

GOD'S KINGDOM ADVOCATE VOL 1

ARE YOU WORTHY OF YOUR PROMOTION?

Every person, in his vocation or profession, has a desire to be elevated to a higher position. Promotion gives joy and only because of its prospect of material benefits but also for the fact that it serves as an acknowledgement of one's merits and ability. But owing to the high incidence of deviations and perversions in almost every sphere of human activities in our time, many people do receive promotions that they do not deserve while those who are genuinely qualified are ignored. However, true promotion, according to the Scriptures, comes from God.

A student in a grammar school has an ambition to be promoted from one class to another in ascending the academic ladder. He knows that this will depend on his success in an examination. And so, in order to realize his ambition, he must have to work hard.

Similarly, an undergraduate in a university, knows too well that he cannot gain academic laurels without passing his examinations. For this reason he has to do all he can in his studies so as to be successful in his examinations. This is the sort of thing that encourages healthy rivalry among students and instills in them a sense of duty and industry. Those of them who succeed in examinations and are promoted on merit are always a happy people. They have the satisfaction of a clear conscience that they have proved themselves worthy of the promotion. And their feeling is that of self-confidence.

But today, there are allegations that students seek to buy their promotions by giving bribes to ungodly teachers or invigilators. Such teachers award high marks not on merit to those students who have stolen their hearts with gifts. There are also allegations that even in some public examinations certain invigilators for reasons of corruption and such like sometimes connive at students' making reference to textbooks or notebooks, and condone unjustly a lot more of other irregularities.

A gift corruptly offered with the intent to carry a favour with anyone is a sin. No person whose morals are high or who is determined to maintain his integrity will accept that sort of gift. It makes one deviate from the course of justice and truth. This accounts for the enactment of a law by God forbidding the acceptance of such gift, which in a plain term is bribe. As it is written: "And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous." (Exodus 23:8) In the New English Bible the text is rendered in a language the ordinary man can better understand: "You shall not accept a bribe, for bribery makes the discerning man blind and the just man give a crooked answer."

With some female students it is a different story. Immoral or corrupt teachers do not want gifts from them. All they want is sex. And some ungodly and stupid girls take pleasure in establishing immoral relationship with their teachers so as to be favoured with the award of good marks during examinations and be promoted. No doubt, students and teachers who indulge in such corrupt practices stand condemned before God and godly men except they repent. It is reproachful for any girl to prostitute herself in order to be given a promotion which she does not merit; and a teacher who encourages such waywardness is not worth his salt and is guilty of breach of trust.

There is nothing wrong in wishing to be promoted but the promotion must be on the basis of what one essentially is. Any sort of promotion gained through bribery or at the price of forfeiting one's self-respect is not really worth the having: it is bogus.

A student girl who fails in an examination but maintains a high standard of morals is much a better person than the one who passes an examination at the expense of her chastity. It pays to maintain one's integrity. And King Solomon stated: "The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them. A gracious woman retaineth honour..." - Proverbs 11:3, 16

And any teacher who purposely causes a student to fail in an examination just because the student refuses to practise any form of corruption or immorality to satisfy his carnal desire, is wicked. He shall pay dearly for it. For the Bible states clearly that an evil man shall not escape God's punishment, and that the pursuit of evil leads to death. - Proverbs 11:19, 21, Romans 1:38-32, 2:6-9 etc.

Many school or college girls have died untimely in attempts to procure abortions of pregnancies for which certain immoral teachers were responsible. There are teachers who take undue advantage of their privileged positions to lure or intimidate some of the girls into intimate acts that lead to their death. A certain man lost his daughter the other day after hearing her confession that her college teacher put her in the family way. The wayward girl stubbornly refused to disclose the name of the teacher until she died. For her foolishness she was given an inglorious burial in which the church refused to take part. The girls are always the losers in the game. However, one thing is certain: though the teacher's name was covered by the girl and he was unknown to men, he was not covered before God. His sin and guilty conscience will ever haunt him. And he will fully be recompensed by the Lord except he shows satisfactory contrition. (2 Corinthians 5:10, Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14)

Obtrusive Influence

Now, turning to other sections of human society it is distressing to note that promotion has lost its significance among very many people. In certain institutions, offices and departments the workers themselves know that their promotion will not depend on industry, diligence or efficiency but on the considerations of tribe, blood relationship, or obtrusive influence or how much one can corruptly offer to please the bosses.

There was a case of a certain young man who had served in his department for a considerable length of time and proved to be efficient. For his intelligence, hard work and devotion to duty he was always respected by his colleagues. This was well known to the board of management of his department. When it was time for promotion, this man who was in all respects best qualified for the senior post was let out and another man was promoted. During the promotion interview, the young man was told by the chairman of the board that there was no adverse report against him and that his work was excellent but it was the wish of the board that he should wait the next opportunity. And when the next opportunity came the following year, it was the same story. Nothing was done to encourage the hardworking young man.

The corruption that was going on behind the scenes all along was common knowledge. But the young man was and is still a Christian who was determined not to isolate his faith and was, therefore, not prepared to take a dishonourable and sinful course of offering bribes to anybody He believes, according to the Scriptures, that true greatness, honour or promotion

comes from God. And since God's time is the best he had the understanding and faith to wait on Him.

It is interesting to note that consequent upon circumstances allowed by God, the gods that constituted that management board were all ousted. And the first measures taken by the newly constituted board to re-organise the department brought the oppressed young man to a position much higher than all those of his colleagues who were earlier promoted undeservedly through corruption.

Moreover, among them some had since been demoted or forced to go on voluntary retirement. For acts not unconnected with dishonesty, abuse of office and inefficiency. But up till today the young man is enjoying the benefits of his hard work and making the most of his promotion to the glory of God.

The Bible shows clearly that God is the Helper of the oppressed. Said the Psalmist: "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set *him* in safety *from him that puffeth at him.*" (Psalm 12:5) What the former board of management did to the young man was a glaring case of oppression and injustice. Any man in a position of trust should always remember that however highly placed he may be, he is still subject to the Highest, God Almighty. If a man uses his position and power to oppress the poor or the innocent, he cannot escape God's judgment. King Solomon said: "If you witness in some province the oppression of the poor and the denial of right and justice, do not be surprised at what goes on, for every official has a higher one set over him, and the Highest keeps watch over them all." - Ecclesiastes 5:8, New English Bible.

People who are thriving through oppression and bribery must be told the plain truth that their riches are false and that by their actions they are digging their own grave. In their own interest they should repent of their evil deeds so as to obtain divine mercy before God's vengeance is expressed on them. God said: "Forasmuch therefore as your treading *is* upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate *from their right.* Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it *is* an evil time." - Amos 5:11-13

God also gave this warning: "Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart *upon them.*" - Psalm 62:10

What is more, Jesus Christ also warned: "...Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." (Luke 12:15) And he further said: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" - Mark 8:36

It is much more better and honourable to live an honest life, having a clear conscience and commanding the respect of your fellow men while you are at peace with God than to be a crook who though rich has no reputation and is not in favour with God. In Proverbs 28:6, 8, it is written: "Better *is* the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than *he that is* perverse *in his* ways, though he *be* rich. He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor."

Immoral Conduct

Another thing that must be condemned without reservation is the immoral conduct of some men in top posts towards the female workers under them. Some ladies who are performing their duties creditably are denied their rights to promotions because of their refusal to flirt with ungodly bosses or succumb to satisfy their carnal lusts. But if they remain faithful to God they shall see the tribulation or punishment of God upon corrupt bosses who refuse to repent and they themselves will be promoted in the long run.

Godly married women and spinsters should never give in to the advances of mean, immoral bosses. They should exercise strong faith in God always and wait patiently for Him. For God's time is the best. He will certainly bless them.

An open letter to the Federal Minister of Health by a female nurse that was published in the West African Pilot on Tuesday December 12, 1961, speaks for itself. She wrote: "BAREFACED SHAMELESSNESS is the only word to describe the mean attitudes of some doctors and male nurses towards the female ones. There is the impression which is eating deep into the minds of the public, that female nurses are corrupt.

"This may sound quite true, but one has only to see the way in which some doctors make approaches to females nurses and if any of these female nurses refuses to yield she will either be threatened with dismissal or disliked and eventually her progress may be retarded. I am making this remark because I have been a victim of their fiendish approaches and I know what position my refusal to yield to their requests has kept me...

"Most of us are not working with a view to befriending doctors and do not care a hoot about their hire-purchase cars with which they think they can get any girl at will. I am optimistic that the responsible authority after reading this letter, will instill sanity into the heads of these sex hungry doctors and to ensure that the interest of the female nurses are adequately protected from the hands of the wolf doctors.

"Female nurses are no prostitutes,"

This sort of experience is not peculiar to female workers in the medical department. In many other departments, similar incidents of crass immorality are rampant. Some executives keep a harem of ungodly, shameless and loose ladies in the office for self-gratification. They work less but earn more: in other words, their earnings are in no way commensurate with the work they do. As long as the girls can keep up the illicit erotic relationship, they are "entitled" to double increment, promotion and other amenities; and besides they are above discipline. Despite the economic and moral adverse effects these acts are bound to have on the company or corporation, no one dares raise a voice in protest, otherwise he will be kicked out of his job.

Those executive officers or bosses who take undue advantage of their positions to defile needy married women or spinsters will surely be punished by God. It is only on the condition that they repent and produce fruit that is consistent with their penitence that they will receive divine mercy.

Thank God, not all doctors, or executive officers, teachers, invigilators or highly placed persons are corrupt or immoral. A story by a columnist published in EVER-BODY'S (June 16-22, 1973) gives a picture of what obtains in some offices, He stated: "One

morning, the official came into his department and found that most of the girls on duty had left their desk. He found out that some of them were in a room. Well, he went inside and found that they were plaiting their hair. He queried them and told them it was wrong to do that on duty. One of the girls retorted: 'Oga, you better go back to your desk...' The officer insisted that they must disband and go back to their desks. As they left, the same girl told the officer: 'I will make sure you regret your action.' The officer little realized that she was the girlfriend of her head of department and, in fact, it was a red letter day for him when he knew the cause of why he was not promoted along with others."

Some people think only of the present joy, and love the pleasures of sin but they do not consider the after-effects of their actions or what God will do in His judgment. Saint Paul said: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad." - 2 Corinthians 5:10

Any promotion gained through bribery and corruption or immorality is not deserved and is ungodly, and except there is evidence of repentance on the part of whoever is concerned all will not be well in the end. The gains of corruption or immorality are cursed. It is better to seek such promotion as is given by God. This does not mean that God will send an angel from heaven to elevate you but when your ways are pleasing to Him because you love to keep His commandments, He will use any man to bring you into honour. Wicked men may delay your promotion but in God's own time it will surely come. The woman Hannah in her thanksgiving said: "The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, *and* lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set *them* among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory..." - 1 Samuel 2:7, 8

And in Psalm 75:6, 7, it is written: "For promotion *cometh* neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another."

What is more, Jesus Christ said: "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will *my* Father honour." The promotion or honour that comes from God is full of grace and is lasting. To be worthy of such promotion you must abstain from bribery and corruption and immorality, and be diligent, honest and God-fearing.

CHRISTIANITY AND NATIONALISM

Christianity is not opposed to nationalism in its concept of love and devotion to one's own nation. And the God's Kingdom Society since the days before independence has always identified herself with the aspirations of Nigeria as is consistent with the tenets of Christianity. However, in the various ways men give expression to their patriotic feelings there are lots of things against which a true Christian must take precaution.

Recently, a Government-owned newspaper based at Enugu - The Renaissance - issue of Tuesday June 5, 1973, carried in its front page a report captioned, "Jehovah's Witnesses Shun National Events". It stated that all the school-children whose parents were members of the Jehovah's Witnesses were not allowed to take part in the Nigerian Children's Day celebration in Umuahia division. A spokesman of the witnesses was quoted as saying: "Our children will not take part in any sort of national celebration because it makes them worshippers of Nigerian leaders. It is only God we will worship and respect on earth. Taking part in national

celebration will make us and our children human worshippers and tools by which the world is split into states and into ideological blocs. Nationalism makes it possible for nation to rise against nation". A similar report was published in the Nigerian Observer issue of Thursday, June 7, 1973.

In consequence of these reports some sections of the Press have been provoked into lashing out against the Watchtower witnesses accusing them of fanaticism and non-cooperation with governments. We had expected that if the reports were untrue the witnesses would spare no time to make a statement refuting the serious allegations against them. But up to the time of writing this release there has been absolute silence from the quarters of the Watchtower Society.

Unfortunately, the Daily Sketch has wittingly or unwittingly dragged the God's Kingdom Society (GKS) into the matter in an editorial. And the Publicity Secretary of the GKS Brother B. O. Tietie immediately sent a telegram to the editor in this vein:

"YOUR EDITORIAL OF TODAY THURSDAY JUNE SEVEN REFERS X BE INFORMED THAT GOD'S KINGDOM ADVOCATE MAGAZINE IS PUBLISHED BY GOD'S KINGDOM SOCIETY AN INDIGENOUS CHRISTIAN ORGANISATION WITH HEADQUARTERS IN SALEM CITY WARRI AND NOT BY JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES SOCALLED X WE OBJECT IN STONGEST TERMS THEREFORE TO YOUR REFERENCE TO GOD'S KINGDOM ADVOCATE AS BELONGING TO JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES OR WATCHTOWER SOCIETY X MUCH AS OF FAITH WE UPHOLD GOD'S LAWS AS SUPREME WE ACKNOWLEDGE NIGERIA'S NATION-HOOD X RESPECT HER RULES AND SHARE IN FEELING OF NATIONALISTIC BELONGING AND LOYALTY IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCRIPTURAL IDEOLOGY X NOTE THAT GOD'S KINGDOM SOCIETY'S CHILDREN TOOK PART IN NIGERIAN CHILDREN'S DAY CELEBRATION X LETTER FOLLOWS."

Such being the case, we are bound naturally to defend ourselves so as to erase from the minds of people any false impression that seeks to group the GKS and the Watchtower Society as one and the same organization. And as the God's Kingdom Society is set for the defence of all that Christianity stands for, we feel constrained as well under the circumstances to throw some light from a scriptural standpoint on certain vital issues in relation to Christianity and nationalism.

The God's Kingdom Society and the Watch Tower Society are poles apart purely on the basis of principles and doctrines. We do not hate their persons but we detest their indiscretion and certain acts of fanaticism which, more often than not, have brought them into open clashes with authorities. Even if they have a good case, their lack of modesty and objectivity in their approach and presentation of matters have often undermined their intentions.

Now, let us consider a few points on the issue of the Nigerian Children Day.

Aim: The celebration as put in the Daily Times (May 28, 1973) was "aimed at reviewing the needs of children and to remind our governments, voluntary organizations, parents - in short, everyone, of their obligations to the young ones". This aim was comprehensively expressed in the message of the Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon that was read by the military governors and others to Nigerian children on the occasion. With regard to the message, The Nigerian Observer(Tuesday, May 29, 1973) reported as follows:

“In the speech, the Head of State, said that children have a unique and important role to play in the overall development of the nation. General Gowon observed that the greatness of a nation lay in the actual and potential contributions which the citizens can make towards its progress... General Gowon advised the children not only to eschew violence or irresponsibility of any kind but also to learn to air their grievances through legitimate and non-violent means in order to achieve effective solutions.

“He called on parents to address themselves in the role which they could play in the development of children. General Gowon expressed the hope that children would still be nurtured to uphold the traditional emphasis on obedience and respect for parents and elders, despite the rapid technological and cultural changes taking place in the world.

“If this tradition is to be sustained, General Gowon observed, parents and guardians owe it as a duty to the nation and indeed to humanity, to provide for their children, ‘good care, affection, understanding, security and protection against all forms of neglect and cruelty’...”

We consider this message of the Head of State as the most important aspect of the celebration. We find nothing in it that is scripturally objectionable. And so we have no regrets, therefore, that the children of the members of God’s Kingdom Society took part in the celebration.

The action of the Jehovah’s witnesses so-called in stopping their children from the Nigerian Children’s Day celebration is without merit and is capable of exciting misgivings. That was why the President of God’s Kingdom Society, Brother E. T. Otomewo, in a telegraphic message urged the representative of the Watchtower Society in Nigeria to warn his fellow witnesses against fanaticism. His telegram dated June 7, 1973, reads as follows:

“I REFER YOU TO RENAISSANCE OF FIFTH INSTANT AND SKETCH OF TODAY SEVENTH REGARDING CHILDREN’S NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION BOYCOTTED BY WATCHTOWER CHILDREN ON INSTRUCTION OF THEIR PARENTS X REASONS FOR THE BOYCOTT AS PUBLISHED IF TRUE ARE AMONG OTHERS THAT THE CELEBRATION AMOUNTS TO WORSHIP AND RESPECT OF MEN X MEN CAN BE RESPECTED OR HONOURED BUT NOT WORSHIPPED AND I KNOW NO RULER OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THIS COUNTRY NOT EVEN THE HEAD OF STATE THAT IS WORSHIPPED AS GOD X YOUR UMUAHIA COLLEAGUES ARE WRONG TO SAY MEN COULD NOT BE RESPECTED X THEY CERTAINLY HAVE NO BIBLE AUTHORITY FOR THIS X RATHER THE BIBLE ADVOCATES RESPECT FOR KINGS RULERS ELDERS AND ‘MEN OF ALL SORTS’ TO QUOTE YOUR NEW WORLD BIBLE X READ FIRST TIMOTHY CHAPTER SIX VERSES ONE AND TWO AND FIRST PETER CHAPTER TWO VERSE SEVENTEEN AND WARN FANATICS AMONG YOU FROM MAKING THEMSELVES CHEAP MARTYRS AND ALSO BRINGING PERSECUTIONS UPON OTHER RELIGIOUS INNOCENT PEOPLE AND STOP GIVING CAUSE TO SCEPTICS TO WRITE MALICIOUS ARTICLES AGAINST THE CHRISTIAN FAITH”.

The view of the Watchtower witnesses that taking part in any sort of national celebration would make them and their children worshippers of Nigerian leaders is untenable. We are not aware of any national celebration in this county in which Nigerian leaders are worshipped. It is not a sin for children or even adults to salute the Head of State or the military governors or any other accredited representative of the Government as a mark of respect.

On the occasion of the Nigerian Children's Day celebration it was the Administrator of the East Central State, Mr. UkpabiAsika, who stood on the dais during the parade at the Enugu Sports Stadium. A picture of the parade appeared in the front page of "The Renaissance" of May 29, 1973.

If any aspect of the ceremonies and activities was objectionable to the witnesses on the ground of their faith, it would have been enough for them to explain themselves politely on that point rather than give the impression that tended to discountenance the entire celebration. It is a good thing that the Government has created such an opportunity to make both the children and their parents and other institutions realize their civic responsibilities as to work together towards the progress of the nation.

Respect

We agree that God alone should be worshipped according to the Scriptures. But we disagree that men, especially rulers, should not be respected. Respect for those in authority, elders, and other classes of men is entrenched in the tenets of Christianity. St. Paul enjoined Christian servants to respect their masters, whether they are believers or not. He stated: "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and *his* doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise *them*... These things teach and exhort." (1 Timothy 6:1, 2, see also Leviticus 19:32) And St. Peter also admonished: "Honour all *men*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king." - 1 Peter 2:17

We must not lose sight of the fact that the governments of the world are secular governments and so they should not be expected in all their ceremonies to conform to all principles and norms of Christianity or any other religion. This does not prevent Christians from co-operating with the governments or proving to be loyal citizens.

For cogent scriptural reasons, some Christians do not sing the national anthems which are political prayers. The freedom God gives everyone which, unfortunately, many abuse or exercise licentiously today by sinning against Him in various ways, and the freedom of religion or worship upheld by good or democratic governments of the world allow such Christians to exercise this aspect of the fundamental rights of man. But they have no right to dissuade others who believe in singing the anthems from doing so. So too those who do not believe in the immaculate conception of Mary or her being the "mother of Almighty God," have the right and freedom not to sing the "Hail Mary". If they do whereas they have no faith in it, it is sheer hypocrisy and will be of no value whatever. And God is against hypocrisy: it is a big sin - Job 13:16, Isaiah 32:6, Matthew 23:27, 28, Luke 12:1, etc.

