will someday judge the living and the dead **when he appears to set up his Kingdom.**" - 2 Timothy 4:1. *LIVING LETTERS.*

Jesus Christ likened the kingdom to a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. Although it is the least of all seeds, it grew to be the greatest among herbs and became a tree with branches where birds took shelter. (Matthew 13:31,32) These things are happening in

our time but many people have not the spiritual understanding to know of them. However, in order that men may have the opportunity to know of the establishment of his kingdom Christ gave this instruction. "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." – Matthew 24:14.

### Judgment

Another work that Jesus Christ has come to do and which is now in progress is that of judgment by which he is separating the sheep from the goats. He said: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left." - Matthew 25:31-33.

Some people think that Christ would come down in the flesh to sit at Jerusalem where the whole world would appear before him and everyone would then give account of himself. This is a wrong idea. Today, Jesus Christ is sitting upon the throne of his glory in heaven and the entire world is before him. The process of his judgment is unlike what obtains in the law courts of the world. He is judging the people by the truth - God's word - as contained in the Holy Bible which his servants are preaching or publishing in obedience to his command. Jesus himself said: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." - John 12:48.

Whoever receives the gospel with joy, believes it firmly and joins others to serve God in the true Church organisation where the truth of God's word is preached unadulterated marks himself as a sheep. But anyone who rejects and opposes the truth wittingly and remains outside God's organisation is a goat spiritually who does not deserve the favour and salvation of God. Christ added: "Then shall the King say unto them (*sheep*) on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." (Matthew 25:34-36) The sheep who, by reason of their faithful service, are the righteous would reply: "Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, **Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.**" (Verses 37-40)

The very opposite of this experience of the sheep would be the case of the goats who are the wicked. They would also enquire as to when they saw Christ and did not minister to or help him. And they would be told by the Lord: "...Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." (Verses 41-46)

Can anybody show from the Bible that Christ during his second coming (presence) would be hungry, thirsty or be a stranger as to be fed, or given water to drink, or received by people?

Would he be naked, or sick (like sinners) or be imprisoned as to be clothed, or visited by anybody?

Jesus Christ knew that he would never appear in the flesh among men any longer but would have representatives or ambassadors who are his servants that would carry his message to the people of the world. Any good turn done to such ones is done to Christ who has chosen them as his ministers. Similarly, whoever derides, opposes or persecutes them is kicking against Christ. We can better appreciate this if we take our minds back to what Jesus told his apostles and the 70 disciples: “He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me...” (Matthew 10:40-42), “He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.” –Luke 10:16; see also 1 Thessalonians 4:8.

We have heard and read so many speculations by professed Christians about the second coming of Jesus Christ. Richard W. De Haan of USA wrote in his Radio Bible Class Newsletter dated January 1970: “The one thing that would surely make 1970 the best year ever is the coming of the Lord! It could well be that this is THE year. We cannot know for certain. We don't believe in setting dates, but wise is that one who is ready and waiting and watching at all times!”

His own statement shows that he is a confused man. If they “cannot know for certain” and if they don't believe in setting dates why has he set 1970 as the year of our Lord's return?

Rev. Billy Graham, in his booklet, *The Second Coming a Glorious Truth*, wrote: “Jeremiah says that at the Lord's coming Jerusalem will be made the throne of His glory and nations shall be gathered in representation - that a disarmament conference will be held not In Washington, London or Paris, but in Jerusalem.”

Although the reverend gentleman did not cite the chapter and verse in which such a prophecy is contained, we are not in doubt that his interpretation is wrong because it runs counter to the revealed truth. The Jerusalem that comes into focus in relation to the second coming of Jesus Christ is not the literal city of Jerusalem in Palestine which today is in the throes of war but the “New Jerusalem” from above which symbolically means God's Kingdom from heaven now established on the earth. - Galatians 4:26; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-3.

### **Vengeance**

Furthermore, Jesus Christ, it is clear in the Scripture, has come to take vengeance upon the wicked and to rid the earth of all unrighteousness before he begins his reign for a thousand years. After Christ had put the parable of the wheat and tares, he declared: “As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity... So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 13:40-42,49-50) The fire here is not literal but a symbol of trouble and bitter suffering of the wicked on this earth before they would be perpetually destroyed. – Romans 2:5,6,8-9; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15.

St. Paul disclosed that Satan the devil will be crushed (Romans 16:20). And he stated in his second epistle to the Thessalonians thus: "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day." - 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; see also chapter 2, verses 8 and 9 and Revelation 20:1-3.

The great tribulation and battle of the great day of God Almighty will climax the events that are taking place in this age of Christ's presence. Despite the fierceness and horrors of that impending trouble, Jesus Christ who is Michael the archangel will give deliverance to the faithful the favoured ones or sheep of God. Concerning this Daniel prophesied: "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." – Daniel 12:1-3.

The battle under reference is not a world war where human weapons are used but it is a war between Jesus Christ, the Commander-in-Chief of Jehovah's army, and Satan, the prince of the demons and his cohorts. And Jesus said: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." - Matthew 24: 21.

Whatever efforts the devil may make to drift men from the truth and righteousness of God, it is vividly shown in the Bible that a great multitude of the sheep of God will survive the trouble, and be granted salvation by Jesus Christ as to enter the Third World - the World without End. – Revelation 7:9-17; Isaiah 45:17,18.

From all that has been explained both in the last issue of *The Weekly Sermon* and in this, we can see that the importance of the second coming of Jesus Christ cannot be over stated. In all sincerity of purpose, we have shown how he comes not with fleshly body visible to men but in spirit; we have marshalled scriptural facts to establish conclusively that our Lord has returned; and we have left no ground uncovered as to make every honest mind understand and appreciate the purpose of his second presence.

It is honourable to accept the truth. For anyone to doubt the truth of Christ's second presence in spite of the signs of the times, which are very easily seen, is unrealistic and unsafe. In fact, in a prophetic statement St. Peter pointed out that such would be the attitude of people in these last days who, being willingly ignorant of the wonderful works of God, mock at religion and live self-indulgent lives. He stated: "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." - 2 Peter

3:3,4.

We need not wait to see Jesus Christ in person before accepting the truth of his presence. It is dangerous to take such an erroneous stand. Christ has come in spirit and he is forever a Spirit. Said St. Paul: "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." - 2 Corinthians 3:17.

May God open the hearts of men who seek after truth to understand His word! Amen.

## **CONTINUE WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN**

**IN the life and teachings of Jesus Christ our Redeemer and Saviour are portrayed all that make for a true disciple of his. And according to the Scriptures, it is one's heart condition, which must be right with God, and one's ability by God's power to translate the vital beliefs and the high ideals of Christianity into practice that is of greater importance than our verbal confession of the faith.**

Today, there are very many people who call themselves Christians and who do not by any standard deserve to bear the name. Several times we have made it known in black and white that nominal Christians are in the majority. This is a fact which no one is apt to dispute if only people know what it means, according to the Bible, to be a Christian.

It is amusing to find certain people who are idolaters, claiming to be Christians and swearing to the Bible in the name of God in the law courts. They feel it is more modern and honourable to identify themselves as Christians in public. And if the police were asked to search these people there would be a lot of shameful nasty finds such as demonized small calabashes in pockets, and chains of fetishistic cowries tied around the waists of some. Yet in spite of all these identification marks of devilism they wish to be associated with Jesus Christ. This has made pagans to have very low opinion of certain Christians.

There are some others who after swearing to the Bible in the name of God resort to telling of blatant lies, bearing false witness against their neighbours contrary to God's commandments in the very Bible they had sworn to and licked. Will it be right to call such people Christians? Of course, it will not. Pagans who take pagan oaths are sincere and are better than the so-called Christians who worship idols and still parade themselves as Christians.

But for the mercies of God and His exercise of the attribute of longsuffering, many people would have turned to pillars of salt or wood in the witness boxes for taking His name in vain. Unless such people take warning and sincerely repent of their sins, the curse of God would remain upon them. The divine law, which, since the days of Moses the prophet, has been in force till this Christian era is: "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." (Exodus 20:7) In the Bible which some swear to, Jesus Christ said his disciples should not swear at all. (Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12) What they should do is to affirm in the court or tribunal that the evidence they will give is the truth, and they should really say the truth.

### **Nominal Christians**

Now, let us direct our minds to those who attend church services. Can it be denied that there are many of them having some form of fetish under their beds, or hung above their doors or hidden somewhere in their rooms? Do some not take part in pagan ceremonies and festivals? Do they not vie with heathens for chieftaincy titles or associate with them in secret cults? Such people are not Christians though they may be deceiving themselves. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 6:24) And what is more St. Paul stated: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness

with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" - 2 Corinthians 6:14,15.

No one can be a true servant of God and at the same time be a worshipper of idols and/or devils. The moment one turns to idolatry he ceases to be a worshipper of God. St. Paul said, "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils." -I Corinthians 10:21

Certain Christians so-called have no faith. For every threat of temptation they waver between two opinions (1Kings 18:21), and whenever they experience the vicissitudes of life they doubt Christ's power to help or to save, and run to witch-doctors and idols to seek aid. In a sense, the pagans who remain steadfast to their idol-worship are better than nominal Christians who for lack of spiritual understanding and faith "cross the carpet" over to idolatry and thus cause reproach. To such faithless Christians the words of Paul the apostle of Christ do apply: "Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written." -Romans 2:22-24.