With regard to national flags, there is no doubt that they have their usefulness, and their importance as political symbols cannot be disputed. But like national anthems a Christian can on the ground of his conscience and faith based on the Scriptures refuse to salute them. He has no right, however, to prevent others who believe it is not a sin from doing so.

Citizen

We hold the view that a person who in sincerity of purpose for the reason of his religious beliefs does not sing a national anthem or venerate the flag but is peaceful and law-abiding, is a better and more useful citizen to the nation than one who though enthusiastic, in singing the

anthem and saluting the flag, is fraud, smuggler, robber traitor or a subversive element who undermines government development plans and so on.

Although Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who were faithful Jews, refused to bow to the golden image of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon, they proved to be loyal subjects. The king, who was rashly furious against them, later regretted his error and realized that they were right, and had no cause to doubt their loyalty. At the end of the whole drama, the king promoted them and they were of immense help to his government. Had they been killed the Babylonish kingdom would have been deprived of their invaluable services which brought blessings to it. - Read Daniel chapter 3.

The experience of Daniel himself when others conspired against him and was thrown into the den of lions is also a striking instance. The fact that he prayed to God instead of King Darius did not mean that he had disaffection towards the government. He was at last vindicated to the appreciation of the king while the conspirators died ignominiously. (Daniel chapter 6) Any exercise, therefore, intended to compel anyone to violate his faith and the sincere dictate of his conscience can only be seen as persecution and an act of oppression. It is in this light we cannot in any way lend support to the atrocities meted out against the "Jehovah's Witnesses" in Malawi, Zambia, Liberia or elsewhere which some reckless writers often cite in attacking them. We do not see how the raping of their women and killing of some of them have improved the images of those countries. Rather, they are a blot on them. And as the editor of "Drum" magazine commented: "We too, have heard reports of religious arrogance by God's people. But the behaviour of the Witnesses does not justify the rape and killings by young political hooligans in Malawi." – Drum, June, 1973.

The degree of respect and dignity commanded by the Head of State and other rulers of Nigeria today before the outside world is not because of their intolerance, restriction of religious freedom or use of violence against armless and innocent citizens (as some would want them to do); rather it is because of their tolerance and the maturity they have shown in their endeavours to keep the country together despite the diversities in the religious beliefs, cultures, and tribes of its people.

Any tendency on the part of any group of Christians not to recognize any constituted authority or government of any country must be deprecated because there is no scriptural justification for it. The existence of human governments in the present evil world is allowed by God. If there is no government there will be a state of disorder and confusion under which the gospel of Christ cannot be preached. And under such a situation the Watchtower witnesses themselves cannot be safe in preaching from house to house uninvitedly as they are doing.

A Christian is free to show love to and serve his country faithfully provided he keeps his faith inviolate and endeavours, by the grace of God, to refrain from sin or from being a reproach to God and his country. "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." - Proverbs 14:34

CHRISTIANITY AND THE PEOPLES' CULTURE

Christianity, by virtue of its peculiar divine merits and universal scope, is far above the culture, customs or traditions of any peoples - be they Jews, Greeks, Romans, Britons or Nigerians. Though it is possible to reflect a people's culture in its practice, there can be no harmony between it and any culture or tradition that is based on idolatry or superstition. And

so whenever any aspect of a people's culture runs counter to the tenets of Christianity, the only path of honour open to anyone who, indeed, is a disciple of Jesus Christ, according to the Scriptures, is to reject such a culture and subject himself to the will of the Most High God.

According to *The Columbia-Viking Desk Encyclopedia*, culture is the "way of life of a society, without implication of refinement or advanced knowledge". And *The American Peoples Encyclopedia* defines it as "The total round of human activities, not due to heredity, shared by members of a group".

As regards the origins of the various cultures of people in the world, historians and social anthropologists have expressed difficulties that beset their inquiries. Thus we find Professor E. O. James of the University of London, in his *History of Religions* stating: "We just do not know, and we have no means of finding out, exactly when, where and how the various traits of what we call collectively 'culture' came into being and precisely what form they took." However, what is certain is that every race, tribe or nations has a cultural history. With the passing of time and increase of knowledge as well as the interchange of ideas with other peoples various cultures have changed or developed from stage to stage. And it has also been stated that "some cultures are more conservative or more resistant to change than others, and part of a culture may change rapidly while another part is little affected".

The claim that differences in racial ability are responsible for the variety in the cultures of peoples cannot be scripturally or historically substantiated. And so today, any claim to racial superiority on the basis of culture is unjustified. On this score, *The American Peoples Encyclopedia* states: "Such claims have been disproved by archaeologists and historians who have shown conclusively that peoples once far advanced have sunk into oblivion. At the time Egypt led in civilization, Greece and Rome possessed simple cultures. In classical times the later were dominant, and the peoples of central and northern Europe were living under primitive conditions. The time came, however, when these very backward peoples became world leaders." - Vol. 6, page 622.

God Almighty who knows the end from the beginning made an auspicious promise to Abraham that in him and his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. (Genesis 12:3, 18:18) The birth of the Jewish nation was a stage reached in pursuance of the Lord's promise. Their culture, customs and traditions were based on the laws of God that were given them through Moses. It was by reason of those divine laws that they were easily distinguished from the Gentiles not only as a great nation but also as "a wise and understanding people". - Deuteronomy 4:5-7.

The culture and customs of the Israelites were by all standards more purposeful, more significant and of higher qualities than those of the gentile nations. While the way of life of the Jews was directed at the clean worship of the Almighty God, the Creator and Possessor of heaven and earth, the other nations were doing service to things which by nature were no gods - the works of their own hands.

Heathen Gods

The gods of the heathens even up till this day have always been made of wood, silver, brass, gold, stone or clay. They worship the planets and even the meanest of creatures. Do some not worship lizards, snakes, fishes, crocodiles or even flies? Are there not those who have trees -

the oak tree, palm tree and so on - as their gods? Do others not worship the god or goddess of the sea to whom they make libation? And what about road junctions? Are they not of “special significance” as centres for sacrifices?

Nothing else could account for all this than total blindness of the mind or crass ignorance at the instance of satan the devil who is capable of inducing man into making an ass of himself. Otherwise how could man who is endowed with intelligence by the benevolent and all-wise Creator set up piece of wood or an image made of clay and pray to that inanimate object to protect him or bless him with children and other good things? Or how could man who is the image of God and who is made to have dominion over all other creatures on earth, stoop so low as to regard the crocodile, snake, lizard or fly as his superior, deserving reverence? Yes, well did the Psalmist say: “Man *that is* in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts *that perish.*” - Psalm 49:12, 20

With regard to the gods of the heathens it is written in the Psalms: “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 115:4-8) Viewed against the background of the religious system of the heathens in all the world -Europe, Asia, Africa and so on - it is understandable why their cultures and traditions based on superstitious tendencies are fundamentally the very opposite of the expressed will of the Almighty God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

Paganism

It is a known fact of history that the cultures of the various tribes of this country, like those of other parts of the continent, were basically associated with the worship of ancestors, pagan gods and such like. Professor J. F. Ajayi in his work, *Christian Mission in Nigeria* 1841-1891, wrote about the complex religious system of the people which he said “was not so much a matter of personal beliefs as the culture of the whole of the community”. He added: “The welfare of the individual, the family, village or larger community was believed to depend on the members severally and collectively maintaining the right relationships with the ancestors, gods and other unseen powers through a complex system of rival observances. There were beliefs of course, about the organic philosophy of the community, the proper relationships between the gods, between them and man, man and woman, the living and the dead; beliefs about the mysteries of life, sickness and death good and ill fortune, and so on.” - Page 4-5

This fact is also well acknowledged in the *Nigeria Handbook* 1970, published by the Federal Ministry of Information. Under the subject “Culture”, it is written: “With almost all people, traditions and cultural achievements can generally be traced to expressions of religious belief. In time past it is probably true that most of the dwellers in what is now Nigeria were animists...”

The Nigeria Handbook 1970 further stated: “Some of the traditional festivals are reserved for special occasions such as the play, performed in Lagos, usually in honour and remembrance of some great sons of the past. This play, in which several eyes or houses take part, symbolizes the spirits of the ancestors returning to bless the people. It is also a reminder that

ancestor worship holds a high place in traditional beliefs... In Southern Nigeria the preparation and ceremonies for installation (of chiefs) may... often involve traditional rites performed at the old shrines and sacred groves..."

It continues: "Closely allied with this adherence to tradition are the customs associated with the preservation of the memory of ancestors. These include the observance of the second burial ceremony in the case of the recently departed... and the observance of annual ceremonies in honour of the old, gods. Among the Yoruba peoples of the Western State of Nigeria it is said that there were over 400 different deities and even today ceremonies are observed for the god of Iron, or Shango (the god of thunder) for Olokun (goddess of Sea) and many other deities too numerous to mention... Seedtime and harvest, fishing and hunting, birth, marriage and death each have their dance and ceremony invoking the pleasure of the gods and success in the undertaking. Many of these dances involve the wearing of masks which may be an artist's interpretation of the spirit said to preside over the particular event being celebrated, which brings us to another form of tradition." - Pages 65-66

If ancestor worship and the observances and rituals for the god of iron, or god of thunder, or goddess of the sea as shown in the foregoing, are not paganism, what are they?

From all indications, subtle attempts are being made by certain people who persuade Government to use tax payers' money in the guise of reviving culture to instal paganism as a sort of national religion in this country.

We are not saying that pagans and all others outside the Christian Faith should not project their culture or tradition. There is freedom of worship or religion for all and sundry in this democratic country; but has anyone the right to use the Nation's money owned by the tax payers who belong to various religions to boost or revive a particular religion of his liking?

"Cultural Revival"

Some now take the "cultural revival" to mean the restoration of long-forgotten, antique ancestral shrines with all the rituals, and a projection of fetish or juju even in its basest form. And there have been reports of missing persons in the country and some are suspected to be victims of ritual practices. Will the sort of cultural revival now going on not encourage perpetrators of such iniquitous acts?

The most unfortunate aspect of the whole affair is that it is not only the heathens who engage themselves in this paganish exercise but also some who profess to be Christians; they cherish these heathenish activities and are grossly involved in them - all in the name of "cultural heritage". Thus said God Almighty: "...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: for *one* cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They *are* upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also *is it* in them to do good." - Jeremiah 10:2-5, See also Leviticus 18:24-30, Romans 3:29-31, Matthew 5:17-19

Whoever calls himself a Christian but is not given to understand in the light of the Scriptures that the "Gentile times" are ended and gone forever, needs be pitied. For a Christian to join or take part in paganish activities is very mean indeed and is a sin to the core. To such erring

Galatians St. Paul wrote: "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? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you..." - Galatians 4:8-11

Cultural Heritage

If there is anything of virtue, and if there is anything of pride or rather glory, Nigeria has to present to the world in her cultural heritage at this stage of her advancement, it is not, definitely not, her competence in idol worship, or display of demonic masquerades carrying dreadful images with jaggy teeth and horns; obviously, it is not her parade of nude young women or those who are scantily clad with a few rounds of beads on their waists. It is gratifying to note that some columnists have come out in strong condemnation of what have been described as "these immoral practices that are clouded under the façade of cultural revival".

Mr. OluMakinde had the support of decent people when he wrote under the heading, "CULTURAL REVIVAL OR PORNOGRAPHY?" thus: "Apart from the official frowns upon whatever seems to threaten the sanctity of sex or anything which degrades its meaning, I am at a loss to figure out why a person capable of retaining an enough presence of mind should revel at the sight of bare-breasted teenagers hopping publicly and exhibiting their sacred parts to curious onlookers under the pretext of a so-called cultural renaissance. It is nothing short of pornography incarnate." - *Daily Sketch* July 17, 1974, Page 3

If the tendency is to present to the outside world at the festival how primitive Nigerians still are then all that is savage, all that is wild, all that is immoral in their culture should feature at the show; then demonised juju priests should be brought to demonstrate how they are capable of eating the raw flesh of dogs and of leaking all sorts of blood; fierce masquerades should all come with whips to administer strokes of their canes on spectators; and men and women in the nude should not be left out. Or are these not parts of Nigerian culture? Let us hope that those at the head of cultral matters will be able to discern and discriminate as to choose what in the people's culture are noble, decent and of merit socially, morally and intellectually.

There is much in African culture that can be projected with dignity and honour, even in Christian worship without offending against the laws of God. Our songs, dances and modes of dress should be aimed at giving glory to God Almighty rather than glorifying idols. But there are several obnoxious and even abominable things in our culture which should only be treated as things of the past. This, of course, is not peculiar to Africa. Our forebears relished in those things because of the circumstances of spiritual darkness - gross ignorance of God's purpose - that pervaded their times. The opportunity of enlightenment consequent upon the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ and other developments which the present generation has, was not available to them. It will be sheer self-deceit to think that times have not changed, and not to change with times. Knowledge, true knowledge of God, should make us feel the sense of shame over certain aspects of the cultures of our people.

Is it not true that some who appear to be modern and sophisticated are in reality primitive, uncouth and old-fashioned at heart? Is there not cause to suspect that to some who are over-zealous about cultural heritage, human sacrifice may still mean a thing of relevance? Only God knows what people do in secret. However, it is certain that no one can escape the

consequences of his doings. Said God: “Woe unto the wicked!*it shall be ill with him:* for the reward of his hands shall be given him.” - Isaiah 3:11, see also Proverbs 11:19-21, 2 Corinthians 5:10

What about Ifa - the oracular deity? Is it not paganism? Those who believe in it say it does some good. But we see it as a weapon of the devil in dividing people and causing confusion. And Chief AdewaleFashamu was being honest when he stated that “there were some unscrupulous diviners who manipulate the Ifa in the interest of the highest bidder in a dispute”. (*Daily Sketch* of August 5, 1972) Have people not been accused of witchcraft or other wrong deeds of which they were, in fact, innocent? Superstition and speculations are its stock-in-trade. No true Christian will have anything to do with such aspect of the people’s culture.

Another thing is the practice of circumcising women. It is not from God. Circumcision, which is God’s own institution, began with Abraham the faithful. And God ordained that only males should be circumcised. (Genesis 17:10-14) But its pollution by the gentile nations brought about the circumcision of women which is now also a part of the people’s culture.

Medical doctors know and have condemned the evils of women circumcision. A 20-year-old housewife was once reported to have suddenly collapsed and died shortly after she had been circumcised. The report, according to the Nigerian Observer(September 2, 1972) said that “the woman started bleeding profusely after the operation which was done in accordance with the age-long tradition of the people”. Attempts to rush her to a medical clinic were said to have been “rejected by some villagers who contended that treating her in hospital was untraditional and abominable”.

These are a few instances of the aspects of the people’s culture and customs that are inconsistent with the laws of God as enunciated in the Scriptures. True Christians must keep away from them. It is a sin for a Christian to compromise with idolatry. St. Paul charged: “But *I say*, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. 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.” - 1 Corinthians 10:20, 21, see also 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, 1 John 5:21

Much is being done on the aspect of cultural dances, some of which still need refinement. But have Africans or Nigerians, to be nearer home, not some games by which their culture can also be projected? Why are some of these games which require tact, real exercise of the intellect and which are amusing or entertaining not developed to international standard? And while talking of African cultural renaissance, African States are spending much money on football, cricket, hockey, tennis and other games which are products of the same western civilization. Is the style of wrestling so in vogue and which people view in TV our own? Or is boxing an African game?

It appears the leaders of thought on African culture are losing sight of many things that could manifest the intelligence of Africa but stressing on things which in this age are primitive, savage and of no consequence.

Christianity

The idea that Christianity is the “white-man’s religion’ or a part of Western civilization is very wrong indeed. This is the ignorance of our people. The European or American has no right whatsoever to lay claim to Christianity more than the African. The fact that the Europeans came in contact with the Christian gospel earlier and had the advantage of first being in possession of copies of the Holy Bible does not in any way place them in a position of superiority over Africans in God’s order of things.

Indeed, some of the prophets of God whom He inspired to write the Bible were black men: Job, Solomon and Jeremiah were black. The prophet Solomon said: “Look not upon me, because I *am* black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; *but* mine own vineyard have I not kept.” - Song of Solomon Chapter 1 verse 6

And so in Christianity, the blackest man in Africa has the same opportunity as the “whitest” man in Europe, America or else-where. Even the natural Jews who were once the Lord’s favoured people and from among whom Christianity originated have equal opportunity with any other race that accepts Christianity. When knowledge of this divine fact was revealed to the apostle Peter at the time of the conversion of Cornelius, he declared: “...Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” - Acts 10:34, 35

To regard Christianity as a religion of any particular tribe, race or nation is a blatant error. Christianity is for all the world irrespective of nationality, race or colour. (Matt. 24: 14; 28: 19, 20; Acts 1: 6-8) Jesus Christ is the promised seed of Abraham through whom God had purposed to bless all the families of the earth. (Gal. 3: 13 – 16) Simeon, that devout man, spoke of him as “a Light to lighten the Gentiles”.

It could be recalled that when some of the Jews in their characteristic obduracy rejected and opposed the Christian gospel, St. Paul and Barnabas told them in plain language: “It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting lasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation into the ends of the earth”.—Acts 13: 46, 47.

Christianity aims at the universal modification of the various religious systems, traditions and cultures of all peoples of the world, and at directing all men to the clean worship of the Almighty Creator through one and the only mediator, Christ Jesus. It was the stubbornness of the Jews and their failure to understand and appreciate this divine purpose of Christ’s mission on earth that led to their rejection of Christianity to their own grief and ruin. And their suffering even up till now cannot be dissociated from their attitude of having treated the grace of God with contempt.—John 1: 10, 11; Matt. 23: 37-39; Acts 13: 44-52.

And so today a Nigerian or Ghanaian or any other national who accepts Jesus Christ and worships God in truth stands a better position to claim Christianity than a Jew who is an agnostic or a non-Christian. In true Christianity there is no room for tribal discrimination or racial segregation. And St. Paul said: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: FOR YE ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS.”—Gal. 3: 27, 28.

What the colonialists brought to Africa was nominal Christianity. It is replete with anomalies both in doctrinal content and in other practices for which there can be no scriptural justification. This is by no means saying that the missionaries did not do good works but there were observances brought under the cloak of Christianity which, in fact, originated from Romish paganism or were features of European culture.

To blame whatever was their shortcomings on Christianity is most unfair—it is an error of judgment.

Any nation that denounces Christianity and will not serve God through Christ will be cutting off itself from God's universal arrangement, and the consequences will be disastrous. As it is written; "And He (God) shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you... And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not fear that prophet (Christ Jesus), shall be destroyed from among the people."—Acts 3: 20-23; see also Isa. 60: 12; Jer. 10: 10, 11; Rev. 14: 6, 7.

EASTER AND THE RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the most significant events in the history of the world. But it is of great disservice to the cause of truth and righteousness to connect it with Easter - a festival known to be entirely the affair of pagans.

Many people who revel in the observance of Easter today are quite ignorant of its origin. The festival has gained popularity in the world because people do accept religious dogmas without ascertaining their scriptural authenticity.

In Christendom, Easter is said to be a festival that celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The celebration is usually marked by church services held in an atmosphere of jubilation. Christian worshippers dress gorgeously and the places of worship are decorated with flowers and candles; and as for colours preference is always for white. "Christ the Lord is risen today" is chanted by jubilant celebrants.

Taken on the surface of it, these things appear to have a savour of Christian spirit but what the inquiring mind will want to know is whether there is an instruction by God that Christ's resurrection should be commemorated; whether the early apostles of Jesus Christ ever celebrated it; whether, if ordained by God, it is being celebrated accordingly; and whether the name EASTER originates from God or Christ or the apostles.

Resurrection is one of the fundamental doctrines of the Bible and its reality is confirmed by that of Christ. Concerning the resurrection of Christ the apostle Paul wrote: "For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept." - 1 Corinthians 15:16-20

Jesus Christ himself said: "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." - Revelation 1:18

There is no doubt that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a matter for great joy to all Christians who have the understanding of its significance. It is indisputably a vindication of

the supremacy of Jehovah, the God of gods, and a positive evidence of the victory of Jesus Christ over death and its author, the devil.

According to the Scriptures, it is Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, that Almighty God has vested with power to raise the dead in His due time. And Christ said: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live..." - John 5:25, 26

Pagan Name

If for any reason, anyone on his own wishes to do honour to Jesus Christ by celebrating his resurrection, why should he make such an event bear a pagan name?

Easter was a festival of the Anglo-saxons originally celebrated in honour of a Teutonic goddess known as Astarte or Eostre. E. Royston Pike in his *Encyclopedia of Religion and Religions* wrote concerning Easter as follows: "According to the Venerable Bede the name is derived from Eostre, the Anglosaxon goddess of spring whose festival was kept at the spring equinox..." He went on: "There is no mention of the celebration of Easter in the New Testament and the Apostolic Age." - Page 32

There is abundance of historical evidence that Easter has no connection whatsoever with the resurrection of Jesus Christ or with true Christianity for that matter. The Encyclopedia Britannica states among other things; "Bede in the 8th century derived it (Easter from that of the Anglo-Saxon spring goddess Eostre...around the Christian observance of Easter as the climax of the liturgical drama of Holy Week and Good Friday folk customs have collected, many of which have been handed down from the ancient ceremonial and symbolism of the pagan spring festival brought into relation with the resurrection them." - Vol. 7 pp. 864-866

The testimony of Alexander Hislop is also a case in point, in his *The Two Babylons* he made it known that Easter "is not a Christian name" and commented: "It bears on Chaldean origin on its very forehead. Easter is nothing else than Astarte, one of the titles of Beltis, the queen of heaven... That name as found by Layard on the Assyrian monuments, is Ishtar... The festival, of which we read in Church history under the name Easter, in the third or fourth centuries, was quite a different festival from that now observed in the Romish Church, and at that time was not known by any such name as Easter. It was called the Pasch or the Passover..." - Page 103-104

Many of the customs associated with the observance of Easter in Christendom were borrowed from the pagans and they are of no spiritual significance to true Christians according to the Scriptures. With reference to Easter the American Educator Encyclopedia has this to say: "The English word is from the name of a Teutonic goddess of spring or the dawn, and many of the Easter customs probably had their beginning in the pagan celebrations of the rebirth of the world in the spring. The Easter egg is a symbol of new life. People dress in new clothes and wear flowers on Easter Sunday because the winter has come to an end and the earth seems alive again." - Vol. 4, Page E-16

The following references from other authoritative works are also worthy of note: "Before the time of Christ people used to worship many gods, goddesses. One was named Eastre; Because Easter comes in the spring. We have named it for this goddess. We have brightly colored eggs at Easter, because eggs stand for the beginning, or birth, just as spring itself is a

birth each year. Christians celebrated Easter as the New Year...” - Illustrated World Encyclopedia, Vol. 7, page 1732

“Many of the popular observances of Easter are pagan in origin. Some may be traced to the feast of the goddess Eostra...” - The American Peoples Encyclopedia, Vol. 7, page 483

Mistranslation

No intelligent student of the Bible will ever make reference to Acts 12:4 as an authority for the celebration of Easter. As a matter of fact that is the only place where the word Easter appears in the Holy Bible. But for the bias of the translators the word would not have come in at all because it is most unrelated to the context of the text. That the word is a mistranslation is indisputable.

Indeed it is in the *Authorized Version* the error is made but other versions or translations of the Bible give the correct rendering. In the *Douay Version* (which some call Roman Catholic Bible) the word Pasch is used. Other versions, such as *the Revised Version*, *Moffat Translation*, *Diaglott*, *The New English Bible* and so on, use the proper word, Passover.

William Nicholson in his *Bible Student's Companion*, stated: “EASTER - An improper translation: for the feast of the Passover is meant, Acts xii. 4. Easter was the name of a Pagan festival observed in spring by our ancestors, in honour of the goddess Astarte or Eostre, a Saxon goddess, the Ashtaroth of Syria. In all other places Paschais rendered Passover, the true meaning.”

The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible confirms that Easter was “originally the spring festival in honour of the Teutonic goddess of light and spring known in Anglo-Saxon as Eastre.” It goes on: “As early as the 8th century the name was transferred by the Anglo-Saxon to the Christian festival designed to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. In Authorised Version it occurs once (Acts 12:4), but is a mistranslation. The original is pascha, the ordinary Greek word for Passover. Revised Version properly employs the word Passover.” - Page 145

With regard to the word Easter in a text in the Authorised Version of the Bible Alexander Hislop's comments are also enlightening. He wrote: “Every one knows that the name ‘Easter’, used in our translation of Acts xii. 4, refers not to any Christian festival but to the Jewish Passover. This is one of the few places in our version where the translators show an undue bias.”

That many things have been going wrong in Christendom there is no doubt. The invention of dogmas and upholding of traditions of men rather than true doctrines and the commandments of God have resulted in the mass production of nominal Christians. Lots of things being done in the name of Christ today cannot receive his approval or be scripturally justified.

Easter, we must re-emphasise, is a pagan festival which has nothing to do with the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

For Betraying Jesus Christ - WAS JUDAS ISCARIOT JUSTIFIED

Whatever benefit mankind derives from the death of Christ was never Judas Iscariot's credit but an act of God, Who turns the evil of the wicked to the good of His children. People who defend the action of Judas for betraying our Lord do so out of an ungodly disposition or scorn for righteousness or because of their ignorance of the Scriptures.

The death of Jesus Christ and the circumstances surrounding it have been a subject of discussion among Christians and non-Christians. A Christian who has a spiritual understanding of all that happened is ever struck with a good impression of the purpose of God Who knows the end from the beginning. But the ordinary man who evaluates spiritual things by worldly standards cannot know the significance of that historic incident or appreciate the justice of God or the harmony of His will.

In a world in which there are all sorts of people with different character and mentality, a world in which the majority are inclined to evil and give support to error, it is not strange that certain people still take sides with Judas Iscariot for committing treachery.

And so those who do not see the bad streak in the character of Judas Iscariot often ask: Did not some one have to betray Jesus, to fulfil the Scriptures; so why blame Judas? If Christ had to be crucified for the good of mankind, in what way was his crucifixion through Judas's scheming wrong?

The case against Judas Iscariot is so bad that no amount of defence could be good or strong enough to absolve him from guilt or condemnation. We can see the truth of this matter in its right perspective if only we accept the authority of the Scripture.

Prophecies

It is true that long before the first advent of Jesus Christ prophecies were uttered concerning his mission and the cruel persecutions he would suffer at the hands of sinners or wicked men. It was foretold that he would be "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief". The prophecies further showed that he would be oppressed and afflicted, and like a lamb to the slaughter he would be led and eventually slain. - Isaiah 53:3-9 Added to all this were prophecies to the effect that Jesus Christ would be betrayed by a familiar friend and that the price of betrayal would be thirty pieces of silver.- Psalm 41:9; Zechariah 11:12, 13

God's word is always true. And so when Jesus Christ came to this world of sin all that the Holy Spirit moved that prophets of old to foretell concerning him were fulfilled.

Judas Iscariot who betrayed him was indeed a familiar friend of him. He was one of the apostles. Despite that fact that he had the grace and golden opportunity to be an associate of the Holy One, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and to taste of the word of God and the powers of the world to come, traits of avarice and wickedness remained in his character.

It is noteworthy that ever before Judas carried out his evil plan in conspiracy with the Pharisees and others, Jesus Christ had given the hint to his apostles that one of them would be

the traitor. On one occasion he said, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:70) On this St. John commented: "He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve." - Verse 71.

Moreover, two days before the feast of Passover, Jesus again spoke of his betrayal and crucifixion to his disciples. Said he: "Ye know that after two days is *the feast of the passover*, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified." - Matthew 26:2

The whole story shows clearly that Judas was a man with an evil heart, and so he was an easy tool of the devil. This is evidenced by his conspiracy with the Pharisees and others. In spite of the fact that he heard what Jesus said about the betrayal he still sneaked away to join the wicked Jews in their plot to kill him. Judas told the plotters: "...What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him." - Matthew 26:14-16

Jesus Christ as a perfect man was already aware of the sinister role being played by Judas Iscariot. And so when he and all the twelve apostles sat to eat in the evening of the first day of the Passover feast, a few hours before his enemies hatched their plot, he said again. "Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me." - Matthew 26:20, 21

The apostles, being so much touched with statement of their master, wanted to know who among them was the traitor. As it is written: "And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I? And he answered and said, He that dippeth *his* hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said." - Matthew 26:22-25

If Judas Iscariot was not a man really given to wickedness, the woe pronounced by Jesus Christ upon whoever the traitor would be would have been enough warning for him to desist from carrying out his treachery to a finish no matter how offended the enemies would be. But being an instrument of the devil he was bent on accomplishing his plot.

As the zero hour when the enemies of truth and righteousness would strike was getting nearer, Jesus Christ was overwhelmed with grief though his determination to do His Father's will till the end remained firm.

It was during that crucial moment when Jesus Christ and the other apostles were heavy in sorrow and while he was still addressing them that Judas Iscariot with his co-plotters arrived to get him (Jesus) arrested. As it is written: "And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him." - Matthew 26:47-50

Evil-doer

There is nothing in the whole episode that reveals a jot of innocence on the part of Judas Iscariot for which he can be justified. It was David who, quoting an ancient proverb, said: "Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked." (1 Samuel 24:13) And Jesus Christ himself said:

“A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.” – Matthew 12:35

The fact that it was foretold earlier that Jesus Christ would be betrayed and killed was not a licence or mandate given anyone by God to do so. The Almighty God knowing the end from the beginning only revealed through His prophets what His Son would suffer in the world during his mission of redemption.

Furthermore, it was shown in the prophecies that those who would betray and kill Jesus Christ were evil doers. Therefore whoever was not wicked could not have been an object upon whom such prophecies could fulfil.

The point, which must not be overlooked, is that Judas and others who took part in the betrayal and crucifixion were not acting out of good will. It was not because they believed that through the death of Jesus Christ blessing would come to mankind they slew him. Judas was avaricious and so he wanted silver at all costs. It was on this consideration he betrayed our Lord and Saviour. The chief priests, the scribes and Caiaphas, the high priest, as well as their followers whose hatred for Jesus Christ all along was not concealed were envious because of his fame which was growing more and more. Their intention, therefore, was to kill him and put an end to his activities which they feared was making “all men believe on him.” It is stated that when the Passover feast was near “...the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people.” (Luke 22:1, 2) Well, if their intention was good, and they believed that by killing Jesus Christ they were doing a good work for the benefit of the human race, why should they fear the people?

What is more, it is clearly stated in the Bible that Judas Iscariot was inspired by the devil and so he could not have acted with a godly motive. Here is the record: “Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money. And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude.” - Luke 22: 3-6

If what Judas was up to was good it was not Satan that should have entered him but the Holy Spirit. That his offence was grave there can be no doubt. Jesus who is the Redeemer and Saviour saw no good in Judas Iscariot’s motive, and he declared: “The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born.” - Matthew 26:24

His Guilt

In the long run Judas himself realized that he had sinned and he acknowledged his guilt as it is written: “Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said. What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, it is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.” - Matthew 27:3-6

Since Judas had pleaded guilty and confessed that he had sinned by betraying the innocent blood, it is therefore ridiculous for anybody to stand as his advocate to justify his nefarious deed. It is a sin to justify the wicked. King Solomon, in his Proverbs, stated: He that justifieth

the wicked and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD.” – Proverbs 17:15

The priest themselves said that it was not lawful to put the pieces of silver returned by Judas into the treasury “because it is the price of blood.”

If Judas Iscariot had done well by betraying our Lord, he would not have committed suicide thus adding sin to sin. Consequent upon his heinous crime he was deposed from his high office or post of the heavenly calling and was replaced by another.

Addressing the disciples after the ascension of Jesus Christ and before the day of Pentecost, St. Peter said concerning Judas Iscariot that: “Men *and* brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, *Aceldama*, that is to say, *The field of blood.*” – Acts 1:16-19

Continuing St. Peter declared: “For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate and let not man dwell therein: and his bishoprick (office of overseer) let another take.”- Verse 20

Before lots were cast to choose Judas’s successor, the disciples prayed so that the person chosen by God “may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.” (Acts 1:24, 25) From this it can also be seen that the apostles and other disciples knew that Judas was a transgressor who deserved not the grace of salvation but whose portion is damnation. And Jesus Christ referred to him as “the son of perdition”. - John 17:12

Judas Iscariot sinned against the light or the Holy Spirit and for that reason there is no forgiveness for him. - Matthew 12:31, 32

On the whole, for betraying the Prince of life, the Redeemer of mankind, Judas Iscariot was not justified.

GOOD FRIDAY AND EASTER

If the day of Christ’s passion and disgraceful death is a good day, why do churchgoers indulge in fasting, wearing of black robes and other ceremonies suggestive of mourning on “Good Friday? Why do they not go about merry-making? And do you know that Easter was derived from paganism and that it has no connection whatsoever with Christianity?

“Good Friday” is the Friday before Easter Sunday which is observed in Christendom to commemorate the death of Jesus Christ. It is a day of fasting, abstinence and penitence, and there is the religious view that “it is the only day of the year upon which Mass may not be said”.

On this occasion the observers hold a protracted three-hour service with ceremonies expressive of intense feelings of the agonies suffered by Jesus Christ. The altars are stripped

have of decorations, the candles are unlit and the priests are dressed in black robes. Yet, this is said to be a good day.

The only reason which has been given for identifying this bloody day with the grand appellation of Good is that the death of Christ has brought redemption to making. This sounds quite plausible but viewed against the background of the Scriptures it is unjustifiable.

To those who were the enemies of light - light of which Christ was and is the very embodiment, that day of his crucifixion was good and pleasant because it was the day their evil desire, conspiracy and machinations against the man whom they branded as a “deceiver” was accomplished. It could therefore be understandable why they reveled in their acts of atrocity while Jesus Christ and his disciples were grief-stricken.

Prior to the crucial hour of the supreme test, Jesus Christ had forewarned his disciples: “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.” - Read John 16:16-20

When the time came for him to bear the griefs of mankind he showed his preparedness to submit, as a loyal Son, to his Father’s will though he was fully aware of his foes’ evil motives to do the worst imaginable. Yet in an outburst of human feeling, he said Peter, James and John: “...My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.” (Matthew 26:38) He was in such great agony of spirit that his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. His disciples were all exhausted from grief, and they remained under the grip of sorrow until the gladsome news of his resurrection was broken to them. - Luke 22:45, Mark 16:9, 10

In the light of these scriptural facts about the painful experience of Jesus Christ and his disciples, it does not stand to reason neither is it spiritually convincing for those who take sides with Christ to call or regard that day of his anguish and inglorious death as good.

The churches have no scriptural authority whatsoever for their mourning, abstinence and dreary ceremonies on “Good Friday”. Jesus Christ had long been resurrected and glorified, never to die again. He did tell his disciples that their sorrow would be turned to joy, and added, “... your joy no man taketh from you.” (John 16:19-22) And so to continue to mourn every year for the risen and glorified Jesus is most unnecessary and very unscriptural.

Moreover, concerning the dead Paul the apostle admonished the Christians “...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.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13, 14) If Christians are not to mourn for the dead because of the hope of resurrection, why should the churches mourn for the Star of that hope who had long ago been raised to glory eternal in the heaven?

It is most unsafe to rely on men’s traditions at the expense of scriptural truth. And it is only when men apply their heart to reason as to accept the truth of Christ that they can be free indeed. - John 8:32, 36

Easter

Easter was a pagan festival originally celebrated by the Anglo-Saxons in the spring equinox in honour of a Teutonic goddess known as Astarte or Eostre.

The word “Easter” appears once in the Holy Bible in Acts 12:4. All scholars of credit agree that it was a wrong translation of a Greek word for Passover. In the Bible Students Companion, William Nicholson wrote: ÉASTER - An improper translation; for the feast of the Passover is meant, Acts xii. 4. Easter was the name of a Pagan festival observed in spring by our ancestors, in honour of the goddess Astarte or Eostro, a Saxon goddess, the Ashtaroth of Syria. In all other places pascha is rendered Passover, the true meaning.”

Concerning Easter, the Westminster Dictionary of the Bible states that it was “originally the spring festival in honour of the Teutonic goddess of light and spring known in Anglo Saxon as Eastre. As early as the 8th century the name was transferred by the Anglo-Saxon to the Christian festival designated to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. In A. V. it occurs once (Acts 12:4), but it is a mistranslation. The original is pascha, the ordinary Greek word for Passover. R. V. properly employs the word Passover.” - Page 145

Alexander Hislop, in his book The Two Babylons, commented: “Every one knows that the name “Easter”, used in our translation of Acts xii. 4, refers not to any Christian festival, but to the Jewish Passover. This is one of the few places in our version where the translators show an undue bias.” - Page 104

Further information may be obtained from the Encyclopedia Britannica, which states: “The English name Easter is of uncertain origin; Bede in the 6th century derived it from that of the Anglo-Saxon spring goddess Eostre... Around the Christian observance of Easter as the climax of the liturgical drama of Holy Week and Good Friday folk customs have collected, many of which have been handed down from the ancient ceremonial and symbolism of the pagan spring festival brought into relation with resurrection theme.” - Vol. 7, pp. 864-866. And what is more, The American Peoples Encyclopedia has this to say: “Many of the popular observances of Easter are pagan in origin. Some may be traced to the feast of goddess Eostra...”—Vol. 7, page 483.

The celebration of Easter is not authorised scripturally. Neither the Passover feast nor Easter has anything to do with resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the light of the foregoing disclosures about “Good Friday” and Easter, no one can remain in doubt of the fact that many “churches” have for long gone astray. The mere fact that professed Christians associate Easter with the resurrection of Christ without authority of the Scriptures does not in any way alter its paganish image or make it receive the blessing of the Lord.

Has God Ever Ordained a Woman Witness?

Women, according to the Scriptures, played important roles both among the Israelites and the early Christians but never was any woman ordained by God to hold the office of a prophet, priest, teacher, apostle or witness. This indisputable fact further exposes the fallacy of the Watchtower Society.

The witnesses of God are His faithful servants who are specifically chosen and anointed by Him for the purpose of imparting His knowledge to mankind. They must be wholly devoted

to the Lord's service. No woman has ever been ordained by God to occupy such an office. When God said, "Ye *are* my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I *am* he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me." (Isaiah 43:10) He was not referring to any woman. In fact, among His prophets and priests in ancient Israel there was not woman.

Diligent and understanding students of the Bible know that references to some few women such as Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Anna and so on, as prophetesses were made in error by translators. None of them was ordained and sent by God as a prophetess to accomplish a specific mission.

What Miriam did was that she led the women of Israel in a victory dance after the Egyptians were drowned in the Red sea. (Exodus 15:20) There was no time God ordained her. And when she purported to make herself equal to Moses the prophet and claimed that she too was God's mouthpiece, she was denounced by God outright and was punished with leprosy. - Numbers 12:1-10

Deborah too was not ordained by God and she herself never made such a claim. It was when the Israelites had fallen out of God's favour because of the transgressions that they in their confusion went to her as an elderly and experienced woman for advice. She was not presumptuous and so she urged Barak to lead until they were delivered from their enemies. - Judges 4:1-4, 14:16, 5:12

That Israel allowed a woman to be its judge was very shameful. It showed how sin could bring men low. And God said: "As *for* my people, children *are* their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee *causethee* to err, and destroy the way of thy paths." - Isaiah 3:12

Space will not permit more explanations of other instances. The place of women in God's order of things is so well defined in the Holy Bible that there should be no room for confusion or doubt for those who have the understanding. God has always ordained men to take the lead as His prophets or witnesses. Although the Watchtower Society knows this fact yet in practice it continues, obstinately, to do the very opposite.