Every understanding Christian ought to know that idols are vain things which could not be relied upon for help or safety. The Psalmist declared: "Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God? But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them." - Psalm 115:2-8

It is not just everyone who professes to be a Christian that is truly a follower of Jesus Christ. Our Saviour himself said: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." - Matthew 7:21-23. From the words of Jesus Christ just quoted it becomes clear that many of those who parade themselves as prophets and who claim to see visions, dream dreams and engage in "divine" healings or do wonders in his name do not derive their powers from him (Jesus) but from Satan the devil.

### **Vital Qualities**

A Christian, therefore, is a believer in Jesus Christ who not only understands the will of God but also does it. In all essential aspects of life, he must endeavour to be like our Master, Jesus the righteous. Christ said: "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" - Matthew 10:25.

In order to be like Jesus Christ we must have vital qualities such as love, faith and understanding,

and be equipped with the knowledge and wisdom, not of the world, but of God. With these we can, by the grace of God, ever stand for and proclaim the truth of Christ notwithstanding the oppositions of gainsayers and the persecutions of the enemies of righteousness. A Christian should be humble, meek and tolerant. He must never compromise with evil but shun it. St. Paul stated: "Abstain from all appearance of evil." -1 Thessalonians 5:22. To be a Christian indeed requires a lot of sacrifice. Under no circumstance must he allow human or worldly considerations to override the demands of Jesus Christ. If the wishes of his parents or wife or relatives or whoever it may be, are in conflict with the requirements of Jesus Christ, he must at all times abandon the wishes of men and cleave to the Lord by doing his will even if this would offend his parents and so on. Jesus Christ said: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." - Matthew 10:37,38. When on a certain occasion a multitude of people followed Jesus Christ during his first advent, he turned to them and said: "...If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." - Luke 14:25-27. Christ did not mean that every Christian should just hate his parents or children and so forth without cause. It is when the parents or wife or brothers are wicked or if they are opposers of the truth of Christ thus constituting an obstacle to his doing the will of God that he would shun them. If he does not it is he that will lose his precious life in the end.

The cross that a Christian is required to bear is not a golden or wooden instrument nor is it a piece of brass or copper but the self-denial he must show and without which he cannot live up to expectation in the Lord. He must do away with the lust of the flesh and make efforts seriously to live a quiet and sober life, and above all, a life of holiness. Sinful and worldly things in which he might have been taking great pleasure before his conversion to Christianity, he must disregard and treat as things of the past. Paul the apostle had such experience, and he said: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:" - Philippians 3:7-9.

### **New Creature**

To be a Christian means to refrain from the life of sin. St. Paul said: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17) The old things that are gone are the works of the flesh some of which were recounted by the same apostle in his epistle to the Christians at Galatia. As it is written: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." - Galatians 5:19-21.

But turning to the qualities of true Christians who are under the control of the Spirit of God, St. Paul further stated: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness,

goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another." - Galatians 5:22-26.

We agree that Jesus Christ came to die for sinners but he did not die that sinners may continue to sin. Rather he came to call sinners to repentance so that through his death the repentant ones may obtain forgiveness of sins and everlasting life in God's perfect Government. – Matthew 9:10-13; 20:28; Luke 24:47; Acts 13:38,39, etc.

Furthermore, St. Peter stated: "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead."- I Peter 4:1-5.

Therefore, exhorting the Christians, St. Paul wrote: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all."- Colossians 3:5-11; see also Ephesians 4:17; 5:1-11.

As a good, loving wife is faithful to her husband or a good loving husband is faithful to his wife, so must a Christian who truly loves Jesus Christ be faithful to him. To serve him (Jesus) and at the same time do ungodly or heathenish things or serve idols amounts to unfaithfulness on the part of such ones and it is spiritual adultery.

Anyone who examines himself against the background of all the Scriptures that have been expounded in this Sermon will know whether he is a nominal Christian or not. And if anyone is only a Christian in name and not in deed, he should pray to God to help him amend his ways. It is "(For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.". (Romans 2:13; James 1:22-25) And Jesus Christ said: "If ye love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15) Anyone who does not keep Christ's commandments is not a Christian; he does not know God or Christ. As it is written: "...He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him..."-1 John 2:3-5.

## RELIGIOUS MINISTERS AND CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

**THE standards by which a man is adjudged as qualified to be a Minister of Jesus Christ are based not on academic attainments but on spiritual qualities. It is of utmost importance, therefore, that people should look beneath surplices and cassocks, the high-sounding religious titles and the holier-than-thou outward appearances of the priests, prophets, apostles, pastors and so on, so as to be able to distinguish between the genuine ministers of Christ and counterfeits. Any attempt to cast a slur on a whole people of an honourable profession because of the misdeeds of impostors, misfits or some errant folks is most unfair. Even if some clergymen are immoral and corrupt Christianity remains untarnished and irreproachable.**

For some time now certain clergymen have been in the news. There are serious allegations of corrupt practices and immorality against some of them. The wrong-doings of such religious leaders are said to have shattered the confidence certain church-goers reposed in the church and, of course, have given cause for unbelievers to blaspheme.

The Nigerian Tribune of Saturday July 11, 1970 came out with this front-page bold headline: **“Persec throws a bombshell CLERGYMEN ACCUSED OVER EXAM LEAKS”**.

The newspaper’s story then followed thus:

The Permanent Secretary, Western State ministry of Education Mr. Augustus Adebayo has said that some clergymen, who by virtue of their sacred position were appointed as supervisors and invigilators of examinations, actively aided and abetted the commission of crimes in the examination halls. Mr. Adebayo who was addressing the conference of proprietors and principals of secondary schools in the state capital at the Parliament Building, Agodi, Ibadan, yesterday said that he regretted that some of our church leaders have fallen very badly from the moral uprightness expected of them.

The permanent secretary disclosed that from the evidence reaching his ministry in connection with the recent cancellation of examination results for the last West African School Certificate Examinations, some clergymen have been deeply involved. In the light of these shortcomings, Mr. Adebayo said: ‘I think quite frankly that the time has come for the church to reform itself since it constituted over 90% of the proprietors of the secondary schools’ ”.

The news astonished some people, and provoked uncomplimentary comments from certain quarters against what some call the Nigerian Church and other religious missions. The Daily Times expressed the opinion that Mr. Adebayo's statement was a serious indictment which called for an equally serious exercise in heart-searching and critical self-examination by all leaders of the church. In an editorial captioned, "Physician, heal thyself!" the *Daily Times* (July 13, 1970), among other things, stated:

Coming as it did from a highly placed civil servant, himself a Christian, the allegation that some clergymen who officiated as supervisors and invigilators in recent public examinations abused their trust must have shattered the confidence and aspirations of those who look up to the church as the pinnacle of perfection and a forum for character-moulding.

In recent months, various leaders of the church have themselves drawn attention to the rising incidence of moral laxity, the increasing wave of corruption and dishonesty in Nigeria's public life. There is no doubt that some of these church leaders are themselves men of exceptional personal probity who are genuinely dedicated to salvaging the citizenry from moral depravity.

But judging from the alarming rate at which church and muslim organisations level accusations of dishonesty and misappropriation of funds against their pastors, vicars and imams and the disquieting number of men in holy orders who get involved in financial scandals in and out of the church; it seems obvious that the church has, through numerous acts of defalcation by many of its leading apostles, suddenly laid itself bare to total disrespect, even contempt, by the laity.

If leaders of religious missions show such a degree of moral **laxitude**, as Mr. Adebayo has just revealed, how can we expect the wards of such corrupt and dishonest clergymen to be anything but crooks, rogues and thieves! It is clear from Mr. Adebayo's revelation and from the involvement of clergymen in various criminal offences that the Nigerian Church and the other religious missions are sick-very sick. They are badly in need of an effective purge to re-discover themselves. For, a corrupt and dishonest leadership cannot minister unto the needs of a society which is perhaps just a shade more corrupt and dishonest.

### **Impostors**

In the first place, we wish to point out the fact that it is not everyone who claims to be a prophet, priest or a most-holy-reverend or an apostle that is truly a servant or minister of Jesus Christ. Impostors or false prophets are always in the majority everywhere but true pastors are few. Christ himself said: "...Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." - Matthew 24:4-5,24; see also verse 11.

The mark of difference between the true and false ministers can be found in their doctrines and conduct. In giving some guidelines to this effect, Jesus Christ warned: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring

forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.” - Matthew 7:15-20.

It will be an error of judgment to blame the guilt of counterfeit ministers of religion on Christianity. The sceptics who rejoice at the misconduct of certain clergymen sometimes reported in newspapers do not impress anyone except infidels like themselves. People know what they are worth. Moreover it is possible for foolish people to mix up with the congregation of true worshippers of God and even rise to some position of honour like Judas Iscariot. God said: “For among my people are found wicked men...” – (Jeremiah 5:26) But in the long run the wicked among the Lord's people do manifest themselves as apostates who do not deserve the salvation of God and they must fall away from His organisation. - Acts 20: 28-30; 1 John 2:19; Hebrews 10:38,39.