Let us consider the following excerpts from the book Life Everlasting In Freedom of The Sons of God Punishment by the Watchtower Society: "The first one whom God raised up to prophesy as a witness of Jehovah was a man, whose name was Enoch... 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. (Exodus 2:1 to 3:22, Hebrews 11:23-28) 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... It was also this man Moses whom God designated to write the first five books of the Holy Bible, from Genesis to Deuteronomy. (Exodus 17:14-16; Deuteronomy 31:24) Thereafter, without exception, all the rest of the writers of the other sixty-one books of the inspired Bible were men..." - Pages 246-248

"The one who was raised up to serve as a forerunner of Jesus and to announce his coming and to baptize him in water was a man of priestly family, John the Baptist. (Matthew 3:1-17, John 1:6-8, 19-36) 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. (Mark 3:13-19, Matthew 10:1-5) 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." - Pages 249-250

Some women, in proper circumstances, enjoyed some privileges in connection with Jesus, but not those of the twelve apostles and the seventy evangelizers." - Page 250

"It becomes plain that the Most High God, Jehovah followed the same way of 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 males, the men, as regards official responsibilities within the theocratic organization. This fact is emphasized for us in Ephesians 4:7-13. In that quotation from Paul's letter the words 'apostles,' 'prophets,' 'evangelizers,' 'shepherds' and 'teachers' are all in the masculine gender..." - Pages 225-256

"In full accord with this, when the apostle Paul writes to Timothy about the qualification for the service positions of 'overseers' (episkopoi) and of ministerial servants' (diakonoi) in the congregation, he specifically states that they must be men..." - Page 256

It is amazing that in spite of these scriptural facts known to the Watchtower Society they still send out their women to preach believing that some are anointed and all of them are witnesses of God. This, obviously, is a case of delusion. It is a rule that in a Christian congregation women should remain silent - not even to ask question. 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 any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." - 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35

But in complete disregard of this rule the Watchtower Society still permits women to address their assemblies. For instance women addressed an international assembly of "Jehovah's Witnesses" at the Yankee Stadium in New York as published in the Report of New World Society of Jehovah's Witnesses, July 19-26, 1953.

What is more, St. Paul wrote: "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 Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." - 1 Timothy 2:11-14

If women are anointed by God they ought to exercise equal privileges with men of the same status in leading and teaching His flock. Why should they be forbidden to speak in the church or to teach? The truth, we reiterate, is that God has never ordained a woman to any office of leadership as a prophetess, priestess, apostle, bishop or witness. It is therefore wrong according to the Scriptures for women to be called "Jehovah's Witnesses".

HAS THIS WORLD AN END?

To every kind of evil, whatever shape or form it takes, there is a determined end. If the will of God must be done on earth as it is in heaven, then this sin-ridden world, which is under the overlordship of satan, is not a place fit for the accomplishment of that purpose. Therefore, God has promised, according to the Scriptures, to put an end to the present imperfect order of

things and to set up a new perfect system to be directed or governed by Jesus Christ, the Righteous.

The question as to whether this evil world will come to an end some day is often discussed. Various views have been expressed on the subject. There are people who strongly believe that this world has an end; so too there are those who do not share such a belief. For the reason that the subject as regards the end of the world is one that arouses curiosity, certain journalists write on it in their columns from time to time and express views calculated to ridicule the whole idea. This they do merely to create sensation either to boost the sale of their newspapers and magazines, or to show off their learning. But the pity of it is that some readers make the mistake of giving credence to such sentiments without realizing that those writers are most incompetent to offer an authoritative opinion on the matter.

That this evil world will come to an end there is no doubt. This is the will of God Almighty as clearly shown in the Holy Scriptures. Whether men dislike or disbelieve it, what God will do, He will do.

What the Bible means by the end of the world is sometimes misunderstood by some people. They think of it as the termination of the existence of the earth as a planet. This is why some find it difficult to believe that the world will end. There is no indication in the Bible that this planet, the earth, will ever cease to exist. Rather it is positively stated that it will remain for ever. Thus it is written: “*One* generation passeth away, and *another* generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.” (Ecclesiastes 1:4) Moreover, it is written: “For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I *am* the LORD; and *there is none else.*” - Isaiah 45:18

Evil System

Chamber’s Encyclopediadescribes the word world as meaning “the whole system of created things (as contradistinguished from the creator)”. The whole system has been so badly affected or corrupted through the influence of satan the devil that the evil in it is far more than the good. It was against the background of this understanding St. Paul employed that term “this present evil world”. - Galatians 1:4

Jesus Christ described the devil as “the prince of this world”. (John 12:31; 14:30) St. Paul referred to him as “the god of this world”. (2Corinthians 4:3, 4) And John the apostle wrote: “We know that we are of God’s family, while the whole godless world lies in the power of the evil one.” -1 John 5:19 N.E.B.

And so by the term ‘the end of the world’ is meant the passing away or termination of the whole evil system of things over which the devil is exercising power and control. But the end will be marked by a terrible trouble and battle the kind of which has never been known in human history.

The destruction of the world by flood in the days of Noah is a good illustration that can help any honest seeker-after-truth to understand what is meant by the end of the world. When after the creation the population of the world had increased. God observed that men had become very wicked and that their thoughts and inclinations were always evil. “And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.” - Genesis 6:13

The end of that world - from Adam to that time - was marked by the Deluge. All the wicked people were destroyed but God saved Noah and his family of seven. –Gen. 7: 1, 7; 8:1; 2 Peter 2: 4, 5

Some people make reference to certain texts in the Bible to show that God said after the great flood of Noah's days that He would no longer destroy the world. Their understanding is wrong. God did not say so; what He said was that He would not use flood to destroy the whole world any more. God said to Noah: "And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh." - Genesis 9:8-15

The understanding therefore, is that flood will no longer be the sole means by which God will destroy the world but He can use other methods to bring the world of sin to an end. Noah, his wife, his three sons and the three wives of his sons comprised the eight souls that survived the Flood. "And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." (Genesis 9:1) It is in fulfilment of this mandate the earth has been remarkably populated as at present. But today, the world has again been filled with violence and wickedness to such an immeasurable degree that is now giving everybody cause for great concern. However, to think that evil will continue and infinitely that the wicked will ever remain on the earth amounts to self delusion. It is the yearning of all men of goodwill who sigh for the abominations being committed in the world that evil should be brought to an end. King David in one of his psalms prayed: "Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just; for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins." - Psalm 7:9

God had long ago given assurance of His determination to rid the earth of evil. He said He has a controversy with the inhabitants of the earth "...because *there is* no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land." In various ways men provoke Him by bloody violence and so forth. - Hosea 4:1-3

In Isaiah 26:21, it is written: "For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain."

It is sometimes hard to distinguish between good and bad in this world. Some wicked people do appear outwardly to be righteous by putting on a false garb of humility and quiet look, and by giving alms openly to the poor in order to be praised by men. However they may cover their mischievous deeds, God knows that they are hypocrites and shall make them reap the fruit of their doings. - Isaiah 3:11

Jesus Christ, in his parable of the wheat and tares, illustrated how and why the good and the bad further pointed to the end of the world when the wicked will be destroyed. In his

interpretation of the parable he said among other things: “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. 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 13:38-42

The Age

The age in which the present evil system of things will be exterminated was termed by Daniel the prophet “the time of the end”. Fast and easy means of transportation, and increase of knowledge were among the signs he foretold that would indicate the time of the end. For the fact that there is increase of knowledge as manifest in the advance in science and technology there is no doubt, therefore, that this is the age.

When Jesus Christ was asked by his disciples as to what signs would show the time of the end, otherwise known as the last days, he said among other things: “For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.” –Matthew 24:3-8

It is clear to all understanding students of the Bible that Christ’s prophecy as regard the signs of the end has been in the course of fulfilment since the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Who will say that this age is not the one of sorrow? Though men’s efforts to win peace have more than trebled since after that global war, the woes of mankind continue to increase! Yet God’s word is always true.

In corroboration of Christ’s prophecy concerning the signs of the times, reference can be made to St. Paul’s description of the last days as perilous times. He stated: “You must face the fact: the final age of this world is to be a time of troubles. Men will love nothing but money and self; they will be arrogant, boastful, and abusive; with no respect for parents, no gratitude, no piety, no natural affection; they will be implacable in their hatreds, scandal-mongers, intemperate and fierce, strangers to all goodness, traitors, adventurers, swollen with self-importance. They will be men who put pleasure in the place of God, men who preserve the outward form of religion, but are a standing denial of its reality.” - 2 Timothy 3:1-5 N.E.B.

This is also the age of Christ’s second presence when he is gathering the sheep of God into His Organisation for refuge so that He may deliver them from the impending destruction. Jesus himself said that as the people in the days of Noah paid no heed to his (Noah’s) warning of the doom that was to come upon them, so it will be in this age with many people. They will be so engrossed in the secular affairs of life and the pleasures of sin that they cannot take warning as to associate with the Lord’s people who worship Him in TRUTH.

Said Jesus Christ: “As things were in Noah’s days, so will they be when the Son of Man comes. In the days before the flood they ate and drank and married, until the day that Noah went into the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away. That is how it will be when the Son of Man comes.” (Matthew 24:37-39 N.E.B.) He added: “Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed *them* all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.” - Luke 17:28-30

The facts of the fulfillment of those prophecies are so glaring in our time that even some skeptics now admit them. Yet there are the die-hard ones - the scoffers - who willfully argue against the truth and do not want to take cognizance of the transitional events of the age. Concerning them St. Peter wrote "Note this first: in the last days there will come men who scoff at religion and live self-indulgent lives, and they will say: 'Where now is the promise of his coming? Our fathers have been laid to their rest, but still everything continues exactly as it has always been since the world began.' In taking this view they lose sight of the fact that there were heavens and earth long ago, created by God's word out of water and with water; and by water that first world was destroyed, the water of the deluge. And the present heavens and earth, again by God's word, have been kept in store for burning; they are being reserved until the day of judgment when the godless will be destroyed." - 2 Peter 3:3-7 N.E.B.

The apostle went on to show that it is not weakness on the part of God that He had not taken vengeance on Satan and his works and removed them from the world before now but that He was patient with men so that they may have enough time to repent so as not to be destroyed with the devil. St. Peter said "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." - 2 Peter 3:9

With regard to the destruction or end of this evil world, the apostle Peter stated: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." - 2 Peter 3:10

The burning and heat as of fire by which the world will melt and pass away as shown in the apostle's description are the vengeance of God and His wrath which will be expressed in such a terrific and irresistible manner as He had never before done. It is a battle in which the Most High, the Lord of hosts, will exterminate all types of evil or every vestige of the devil's works from the world. It is the war that will end all wars.

Extraordinary Conflict

The prophet Nahum prophesied concerning this extraordinary conflict in this vein: "What do ye imagine against the LORD? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time." Nahum 1:9

The magnitude of the forth-coming battle of God Almighty that will mark the close of this sinful world is beyond human imagination. Human wars, no matter how destructive the weapons they use, cannot be compared to it. It is by far worse than the flood in the days of Noah. Whereas that flood had to do with the killing of earthly or fleshly creatures without touching the devils or demons who are spirit creatures, the impending destruction is for all wicked elements both visible and invisible. Of that horrible event Zephaniah prophesied thus: "The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, *even* the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness... And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD; and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire

of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.” - Zephaniah 1:14-18

The destruction of the wicked in that day of the Lord will be total. As 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

The day, month or year in which the battle of the Lord will begin is not revealed, and so nobody can tell. But to resort to guess-work and indulge in unnecessary arithmetical calculation of time as the so-called Jehovah’s Witnesses are doing is presumptuous. Despite the fact that their forecasts of dates in the past proved them false, they have now again fixed 1975 as the end of the world and the beginning of Christ’s reign for a thousand years. Jesus Christ himself said: “But of that day and hour knoweth no *man*, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.” - Matthew 24:36

Although the majority of people will be slain, there is the consolation that as Noah and his family survived the Deluge, very many people – indeed uncountable – will be saved by God and will pass through the great tribulation and battle of the great day into the next world which is the “world without end.” The gospel of Christ as now being preached in the world is intended to impart the knowledge of God’s purpose to mankind so that no one may plead ignorance before Him in that day of decision. It was Jesus Christ himself who commanded: “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

It has been made abundantly clear that this evil world has an end according to the Scriptures. What men are required to do is not to get excited by thoughts of the horrors of the impending disaster but to repent of their sins in obedience to the gospel in order to work out their own salvation in the fear of God. - Philippians 2:12

Watch and Pray

The present permissive society is the devil’s creation to alienate men from Jesus Christ and to lure them into the way of destruction. In the interest of the sheep of God in these last days Jesus Christ gave this warning: “And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.” - Luke 21:34-36

And St. Peter, in his exhortation to godliness, said: “But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.” - 1 Peter 4:7

HOW ARE WATCHTOWER WITNESSES ORDAINED?

That Jehovah, the Almighty God alone ordains His witnesses – His servants whom He has chosen (Isaiah 43:10-12) - there is abundance of scriptural evidence. To be appointed to such an office like that of a high priest, is a great honour. But St. Paul declared: “And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as *was* Aaron.” - Hebrews 5:4

In a booklet entitled Theocracy published in 1941, the Watchtower Society stated: "...It is the prerogative solely of Jehovah God to select and organize his own witnesses and no man has any authority whatsoever to select or organize them... They are made up of persons who are entirely devoted to Jehovah God and his kingdom and who are diligent and faithful in carrying out His orders as commanded by the Most High. **They are selected or chosen by Almighty Jehovah God. No man could select them.**" Pages 18 & 19, Emphasis ours) They continue: "From the days of the apostles forward Jehovah continued to select His witnesses to bear testimony to His name and His kingdom in the earth... and concerning such it is written: "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him." (1 Corinthians 12:18) **This is conclusive proof that Jehovah's witnesses are those, and those only, whom God selects, and whom no man can select.**"(Page 22) Emphasis ours

Contrary to this conclusive assertion, "that Jehovah's witnesses are those, and those only, who God selects, and whom no man can select," the officials of the Watchtower Society have been ordaining their own "Jehovah's witnesses". Their book Let God Be True, has this to say; "Each one of Jehovah's witnesses is a minister of the gospel... Jehovah's witnesses are a society of ministers.

"While Jehovah's witnesses of today do not attend any theological seminary or religious universities in preparing for their ministry, neither did Christ Jesus nor his apostles nor any others of Jehovah's witnesses who performed their God-given ministry even in the many centuries before Christ Jesus' days on earth. Today, however, they do receive an adequate and regular course of instruction and training before their ordination or ministers of Jehovah God and Christ Jesus. – Page 216

If Jesus Christ, his apostles and order Jehovah's witnesses before Christ did not attend any formal course of training, why should it be different with those of today? From whom do the "Jehovah's witnesses" of today "receive an adequate and regular course of instruction and training before their ordination"? Their answer is, "Each congregation or company of Jehovah's witnesses maintains regular classes for instruction of ministers..." (Pages 216 & 217) And so, it is neither God Almighty nor Jesus Christ but "Jehovah's witnesses" that train and ordain "Jehovah's witnesses" of the Watchtower Society.

They stated further: "Each such minister sent forth is ordained or authorized primarily by Jehovah God. (Isaiah 61:1, 2) Christ Jesus was ordained in like manner simultaneously with his baptism in the Jordan River. (Luke 4:17-19) However, the corporate legal servant body of Jehovah's witnesses issues to each minister credentials. Such show that he is duly authorized to preach and that he has been regularly ordained in accordance with the regulations of the organisation, based on the Bible." - Page 218

The system of their ordination is inconsistent with the scriptures to which they referred. Isaiah said: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *them that are* bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;" (Isa. 61:1, 2) This precisely fulfilled in Jesus Christ according to Luke 4:17-21. Whereas the ordination of Jesus Christ, the prophets and the apostles was by anointing of the Lord, that of the Watchtower Society is by issuing of credential or certificates by a "corporate legal servant body".

The truth that has become plain is that while people ordained by Jehovah through Jesus Christ are Jehovah's witnesses, those ordained by the Watchtower Society can only but be Watchtower's witnesses.

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT GKS?

The God's Kingdom Society (GKS) is purely a Christian Organisation founded by God through the instrumentality of the late Gideon M. Urhobo who also was her first President. It was in Lagos about four decades ago the GKS was organised.

She has no connection whatsoever with the Watchtower Society, whose members call themselves Jehovah's witnesses, or with any other religious body, Her headquarter is in Salem City, Warri, in the Midwestern State of Nigeria, and she has many branches in this country and abroad.

Today, the Organisation is headed visibly by Brother E. T. Otomewo upon whom the mantle fell after the death of St. Urhobo on February 25, 1952. He has proved to be a man of great merits, and under his leadership the GKS has made tremendous strides spiritually, materially and otherwise. The credit for this he has never ascribed to himself but to God Who, by His grace, is using him as a vessel of honour.

And whatever opinion anyone holds, the high standard of morals, discipline, forthrightness and devotion to truth for which the GKS is well known are evidences of God's spiritual blessings upon His Church.

THE MINISTRY

The Ministry of the G.K.S. is made up of men and women and children from various tribes who have fully devoted their lives to the Lord's Kingdom Service. And they live a communal life after the pattern of the early disciples of Jesus Christ. – Act 2:44, 45; 4:32-37

OBJECTS

The objects of the Organisation are:

- (1) To declare God's Kingdom of Righteousness on Earth and to express this doctrine in every conceivable way and form, with the bounds of law, order and human decency and to do so at any time or place, to the best of our knowledge and understanding of Bible interpretations and symbolism.
- (2) To vindicate, admonish, preach and impart to mankind irrespective of colour, creed or caste the wholesome idea of service, fear, adoration and reverence to God Almighty the Maker of Man, the Author of Life and Destiny, and the Great Ruler and Architect of the Universe; and for this purpose always to organise meetings and gatherings in any corner of the street, road, house or premises in any township, village or locality without harm, violence or damage to any person or property, and without infringement of any laws or regulations of any constituted authority.
- (3) To excite the interest of Africans and all peoples of the earth to the study of the Holy Bible, the Christian Ethics and Theology, and to promote all means and measures conducive to the propagation of this knowledge for the eventual peace and

realization of harmony and tranquility among all peoples of the human race in accordance with scriptural ideology.

- (4) To formulate plans and schemes capable of giving effect to the objects of the God's Kingdom Society, and by dint of experiment and experience to arouse the interest of mankind toward the ultimate attainment of God's Kingdom of Righteousness on Earth.

DOCTRINES

All over the world, people know that doctrines form the very quintessence of all Christian beliefs and principles. Where the doctrines are untrue the organisation that promulgates them, no matter how long it has existed or how wide it has grown, is also false. It was St. Paul who said: "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..." - Galatians 1:8, 9 See also Isaiah 8:20

The Society therefore holds strictly to the truth of the Bible in regard to the Fatherhood of God, the Creator and Possessor of heaven and earth, the Sonship of Jesus Christ, the only Mediator between God and men, and the everlasting Kingdom of God which is the only hope of suffering humanity. On these fundamental revelations other teachings are based.

POPULATION

The GKS has a large following in the country and abroad but she does not strictly keep membership roll.

Much as the number of adherents can show the extent to which an organisation has grown, it does not connote its spiritual quality. If a million people worship in a magnificent cathedral with golden pews, and flamboyant decorations including images of angels and saints, and the saving truth of Christ is absent their services will not go beyond the ceiling of the building. Whereas if only two or three people worship God in a hut built with bamboos but in TRUTH, their services, like the sacrifice of Abel, will reach heaven or receive God's approval. - Matthew 7:13, 14, 20; 2 Corinthians 2:17; Matt. 18: 20, etc.

LEVEL OF CO-OPERATION WITH OTHER RELIGIOUS BODIES

The GKS believes in peaceful co-existence of all religious bodies - true or false - until God in His own time and according to His purpose will put an end to all iniquities and falsehood. Jesus Christ said, "Let both (wheat and tares) grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers (angels), Gather ye together first the tares (the wicked - children of the evil one, satan), and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn (God's organisation)." - Matthew 13:30, 37-43

But the policy of the GKS is that of non-compromise with falsehood or evil; that is, she does not believe in compromising the right doctrines of Jesus Christ with unbiblical pharisaical doctrines of nominal Christianity. (Matthew 16:5-12; Luke 12:1) St. Paul also stated that there is no communion between truth and error, or light and darkness. (2 Corinthians 6:14-17). On this scriptural ground the GKS does not practise inter-faith or inter-denominationalism which she believes is nothing but religious hypocrisy and a union of contraries.

CO-OPERATION WITH GOVERNMENT

The GKS firmly believes that human governments, imperfect though they are, are allowed by God to rule over the affairs of men until God's Kingdom, which men of goodwill everywhere including kings, queens, heads of state, governors, prime ministers as well as the masses have been praying for, will take over the control of the whole world as purposed by God Almighty. - Matthew 6:9, 10

The GKS therefore encourages her adherents to be loyal and law-abiding citizens and to contribute towards Government development and other healthy projects and so forth, provided nothing inconsistent with the principles of Christianity is done. She believes in the payment of tax without which no government can meet the social and other good demands of the nation. For this reason she does not only urge her members through announcements in church assemblies to pay tax every year but has on several occasions given financial help to some and even to non-members, to pay. All these are being done in compliance with Christ's injunction of rendering "... unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's..." (Matthew 22:21) But the GKS, on scriptural grounds, is strongly opposed to any idea of giving to Caesar the things that are God's.

For enough, it is on record that during the nation's hour of need consequent upon the crises which culminated in a bloody conflict, the GKS contributed towards rehabilitation and reconciliation activities spearheaded by the Federal Military Government of Nigeria.

SCHOLARSHIP

The GKS is not opposed to college or university education but she has always warned against the dangers in accepting vain and atheistic philosophies which abound in institutions of higher learning of the world and which are injurious to spiritual development. The organisation has therefore trained many including some clever, deserving children of the poor but faithful members; and even now several others are still enjoying this privilege.

FUNDS

The GKS derives her funds mainly from tithes and offerings as well as donations by members and well-wishers in accordance with the Scriptures. She has also a scheme for some economic projects with a view to providing employment opportunities to members and non-members alike, and getting more money to meet the heavy financial commitments of the church in furtherance of the gospel and for other charitable uses in aid of the poor and needy.

It is from such funds the GKS is able to publish her tracts most of which are given out free of charge or on donation basis. The circulation of her fortnightly periodical - "God's Kingdom Advocate" - has risen to 75,000, yet it is also free of charge. It is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in the people's eyes.

It is a matter for gratitude to God that the GKS, despite the machinations and malicious misrepresentations of her detractors, is making progress.

On the whole the God's Kingdom Society is quite an interesting and militant Christian organisation that deserves to be encouraged by all men of goodwill and the Government.

IF ENOCH AND ELIJAH WERE IN HEAVEN

WOULD CHRIST NOT HAVE SAID SO?

It is an indisputable fact that Enoch and Elijah will be among the nobles in the glorious and everlasting Kingdom of God. They were men renowned for their religious devotion and intrepid faith. However, for the fact that none of the ancient faithful before Christ, according to the Scriptures, has a place in heaven, the belief that Enoch and Elijah are in heaven is, undoubtedly, a misconception.

The time has come for people to make serious godly endeavour to know and accept the unadulterated truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ and put away sentiments as well as teachings and beliefs that have no foundation in the Holy Bible. Many doctrines in the major denominations of Christendom are fraught with errors and lies. And that is why countless numbers of people have been misled and are very ignorant about vital doctrines of the Christian faith.

Many people - as a result of the false teaching of the clergy have the strong feeling and conviction that by reason of their contributions towards church work they will, in the event of death, be carried by angels to heaven. This is so because they have been taught to believe that heaven is the home of all the faithful. Certain clergymen and teachers in their efforts to justify this teaching often make reference to Enoch and Elijah as those whom God had taken to heaven to enjoy His Kingdom.

It is this hope of heaven that has inspired many people to make great sacrifices morally, financially and otherwise to meet the demands of their church organizations. They believe that they will be rewarded in heaven when they die. But, unfortunately, they are misguided!

It is of great interest to know that it is not everyone who receives approval for salvation that will be in heaven in God's Kingdom. Those who will be in heaven are comparatively few - and all of them must be Christians. They constitute the class of Christians that Christ called "Little Flock". (Luke 12:32) And since Enoch and Elijah lived and died before the advent of Jesus Christ, it is obvious that they were not Christians and could not come under the grace of the heavenly calling.

Enoch

Now let us get a clear view of the fact about Enoch. It is stated in the Holy Bible that Enoch, who was the son of Jared, was the seventh in descent from Adam. (Genesis 5:18; Jude 14) He lived in a manner consistent with the will of God and thus pleased Him. Indeed this testified to his faith and righteousness.

The end of Enoch was marked by a peculiar incident. He did not die in the manner that is common with men. He, having attained the age of 365, disappeared in that God took him away from among men. It is written of him: "And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: and all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: and Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." - Genesis 5:22-24

Concerning the faith of Enoch, St. Paul wrote: “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” - Hebrews 11:5, 6

The teaching of some people that Enoch was taken to heaven without passing through death is inconsistent with the truth of the gospel it is therefore wrong. What actually happened was that God removed him from among men that he should not die in the ordinary way. He is not existing anywhere. He would be among other faithful men and women of ancient times that would have part in a better resurrection as stated by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Hebrews chapter 11 verses 1-40.

Elijah

The case of Elijah is similar to that of Enoch save that he (Elijah) was actually seen being taken up heavenward. It is significant that Elisha, upon whom the mantle of Elijah fell, was present when he was taken up after both of them had crossed Jordan River.

Here is the Bible account: “And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing; *nevertheless*, if thou see me *when I am* taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be *so*. And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, *there appeared* a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.” – 2 Kings 2:9-11

From this account, taken on the surface, one may be prone to arrive at the conclusion that Elijah is in heaven with God. But the real, spiritual understanding of the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 2:13-14; Colossians 1:9; 2 Timothy 2:7) reveals the truth that Elijah did not and will never go to the dwelling-place of God in heaven.

This, in the first instance, will lead us to the definition of heaven. According to The New Imperial Reference Dictionary, heaven means “the vault of sky overhanging the earth; the upper region of the air; a very great and indefinite height; the dwelling-place of God.” All of these definitions are in harmony with the Scriptures.

In the Bible it is written: “God called the firmament heaven.” (Genesis 1:8) The birds are described as “fowls that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven” and also as “the fowls of heaven”. (Genesis 1:20; Job 35:11) In Proverbs 25:3, it is stated: “The heaven for height ... is unsearchable”. And the Psalmist said, “...the Lord’s throne is in heaven...” Psalm 11:4

For the reason that there are several heavens the Bible describes the dwelling-place of God, which is the greatest and highest of all as “the heaven of heavens”. - Deuteronomy 10:14: 1 Kings 8:27

Elijah was taken up by a whirlwind to a very great height in the upper regions of the air and was turned to nothing. He did not go to heaven which is the abode of God and His angels.

The Incident of Enoch's translation and that of Elijah took place long before the advent of Jesus Christ. If they were in heaven Jesus Christ who came down from there (John 6:38) would have said so. Rather he unequivocally stated: "No one ever went up into heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of Man whose home is in heaven." – John 3:13, N.E.B.

The Bible shows clearly that none of the ancient faithful - from the first righteous man, Abel, to John the Baptist, the last prophet before Christ - would be in heaven in God's Kingdom. This understanding was given by Jesus Christ in his statement concerning John the Baptist, to wit: "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than him." - Matthew 11:11

If the least among those in heaven is greater than John the Baptist, and none of those (including Enoch and Elijah) who lived before him (John) is greater than he, it is therefore obvious that all that lived from the genesis of man's creation up to John, the forerunner of Jesus Christ, are excluded from the class of those who are favoured to be in the heavenly realm.

In fact, it would not have been possible for Enoch, Elijah or any other of the holy men of old to have gone to heaven since Jesus Christ, the Messiah, had not come to the earth to shed his blood to redeem mankind from sin, and since he had not been glorified and, consequently, the Kingdom of God had not then been set up in heaven.

It is Jesus Christ himself who after his resurrection went to heaven to prepare it for the saints - the anointed Christians - and left promise that he would come again to receive them to himself up there. To the apostles 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

When Jesus Christ further told them that they knew where he was going and the way to it, Thomas said to him, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" Jesus Christ then answered: "I am the way the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." - John 14:4-6

It is clear from the foregoing statement of Jesus Christ that all who will go to heaven must go through him who is the way. So the point of Enoch, Elijah or any other person going to heaven before the advent of Christ is completely ruled out.

Transfiguration

Moreover, certain religious teachers have made reference to the appearance of Elijah during the transfiguration of Jesus Christ as a proof that he (Elijah) is in heaven. They are very wrong.

St. Matthew's record of the Transfiguration runs thus: "And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us

make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard *it*, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.” - Matthew 17:1-8

In the whole account there is no reference whatsoever to heaven and so it would be groundless to infer that Moses and Elijah are in heaven. And the mistake of some people is that they take it to mean that Moses and Elijah who appeared were literally living. They lose sight of the fact that it was a vision intended to confirm the faith of the spotless in the majority of Jesus Christ. That the appearance of Moses and Elijah to the apostles was a vision was plainly stated by Jesus Christ himself; as it is written: “And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.” - Matthew 17:9

There is no record in the Bible that Moses was ever taken up to heaven. Rather it is stated that he died on the Mountain of Nebo in the land of Moab but his real burial-place was unknown to any man. - Deuteronomy 34:1, 5-6

Certain professed Christians believe that David too is in heaven, and in their devotions they often say: “David pray for us.” But St. Peter stated quite assertively, “David is not ascended into the heavens”! (Acts 2:34) It is not only in heaven that all the faithful will enjoy everlasting life and bliss, it is the earth that shall be inhabited by majority of them in perfect peace and happiness forever in God’s Kingdom in fulfillment of the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven.” - Matthew 6: 10

The truth of the whole matter has been brought to light. Let no one be deceived as to believe that Enoch and Elijah are in heave. They are not. Rather, they, as well as all other holy men and women of old before Christ, shall be brought back to life on Resurrection Day to inherit God’s Kingdom, NOT in heaven, but on earth in perfect peace and happiness. “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth”, said Jesus. He did not say they shall inherit heaven. - Read Psalm 37:9-11; Proverbs 11:31; Matthew 5:5; Luke 13:28, 29 etc.

In the eleventh chapter of the epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, he gave a comprehensive account of the faith of the ancient faithful beginning from Abel, and which faith they demonstrated by marvelous acts and meritorious works. About them he wrote: “...Who through faith subdued Kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises...Women received their dead raised to life again...” (Hebrews 11:32-38) It could be recalled that the son of the widow of Zarephath was raised to life by Elijah. - 1 Kings 17:17-24

St. Paul further pointed out that all those devout worshippers of God did not receive the promised inheritance and that without them, the anointed Christians (the Saints) whose grace is much greater; the ancient faithful could not be perfected. Thus concluding the chapter, St. Paul stated: “And these all, having obtained a good report through faith received not the promise: God having provided some better things for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.” - Hebrews 11:39, 40

It can be seen from all that have been explained in this article that the weight of scriptural evidence is against the teaching that Enoch and Elijah are in heaven. If they were there,

Christ would not have said, “No man hath ascended up to heaven”. (John 3:13) He would have told us in his characteristic plainness and sincerity that they were there. This is the truth that cannot be denied; it must be acknowledged and believed in order to obtain the blessings of salvation.

IS GOD TRULY ALIVE?

It is an indisputable fact that God is alive! He lives everlastingly according to the Holy Scriptures. In all of human history His existence has never at any time been called in question by those who are pure in heart. The wave of godlessness that is sweeping through the earth in this atomic age is not only indicative of the corruptness of man’s minds but also portends a world-wide calamity.

The Timenews-magazine (April 8, 1966) published in the United States once carried on its cover the startling question: “Is God Dead?” The publishers claimed that no story had been approached with more deliberation than the treatment of what they said to be “the contemporary concepts of God”. The project, it was claimed, was under consideration by the editors for nearly a year, and reporters were said to have talked to theologians, philosophers, scientists, artists, teachers and students, among others, discussing notions of God that varied from pop atheism to the faithfully traditional.

The writer of the story stated that the question was no longer a taunting jest of skeptics for whom unbelief is the test of wisdom. He further stated: “Even within Christianity, now confidently renewing itself in spirit as well as form, a small band of radical theologians has seriously argued that the churches must accept the fact of God’s death, and get along without him... The current death-of-God groups believe that God is indeed absolutely dead, but proposes to carry on and write a theology without theos, without God.”

There was also a report that a Methodist student magazine Motive had run “an obituary of God” in newspaper style. The ordinary man may be startled by such effusions in irreverent and blasphemous statements from the quarters of those whom the world is looking to for leadership. But with those who in divine knowledge are matured they are nothing strange.

Satan the devil is capable of instilling evil thoughts in men and making them mad to the extent of denying their Creator. This is the trouble with those who relish in atheism and blasphemy. And it is mostly among the worldly intellectuals one finds such characters. What has been described as “contemporary concepts of God” are a web of lies trumped up to mislead simple folks. The sceptics’ saying that “God is dead” defeats their own argument that there is no god. In fact if there is not God who ever lived, then the point of his death as the infidels are saying does not arise.

Obviously, the whole exercise of the “death-of-God” notion is useless.

Creator

In Genesis chapter 1, verse 1, it is written: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” Thus it becomes clear that God is the Architect and Creator of the universe.

The word god is a derivative of an Hebrew word meaning ‘a mighty one’. And for the fact that the great Creator made other mighty ones also known as gods He distinguishes Himself

from others by His names and titles. He told Abraham: "...I *am* the Almighty God..." (Genesis 17:1) To Moses in Egypt He declared: "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) What is more, Moses himself said to the Israelites: "For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward." - Deuteronomy 10:17

God Almighty is a Spirit Person and, therefore, He is invisible to human eyes. Jesus said: "God is a Spirit". And God told Moses: "...Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live." (Exodus 33:20) He made man in His own image, after His likeness, and so there can be no doubt about His personality - the difference being that while He is a Spirit, man is human or flesh. - Genesis 1:26, 27, Luke 24:39, John 4:24; 1 Corinthians 11:7

Some preachers present God in such a way as to make Him appear vague in the minds of men. The teaching that God is not a person and that He has not a body or is not limited to a shape or form has no foundation in the Scriptures. This baseless teaching contributes in no small way in confusing people about the personality of God. St. Paul described Jesus Christ as "...being the brightness of *his*(God's) glory, and the express image of his person..." (Hebrews 1:3) The apostle further stated that after Christ had purged our sins, through shedding of his blood, of course, he "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty (God Almighty) on high".

In the so-called Apostles Creed it is stated that after Jesus Christ rose from the dead, "he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right-hand of God, the Father Almighty". How would it make sense to say that Christ sits at the right-hand of God, if He (God) has no form or shape, or is not a personality?

It was in answer to the vague ideas of the ungodly, the Psalmist in an outburst of righteous indignation chided: "Understand, ye brutish among the people: and *ye* fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, *shall not he know?* The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they *are* vanity." - Psalm 94:8-11

At one time or another in human history men at the instance of Satan had indulged in blasphemy and launched attack on holy things in various ways. Yet up till today the truth of the eternal existence of the Most High remains like the sun beam unsoiled. But the blasphemers and antagonists of things divine had always ended up disgracefully without achieving their objective and passed into oblivion while the praise of God continues among men still unabated.

Lesson

The life of the late Thomas Paine should serve as a lesson to modern-day atheists and agnostics who are taking pride in blasphemy. Paine reached the pinnacle of worldly fame through his irreligious effusions which provided literary amusements to his friends and admirers. Yet he crashed to the ground and died a wretch!

The biography of Thomas Paine as written by Mr. Alfred Owen Aldridge, a professor of English in the University of Maryland, despite its grains of sympathy, is a clear exposition of the emptiness of a life without God and without Christ. A review of his biography in the

“Nigerian Morning Post” (August 20, 1963) brought to view more vividly a few points about his failure in everything. Concerning Paine it is written: “He lived a life of ducks and drakes which cost him not only his dear wife Elizabeth but also the sale of his property to pay for a debt he owed.

“At the end of his 37th year, Paine’s life to the ordinary observer and perhaps to himself, was a dreary series of failure in his profession, in business and in marriage. But later in his life he became very unpopular with the people that built him up. First by defending the execution of Louis XVI found guilty of treason and by his ‘Rights of Man’. “He was imprisoned and his book proscribed. “He was practically deserted by his friends and so his death bed, it was left with a woman sympathizer to care for him and to lend her parcel of land for his burial. He died broken-hearted, unnoticed, unrewarded and unsung”!

The death-of-God notion is another strategy of atheists and agnostics some of whom disguise themselves as theologians. It was aimed at taking believers in God by storm as to turn them from their religious beliefs but it has proved to be a failure. All men are not of the same character and all cannot be easy tools at the hands of the devil in his opposition to God and righteousness.

A Russian astronaut was once reported as saying, “Some people say there is a God out there: I saw no God. No God help build our rocket. The rocket was made by our people, I don’t believe in God.” But Colonel John Glenn of America was the more convinced of his belief in God’s existence after his space-travel, and wrote of “the orderliness of the whole universe around us”. He asked: “Could this just have happened? Was it an accident that a collection of solid masses of material, like our sun, stars, the planets, etc, suddenly started making these orbits of its own accord? I cannot believe that. This was a definite plan. This is one big thing that shows me there is a God. Some Power puts all this into orbit and keeps it there.” - African Challenge, March, 1963.

Longsuffering

One of the qualities of the Almighty God is longsuffering. Thought men provoke Him every day by their utterances and deeds; He keeps calm and still shows mercy. He cannot be tempted or moved to do anything before His due time. And so some men take undue advantage of this to continue to be foolish in their godlessness. But when His appointed time to take vengeance is due what He will do, He will do to bring iniquity to an end.

Pharaoh of Egypt in his pride showed contempt for God, but he in the long run swallowed his pride. When Moses and Aaron were sent to him as to allow the Israelites to go out of Egypt, he blurted out: “...Who *is* the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.” (Exodus 5:1, 2) Consequent upon his obstinacy the whole of Egypt was plague so much so that Pharaoh himself was compelled to confess his iniquity. He said to Moses and Aaron: “...I have sinned this time: the LORD is righteous, and I and my people *are* wicked.” - Exodus 9: 27

Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, was a man who was also inflated with pride by reason of his material attainment that he had no regard for God. At the height of his counterfeit glory when he was strutting in his palace and boasting of his power wealth and honour, a voice from heaven announced to him: “The kingdom is departed from thee.” He lost his reason

and having been driven from among men and made like a beast going on all fours, he ate grass like oxen. – Daniel 4:28-33

At the expiration of his period of punishment, he regained his senses and acknowledged the supremacy of God. As it is written: “And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works *are* truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.” - Daniel 4:34-37

Living God

The Almighty God is self-existent. He is the Source and Giver of life, and is not subject to death. The Psalmist declared: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou *art* God.” (Psalm 90:2) Jeremiah the Prophet also said: “But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation.” - Jeremiah 10:10

It is sheer intellectual madness for men to conjecture a notion of the “death of God”. The mere fact that a person completes a formal course in theology in an institution of higher learning, is no evidence of godliness or qualification to being a true servant of Christ. Any knowledge or wisdom that makes one blaspheme God or relegate Him to the background is useless. Concerning the worldly wise men Jeremiah stated: “How do ye say, *We are* wise, and the law of the LORD is with us? Lo, certainly in vain made he *it*; the pen of the scribes is in vain. 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 8:8, 9

The facts of God’s existence and eternity are so evident from His creation that no man can be excused or justified for his atheism or blasphemy. Said St. Paul: “His (God’s) invisible attributes, that is to say His everlasting power and deity, have been visible, ever since the world began, to the eye of reason, in the things He has made. There is therefore no possible defence for their conduct; knowing God, they have refused to honour Him as God, or to render Him thanks. Hence all their thinking has ended in futility, and their misguided minds are plunged in darkness. They boast of their wisdom, but they have made fools of themselves.” (Romans 1:20-22, New English Bible) Jesus Christ said: “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;” (John 5: 26) And he also spoke of God Almighty as the Living Father who sent him and to whom he owes his existent. – John 6: 57

There is also the testimony of Paul the apostle to the fact that God is immortal in his epistle to Timothy he wrote: “Now in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Jesus Christ, who himself made the same noble confession and gave his testimony to it before Pontius Pilate, I charge you to obey your orders irreproachably and without fault until our Lord Jesus Christ appears. That appearance God will bring to pass in His own good time -

God who in eternal felicity alone holds sway. He is King of kings and Lord of lords; He alone possesses immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light. No man has ever seen or ever can see him. To Him be honour and might forever! Amen.” - 1 Timothy 6:13-16, New English Bible

We are now in the age in which the Lord of hosts, God Almighty, will exercise His power to such a degree that the ungodly will find themselves in a spiritual storm and will be compelled to acknowledge His supremacy. Then shall fulfill the prayer of the Psalmist, to wit: “So persecute them (the ungodly) with thy tempest, and make them afraid with thy storm. Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O LORD. Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish: That *men* may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, *art* the most high over all the earth.” - Psalm 83:15-18

And in the epistle of Jude it is affirmed: “...Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard *speeches* which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” - Jude verses 14, 15

Indeed the ungodly like Nebuchadnezzar shall confess, The LORD Liveth For Ever!