Sometime ago the female members of a certain church denomination protested against the pastor in charge of their parish and demanded his immediate removal. The reason was an open secret. There were reports that the minister was fond of making immoral advances to some of the women when they attended evening devotions.

In other parts of the world similar cases of immoral conduct of priests have also been reported. One of such, which is very striking, is that of a London woman who admitted having got herself involved with a Vicar in adultery. This story was carried in the front page of the Nigerian Daily Express of April 16, 1961. The newspaper reported that "a woman told a church court in London that she committed adultery 75 to 80 times with a vicar!"

There are other reported cases of priests who from time to time involved themselves in scandalous acts. Certain priests, it is reported, have been made to pay damages for acts of adultery and some others had become fathers of illegitimate children. Misappropriation of church funds and other corrupt deeds and irregularities have also been associated with certain clergymen. These things must be condemned as we have always done.

What will a pastor who is an adulterer, or a fornicator or thief teach his flock? Whatever he is, for giving cause for infidels - the enemies of righteousness - to blaspheme the name of God and Christ, he will face greater judgment and condemnation. St. Paul said: “Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.” - Romans 2:1-3,21-24.

All had never been well with the priests or pastors who indulged in sinful acts and misled the sheep of God. There were such pastors in the days of old before Christ, and concerning them

God said: "For the pastors are become brutish, and have not sought the LORD: therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered." (Jeremiah 10: 21) "Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD. Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD." – Jeremiah 23: 1,2.

And during the period of Christ's ministry on earth he encountered the scribes and Pharisees who were religious misleaders. They were fond of drawing people's attention to the laws of Moses which they themselves could not observe; and for their hypocrisy Jesus Christ exposed them and warned his disciples against them. Christ said: "...The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ." - Matthew 23:2-10.

Today, there are the counterparts of the scribes and Pharisees. They appear to be holy outwardly but in secret or in their private lives they are worse than infidels. Worse still they deceive their adherents by their false doctrines and observe vain traditions of men contrary to the Scriptures. - Matthew 15:1-14.

The training some clergymen underwent before their ordination was so patterned after a worldly system and fraught with secular ingredients that academic knowledge is more their **gail**. But as regards the true knowledge of God in the Scriptures, which they ought to impart to the believers so as to obtain salvation, they are wanting. So it will be difficult for such priests to live up to expectation in the Lord. In Malachi 2:7, it is written: "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts." And concerning those priests who went astray (in those days as it is today) it is recorded: "But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts." - Malachi 2:8.

### **True Pastors**

God had promised to send true pastors and teachers to impart divine knowledge and the understanding of His way to His sheep. It is written "And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." (Jeremiah 3:15) In Jesus Christ and his apostles with their companions or fellow-workers in the gospel we find the fulfilment of the Lord's promise.

It is gratifying that in our time, there are also the true pastors or ministers of Jesus Christ who are well nourished in the words of faith and of good doctrine and whose evangelistic activities have been yielding good fruits in Christ. Like the apostles of Jesus and other ministers of the primitive

church they are not much learned in the ways and wisdom of this corrupt world (Acts 4:13; I Corinthians 2:1-8) which are drifting the world to destruction. They have not buried their talents but have used them for the benefit of the sheep of God and to the glory of His holy name. And for the fact that such true ministers are rare being in the minority it will require the grace of God and diligent search in order to recognise them and find out the truth. Unless Christian believers associate themselves with the true pastors or ministers of the gospel and abide in the truth of Christ there can be no hope of salvation. "The truth", Christ said, "shall make you free" -John 8:32; see also Isaiah 26:2-4; Acts 10:34,35.

### **WHEN WILL GOD'S KINGDOM COME?**

**WHEN will our Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom come" be answered? Or is the prayer introduced nearly 2,000 years ago, to be said forever? Where will the kingdom come? And how will it come? The answers to these questions, which are often asked, are no mysteries but are revelations of tremendous significance in our age. The truth, though still hidden from many people, is that God Almighty has set up His Kingdom in fulfilment of prophecies. And whoever is blessed with this understanding now prays with joy, Thy Kingdom has come!**

God, through His holy prophets, had clearly expressed His purpose to establish a universal, righteous and everlasting kingdom long before the advent of Jesus Christ. The teachings of Christ were predominantly centred upon the promised kingdom. And he knowing its glories and blessings, taught his disciples to pray for it: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." - Matthew 6:10.

It is because many people do not understand the meaning of this aspect of the Lord's Prayer in regard to God's Kingdom that they are longing to go to heaven. Jesus was quite aware that the Kingdom would surely come to this earth, hence he asked his disciples to pray for it. And if God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven, why should some people think it is only in heaven they can find God's Kingdom and therefore scramble to go there?

When Jesus Christ was demanded of the Pharisees as to the time the Kingdom of God would come, he told them that it would not come with observation - that is, the setting up of the kingdom would not be marked with flourish of trumpets or any kind of public demonstration to attract the attention of the world. But he added: "...for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17: 20,21) He said the Kingdom was among them because he being its appointed king was in their midst.

The Omnipotent and all-wise God Who knows the end from the beginning, had since ancient times inspired men to give prophetically, an outline of the various stages of His purpose that would culminate in the setting up of His Kingdom. This perfect, kingdom would serve as the panacea or remedy for all the woes of mankind. It was in pursuance of the same divine purpose that it became necessary that Jesus Christ, who had been foreordained by the Almighty Father to be the Sovereign of that Kingdom of eternal glory, should come to this evil world for the redemption of sinners. Jesus told Pilate: "...My kingdom is not of this world... Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth..." - John 18:36,37.

Jesus Christ, after his resurrection, declared: "... All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." (Matthew 28:18) When he ascended to heaven, Jehovah, his Father asked him to sit at His right hand until He would make his enemies his footstool. And the Psalmist testified to this prophetically in Psalm 110:1. See also Matthew 22:44; Acts 2:34,35. Jesus was not intoxicated by the immeasurable powers or authority with which he was vested over the entire creation of God, nor did he attempt to exercise his powers in taking vengeance upon his enemies. As an obedient son, he waited patiently on God's time. And when the time came he was brought before our Heavenly Father, the Ancient of Days, and was crowned as King of God's Kingdom. (Daniel 7:13,14; Psalm 2:6) It was then, in fulfilment of prophecies, the Father commanded him: "...rule thou in the midst of thine enemies." - Psalm. 110: 2.

Following the coronation of Jesus Christ there was war in heaven between him and the devil. (Revelation 12:7-12) He with his holy angels conquered Satan and drove him with his wicked angels or demons from heaven to the earth. The proclamation by a voice in heaven shows that God's Kingdom had since then been established in heaven. The voice said: "...Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down... Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them..." But turning to the earth, the voice said: "...Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." (Verse 12).

The devil exercises vile influence over men. He, in an outburst of anger, having been hurled down to this earth with his demons, caused World War I (1914-1918) with the aim to destroy all flesh so as to defeat the purpose of God towards mankind, but Jesus Christ in exercise of his power made the war to cease for the sake of his elect - the Anointed Christians in particular, and the "other sheep" in general (Matthew 24:7,22). The anger of the nations that was clearly expressed in that global war was an indisputable proof that Jesus Christ, according to the holy

Scriptures, had been coronated in heaven and given power to reign. As it is written: "...because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth." - Revelation 11:17,18.

After World War I, Jesus Christ, according to his promise, came in spirit to the earth to raise the dead saints, which include his early apostles, to meet him in heaven (John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-16) and to set up his kingdom on earth by choosing through his angels the remaining ones of the saints or anointed Christians to preach the gospel of the kingdom. - Matthew 24:31,14; 2 Timothy 4:1.

The signs of the times which have fulfilled prophecies of the Bible prove beyond every shadow of doubt that God's Kingdom has truly come. Some may ask to know as to why, if the kingdom has come, there are still evils and troubles in the world. But the truth, which no one can gainsay, is that it is in the midst of this evil world God promised to set up His Kingdom.

### **World Empires**

It is revealed in the Bible that seven main empires or kingdoms of men would dominate the world in their turns at different times. History confirms the authenticity of the Bible on this issue. These empires, which were brought into focus by divine revelation and prophecy, are those of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome and Britain. The Bible further shows that these kingdoms of men would in due course come together in a union to form a world body. This body or organisation described as "beast", though not an empire or government would be the eighth and it would go into destruction.

These wonderful facts about world empires came within the purview of the revelation of Jesus Christ to John the apostle in the island of Patmos. As it is written: "And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition." - Revelation 17:10,11.

The five kings or kingdoms that were fallen then were the Egyptian Empire, Assyrian Empire, Babylonish Empire, Medo-Persian Empire and the Grecian Empire. The Roman Empire was the one then in existence, and the kingdom that was yet to come at that time is the British Empire. Moreover, "the beast that was, and is not" which is the eighth, symbolises the defunct League of Nations that went to partial destruction at the outbreak of the Second World War and came up again by another name - United Nations Organisation.

Pointing to this age - the last days - when the kingdoms of the world are complete and still existing, Daniel under inspiration made this prophetic statement: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." - Daniel 2:44.

That this prophecy of Daniel is already fulfilling there is no doubt God's Kingdom is now in

action, and the days are fast approaching when human governments shall sink into oblivion and God's Kingdom will take full control of the affairs of the world. Queen Elizabeth II, when a child, once told a visitor as reported: "Jesus is a greater King than grand-papa." - The Royal Day, June 2nd 1953. Whether men believe the truth of God's word or not, He would certainly accomplish His purpose. - Isaiah 14:27; 46:9-11.

The Bible states categorically that the Kingdom of God symbolically called Mountain would be established in these last days of the present evil world. Concerning this it is written: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it." (Isaiah 2:2) The Mountain of the Lord's house symbolises the Kingdom of God belonging to Jesus Christ and the saints who constitute the spiritual house or temple of God. (Luke 12:32; 22:28-30; I Corinthians 3:16,17; Hebrews 3:6, etc.) The "mountains" are symbolic of Satan's entire organization - his visible and invisible realms. And the "hills" means worldly societies or human organisations of any description - formed for social, cultural or charitable purposes or as secret cults or suchlike.

That we are now in the last days is proved by the physical facts we have seen and which are in accord with Bible prophecies. The high increase of knowledge and the abundance of easy means of transport everywhere are ready instances. (Daniel 12:4,8-10) Also, the rising of nations against nations, and kingdoms against kingdoms, as was seen in World War I together with the incidents of famines, earthquakes and epidemics such as the Spanish Influenza that followed the war and events of World War II are concrete proofs that we are now in the last days or end of the world in which God promised to set up His Kingdom. - Matthew 24:3-8.

Since Jesus Christ has taken up his power to reign and his kingdom has been established in heaven, while the devil and his wicked associates were driven from there to this earth, it is evident that God's Kingdom (the Mountain of the Lord's house) has been set up on top of the mountains (Satan's organisation). Of the increase of God's Kingdom on earth there will be no end, and it will by a gradual process grow above all worldly unions and clubs, (for men of goodwill towards God everywhere will flee into it) and outshine or surpass them all by reason of its stand for truth and righteousness. (Isaiah 9:7) See also Psalm 145:10-13. "All nations"-that is, all persons of good-will toward God in all parts of the world - shall flow into the Lord's Mountain because they know that it is a place of refuge in these perilous times when the devil is filled with fury - he being at the end of his tether. And such people of goodwill always look to Zion, the capital of God's Kingdom in heaven, for direction. Thus it is further written: "And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." - Isaiah 2:3,4.

These things are happening in our time but those who have no faith or spiritual understanding cannot appreciate them.

Furthermore, Jesus Christ said: “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains:” – Matthew 24:15,16.

### **League of Nations**

The “abomination of desolation” that Jesus Christ prophetically referred to found fulfilment in the same League of Nations that was formed in 1919 after the First World War. Daniel, as Christ truly stated, spoke of it as “the abomination that maketh desolate”. (Daniel 12:11) It is an abomination because it was an ungodly organisation that was characterised by deceit and hypocrisy and yet was glorified and extolled to the skies by the world. Jesus did say: “...for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.” - Luke 16:15; See also Proverbs 6:16-19; 11:20.

The League of Nations stood in a holy place in that it was acclaimed as “the political expression of God's Kingdom on earth”. But it is true that it was an hybrid of an organisation where atheists, agnostics and all sorts of sceptics mixed up in an unholy union with others of different and divided faiths. Those who set their hopes on the League were disappointed in that it failed woefully to preserve world peace.

The desolation or waste the League caused many countries, especially, in Europe, to suffer during the Second World War is now history. The failure of that international body is a clear manifestation of the vanity of human wisdom and of how futile men's endeavours can be where God is relegated to the background. God's word is always true. It was Jeremiah who said: “The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the LORD; and what wisdom is in them?”- Jeremiah 8:9

Jesus Christ foreknew that God's Kingdom would be set up on earth in the last days hence he warned that those in Judaea should flee into the Mountains symbolising God's Kingdom organisations all over the world, when they see the “abomination that maketh desolate”. Judaea - under reference does not mean the literal land of Judah. The word Judah or Judaea means praise or praise if God. Judaea spiritually, as used by Jesus Christ means the people who love truth and righteousness and who are inclined to serve and praise God in any part of the world. This is the time such ones should seek to identify the Lord's established Kingdom so as to flee into it for safety and protection in obedience to Christ's warning.

There is need for men generally, but especially the anointed Christians to have a good understanding of these important facts so that they may teach the people aright. That is why Jesus gave this advice: "Whoso readeth, let him understand."

### **Mustard Seed**

As to how the Kingdom of God would come Jesus Christ did not leave his followers in doubt but showed that it would begin as a little thing to be looked down upon by men, especially sceptics, yet it would grow to become a very mighty organisation. He said: “...The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.” -Matthew 13:31,32.

By interpretation, the “mustard seed” represents, collectively or individually the remnant of anointed Christians whom Jesus Christ (the sower) promised to choose through his angels from different parts of the world for the propagation of the saving gospel of the established Kingdom. (Matthew 24:31) The “field” in which the seed is sowed is the world. The mustard seed is the least of all seeds precisely as the Kingdom of God begins in so small a manner that it cannot be compared to other organisations of men. Yet it grows to become the greatest among herbs - that is, God's Kingdom will gradually process to be greater than all human societies in the long run, being the Lord's spiritual plant. It will become a tree, that is, a mighty organisation with branches on which "birds" typifying lovers of truth and righteousness will take shelter.

The process of gradual growth must apply to every true anointed servant of Christ in these last days. Concerning them it is written: “A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time.” - Isaiah 60:22.

It must be understood, therefore, that any church organisation that is preaching the truth -nothing but the truth of the saving gospel of Christ without compromise is the Kingdom of God. Without mincing words and without fear of criticism we say with all sincerity and by strength of faith that the God's Kingdom Society (GKS) is God's Kingdom in this part of the world. Jesus Christ said: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20) And where Christ the King is, in spirit, there his Kingdom, undoubtedly, is also. God's Kingdom will be not only in heaven, we repeat, but will also be on earth for men to dwell in. David stated: “But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” (Psalm 37:11.) And Jesus said: Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” - Matthew 5:5.

God's Kingdom has come, but it is when the Kingdom is fully established after the destruction of Satan the devil and all his followers that there will be no more evil of any kind on earth. Then the whole creation of God shall forever be in “the New Heavens and New Earth wherein dwelleth righteousness”. “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” – Revelation 21:4; see also Isaiah 65:17-25; 2 Peter 3:13.

Whoever reads this Sermon with an open mind and understands the prophecies explained along with their physical fulfilments will appreciate the fact that God's Kingdom has come to serve as a place of refuge and deliverance for His people in this dangerous age. Blessed are they that believe.

**VOL. II NO. 42**

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF DOCTRINES**

**THE quality of the faith of anyone who professes Christianity does not depend on his oral acceptance of Jesus Christ but on the soundness and purity of the doctrines he believes. If the doctrines are pure or true in the sense that they are established in the Holy Scriptures, then the faith is also genuine and well founded; but if on the contrary the doctrines are**

**false, the obvious fact is that the faith, no matter how elegant or gigantic its outward structure, is as well spurious. And Jesus warned, “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees!”**

At the sight of some well-known old friends who came out of hiding from the war zones after the recent civil war in Nigeria, many people were stunned and some did shed tears. The friends looked pale all over, their feet were swollen, their bellies protruded unnaturally and they looked like living skeletons. This tragic condition termed **malnutrition** by men of medical training is said to be as a consequence of inadequate quantity of food or deficiency of any of the essential elements of food such as vitamins, mineral salts and protein. And many as a result of malnutrition died during and after the war.

### **Spiritual Malnutrition**

It is our aim by this observation to bring it borne to our readers that as lack of good food is capable of impairing bodily health and causing death, so too doctrines that are devoid of truth are harmful to the spiritual health of people and can send them to destruction. Thus spiritual malnutrition is more dangerous than the physical one.

That many people, today, are suffering from spiritual malnutrition is a fact. They have been so tied to the apron-strings of false apostles and prophets, hypocritical ministers and visionaries or dreamers that they can swallow without question any dogma no matter how unreasonable and unscriptural it may be. Such are the people who are fed with stones: (lies) instead of bread (truth).

Some people think that once they express their belief in God, attend church services and pay dues in their church organisations they will be saved. They do not care whether the doctrines of those organisations are in harmony with the Scriptures or not. This indifference on the part of certain people in regard to doctrines has made false prophets and teachers to gain undue advantage of them. But except such ones go out of the grip of blind leaders to follow the light of Jesus Christ the end will be gloomy. God said: “A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?” - Jeremiah 5:30,31.

### **Leaven of Pharisees**

Jesus Christ does not want his followers to believe false doctrines because he knows that they cannot lead to salvation. In the course of his ministry on earth, he warned his disciples against the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He said: “...Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.” Not understanding what the Master meant his disciples thought he was talking of ordinary bread. After Christ had advanced a few points more, “Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.”- Matthew 16:6-12.