REINCARNATION AND TRANSMIGRATION

Among the factors that have given rise to the doctrine of reincarnation and transmigration, ignorance and superstition preponderate over all others. The belief that a person who dies is born again on earth or that there is a soul in man that enters, after death, into another human or animal body is without scriptural foundation. It is deeply rooted in heathenism; and true Christians do not believe in it.

Reincarnation is described as a religious belief and is defined in the *Oxford Dictionary of the English Language* as “the return of the soul to earth after death, in a fresh bodily form”. From all data available there is no doubt that the belief is very ancient and it is shared by peoples of various creeds, tribes and nationalities in all the world.

“Transmigration of the soul” or “metempsychosis” is said to be the belief that after the body dies, the soul passes into some other material form or body - whether human or animal, plant or inanimate matter and so on. According to The American Educator Encyclopedia, “transmigration involves belief in the pre-existence as well as the survival of the soul after death; it is the conviction that the soul is not only indestructible but uncreated - eternal in the strictest sense. The doctrine appears in many religions, among them the Hindu and the ancient Egyptian, and it was held by many Greek and Roman philosophers, notably Plato...” - Vol.14, page T-154

It can be noted that while transmigration is said to mean the rebirth of a “soul” at death in another body, whether human or animal or plant or so, reincarnation usually means rebirth in a body of the same species.

Concerning reincarnation, E. Royston Pike stated: “The belief that when we die we are reborn on earth in another human body. Very often it is regarded as another name for Transmigration but this, strictly speaking, teaches that the reappearance on earth may be in non human (plant

or animal) form equally with human. The Greek term for very much the same idea is Metempsychosis.”- Encyclopedia of Religion and Religions, page 319.

Spiritual Ignorance

On the subject “Reincarnation, otherwise Transmigration or Metempsychosis” the Chamber’s Encyclopedia has this to say among other things: “The primitive conception of the separable soul capable of passing out of the body, assuming as independent existence of its own and taking up its abode in some other human being animal or inanimate object, finds expression in the idea of metempsychosis and transmigration which in the philosophical thought of Greece and India gathered a moral content as an explanation of the inequalities of life... At death the soul passes into an insect or some other animal or vegetable species; and not infrequently it is reborn with in the same family or clan in human form, an occurrence which is thought to account for the resemblances between persons of different generations. By some what similar reasoning the Australian natives explain why strangers be come fast friends almost at first sight, alleging that the parties must have been comrades in a previous existence.

“In Madagascar there appear to have been many tribes of whom their neighbours asserted that they were transformed at death into animals...

“The Zulu, like many other peoples, believe that their dead pass, according to their rank, into various kinds of serpents or lizards; but other Bantu-speaking peoples hold that their chiefs, or even the common herd, pass into lions and other animals; some Zambezi tribes say that a man can choose his own soul-animal by swallowing the maggots from the putrefying flesh of his chosen species.

“The following account of Ewe beliefs, itself only a sample of West African creeds is but a survey of some features of the reincarnation complex. The Ewe say that a man had two souls, one of which goes into the grave and thence to the land of the dead, which is a duplicate of this world: a man who has been a great king there will die soon after birth here, so that he may return to the scene of his former glories; and an aged man in this world may fall ill because his associates in Amedzowe, impatient at his long absence, are preparing to break down his hut there; his relatives in Amedzowe send him to this world...

“The deep-rooted confusion disclosed by this summary is parallel among the Edo of Benin, though the aspect of the creed differs widely; among them the genius is double and some say that the one in elimi (heaven) comes to earth when the one on earth leave the corpse of a dead man.” – Vol. 11, page 572-573

This encyclopedia also touches on the ideas of Greece, India, Australasia and Europe, and they all reveal how man because of spiritual ignorance is capable of making himself a slave of his own imaginations and inventions.

Among several tribes in this country the belief is rife. Such children who are believed to have been born again in a new body are mostly identified by some kind of names with superstitious intention. In their infancy they are deemed not to deserve as much tender care as others, and their mothers prefer to use rags or sack-clothes for them.

Yoruba Conception

Dr. J. O. Lucas, writing on “The Yoruba Conception of Man”, stated among other things: “The fact that children are born who show physical characteristics possessed by their parents to such an extent as to suggest that they are re-incarnations of their parents or ancestors leads to the idea that the second individuality is a double entity, a part of which may be incarnated in a new-born child. Whilst the other part contains the existence of the man as an individual.”
- The Religion of the Yorubas, page 245

In the view of Mr. Justice Adewale Thompson: “It is impracticable to expect any better standard of proof other than circumstantial evidence” as regards reincarnation. He stated in his book, *The Invisible World*, thus: “Since I am not yet dead and since I do not propose to do so for a considerable time I think it will not be fair to expect me to give an account of a former life.

“It is safe to assume that we are now prepared to accept the view that man is made up of body, soul and spirit and that the spirit is part of the universal spirit which pervades the whole of creation.”

Justice Adewale Thompson explained that the two schools of thought on reincarnation are “The Extinctionist School” and “The Survival School”; and “judging by the results of modern experiments,” according to him, “the latter school is more acceptable”.

He stated: “The Survival School... argues that since the process of procreation continues, it is only logical to expect that the universal spirit which is being replenished by additional spirit essence on the death of a person, is also committed to surrender a corresponding side of its illimitable substance, at any time a new life is born, otherwise our public registers will be filled with records of deaths, and no births; maternity hospitals will be closed down and cemeteries constructed instead.” – Page 52

None of the authors quoted in the foregoing claimed to be inspired by the Father of Jesus Christ - Jehovah or Yahweh whichever you accept.

That the devil has capacity beyond human measure in making men take the shadow for the substance or believe what in fact does not exist, no one can gainsay. The Holy Bible does not in any way give credit to the doctrine of reincarnation or transmigration.

There is no time in all of history that reincarnation transmigration was connected with the true worshippers of God - whether before Christ or after him. The belief in either of them is known to have existed in ancient times only among the Greeks, Egyptians and some other non-Jewish nation who were not of the true supreme religion. And no Jew who was not an apostate would ever cherish the illusion that a dead person could be reborn on earth.

But today many people who claim to be Christians have expressed their belief in reincarnation. It is not because they find a passage in the Holy Bible that gives such an idea but because they have a tendency of swallowing or accepting what they will without recourse to the Book of books, which is the guide to true Christians in all matters of faith.

Living Soul

The whole foundation of the belief or teaching concerning reincarnation or transmigration is, according to the Scriptures, without substance. To think of the soul as a “living entity” or “being” in man that after death, is able to live on its own or enter another body to continue

existence is very wrong. This notion, which has been instilled in the minds of men at the instance of Satan the devil, has developed into lots of imaginary beliefs and dogmas both among professed Christians and other religionists.

As regards the creation of man the Bible states: “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.” (Genesis 2:7) The living soul or person is made up of the body from the dust of the ground and breath of life or spirit. The spirit is the air or breath men take in through the nostrils. What makes this particular air different is that it has the power of existence or life.

When the breath of life or spirit goes out of man or animal, the organs of the body cease to function and that means death. The Psalmist declared: “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.” - Psalm 146:3, 4

It is the same breath that operates in animals. And King Solomon, moved by the holy spirit of God, stated: “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 preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.” – Ecclesiastes 3:19, 20

God has made the air or breath available to all creatures that come into being in any part of the world; and it is inexhaustible. There is no particular kind of breath or spirit for every individual person or animal. And the air in the whole world is under the control of God. So when a man dies his breath of spirit returns to God in the sense that it is deposited in the air. As it is written, “If He (God) were to turn His thoughts inwards and recall His life-giving spirit, all that lives would perish on the instant, and man return again to dust.” (Job 34:14, 15 New English Bible) “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” - Ecclesiastes 12:7

All stories that have been weaved around the word soul as an “immaterial being” that passes, after death, into another human body or into animal or plant, or goes to heaven to enjoy bliss or into “hell-fire” for punishment and so on, are a web of lies. They are just human imaginations, and the devil has always endeavoured to create circumstances to make them appear as though they are realities. And so when Justice Adewale Thompson stated with reference to reincarnation that “it is impracticable to expect any better standard of proof other than circumstantial evidence” he was being honest.

The view that the soul is uncreated and indestructible or immortal is unscriptural. God Who is the Creator of all souls said: “Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die...” - Ezekiel 18:4, 20

St. Peter, having pointed to Jesus Christ as the prophet and Messiah spoken of by Moses, added: “And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet (Jesus), shall be destroyed from among the people.” (Acts 3:23) It is abundantly clear from these indisputable scriptural authorities that the soul is destructible or mortal.

True Christians do not believe in transmigration. The idea of a human “soul” taking abode in plants and even in inanimate objects is not from God but from Satan.

With regard to the creation of plants, it is written: “And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so ...” (Genesis 1:11, 12) God never said that the “soul” of persons should find abode in plants.

Moreover, the belief that a person who dies can be born again on earth is untrue. It is a fact that the process of Procreation continues but to think that it is the “spirit” of the dead that makes the birth of new lives possible is very wrong. The process of procreation is the fulfillment of the Divine mandate – “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.” (Genesis 1:28) If it is those who die that are born again, how then came about the birth of Cain and Abel when nobody had died after Adam and Eve were created? And if the dead pass into serpents, lizards and other animals and so on, where then did the “souls” of the countless number of people who died in the Great Deluge in the days of Noah find shelter when both men and beasts were destroyed?

Evil Spirits

Any person who purports to have experienced the sensation of regaining the memories of a past life must either be a victim of evil spirits or must have been in the flight of fancy. There is the saying that by the power of fancy one may create an unread world. The story of the so-called pre-existence of human beings is a creation of the brain; it is not true.

It must be admitted that certain children had been born who had the very physical characteristics or features of some members of their families who had died. There is a story of a certain woman whose male child died having his face scarred by small-pox. Later on the woman became pregnant and she gave birth to another baby-boy on whose face were certain marks similar to those of the child who died. It was widely believed within the area of the incident that it was the dead child that was born again.

It is possible to cite other instances similar to this just mentioned, yet the truth remain that no human being is born twice or more on earth. Two things are mainly responsible for the incidents of new-born babies having features or marks identical with those of their deceased relatives, friends and so forth. They are either the hand-works of the devil or the outcome of the law of reflection.

The devil, as a spirit creature who since his rebellion has been misusing the wide power given him by God before his fall, can interfere with children in the womb in various ways. He had caused some to be born blind or to cripples from birth. And some of such deformed ones were miraculously healed by Jesus Christ and his apostles in their day as a manifestation of God’s supreme power. – John 9:1-3, Acts 3:1-10

Moreover, the devil too can create and his children always bear his vicious characteristics. They are extra-ordinarily obstinate, troublesome and ungodly inclined. The Psalmist said: “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.” (Psalm 58:3) And Jesus Christ parabolically referred to the devil’s children as tares that would be destroyed by God. - Matthew 13:38-40

Law of Reflection

On the other hand through the law of reflection a pregnant woman who is fond of cuddling or playing with a monkey may give birth to a child having the looks of a monkey. Similarly, a pregnant woman who has a devoted love for her husband or who is ever pre-occupied with admiration for her husband’s features, may bear a child who resembles her husband.

There is a striking instance of the law of reflection in the Bible. This happened when Jacob still managed the flocks of Laban after he had made up his mind to quit his services so as to provide for his family. In answer to Laban's question as to what he wanted, Jacob said he would still serve him if he (Jacob) would be permitted to pick out "all the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats" as his wages.

Having received the consent of Laban that everyone that was spotted among the goats and brown among the sheep was his, he (Jacob) adopted a strategy whereby he increased his own flocks. As it is written, "And Jacob took him rods of green poplar, and of the hazel and chesnut tree; and pilled white strakes in them, and made the white appear which *was* in the rods. And he set the rods which he had pilled before the flocks in the gutters in the watering troughs when the flocks came to drink, that they should conceive when they came to drink. And the flocks conceived before the rods, and brought forth cattle ringstraked, speckled, and spotted." - Read Genesis 30:37-43

Resurrection

In all the wonderful revelations of God through the ancient prophets, Jesus Christ and his apostles, as contained in the Holy Bible, no indication is given that a person can be born twice or more. Rather what is made known is the doctrine of resurrection. And by resurrection is meant the raising of the dead. This God promised to do through Jesus Christ at the time appointed.

The vision of Ezekiel the prophet concerning the dry bones was a demonstration of how the dead would be raised. (Ezekiel 37:1-14) There is no point of a soul entering into a body and being reborn. It is breath of life otherwise referred to as spirit God would send to revive the dead. And so He told Ezekiel: "Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army." (Verses 9, 10) God then said to Israel: "And ye shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken *it*, and performed *it*, saith the LORD." Verses 13, 14

What is more, Jesus Christ said: "Wonder not at this; for the hour cometh, wherein all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God. And they that have done good things shall come forth unto the resurrection of life; but they that have done evil unto the resurrection of Judgment." - John 5:28, 29 (Douay Version) See also Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15

It can be seen from the facts of the Scripture already brought to light that there is no transmigration or reincarnation but resurrection of the dead. "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead," and St. Paul. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." - 1 Corinthians 15: 21, 22

It is when the dead are raised that they shall be judged and rewarded according to their works as stated by Jesus Christ. Until then excepting the "little flock", the saints, who go to heaven according the Scriptures - they must remain in their graves. Thus Paul the apostle stated: "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." (Hebrews 9:27)

The doctrine of reincarnation or transmigration is from the devil. Not from God Almighty, we repeat. And true Christians are strongly warned in the Holy Scriptures against “the doctrines of devils”. - 1 Timothy 4:1-6

THE VANITY OF MAN

“LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.

“Behold, Thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before Thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.

“Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.

“And now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in Thee.”- Psalm 39:4-7

SLANDERERS IN GOD’S JUDGMENT

Whoever makes a false accusation against his fellow-man in order to get him involved in trouble or to put him in a bad light before others is very uncharitable and wicked. And any other person who spreads such injurious accusation knowing it to be false or without hearing the accused’s version is equally guilty before God. The royal law according to the Scriptures demands that “as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.”

The sins of men are many and varied. Some people actually take pleasure in sins and so commit them willfully. Some others do so out of ignorance. And there are yet those who become partakers of the sins of others either because of their tendency to please men or to appear socially popular amid the worldlings.

A slanderer is one who utters false or malicious statement, tale or report designed to injure the reputation of another person. In biblical terms a slanderer is also a false accuser.

Both in the law of God and in civil law of the world; slander is an offence. The laws of the land concede to everyone a legal right to earn the goodwill and respect of his fellow men. And so if by the publication of a defamatory statement one causes another to be shunned by others or to suffer some damage, such publication is said to be an invasion of his legal right, and generally a cause for action. Lawyers know better about this.

Our purpose and concern is to treat the subject against the background of the law of God. In fact, by the standard of divine judgment the sin of slander is of far more serious consequence than what obtains in human society.

People have suffered in different ways because of false allegations or reports made against them. Have some not been cast into prison as a result of false accusation? Have some others not even been killed? Are there not people who have been sacked from their jobs because of malicious misrepresentations? And can anyone deny that slander or false reports have caused some homes to be broken?

Slander carries with it other vices such as whispering, back-biting, evil surmising, tale-bearing and so forth. And some of those who indulge in these things call themselves Christians. Except they repent they, whoever they are, shall bear their own judgment. The law of God says: “Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbour.” - Exodus 20:16, Deuteronomy 5:20, Matthew 19:18

Furthermore, it is written: “you shall not utter a false report. You shall not join hands with a wicked man, to be a malicious witness. You shall not follow a multitude to do evil; nor shall you bear witness in a suit, turning aside after a multitude, so as to pervert justice.” - Exodus 23:1, 2 Revised Standard Version

Many people are tale-bearers, backbiters and busybodies in other men’s matters. They have a habit of poking their noses into people’s private affairs with a view to telling tales. There are some whose tendency is always to exaggerate rumours that are already false. If they receive or hear a report against some other person they do not want to hear the version of the person who is accused before they give their own verdict or set on the devil’s work of spreading such false matters. The Bible says: “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.” - Proverbs 18:13

What people should know is that God’s judgment is against not only the person who commits an offence but also whoever condones or takes pleasure in the offence. - Romans 1:32

False Story

When in 1952 the God’s Kingdom Society lost her first President, the late Gideon M. Urhobo, her detractors forged lies and slandered him with a view to bringing the Lord’s Organisation - the GKS - into disrepute. It was wickedly alleged that St. Urhobo had earlier said he would rise the third day after his death. Some added that he took certain pills so that after being in a coma for three days he might wake so as to be acclaimed by GKS members as having risen from the dead. People like those whom Job called “forgers of lies” or the enemies of truth and righteousness did their worst to spread these fabricated tales far and wide.

If it is true that St. Urhobo said and did all that they alleged then he was a false prophet: blessing will surely be upon those who are saying it; but if he did not then whoever is responsible for or has contributed to that false story against the innocent must give account of himself to God who says, “Vengeance is mine.” - 2 Corinthians 5:10, Romans 12:19

It was Jesus Christ who said: “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” - Matthew 12:35-37

Those who rejoice at the troubles of others need be pitied: they are fools. King Solomon said; “...he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished.” (Proverbs 17:5) Nobody is free from trouble in this world of sin. Many of those who rejoice at the death of St. Urhobo are no longer living. Before the death of some of them they began to rot with offensive odour all over the place while they were still breathing, and some others had no good burial. In what way then were they better than St. Urhobo?

Yet the members of GKS, for spiritual reasons, did not leap for joy when those detractors died. God said: “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” - Ezekiel 33:11

The God's Kingdom Society is one of the most misrepresented Church organizations. Those who made themselves her enemies are not tired of adding sin to sin in lying against her. At one time they said the GKS does not believe in burying the dead. When that became known to be false, they invented another lie to the effect that if any of the members dies the Society will carry away all his property.

Some people have also been saying that the GKS always takes the salaries or earnings of the members for her use. But the devil having made them stupid they do not care to reason how it is possible for those members to pay their house rents and maintain themselves and their families throughout the month or year. They are willingly blind to the fact that many who came to the GKS in a low state or who were living in penury are today blessed with landed property, cars and other necessities of life.

Those who are filled with envy at the progress of the GKS take delight in reproaching her for every misdeed of any member in her fold, as if the Society is responsible for such a wrong act.

Since the Robbery and Firearms (Special Provisions) Decree of the Military Government came into effect, many people have been killed by the firing squad. Among those executed so far were atheists, agnostics, pagans and others who professed the Christian or Islamic faith. We do not hear people reproaching the religions or denominations to which the executed robbers belonged. It is the clergy and Imans who "blessed" the robbers before they were executed that people have criticized or reproached.

We know that if any of the executed robbers had been a member of GKS, her detractors, instead of holding up to shame such an ungodly citizen would have jumped up and down in excitement to rain reproaches or abuses on her. We thank God that no GKS member has committed the heinous crime of armed robbery; may He help us to be true Christians always, by His grace, to the glory and praise of His name. We of the GKS do not speak ill of any religion or church group for the sins or crimes of any of her members as it is unreasonable and foolish to do so. It is not the churches or religions the criminals belong to that send them to commit crimes. A church group can be blamed if only it condones such evils. But the GKS has always criticized those clergy who undertake the unholy job of "blessing" condemned hardened robbers because they do not have backing of the Scriptures.

The slanderers of St. Urhobo and the GKS ought to have realized by now that their propaganda has been a failure and that no amount of misrepresentation or evil-speaking can prevent God from blessing His work or Church. Despite all the machinations of wicked people the GKS continues, by the grace of God, to grow from strength to strength spiritually, physically and otherwise. The Psalmist declared: "Let them curse, but bless thou (God)..." - Psalm 109:28

What is more, Jesus Christ said "Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." – Matthew 5:10-12

Like Jesus Christ our attitude towards our detractors is that God may forgive them for they know not what they do, but on the ground that - according to the Scriptures - they repent of their sins.