The apostle John stated: “I Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1) And St. Paul said: “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” (1 Thessalonians 5:21) But how many pay heed to these admonitions of the apostles? How many people take time to examine doctrines

before they believe? Do some not just stick to certain church organisations because of unspiritual reasons such as being born into that particular church group or for its being one of the oldest orthodox churches or for having married in that church or for attending the college or university founded by that church? To remain in a church, which teaches false doctrines, for these unscriptural reasons is wrong and disastrous in the end. - Proverbs 16:25.

However, we thank God that through the publications of God's Kingdom Society (GKS) and some other Christian groups, many people are now getting out from the shackles of dogmatism and ignorance and are seeing the light of Jesus to appreciate the importance of doctrines. They no longer want to be led by the nose. It was Christ who said: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."-John 8: 32.

Owing to lack of spiritual knowledge and because of simplicity many people have been deceived with the result that they base their faith on errors or false teachings. There is need to be critical of doctrines, not with the aim to find fault but to ascertain the truth of our beliefs. St. Paul said: "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:" - Ephesians 4:14,15; Hebrews 13:9.

Many institutions of learning have become places where children are fed with lies about God and His purposes of creation. Some of those who are employed to teach religious knowledge in the colleges do not know God, they themselves being sceptics or half-baked or nominal Christians. It is most unfortunate that certain people who do not believe in the Bible are made to be religious teacher: merely because of paper qualifications. Instead of imparting divine knowledge to their students they preach their own imaginations and doctrines of devils and consequently the children become godless and come out of schools as atheists or agnostics.

In certain public examinations the answers to some of the questions which have been given credence in the subject of religion and for which some obtained credit are a farrago of untruth. Of course, it is not from secular, academic authorities people should expect to gain the knowledge of God's revelation that will make them to be saved; it is from ministers of religion who preach the truth of God without corruption as recorded in the Bible. - Proverbs 12:17; 14:25; Jeremiah 3:15.

### **Invented Dogmas**

Also in many church organisations the ministers, priest and catechists teach a lot of things for which they have no scriptural authority. They always stick to the vain traditions of men and invented dogmas of their predecessors, though some of such teachings are against their own conscience.

Let us examine some few points of doctrine that are being taught today. For instance, many have been taught to believe that God's Kingdom is only in heaven which they say is the home of all the righteous. Yet they pray for God's Kingdom to come to the earth. And Jesus Christ said: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:5) And if all the good are in heaven and the wicked are in hell-fire as they believe, why did Jesus Christ say that in the day of

resurrection all the dead both good and bad would come from the graves? He did not teach that the righteous would descend from heaven or that the wicked would come out of fire but that all of them would rise from the GRAVES!- John 5:28, 29; see also Acts 24:15. Some say that the soul can never die. But this view is the very opposite of the truth of the Scriptures. St. Peter said that unbelieving souls shall be destroyed. (Acts 3:23) If the soul can never die as some churches are teaching why did St Peter say so? Look up also Psalm 89:48 (**Psalm 88:49, Douay**); Ezekiel 18:4,20; Matthew 10:28 and Revelation 16:3.

It is also held as an article of faith in certain circles that Mary is the mediator between God and men but this has no foundation in the Scriptures, rather the Bible states positively that there is "ONE MEDIATOR between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5), NOT Mary. It is also believed and taught that Mary was carried body and soul by angels to heaven. This is a blatant lie. We challenge anyone to cite a single proof from the Scriptures, which all churches agree is the AUTHORITY, to substantiate this view. The human corruptible body CANNOT go to, or dwell in heaven. It is written clearly in the Scriptures that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God" in heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:50) Jesus himself went there, NOT with human body, but with the spiritual body by which God raised him from the dead.-1 Peter 3:18-20; Acts 1:1-9; 1 Corinthians 15:40,44,49-50.

There are certain religious organisations that allow women to preach from house to house or to mount the pulpits to preach sermons in the churches. But St. Paul says, "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak" (1 Corinthians 14:34,35) And he further stated: "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man." 1 Timothy 2:12

In 1 Timothy 2:11-14. We have brought the foregoing few points to light to show how many errors have been accepted by people knowingly or unknowingly, and to stress the need for vigilance.

Any doctrine that is not in conformity, with the Holy Scriptures is counterfeit and must be discarded. If anybody tells you to accept a dogma whose authority is derived from a source outside the Holy Bible, never must you give in - even if he calls himself the most holy angel. Here is St. Paul's stern warning: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." - Galatians 1:8,9; see also Isaiah 8:20.

Furthermore, St. Paul in his first letter to Timothy stated: "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself." - 1 Timothy 6:3-5.

Doctrine of Christ The importance of doctrines cannot be over-stated. True doctrines are from God. Jesus Christ said: "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his

will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” (John 7:16,17) These true doctrines cannot be obtained from anywhere other than from the Holy Bible. And St. Paul stated emphatically: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

Anyone who wanders from the teachings of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures will lose the favour of God and the grace of life. It is worthwhile to warn people therefore not to take things for granted nor do anything in support of false religious ministers to promote the cause of falsehood and unrighteousness. John the apostle wrote: “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” - 2 John 9-11.

True Christians of today must follow the example of Jesus Christ and see to it that his doctrines are jealously guarded against corruption. St. Paul said: “For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” (2 Corinthians 2:17) And knowing the importance of doctrines he (Paul) charged Timothy: “If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.” - I Timothy 4:6-7,16.

The apostle also counselled Titus to be a pattern of good works, and added, “...in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.” - Titus 2: 1,7,8.

The facts are quite clear. Let no one expose himself to the poison of false doctrines and so suffer spiritual malnutrition. Rather let everyone ensure that he receives but the untarnished truth of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ as clearly recorded in the Bible for his spiritual well-being and salvation.

## ARE THREE PERSONS IN ONE GOD?

**THAT God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are one indivisible entity is, from a scriptural point of view, very misleading indeed. It is a major doctrine in Christendom through which countless millions of people since the fourth century have been imbibed with a wrong concept of God. The seriousness of this matter is underlined by the fact that without having an accurate knowledge of God as revealed in the Holy Bible or believing in the truth as such, there can be no hope of salvation. It is in the interest of seekers-after-truth, therefore, we are going to examine the doctrine of Trinity in the light of the Holy Scriptures.**

Doctrines are the fundamentals of the Christian Faith and they must be guarded jealously against errors. The time has come when people who earnestly desire to worship God should be prepared to face biblical realities rather than allow traditionalism to blur their vision of understanding.

From all available facts both from the Holy Bible and history, it is clear that the doctrine of Trinity did not originate from Jesus Christ or his apostles but from nominal Christianity several years after the apostolic times. According to The American Peoples Encyclopaedia.

“The term, from the Latin trinitas, was first used by Tertullian of Carthage, one of the Latin Church Fathers, to describe the Being of God... Tertullian stated the orthodox concept in his work Against Praxeas: ‘... one cannot believe in one God in any other way than by saying that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are the very selfsame Person’”. – Vol. 18, pages 744-745.

However, it was Theophilus of Antioch – NOT Jesus Christ or his apostles – who introduced the Trinity doctrine into the Roman Church and the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., declared it as an article of faith and “an official part of the Christian religion”. (Illustrated World Encyclopaedia, Vol. 19, page 4657.)

Concerning Trinity, the Encyclopaedia Britannica has this to say: “Neither the word ‘Trinity’ nor the explicit doctrine as such appears at any one place in the Bible; the ecclesiastical dogma is an effort to unite in one confession all the several strains of the biblical description of God The Council of Nicaea in 325 stated the crucial formula for that doctrine in its confession that the Son is ‘of the same essence (homoousios)’ as the father, even though it said very little about the Holy Spirit. Over the next half- century Athanasius defended and refined the Nicene formula, and by the end of the 4th century, under the leadership of Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory Nazianzus, the doctrine of the Trinity took substantially the form it has maintained ever since.” – Volume 22, page 241. (Emphasis ours)

Up till today very many innocent people wrongly believe in the Trinity and in both the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican as well as many other denominations it is accepted as the central or Cardinal doctrine of the Christian Religion. In answer to questions 25 and 26, The Explanatory Catechism of Christian Doctrine states: "There are three Persons in God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. These three Persons are not three Gods: the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost are all one and the same God." (Emphasis Ours).

### **Athanasius Creed**

A detailed picture of this doctrine is given in the "Creed of Athanasius", which *is* given prominence in the Book of Common Prayer among other things the Athanasius Creed *states* as follows:

"WHOSOEVER will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith. Which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the Catholic Faith is this: That we Worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance. For there is One Person of the Father, another of the Son: and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all One: the Glory equal, the Majesty Co-eternal The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate: and the Holy Ghost uncreate...so likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty: and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties: but one Almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God: and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods: but one God...And in this Trinity none is afore, or after other: none is greater, or less than another; but the whole three Persons are Co-eternal together: and co-equal." - Pages 23-24. It is commonly held by professed Christians that the Trinity doctrine is beyond human Understanding - that is, it is a mystery. This is devised by trinitarians in order to run away from facing the facts or to avoid the search- light of scriptural criticism which the doctrine cannot stand.

We hold that if the doctrine remains a mystery it ought not to be taught at all. Christian teachers must preach what they know and what they can prove. Jesus Christ himself said: "...We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen..." - John 3:11; see also Deuteronomy 29:29.

If the doctrine of Trinity were true and it were a mystery, Jesus Christ and his apostles would have revealed and preached it when they did God's work in their days. The deep things of God which the ancient faithful did not understand were revealed through Jesus Christ of his apostles for the benefit of His sheep everywhere. St Paul testified to this when he wrote: " How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery... Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit... And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ" - Ephesians 3:3-9; see also 1 Corinthians 2:9,10.

The doctrine of Trinity has no biblical basis - it is false. We agree that the Father is God and that the Son is a god but in no place in the Bible is the Holy Spirit referred to as a god. Apart from the Son Jesus there are other creatures both in heaven and on earth who are also gods but they, including Jesus Christ, are all subject to the Father. In the Psalms it is written: "... Ye are gods;

and all of you are children of the most High.” (Psalm 82:6) Thus the Father is the “God of gods, and Lord of lords” – Deuteronomy 10:17; see also 1 Corinthians 8:5,6.

The Father According to the Bible, God the Father is a separate entity from the Son. He is the Great Architect of the universe and the Source of life who is responsible for the existence of Jesus Christ. He only is uncreated, and in the Words of the Psalmist, He is “from everlasting to everlasting” - Psalm 90:2.

### **The Father**

He appeared to Abraham as the Almighty God. And to Moses He said: “And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them.” (Exodus 6:3) He has other names and titles by which He is distinguished from other gods.

It is wrong to say that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one and the same God. They are separate entities. In an attempt to find support for Trinity in the Scriptures, some people do cite the statement of Jesus Christ in John 10:30, to wit: “I and my Father are one.” It is worthy of note that Christ did not include the Holy Spirit in this declaration, and so it does not suggest the existence of Trinity. Moreover, Jesus did not mean that he and his Father are one in substance or that They are the selfsame Person; rather he meant unity of purpose. The oneness implied by Jesus Christ in the text just cited is explained in his prayer to the Father for his apostles and other believers, to wit: “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” (John 17:20-23)

Jesus was not saying that all the apostles and other disciples should be one in substance or person but that they should agree or be united in spirit, purpose and faith. If it is admitted that the Father and the Son are one and the same God whose substance cannot be divided, it implies therefore that when Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary, the Father and the holy spirit were also there, and there was no God in heaven! So, too, when Christ was killed and buried, there was no God in existence for the period of three days during which he was in the grave! You can now see how blasphemous and ridiculous the Trinity doctrine is.

If the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are the selfsame inseparable God, whose voice then was heard from heaven at the baptism of Jesus Christ saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”? And how come about the holy spirit that descended and alighted upon him? That the Father and the Son are quite separate and existing apart was manifest during the baptism of Jesus Christ. While he (Christ) was on earth the Father was in heaven, and it was the Father who sent the holy spirit to anoint him.

When Jesus Christ was to raise Lazarus from the dead it is recorded that he lifted up his eyes and prayed: “... Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always...” (John 11:41,42) Christ lifted up his eyes because the Father was and is in heaven. And

if he and the Father are the same Person, does it mean he was praying to himself?

Furthermore, Jesus told his disciples, "...I go unto the Father..." (John 14:28) This shows that the Father was somewhere else; in fact, He is a SEPARATE PERSON and has always been in heaven, hence Jesus taught his followers to pray, "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name." - Matthew 6:9.

### **The Son**

The Holy Bible plainly shows that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Almighty God because he derived life from Him the Father. Christ himself said: "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" - John 5:26. Therefore, to say that Jesus Christ is uncreated is a lie.

It is clearly stated in the Bible that he was the first thing ever created by the Almighty God. The Father then made him His creative agent or instrument through whom He created all other perfect things. It was he the Father was addressing when He said, "...Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." (Genesis 1:26) Christ in his pre-human days was the Logos (Greek) or Word (English), the chief of the angels in heaven. He was made human in order to redeem mankind from sin and death, and thus became the mediator between God and men.-Matthew 20:28; 1 Timothy 2:5,6; Hebrews 2:9,14-18.

In John 1:1,2, it is written: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God." This text is no support for Trinity as some wrongly suppose. The Word is Jesus Christ and he from the beginning of his creation was with God the Father, and he too was god but he and the Father were not the very same God or Person. The word god is from the Hebrew word elohim which means a mighty or powerful one. So we agree that Jesus Christ is a god as there are others but he is not God Almighty.

If the Word is the same God the Father does it not show that He the Father has beginning? But the Bible states that the Father has neither beginning nor end of days. He is from eternity to eternity. (Psalm 90:2; 102: 25-27) It was the Word, Jesus Christ, who from his beginning was with God the Father.

St. Paul described Jesus Christ as "the firstborn of every creature" through whom God created all other things. As it is written: "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." - Colossians 1:15-17; see also Ephesians 3:9. What is more, it is categorically stated that Jesus Christ, the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, is "the BEGINNING OF THE CREATION OF GOD."-Revelation 3:14.

Another error in the Trinity doctrine is the point that the three Persons are co-equal. James Cardinal Gibbons, an authority in Roman Catholicism, wrote in his book, The Faith of Our Fathers, that "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are perfectly equal to each other". (Page 1) But he cited no Bible text to support this view because there is none.

No one in heaven and earth is equal to God Almighty. He Himself declared: "To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like?" - Isaiah 46:5; see also Isaiah 49:18; 42:8.

When Jesus Christ came to the world he showed clearly that he is subordinate to the Father. He said: "I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." (John 5:30) Again he said: "For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak." - John 12:49.

If the Father and the Son are the selfsame Person it will not make sense for Christ to say that the Father sent him. And if they are "perfectly equal to each other" why should the Father dictate to the Son as to what he should say? The fact that the Son was sent by the Father shows vividly that he was subject to the Father and they could not be the same one God or Person. This is explained in Christ's own words, to wit: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him." - John 13:16.

To be more positive Jesus Christ said to his apostles: "Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I." - John 14:28.

It is on the strength of this understanding St. Paul stated: "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God." - 1 Corinthians 11:3.

How can any honest person in the face of these incontrovertible Scriptures hold that Jesus Christ is equal to the Almighty Father? It is a sin to argue against the truth. Christ's own testimony is, "My Father is greater than I."

### **The Holy Spirit**

With reference to Jesus Christ, a prophecy was uttered by Isaiah, to wit: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek..." "The Spirit of the Lord God is. upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek ..." (Isaiah 61:1) This actually fulfilled in Jesus Christ. (Luke 4:16-21) He was given the Spirit which appeared in the form of a dove at his baptism, and John the Baptist said, "...for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him." - John 3:34.

If the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one and the same God why was it necessary for the Son to be given the Spirit when he himself is the very Spirit? And if the Holy Spirit is the very God the Father, how then did the Father send" the Spirit? or was He sending Himself? To pretend to over these issues with the answer that it is a mystery is to make fools of moral beings.

The Trinity doctrine is unscriptural and very unreasonable indeed. It is not from God. This doctrine is one of those that have had many people turned to agnosticism when they could not put up with the unreasonableness of certain teachings of professed Christians.

God said in prophecy: "...I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy..." (Joel 2:28,29) Jesus described the Spirit as the Comforter or Spirit of truth which he promised to send to his apostles from His Father. (John 14:16,17; 15:26) Truly, after his ascension the Spirit came upon the apostles and made them speak in tongues, and propelled them to greater activities in the Lord's service. - Acts 2:1- 43.

How can this Holy Spirit which is God's own and which He uses or controls at His will be equated with Him? It is unthinkable!

The teaching that the Son and even the Holy Spirit are "perfectly equal" with the Father Almighty is derogatory to the eternal and supreme honour and majesty of the Father. Trinity teachers are like the erring priests of Israel to whom God said: "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?" - Malachi 1:6.

From the facts we have disclosed in this Sermon it is abundantly clear that Trinity is false. It does not lead men to know God; and without having the correct knowledge of Him we cannot be saved. Jesus said: "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou (the Father) hast sent." - John 17:3. Here again Jesus Christ excludes the Holy Spirit. He did not say to know God, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but to "know Thee the ONLY true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou (the Father) hast sent" is life everlasting.

It is in your own interest, dear readers, to accept the truth of the Scriptures as shown in this Sermon. May God help you. Amen.