God's Judgment

It does not pay to say or do things maliciously to injure another or cause him damage. God said: "Woe to thee that spoilest, and thou wast not spoiled; and dealest treacherously with thee? When thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled (obviously by God); and when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee." - Isaiah 33:1

The point that must be brought home to those who take pleasure in slandering their neighbours is that they are putting themselves in danger of God's judgment. They will definitely be recompensed by the Lord for their evil deeds. Concerning such people God said: "Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." - Psalm 50:19-22

In this country and some others when women lost their husbands some people accuse them (the widows) of being witches who are responsible for the death of the men. But if the women die their husbands are no wizards! The pity of it is that some traditional zealots go to the extreme of molesting innocent women at a time when their hearts are heavy in sorrow and when most they deserve sympathy. To maltreat a widow is a sin. God said: "Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless." - Exodus 22:22-24

Experience has shown that some who are loudest in calling others witches, are the very witches themselves. We agree that witchcraft is a sin, and every witch or wizard who does not repent or forsake evil cannot escape God's vengeance. (Deuteronomy 18:10-13, Revelation 21:8) The end of witches is never blessed - but marked with anguish and ignominy. Even then this does not excuse anyone to take the law of God into his hands or to defame the character of another on mere suspicion.

It is the one who slanders his neighbour or carries false tales about to cast detraction on him that is the worse sinner. Said King Solomon: "He who conceals hatred had lying lips, and he who utters slander is a fool. When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is prudent." - Proverbs 10:18, 19 Revised Standard Version

And God Himself said: "Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer." - Psalm 101:5

It is for the reason that slander is a sin that St. Paul particularly warned that the wives of deacons who should serve as good example to other women must not be slanderers. (1 Timothy 3:11) He also charged the older women, who are entrusted with the duty of teaching the young ones, not to be false accusers. - Titus 2:5

Generally, all Christians are admonished not speak evil of one another. James the apostle wrote: “Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of *his* brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.” - James 4:11

This by no means rules out the principle of righteous judgment by which evil can be condemned. Jesus Christ said: “...Judge righteous judgment.” (John 7:24) And St. Paul charged Timothy as a minister of the gospel: “They that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.” - 1 Timothy 5:20

The condemnation or exposition of evil, provided it is based on truth, is justified. What the bible warns against are evil-speaking or slander and similar evils.

Slander is an evidence of lack of Christian love. Thus it is written: “For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if *there be* any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love *is* the fulfilling of the law.” - Romans 13:9, 10

Let this sermon serve as warning to whoever has been slandering his neighbour so that he may repent and obtain divine mercy otherwise in God’s judgment he stands condemned. – Proverbs 18:21, Matthew 12:36, 37

THE ABRAHAMIC PROMISE

By the promise of the Almighty God that in the seed of Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed, He unfolded His magnificent purpose of salvation for mankind. The advent of Jesus Christ who was typified by Isaac, Abraham’s son, was the most significant stepping-stone in fulfilling the Lord’s purpose; and the impact of his successful mission on the people of the world – Jews and non-Jews alike –confirms the reality of the promise. Indeed the Abrahamic promise is one of the cardinal doctrines of the Holy Bible.

Abraham was a man of high reputation. God brought him into prominence and he lived up to expectation. His faith and bent towards the righteousness of God are the qualities that had made him, by God’s grace, a model for all true worshippers of the Lord.

After the death of Abraham’s father in Haran, God told him to go out of his own country, from his kinsmen and his father’s house, to a land that He would show him. This command was backed with the promise that Abraham would be made great and blessed and that in him blessing would redound to the whole world.

Here is the Bible account:

“Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: and I will make of thee a great

nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”—Gen. 12: 1-3.

In obedience to the Lord’s command Abraham and his household set out of Haran on their journey to Canaan. Then he was 75 years old.

Abraham stood high in the Lord’s favour. His assurance that whoever blessed Abraham was blessed and that curse would go to anyone who cursed him was an evidence of this favour. The lesson to be learnt from this divine statement is that it is dangerous not to wish well anybody who is granted to be in the good graces of God or who is blessed by Him.

It was on the strength of this knowledge that Balaam refused to curse Israel when he was hired by Balak to do so. He said: “How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? Or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied?”—Num. 23: 8.

One of the striking aspects of the Lord’s utterance to Abraham is the auspicious promise, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”. When the angels of God were going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah they revealed their mission to Abraham because of the promise God made to him. Said one of the angels: “shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I see; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD; to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him.”—Gen.18: 17-19.

At that material time Abraham had two children – Ishmael and Isaac. Sarah – a Jewess— was the mother of Isaac; and Hagar, an Egyptian handmaid of Sarah who became Abraham’s second wife, was the mother of Ishmael.

After Abraham had passed through the test of faith in which he was to offer Isaac as sacrifice, God through His angel said to him: “By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this things, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”—Gen. 22: 16-18.

It is noteworthy that on this occasion God made His promise not only on oath but also more explicit in that He said that it was through the SEED of Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Who this seed should be – whether Isaac or Ishmael – was not immediately

stated though God had earlier indicated, as it pleased Him, His preference for Isaac over Ishmael. – Gen. 17: 19-21.

Both Isaac and Ishmael were blessed by God; but it was clear that Isaac had a greater favour from God than his brother Ishmael. After the death of Abraham it became manifest that the promised seed belonged to the family line not of Ishmael but Isaac. This is proved by the fact that God did confirm His promise to Isaac. As it is written: “And the LORD appeared unto him (Isaac) and said... I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries and I will perform the oath, which I swear unto Abraham thy father; and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven. And will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”—Gen. 26: 2-5.

The Abrahamic promise did not stop with Isaac but was passed on to his son Jacob. In a dream God appeared to him and said: “...I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac; the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” --Read Genesis. 28: 10-14.

Ishmael

Our Muslim friends believe that Ishmael being an elder brother to Isaac was vested with the right to inherit the promised blessing. And so in their view since Mohammed was a descendant of Ishmael he is the one people should look to for salvation. In a tract published by the Muslim Youth Wing in Warri recently it is stated: “Muhammad claimed lineal descent from Ishmael the first born of Abraham. The law of the Jews favours blessing and major inheritance to the first son of the so-called hated wife: Search your Bible book of Deut. 21: 15 to 17. Allah promised to make Ishmael great also. - Genesis 17: 20-22 Gen. 21: 17-21.

The Bible is not opposed to criticism. Therefore anybody is free to criticize the Christian Faith provided he does so without prejudice and without deliberate distortion of the truth or misrepresentation of facts.

In the first place it must be noted that the right of the firstborn son as stipulated in the Mosaic Law has nothing to do with the election of God. Aaron was the elder brother of Moses but when the time came for God to deliver the Israelites from their afflictions in Egypt

it was Moses God chose to be their ruler, judge and deliverer. (Exod. 3: 7-18; Acts 7: 33-35) The anointing of David as a king and prophet—though he was the youngest of Jesse’s sons – is also a case in point. Before David was chosen, Eliab, Abinadab, Shammah and other seven sons of Jesse who were all older than he had been rejected by God. (1 Sam. 16: 1-13) In the light of the forgoing, it is therefore very wrong of our Muslim neighbours or anyone else to quote out of context, portions of the Bible on this matter of Isaac and Ishmael or any other doctrinal issue.

That Ishmael was great it must be admitted. But the fact, which is indisputable and which God Himself made abundantly clear, is that it is through the need of Isaac all the nations of the earth including Ishmael and his descendants would be blessed. This is the unchangeable will of God. This is the truth; and no matter how much it is distorted it remains the truth.

According to the Scriptures, the promised seed through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed is none other than Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Saviour. Indeed he was born a Jew, a descendant of Abraham of the lineage of Isaac. With regard to his genealogy, St. Matthew wrote: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas (Judah) and his brethren.”—Matt. 1: 1, 2; see also Luke 3: 23, 24, 33, 34.

No one who has the understanding of the Abrahamic promise will ever think of the scope of Christ’s mission as limited to the Jewish race. The announcement of Christ’s birth was described by an angel of God as “good tidings of great joy, which shall be to ALL PEOPLE”; and after his birth Simeon spoke of him as “a light to lighten the gentiles”. –Luke 2: 10-11, 25-32.

What is more, it is written: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—John 3: 16.

“Charity begins at home” is a common saying. Jesus Christ began his work on earth from among his own people—the Jews—as purposed by God. (Rom. 15: 8; Acts 3: 25, 26) But knowing that his mission was for the benefit of the human race and having laid the foundation, he at the end of his stay on earth, after his resurrection, said to his apostles: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. “—Acts 1: 8.

Moreover, he commanded them: “Go ye therefore, and TEACH ALL NATIONS, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to

observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”—Matt. 28: 19, 20

It was a matter of grace that the natural Jews were first given the opportunity to benefit from the ministry of Jesus Christ but, unfortunately, many of them did not understand or appreciate it. (Matt. 23: 37-39; Acts 13: 27-31, 46-48.) The apostles were given to understand that the promised seed of Abraham was no one else but Jesus Christ through whom life-everlasting and other blessings divine would come to mankind.

St. Peter, addressing the Jews declared: “Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, and in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.”—Acts 3: 25, 26.

The blessings of Jesus Christ are open to anybody in any part of the world but only on the condition that that person believes or has faith in him. Thus it is written: “For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 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: 17, 18, 36.

Faith

Since the advent of Jesus Christ faith and not blood relationship has become the mark by which the true children of Abraham – the Spiritual Jews – are identified. And so St. Paul, debating upon the promise of the Lord to Abraham, stated: “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.”—Gal. 3: 7-9.

Furthermore, St. Paul said: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ.” (Gal. 3: 16) The Jew English Bible renders the text thus: Now the promises were pronounced to Abraham and to his ‘issue’. It does not say ‘issues’ in the plural, but in the singular, ‘and to your issue’; and the ‘issue’ intended is Christ.” This proves conclusively that Jesus Christ is the promised seed of Abraham through whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

Upon Jesus Christ rests the hope of man. He is our Redeemer and Saviour. Concerning him St. Peter said: “This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the

head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”—Acts 4: 11, 12.

After Jesus Christ had been resurrected by God Almighty the Father, he declared: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” (Matt. 28: 18) This power is already being used by him and he will continue to wield it until the Father’s purpose will be accomplished. It is in exercise of this power he is gathering his people in all parts of the world through the gospel into his organisation so that they may be saved; it is by this unique power he will subdue satan the devil and bring iniquity to an end; and it is by the same power he will bring all things to perfection in the New Heavens and New Earth-God’s Kingdom of endless peace, glory and happiness.

Jesus Christ holds a pre-eminent position among the creation of God and he is the King of God’s universal and everlasting Government. Concerning him it is written: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God. The Everlasting Father. The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this,”—Isa. 9: b, 7.

Daniel who was made to see the vision of Christ’s coronation in heaven, said: “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before Him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.” –Dan. 7: 13,14.

Jesus Christ was quite aware of the royal office he was predestined to occupy, and during his earthly ministry he did not hide his identity. He told Pilate: “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 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. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.” –John. 18: 36,37.

It is impossible for any mortal to give a full description of the beauties of the New World – the World Without End – and the blessings of those who deserve to inherit it. St. Paul, quoting the prophet Isaiah stated: “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into

the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” The apostle added: “But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”—1Cor. 2: 9, 10.

Unless men submit themselves to God Almighty so as to be guided by His Spirit they can never come to the knowledge of the truth in regard to the divine arrangement for the blessing of mankind in Christ Jesus –the antitypical SEED of Abraham. Owing to the evil influence of satan the devil majority of people are absolutely ignorant of the significance of the Abrahamic promise.

Mission of Jesus

Sin has been the bane of human societies. It is responsible for the shortsightedness and ignorance of men about God and His purpose of creation. Some people, because of prejudice and racial discrimination, think of Jesus Christ as being of no consequence to their race, nation or tribe. But if they had known the truth of what Jesus Christ stands for they would have loved to embrace him.

The scope of the mission of Jesus Christ cuts beyond tribal or racial horizon: it is universal. Whoever believes in Jesus Christ and does his will is the child of God and is therefore under grace to share in the Abrahamic promise. The question of race, colour or tribe is completely ruled out. Said St. Paul: “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”— Gal. 3: 26-29.

What is man without Christ? To deny him or refuse to be identified with him is, according to the Scriptures, to mark oneself as having been cut off from the commonwealth of spiritual Israel.

The pleasures of this world are sin-ridden, basically artificial, and are temporal. Whatever the joys of this evil world, the glamour of its social life, the comfort and luxury attainable by man’s device, are nothing to be compared to the glories and bliss of Christ’s Kingdom. A man who prefers to enjoy this world of sin and lose the World Without End should be pitied. “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” asked Jesus Christ. —Mark 8: 36.

It was for good reason the holy men and women of old—the ancient faithful as well as the early disciples of Jesus Christ had been expecting the dawn of the Lord’s reign. St. Peter said:

“Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”—2 Pet. 3: 13.

No system of imperfect human governments of the world can meet or satisfy the needs of mankind. God’s Perfect Kingdom over which Christ has been made the King of kings, is the ONLY HOPE of the world. When John the apostle saw the vision of the Lord’s glorious kingdom – the New World – he said: ‘And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sin. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adored for her husband..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.’—Rev. 21: 1-4.

It is when the kingdom of God is fully established both in heaven and on earth that the Abrahamic promise shall have been completely fulfilled. “In thy seed” said God Almighty, “shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

THE RACE OF SALVATION

The work of God is a race in which one is required to put up maximum effort and abide by the principles of Jesus Christ in order to win the price of eternal life. To be obstructed or disqualified in the race, which is the one of salvation as not to gain the prize is the worst misfortune a man can suffer in this world.

Literally, race is the act of running, swimming, sailing and so on, in a competition with one or more rivals. It may be with the aim to see who can finish a piece of work or get to a certain place first. And the winner is awarded a prize for his excellent performance. Usually, every event has set rules with which the participants are bound to comply.

In a spiritual sense the work of God is a race. And for the fact that the prize to be awarded every winner in the race is everlasting life it is proper to term it the race of salvation. It is a race that is open to all mankind irrespective of race, caste, colour or tribe. God Almighty said: “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else.” - Isaiah 45:22

In the race of salvation there are rules or principles laid down for everyone to keep. And it is a requirement that one must continue in the race steadfastly and faithfully till the end so as to obtain the prize.

St. Paul illustrated the work of God with athletic race and in a contrast he showed the excellence of the reward attainable in the Lord’s service. The need therefore to be more diligent and hardworking in the race of salvation becomes at once obvious. St. Paul said: “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now

they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” - 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

As athletes who do not keep to their tracks or obey the rules of the games are disqualified so too the worshippers of God who do not abide by the rules of Jesus Christ as enunciated in the Holy Bible would be deemed unfit or unworthy to obtain salvation.

Truth

In the first instance, in running the race every one must make sure that he is in the right track, that is, the organisation where the Truth of Jesus Christ is preached without a taint of falsehood or devilish doctrines. Christ said: “...I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” - John 14:6

It is the Truth that distinguishes the way of salvation from others. This accounts for the popular statement of Jesus Christ that the freedom of his disciples depends on their knowledge of the Truth. As it is written: “Then said Jesus to those Jews which 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) Without the knowledge of the truth no one can obtain eternal life in God’s Kingdom of righteousness and peace. St. Paul wrote: “For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” - 1 Timothy 2:3, 4

Apart from the knowledge of God, which is of vital importance (John 17:3), there are other qualities a person is required to possess in order to succeed in the race of salvation. In this regard St. Peter’s exhortation to such virtues as would enable the Christians to regulate their zeal, courage and conduct, and make them fruitful in the Lord is of particular interest. He stated: “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither *be* barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” - 2 Peter 1:5-8

He further exhorted: “But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” - Verses 9-11

Three of the qualities which need be singled out for more elucidation or explanation are faith, love and patience. As touching faith, St. Paul stated: “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” - Hebrews 11:6

Love is the premier of virtues. Jesus Christ said: “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) All the commandments of God hang on love: hence Paul the apostle stated that “...love *is* the

fulfilling of the law.” - Romans 13:9, 10 See also Matthew 22:37-40, 1 Corinthians 13:1-8, 13, Galatians 5:14

With regard to patience, it must be pointed out that without it no one can persevere or wait on the Lord as not to stumble or fall by the way in the race. Jesus Christ said that it is those who endure (or who are perfectly patient) to the end that will be saved. (Matthew 24:12, 13) And he further said: “In your patience possess ye your souls.” (Luke 21:19) Indeed “...the race is not to the swift...” - Ecclesiastes 9:11

What is more, St. Paul exhorted the Christians thus: “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.” – Hebrews 10:35, 36

One thing that must be known is that sin is a great obstacle to progress in the race of salvation. And so it is enough to conclude with St. Paul’s exhortation, to wit: “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” - Hebrews 12:1-3

WAS JESUS CHRIST HANGED ON A CROSS OR TREE?

This erroneous belief that our Saviour Jesus Christ was crucified on a cross has given rise to superstitious tendencies and practices in Christendom for which there can be no scriptural justification. According to the Scriptures, the instrument upon which Christ was hanged and which in the Gospels is sometimes termed cross; was in fact a tree or piece of wood. And to venerate the cross is idolatrous.

Today, the cross is made an object of worship in the circles of many who profess to be Christians. It is believed by some that the cross is efficacious against poison, witchcraft, and so on. And there are those who make on their person the sign of the cross. In some Church buildings it occupies a conspicuous place; it is carried aloft during certain religious processions; at funerals it also has a part to play: It is worn on the chest by bishops and some others, suspended about the neck by a chain or cord; and it is engraved on tomb-stone.

There seem to be a competition these days among some Church denominations as to which of them is able to display the biggest cross. The inspiring mind will want to know the scriptural basis for these beliefs and practices concerning the cross. All Churches agree that the Holy Bible is the Guide Book provided by God to which reference must be made on any point of doctrine and on other aspects of the Christian way of life.

James Cardinal Gibbons, a powerful authority in Roman Catholicism, wrote in his book *The Faith of Our Fathers*: “The Cross is held in the highest reverence by Catholics, because it was the instrument of our Saviour’s crucifixion. It surmounts our churches and adorns our sanctuaries. We venerate it as the emblem of our salvation.” (Page 2) He further stated: “It is also a very ancient and pious practice for the faithful to make on their person the sign of the Cross, saying at the same time: ‘In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.’ Tertullian, who lived in the second century of the Christian era, Says: ‘In all our

actions when we come in or go out, when we dress, when we wash, at our meals, before retiring to sleep,... we form on our foreheads the sign of the cross. These practices are not commanded by a formal law of scripture; but tradition teaches them, custom confirms them, faith observes them.” - Pages 2-3, (Caps our).

The Catholic Encyclopedic Dictionary edited by Donald Attwater states that the cross is “the most widespread and venerated symbol of the Christian religion because upon a cross of wood our Lord died to redeem the world.” Generally, a cross is known to be a stake or post with another piece of wood across it such as the Latin Cross, Greek Cross, Tan Cross and the so called St. Andrew’s Cross.



Traditional View

The traditional view is that Christ was probably crucified on the Latin Cross, though some other Roman Catholic Scholars are more inclined to believe that it was the Tau. The actual cross on which Christ was crucified is said to have been found by Helena, mother of Constantine, in A. D. 326. Concerning this, the Catholic Voice Issue of the Emperor Constantine who had marched to victory under the sign of the Cross and had proclaimed for the first time the legality of the Christian Religion in the Roman Empire, was piously moved to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and seek there for the True Cross on which our saviour died. After much search and digging around the Hill of Calvary, three crosses were discovered. Which, if any, was the True Cross? Two of them were placed near a sick man, but nothing happened. Immediately, however, that the third cross was brought near to him he recovered from his illness and was at once restored to health. So, according to this pious tradition, was the True Cross discovered. The Cross was brought to Rome and the practice then arose of sending portions of it to important parts of the Church and to important personages.’ – Page 129

Historically, no story can be of more doubtful truth than that of the so-called “finding of the Cross”. The American Peoples Encyclopedia has this to say: “The tradition of ‘The invention of the Holy Cross’ by Helena conflicts with a still older tradition, according to which the true cross was found during the reign of Tiberius. An attempt during the nineteenth century to reconcile the two legends (by terming Helena’s discovery a ‘rediscovery’) was unconvincing to most scholars.” - Vol. 6, Page 557

If it is true that the actual cross of Christ was found by Helena, why are Roman Catholic theologians and scholars still uncertain as to whether the cross was the Latin or Tau type? The Catholic Encyclopedic Dictionary stated: “Christ’s cross was probably shaped as in Fig. 1 (Latin), though it may have been as in Fig. 6 (Tau).” (Page 129) And The Catholic Concise Encyclopedia stated: “The shape of the cross upon which Christ died is not certainly known, but it is determined that probably it was the T-Form with the upright (*crux immissa*) extending slightly above with room for an inscription (St. Irenaeus).” -Page 117

Viewed against the background of the Scriptures, this legend of the finding of the cross by Helena is of no significance at all to true Christians. It has only served as a devise through

which the devil has lured innocent, spiritually unlearned men into more idolatrous and sinful practices.