## **DO YOU KNOW? CHRIST WAS KILLED ON A WEDNESDAY**

**One of the interesting incidents of old which God Almighty used to illustrate salient divine truths to prepare man for the glorious reward of eternal life in His everlasting Kingdom is the story of Jonah. It is more than a story of obedience and God's mercy on repentant sinners. The story foretells the entombment and miraculous resurrection of Jesus the true Messiah mankind must look to for salvation. It also clearly attests to the authenticity of God's word contained in the Holy Bible.**

### **Three Days, Three Nights**

Jesus Christ himself left no room for doubt as to the duration of his entombment. The account in Matthew 12:38-40 states as follows: "Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." In the account just read, Jesus Christ said he will be in the grave for three days and three nights, which is 72 hours. His words in regard to the period of his entombment must fulfil to the letter. (Matthew 24:35) It should be pointed out that Jehovah being a God of exactness does all His things on schedule. For example the Jews left Egypt on the "self-same day" that completed the 430 years God had promised they will stay there. (Exodus 12:40,41; Galatians 3:17) Jesus Christ was born into the world "at the fullness of time" (Galatians 4:4) And he could only be

killed at the time appointed by God. (John 7:8) The period Christ will stay in the grave must also be as the Lord had foretold.

It should be noted that when Christ was killed two of his disciples went to Pontius Pilate for permission to bury him while the chief priests and the Pharisees sought to properly secure the burial place of Christ “lest his disciples come by night and take him away”. Now if he was killed on Friday the Chief Priest and the Pharisees could not have on the following day (Saturday) violated the more stringent law of the weekly Sabbath by going to Pilate to make their request. (See John 19:39-42; Matthew 27:62-66) Thus, Christ could not have been killed on Friday. Such an erroneous view gives the impression that he stayed in the grave for only two nights and one day and is derogatory of Christ’s unassailable position as the Son of God.

### **The Passover Sabbath**

Many people confuse the day Christ was killed because of a misunderstanding of the “Sabbath” which the Jews were to observe on the eve of his death. According to St. John’s account “The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.” – John 19:31.

The text just cited spoke of a “Sabbath” that was an “high day”. Which Sabbath was that? It should be noted that some days other than the seventh day of the week were also called Sabbaths. For instance, the Jews have Sabbaths for the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of Harvest, Festival of blowing of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Passover. – Leviticus 23:1-44.

Proof that Jesus was killed on Wednesday is the prophecy of Daniel the prophet that the Messiah shall be cut off (or die temporarily) in the midst of the literal week of seven days which is Wednesday. - Daniel 9:27.

### **The Day of Preparation**

Under the old covenant, the day following the killing of Passover lamb was always designated a Sabbath. (Leviticus 23:5-7) Jesus Christ was killed on the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jews known as Nisan or Abib, the day on which the Passover lamb was slain. (Exodus 12:1-6) The day he was killed was the “preparation” for the Passover Sabbath to follow – which was “an high day”. (John 19:31) Since the Passover Sabbath like a person’s birthday could fall on any day of the week, the one for that year in which Christ was killed fell on Thursday, meaning that the “preparation“ was Wednesday. Indeed, the Bible shows that he was killed on the day of preparation, the day before the Sabbath (Mark 15:42) “which was an high day” - John 19:14,31,42.

Christ had celebrated his last Passover on Tuesday evening (John 13:27-30; 1 Corinthians 11:23). He was arrested that Tuesday night and was harassed and judged throughout the night (John 18:1-6,27-39). He was nailed to the stake on the “third hour” – 9 am – and died at the “ninth hour” – 3 p.m. – on Wednesday (Mark 15:25,33-37). After Christ’s death, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus – two of his disciples – obtained permission from Pontius Pilate to inter the body in a new tomb because the “even was come” and “because it was the preparation”, that is, the day before the Sabbath of the Passover and in line with God’s injunction in Deuteronomy 21:22,23 to the effect that the body of a man hanged on the tree should be buried that same day.

### **Saturday Resurrection**

Among the Jews, 12 hours daylight (6.00 a.m. – 6.00 p.m.) was calculated as one day (John 11:9) while the other 12 hours (6.00 p.m. – 6.00 a.m.) is taken as one night. Thus, Jesus was in the grave for three clear days – Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and three nights – Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday nights. He rose at the end of Saturday at sunset in fulfilment of Matthew 12:38-40.

That was why when Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James (Luke 24:10) among others came to the tomb the night after the Sabbath, they found it empty – Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1-9; John 20:1.

Another logical way of knowing the day Christ was killed is this: since he rose at the end of Saturday it is only plausible to then count three days backwards; Saturday, Friday and Thursday; and three nights; Friday night, Thursday night and Wednesday night – the day he was killed.

From the foregoing the idea of Sunday morning resurrection of Christ can be seen to be erroneous and scripturally unacceptable. The understanding that he was killed on Wednesday makes clear to all the grand fulfilment of our Saviour's words proves his son-ship and confirms his stature as the greatest prophet of God for all ages. (Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 3:23; 4:10-12) There is therefore no biblical reason whatsoever to observe "Good Friday" or even "Easter" which most churches regard as "the greatest Christian festival".

It is the truth that gives the people salvation as Christ himself said: "And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." – John 8:32.

### **THE LORD'S SUPPER**

On the eve of the Feast of Passover, which was also the eve of his death, Jesus Christ in a brief ceremony, entertained his 12 apostles exclusively to a special meal of bread and wine with thanksgiving as memorial of himself. This meal was historic because of its spiritual significance. St. Paul termed it "The Lord's Supper".

St. Matthew's account of the events goes thus: **"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."** - Matthew 26:26-28.

Today the Lord's Supper is commonly known among those professing Christianity as the Holy Communion, the Sacrament of the Eucharist, Memorial Supper or the Lord's Evening Meal. But as to when or to whom it should be administered there are disagreements among the various church denominations.

A text commonly cited in relation to the Lord's supper is John 6:48-51 in which Jesus Christ told the unbelieving Jews: "...I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." The Jews who did not understand the spiritual import of his words disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Then Jesus told them more emphatically: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." - John 6:52-54.

Some argue that the words of Christ cited above are not figurative but literal. We agree that the crowd took his words to be literal hence they were confused as is evident from their statement "This is an hard saying: who can hear it?" But Jesus Christ, knowing their confusion explained himself in verse 63 "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

To eat the flesh of a man or to drink any kind of blood, even the blood of beasts is contrary to the commandment of God, as it is written "And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people..." (Leviticus 17:10-14; see also Acts 15:28,29) Jesus Christ did not say or mean that the bread was his real and substantial living body or that the wine was his actual blood, rather he pointed out that the wine was the "FRUIT OF THE VINE" (Matthew 26:29) The bread and wine are emblems or representations of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Dr. Moffat's translation of the Bible renders Matthew 26:26-28, thus: "Take and eat this, it MEANS MY BODY ...Drink of it, all of you; this MEANS MY BLOOD..."

The words, bread, meat, milk, wine and water are sometimes used in the Bible figuratively to mean the word of God or good doctrine. (Isaiah 55:1-3; Ephesians 5:26; Hebrews 5:12-14) When Christ warned his disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees, they mistakenly thought he meant the ordinary bread but when he explained further "then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." – Matthew 16:6-12.

Some priests give only the bread to the communicants while they themselves drink the wine. But Jesus Christ who instituted the Memorial Supper gave both the bread and wine, though separately, to the apostles. (Matthew 26:26-29) This is clear enough.

The practice of certain churches in giving the bread and wine to everyone of their adherents is unscriptural. Their explanation that the "Holy Communion" is a "nutritional food to the soul" and an "antidote for sin" is not in harmony with the Scriptures. The fact is that Christ intended the observance of the Supper **ONLY** for the Anointed Christians who are of the class of the apostles. They are men who devote their lives wholly by giving up their secular work to the preaching of the gospel and in that they proclaim the Lord's death. Anyone who is not of this class of consecrated Christians, the Saints, ought not to partake of the Supper because it is a damnable sin to do so.

In the Bible no woman or child ever took it. There were many faithful female disciples of Jesus in his days but none of them partook of the bread and wine spiritual feast – NOT EVEN MARY HIS MOTHER. Why? It is because it is meant for the SAINTS, the ANOINTED CHRISTIANS who are members of his body (cabinet). The danger in taking the Supper unworthily is shown in St. Paul's epistle to the Corinthians in which he warned: "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." - 1 Corinthians 11:27-30

Those who, like the disorderly Corinthian Christians, think that the Lord's Supper is daily food which they must always feed on, should take warning and cease from doing so.

Moreover the observance of the Lord's Supper was not meant to take place daily or weekly or monthly as many church denominations are doing. Being the commemoration of the death of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:23-26), the Lord's Supper should be taken but ONCE year.

There is a point which we have always called people's attention to but which many too, have lost sight of, and that is the fact that the Lord's Supper was not instituted to be celebrated for eternity but for a limited period of time. St. Paul said: For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death **till he come**" (1 Corinthians 11:26). This shows that its observance would cease at the appearing or second presence of Christ. Jesus Christ said his coming will be spiritual, invisible to human eyes, and so will be marked by signs, particularly the First World War of 1914-1918. Since these signs have fulfilled, it is evident that the Lord is now in his temple in the heavens and therefore there is no need to celebrate the Lord's Supper. – John 14:19,22; 2 Corinthians 5:16; Luke 17:30; Matthew 24:1-3,7,8.

There is need therefore for people to be critical and to be wary of accepting the doctrines of religious groups because of the spiritual dangers involved in swallowing falsehoods. (Isaiah 9:16) However, there is still room for them to repent and follow the truth which Jesus Christ said would make the believers free. – John 8:31,32.

## WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT FASTING

Due to the prevalence of fasting as a required rite among several churches in Christendom, many people have been asking questions as to the place of fasting in Christianity.

Fasting is abstinence from food for a fixed period of time. It implies the taming of the passions such that one denies oneself things that give pleasure and comfort even if such are lawful.

The issue of fasting has become highly controversial because several Churches, in their quest for instant healing or miracles, have evolved various types of fasting for their adherents. They

believe it is a command from God that they should fast. Writing in his book *BIBLICAL FASTING AND PRAYER*, R. D. Flory describes fasting as a “spiritual exercise (like a prayer) to cleanse the channel so His (God’s) gifts and life will flow...a matter of love and obedience.” He adds: “After a 21-day fast you will realize for the first time the Biblical authority you have over demons, over princes and powers of the air, which Jesus has given you through His triumphant work on your behalf on the cross.” Thus many people, rather than regard fasting as a reflection of deep piety, indulge in it because of their quest for miracles or instant cures.

Harold R. Brown, a South African naturopath in his book *The fast way to health and vigour*, says, “Since time immemorial, fasting has been the *sine qua non* of real and lasting cure. The survival of the human race is due as much to periodic abstention from all food, save water, as by its consumption. Many who could not afford a doctor’s prescription have unknowingly cured themselves simply by doing without the very foods and drugs they thought were essential to their better health. An empty stomach has saved more lives than any known specific in medical records.”

### **Purpose of Fasting**

The Holy Bible makes it clear that fasting may be done in supplication to God for some divine gifts, to ward off danger or to solve some pressing problems affecting the worshippers of God either as individuals or groups. The Church at Antioch fasted and prayed as a result of which the Lord revealed to them that Barnabas and Saul should be set apart for the work of God. - Acts 13:1-3.

Fasting may be done to show contrition or remorse for one’s sins. David fasted and prayed to God to spare his child – the product of his adulterous union. However in spite of his fasting, the child died according to the word of the Lord. - 2 Samuel 12:14-17; See also Daniel 6:18; 2 Samuel 1:12; Psalm 69:12; 35:13; Joel 2:12-15.

The children of Israel were enjoined by God to observe a certain day in the year as a Day of Atonement during which time the high priest makes atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year. That day was one of self-denial, of abstinence from fleshly pleasures, and of reconciliation of the natural Jews to God. (Leviticus 16:27-31). The Day of Atonement, now observed by the Jews as Yom Kippur, was the “fast” mentioned by St. Paul in Acts 27:9 at which time of the year (September-October), sailing was dangerous.

There are examples of fasting to avert a national calamity. The children of Israel, threatened with destruction by the Moabite, Ammonites and other gentile nations, the Holy writ says that King “Jehoshaphat feared and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.” The outcome of that battle was that the enemies of the children of Israel were routed by the Lord’s angel and the Jews only came to gather the spoil. – 2 Chronicles 20:1-4,15-17, 20,24-30. See also Jonah 3:6-10; Nehemiah 9:12.

St Paul also advised Christian couples that they could, with common consent, abstain from sexual relations for the purpose of giving themselves to fasting and prayer.– 1 Corinthians 7:3-5.

## Jesus Christ and Fasting

By the time of Jesus Christ fasting, as an important adjunct to prayer, was a pretty well established custom among the Jews. However, formalism and empty traditionalism had become associated with it. Fasting had been stripped of its essence; vainglory and hypocrisy had taken over. This was evident in Christ's telling indictment of the self-righteous, holier-than-thou Pharisee, who was not justified in the sight of God inspite of the fact that he fasted "twice a week" (Luke 18:9-14).

During Christ's earthly ministry, the disciples of John the Baptist were curious that they and the Pharisees fasted often but the disciples of Jesus Christ never did. They then came to the Lord Jesus Christ to find out. They asked, "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?" Jesus said to them, "Can the children of the bride chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?" He added, "As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days." - Mark 2:18-20

The point Christ was making to his disciples (whom he referred to as the children of the bride chamber) was that since he (the bridegroom) was with them to cater for their spiritual well-being (as opposed to the disciples of John whose master was then in prison), there was no compelling need for them to fast or to afflict themselves in any wise. Not all the trees in Christ's garden are of equal growth. Christ would not give to his disciples, duties they could not bear as they, being new in their calling, were not used to such religious austerities as fasting.

Moreover, God is a God of order. There is time for everything. (1 Corinthians 14:33,40; Ecclesiastes 3:1). Hence, the Lord added: "No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles." – Mark 2:21-22; Matthew 9:14-17; Luke 5:33-39).

The implication of Christ's statement that his disciples could not fast while he was with them, was that when he would be taken away (at his crucifixion), they would be thrown into sorrow. The Lord made this clear in John 16:20 "Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy" Indeed after Christ's crucifixion the disciples "mourned and wept" (Mark 16:10). They fasted when the Lord was taken away from them as he had earlier predicted.

## Fasting In the Present Day

**That fasting is not ruled out in the Christian era is evident from the case of the deaf and dumb spirit, which Jesus Christ cast out of a Jewish boy. Earlier his own disciples had tried to oust the devil from the boy but failed; but at Jesus' command the deaf and dumb spirit left the boy.**

Intrigued by it all, the disciples asked why they could not cast the deaf and dumb spirit out. Christ answered, “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.” This clearly gives the understanding that under certain desperate situation, one could fast. – Matthew 17:14-21; Mark 9:17-29.

However no matter how deeply one may afflict his soul, no matter how extensive the fasting, it will be ineffective if it is not based on the truth, the fear of God and the practice of righteousness. The Jews made an error of judgement by believing that because they fasted often they would be in favour with God and be blessed by Him. Many professed Christians have fallen into this error of turning the solemn, private act of fasting into a mere ritual or formalism. Some even pay other people to fast for them according to the number of days some so-called visionaries, pastors, prophets and prophetesses that abound these days prescribe.

Fasting is a voluntary act of self-denial or sacrifice by a troubled individual or group of persons. It is ridiculous, therefore, for someone to engage in fasting on behalf of another. Please see Philippians 2:12; Ezekiel 18:4,20; Galatians 6:4,5; Ezekiel 14:12-20 etc.

### **Length of Fasting**

With regard to the period of time one should fast, some individuals have been known to fast for upwards of 40 days, apparently in imitation of Moses and the Lord Jesus Christ who neither took food nor water during their fast. Others recommend fewer days. According to Flory, “Your need and desperation should influence the length of the fast. Some (have) continued in prayer and fasting for 40 days until the demons went out”. However, Christians should guide their affairs with discretion. It is indiscreet to fast for days on end especially in this time of grace. – Proverbs 2:10; Psalm 112:5.

Because the Israelites had turned the solemn rite of fasting into mere formality – they fasted and “afflicted their souls” but at the same time revelled in iniquity - God Almighty speaking through Isaiah pointed out to them that He had no regard for their prayers and fasting, as it is written: “Wherefore have we fasted, say they and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?”- Isaiah 58:3-5.

Jeremiah the prophet was used by God to proclaim also that because the Jews persisted in wickedness, their fasting and prayers would be of no avail: “Then said the Lord unto me, Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offerings and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence”. -Jeremiah 14:10-12.

It can be understood from Jeremiah’s proclamation that one who fasts often and yet indulges in sin or personal righteousness in order to get the praise of men cannot be blessed by God. Such a one is exposing himself to the adverse judgement of God. Jesus Christ warned: “Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they

may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: the Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” – Matthew 6:16-18.

But contrary to Christ’s injunction that fasting should be a quiet, sober or private affair, many churches make such a flourish about fasting that special dates and holidays are set aside for them. Fasting has thus been robbed of its essence in order to attract the attention of the world and for the individuals involved to be hailed by men as righteous. As the Jesus Christ said, such already have their reward, which is the admiration they get from those unlearned in the Scriptures - and nothing more.

The fast required by God is not so much the abstinence from food as the doing of righteousness at all times. He made this clear in Isaiah 58:6-9 to wit: “Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh”.

What the foregoing passage makes clear is that importance is no longer attached to fasting as a rite. What is important is the fear of God and the practice of righteousness. The fasting that is more acceptable to God and which “is in the sight of God of great prize” is the practice of righteousness at all times. (Psalm 106:3). Thus a Christian can be having his normal three square meals a day and yet be fasting, that is giving himself to righteousness. Such a one must deny himself of “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” to meet up the Lord’s requirement. This is the fasting that is required of every faithful Christian in these last days. - See John 2:15-17; Matthew 6:27; Romans 13:11-14; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; 1 Timothy 2:1-5.

From all that has been said, it is evident that fasting is a sober, private affair: It should not be published.

Those who publish their fast, calling attention of the world are like the hypocrites in time of Christ. (Matthew 6:16-18). They are not doing the will of God. Moreover, now that Christ has come the second time, fasting is not mandatory or binding. Christ the Tabernacle of God is now with men, as it is written: “And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.” - Revelation 21:3.

As stated earlier, anybody who chooses to fast does so on his own personal volition. He should not say it is the command of God.

May God Almighty bless His children with the understanding of His word by His grace. Amen.