The Addis & Arnold's Catholic Dictionary states: "From the time that the cross on which Christ died was found by Helena, mother of Constantine, Christians esteemed it a great happiness to possess a particle of its sacred wood. We read in the 'Peregrinatio Etheriae' how on Good Friday at Jerusalem the bishop used to tell the people: 'Be ready here that you may be able to behold the holy wood of the Cross, each one of us believing that it will be profitable to his salvation...' 'A silver-gilt casket is brought in which is the wood of the holy Cross...**The custom is that the people come one by one and bowing down at the table, kiss the wood and pass on.**'" – Page 235 (Emphasis ours)

To bow down or genuflect to a particle of wood - be it the "Cross" of Christ or not - is contrary to God's commandment in Exodus 20:4-6 and is nothing short of idolatry. Neither Jesus Christ himself nor his apostles gave any intrinsic virtue, and importance was to be attached to it as such the apostles of Jesus Christ should have set the example for other Christians to follow. But it was Constantine, Emperor of Rome, who made the cross gain popularity in Christendom. He claimed to have seen a vision of the cross in the sky in 312 A.D. and it was his mother who purported to have seen the "true" cross in 326 A.D.

The Bible should be the basis for any Christian teaching or practice. Christians are warned against legends or fables such as that of "the invention the Holy Cross". St. Paul admonished: "But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself *rather* unto godliness."- 1 Timothy 4:7

Lots of things done in Christendom for which they have no scriptural authority are easily covered up in the name of tradition. This was the attitude of the typical Pharisees and Scribes that was condemned by Jesus Christ. He (Christ) told them: "But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? ...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 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." - Matthew 15:3-9

Now, turning to the Holy Bible, the texts often cited to show that Jesus Christ was crucified on a cross are with reference to the story of the crucifixion in the first four books of the New Testament. St. Matthew, relation how Christ was crucified, stated among other things: "And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify *him*. And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest *it* in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking *him*, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him." – Matthew 27:31, 32, 39-42

Similarly, the word cross is used in the other three books of the New Testament. There is no argument about this. But we must not lose sight of the fact that translators of the Holy Bible did occasionally manifest in their usages of words and expressions their personal prejudices, and bias for certain prevailing dogmas and customs of their times.

Even today, in our time, some translators still harbour prejudices and bias which make them alter, Bible texts to suite their traditional religious beliefs. An instance is The New Testament Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition. The Archbishop of Nepte and Apostolic Delegate to Great Britain - H.E. Cardinal - who wrote the FORWARD to the Catholic edition of the Revised Standard Version under discussion, said: "This Version of the New Testament has been so edited as to make it acceptable to Catholic readers. The Standard Bible Committee of the United States of America is to be thanked warmly for graciously giving consent to such alterations"!

Taken on the surface, the story in the Gospels would mean that Christ was crucified on a cross but getting below the surface, the weight of scriptural evidence is found to be in favour of the fact that he was hanged on a tree. In the light of this the word cross in the context is inappropriate.

It must be borne in mind that long before the Bible was translated into English the cross had been a traditional object of veneration by nominal Christianity believing that it was the instrument of punishment on which Christ died. Between the second and fourth centuries Tertullian and Constantine were among those who made much ado about the cross and contributed to its installation as a thing of special virtue that must be adored.

According to Benjamin Vincent in his Haydn's Dictionary of dates and Universal Information, "Crosses in churches and chambers were introduced about 431; and set up on steeples about 568." Judging the extent of popularity the cross had gained at the time translations of the Bible began, it is no surprise that translators were influenced by their bias in its usage. Moreover, it is on record that the simplest "form of cross" in ancient times was an upright stake, tree or piece of wood. The idea of a cross-beam fastened at right angles at the top of the stake was later developed.

E. Royston Pike, in his Encyclopedia of Religion and Religions, stated: "The simplest form of cross was an upright stake to which the criminal was bound... From this there were developed by the addition of a cross-piece three main shapes of cross proper..." - Page 115

And The New Bible Dictionary states that "the Greek word for 'cross' means primarily an upright stake or beam, and secondarily a stake used as an instrument for punishment and execution," - Page 279

Can anyone prove from the Bible that the stake on which Christ was crucified had a cross-beam? Or is there any scriptural authority to back the assumption that he was crucified on the Latin or Tau cross? It is all mere imagination and vain tradition.

In an attempt to justify the idea of a cross-piece fastened at right angles below the top of the upright stake, some have had reference to the statement that a title or inscription was written by Pilate and placed above the head of Jesus Christ. This, no doubt, is a weak argument. Is it the title that made or turned the tree or stake into a cross? The Bible shows clearly that the title was quite different from the stake which was improperly termed cross. As it is written: "And Pilate wrote a title, and put *it* on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS." - John 19:19

Eye-Witness

St. Peter who, too, was an eye-witness of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ stated categorically on more than two occasions that he (Christ) was hanged on a tree. He (Peter) and the other apostles, addressing the council of the Jews, declared: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand *to be* a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and *so is* also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him." - Acts 5:30-32

The testimony of all the apostles which is of great weight, and which in all honesty was made to those who killed Jesus Christ, makes no reference to cross as the instrument of Christ's execution. On a TREE, not Cross, they all attested to, he was hanged.

On the occasion when Peter the apostle went and spoke to Cornelius and his company as directed by the Lord, he (Peter) also said: "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly." (Acts 20:38-40) Tree in the context with reference to texts just cited does not mean a perennial plant with branches but a piece of wood, beam or stake. The Oxford Universal Dictionary defines tree, among other things, as "a piece of wood, a stem or branch of a tree, a pole, stake, post, beam, wooden bar, etc." It was the tree or piece of wood improperly or wrongly translated "cross" in the Gospels that one Simon was compelled to carry after Jesus Christ to Calvary.

Furthermore, St. Peter confirmed in his epistle that Christ died on the tree. He stated: "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: ...Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." - 1 Peter 2:21- 24

There is also the declaration of Paul the apostle that the body of Jesus was taken down from the tree, not cross. He said to the Jews: "Men *and* brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled *them* in condemning *him*. And though they found no cause of death *in him*, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took *him* down from the tree, and laid *him* in a sepulchre. But God raised him from the dead:" - Acts 13:26-30

Jewish Custom

The use of the cross as an instrument of execution of criminals was alien to the Jews. The Jewish custom based on the law of God was to hang accursed persons on trees. As it is written: "And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged *is* accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee *for* an inheritance." - Deuteronomy 21:22, 23

It was on the strength of this law Joshua, after hanging the king of Ai on a tree, commanded that his body should be taken down when the sun had set. He did a similar thing to other fine kings whom he hanged on trees. (Read Joshua 8:28, 29, 10:26-27) Pilate, in treating with the

Jews as regard the trial and execution of Jesus Christ, conceded to them their custom. - John 18:39, 19:31-33, 40

Jesus Christ was treated as an accursed person by the ungodly Jews and they executed him by hanging him on a tree in fulfillment of the Scriptures. But God has through this wicked act of the unbelieving Jews brought redemption to all believers. For this reason St. Paul wrote: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:" – Galatians 3:13

There is no scriptural authority to substantiate the view generally held that the cross is a Christian symbol. Jesus Christ did not give such indication, and his apostles never did. "We usually think of the cross as a symbol of Christ and Christianity, but actually, crosses were used long before Christ was killed on the cross. They have been found as far back as the Stone Age and long before the birth of Jesus they were used all throughout Europe, sometimes on medals and coins. The first time that the cross was used as a Christian symbol was during the reign of Constantine, an early Roman emperor." - Illustrated World Encyclopedia, Vol. 6, Page 1473

The Bible truth which cannot be successfully twisted by biased, misinformed people is that Jesus Christ was not crucified on a cross but was hanged on a tree as testified to by Peter the apostle and his colleagues who were eye-witnesses. – Acts 5:29-32, 10:38-40

WHAT IS FANATICISM?

The exercise of faith in the Lord's service calls for zeal but when zeal is excessive or goes beyond the bounds of reason contrary to the Scriptures, it loses spiritual value. A Christian is required to show that he has the Spirit of God by his utterances and deeds which should reflect Christ-like qualities.

Fanaticism is defined as violent, unreasoning or excessive enthusiasm especially in religious matters. And a person who is filled with such enthusiasm is a fanatic.

According to the Encyclopedia of Religion and Religions by E. Royston Pike, a fanatic was originally a person who was occupied in the service of a temple to the exclusion of all other interest. "In course of time the word assumed an opprobrious meaning, being applied to persons whose zeal in religious matters is apt to outrun not only their discretion but the bounds of human feeling - all with the idea of acting so as to be particularly pleasing to God." As it is in religion, so it is in politics and there are political fanatics all over the world today.

There is nothing wrong in seeking to please God. Such an attitude is most commendable. But in our effort to please Him care must be taken that His commandments are not overstepped. Many people had wrongly been called fanatics when, in fact, they had taken the right course of faith in God. Even today acts of firmness or constancy in the Christian faith are sometimes regarded by non-Christians and nominal Christians alike as having sprung from fanaticism.

For instance, in this country some Christians so-called subscribe to contributions of their villages or tribal unions that are meant for idolatrous purposes or for things unchristian. They may intend to erect a shrine, or build a house for the revival of an ancient god of agriculture

or of thunder or of war, or clean the town preparatory to a juj festival, or want to consult oracles in respect of an epidemic or a land case, and so forth.

But a true Christian, who definitely refuses to contribute in any way to such things because they are contrary to his faith, may be branded a fanatic or as unpatriotic. This, obviously, is an error of judgment. A Christian who abides by the tenets of his faith as is consistent with the Scriptures is not a fanatic. He deserves to be commended for his integrity and steadfastness.

Experience of Mordecai

There are such instances in the Holy Bible. The experience of Mordecai in the kingdom of Medo-Persia is a case in point. He was a Jewish exile who was employed in the palace of Ahasuerus the King. When Haman, one of the officers of the king, was promoted an order was issued to the effect that the servants of the king should bow down and do obeisance to him (Haman). While all the other servants did bow, Mordecai, being a Jew who worshipped the Almighty God, bluntly refused to do so.

His attitude was not borne out of pride but was due to his awareness of the law of God and his determination to obey Him rather than men. His fellow servants did not appreciate why he should flout his majesty's command. In spite of their daily challenges Mordecai remained firm, and so they reported the matter to Haman. When he saw that Mordecai was not bowing to him, he felt that his pride had been wounded and was filled with anger. Having learnt that Mordecai was a Jew he scorned to deal with him alone, and sought to destroy all the Jews throughout the whole kingdom. - Read Esther 3:1-6

In carrying out his plot he made a false and malicious misrepresentation of the Jews to the king. He painted them as a people who were disaffected to the government. He said: "There is a certain people, dispersed among the many peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom, who keep themselves apart. Their laws are different from those of every other people; they do not keep your majesty's laws. It does not befit your majesty to tolerate them. If it pleases your majesty, let an order be made in writing for their destruction; and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to your majesty's officials, to be deposited in the royal treasury." - Esther 3:8, 9, New English Bible

It is a matter of great lesson that it was not long before the day of retribution dawned upon Haman. The plot and mischief which he contrived for the annihilation of the people of God returned upon his own head. Thus he was hanged on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai!

And consequently, Mordecai having, proved to be a man of integrity and merit, became the favourite of the king. He was then elevated and he succeeded Haman in office, being made next in rank to the king.

A rash person who of course is without spiritual understanding would easily have passed sentence on Mordecai as having been guilty of fanaticism for flouting the king's law. Such was the opinion of his fellow servants and Haman who preferred to place God's law in a secondary position as below that of the king. But the truth is that he (Mordecai) was not a fanatic. He was just firm and steadfast in his faith in God to whom even the king was subject

- yet without the least intention to be disloyal to the government. And Mordecai was indeed vindicated because his cause was just.

Three Faithful Jews

Another instance that readily comes to mind is that of the three faithful Jews with the Babylonish names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who were administrative officers in the kingdom of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had set up a golden image of an enormous size to be dedicated. He summoned all his high-ranking officers - civil and military - from all provinces of his extensive dominion to attend the dedication. The royal command was that all peoples and nations of every language were to prostrate themselves and worship the golden image when they heard the sound of musical instruments. And whoever refused compliance with the order was immediately to be thrown into a blazing furnace.

All the peoples with the exception of the three Jews did obey the order. The Jews were mindful of the law of God prohibiting the worship of idols. (Exodus 20:3-5, Isaiah 2:8, 9) The fact that the image was of gold and was set up by a king does not make it different from any other idol. The law of God must take precedence over the laws of men. Under such circumstances, man for carnal considerations are prone to attribute fanaticism to those who on the ground of genuine faith refuse to toe the line of the majority – more so when the order are from the rulers. But the attitude of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego was far from being fanatical. It was but a demonstration of intrepid faith and courage which are attributes of the faithful.

When Nebuchadnezzar was informed that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego disobeyed the order he, as is characteristic of some men in authority, was rashly infuriated without consideration for the faith and conscience of the Jews who had all along proved to be loyal, quiet and helpful subjects. The three of them maintained their courageous refusal and stood firm on the ground of their faith despite the fury and threats of the king. (Read Daniel 3:1-18) As a result of this the three faithful Jews were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. God Almighty, the God of unequalled wonders, delivered them so miraculously that the king was amazed. They came out of the fire unhurt and without the slightest smell of fire. - Daniel 3:26, 27, Exodus 15:11, Psalm 136:1, 4

Nebuchadnezzar was compelled to swallow his pride and he blessed the Most High for sending His angels to deliver "...His servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God." He then declared: "Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in the province of Babylon." - Daniel 3:29-30

There is much to learn from the whole episode. Majority – in many cases - is not always right. (Exodus 23:2, Matthew 7:12-14) Though Nebuchadnezzar and his host of officers used their positions and power against the very few faithful worshippers of God; they were proved to be wrong.

Even, today, where an emperor, a king, president or government in any part of the world sets up any object for special respect or reverence and a Christian on the ground of his faith refuses to give such reverence to an inanimate object he may be branded a fanatic or as an unpatriotic fellow. And some may go to the extent of persecuting the innocent like as Nebuchadnezzar did.

However, it is a matter of gratitude to God that there are also many rulers in the world in our time who have high regard for religious freedom and toleration. They concede to citizens their right to practise their religions according to the dictate of their conscience with less a hindrance.

These points are made in order to correct the wrong notion whereby some mistake sincere acts of faith and integrity for fanaticism.

Acts of Fanaticism

In ecclesiastical history instances of acts of fanaticism abound. When Saul of Tarsus as a Pharisee practised Judaism, he was a fanatic. Without taking pains to get an insight into the basis of the Christian faith as professed by the apostles and other disciples of Jesus Christ, he subjected them to cruel persecutions. His excessive zeal for the traditions of his fathers always drove him into acts of violence against the Christians.

After his conversion to Christianity he regretted his pharisaical fanaticism and confessed his ignorance which made him obtain the mercy of God. He wrote: "You have heard what my manner of life was when I was still a practising Jew; how savagely I persecuted the church of God, and tried to destroy it, and how in the practice of our national religion I was outstripping many of my Jewish contemporaries in my boundless devotion to traditions for my ancestors..." - Galatians 1:13-16, New English Bible

And in his first epistle to Timothy, his beloved spiritual son in the gospel, he stated of himself as one "Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious:" He then added: "but I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief." - 1 Timothy 1:13

During the religious upheavals of the 16th century termed "The Reformation" fanaticism was deeply rooted in the actions of many who purported to be the advocates of Christianity. There can be no justification on the basis of the Scriptures for such actions which led to the destruction of lives and property, setting ablaze of copies of the Holy Bible and condemning of souls to the flames. Nowhere in the sacred Scriptures – since the advent of Jesus Christ, the Reformer – is it stated that God mandated human beings to take vengeance or take away the life of a person because of differences in doctrines or beliefs.

It is most unfortunate that up till today, incidents fraught with fanaticism are often in the news, both from among Christians so-called and those of other faiths. That people who profess Christianity should resort to the use of carnal weapons and indulge in brutal violence and bloodshed is very unfortunate indeed. This is Fanaticism at its worst. Whether the basis of the controversy is religious or political it stands condemned at the bar of reason, and above all from a scriptural standpoint.

In the days of old before the advent of Jesus Christ, physical or carnal weapons were employed by the people of God against their enemies. This is disallowed in the Christian Era.

The word of God described as the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17) is the weapon Christians are urged to employ in the battle against falsehood and all unrighteousness. And St. Paul stated: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." - 2 Corinthians 20:3-5

A Nigeria national magazine, SPEAR (August 1972) carried a comprehensive feature story on Northern Ireland described as "The Land of Terror and Murder" by Stephanie Richards. The war is between the Protestants and the Catholics. Concerning the situation there the writer put it thus:

"In the emotionally-charged atmosphere in Ulster, Logic and peace are as alien as goodwill and fair settlement... With this fierce hatred between the two religious groups it seems the country will never know peace for any length of time."

Stephanie Richards concluded:

"It would take a miracle indeed - either a Catholic or Protestant induced one - to penetrate the cancerous growth of bitterness - so that the past may be forgotten and these ardent representatives of Christianity could start practising what their respective doctrines teach."

Is this not a reproach on Christianity especially the denominations concerned? Until they remove this stigma from their faces and put their houses in order their priests anywhere are not competent to pose as ambassadors of Christ to teach men the love and fear of God. St. Paul Asked: "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? ...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..." - Romans 2:21-24

The other day, sometime in 1969, there were reports of the burning of the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. This was widely condemned by the GKS and other Christian groups as an ungodly act. And when feelings among Moslems were rising high in this country, the Daily Times reported Alhaji Dauda Adegbenro as warning "Moslems in Nigeria against making any policy statements on the burning of the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem UNTIL ALL THE FACTS WERE KNOWN". He was reported to have added: "We in Nigeria are too far away from the spot to know all the delicate issues involved." - Daily Times, September 9, 1969. (*Caps ours*) It was a timely and judicious advice acclaimed as having helped to check action that would have outrun reason.

This country loves peace and unity and so should not subscribe to any act that will promote religious or political rancour or conflict. Rather, we should be tolerant and should always pursue what will make for quietness and good neighbourliness. But fanatics who resort to physical violence and destructive acts should be punished according to the law.

There was also a news item (Daily Times, August 17, 1972) that a Moslem leader and teacher was alleged to have led some of his followers to damage the doors and windows of a building belonging to an Ogboni cult. If this was true then their action of physical violence was fanaticism. But there would have been nothing wrong if the Moslem preacher had employed the authority of the Koran as it is, like the Holy Bible, against secret societies in criticizing and denouncing Ogbonism as a warning to the public, particularly the Moslems.

In February this year 40 pupils as reported by the Daily Times (Feb. 12, 1973) were injured when a group of religious adherents entered into Saint Joseph Catholic School, Kaduna, to seek retaliation. Doors and windows of the school were alleged to have been shattered, and a car belonging to a priest destroyed. The children of the Catholic faith were reported to have disturbed the devotion of the other group by pouring sand on worshippers and deliberately making horrible noise to distract their attention.

Such fanaticism as was manifested in the act of the Catholic children was unchristian and therefore devilish and must be strongly discouraged. Similarly, the Moslem youths whose "2 p.m. Jumat prayers" were disturbed, and whose anger was justified, were wrong for acting ungodly in damaging "doors and windows of the school" of their offenders and in destroying "a car belonging to a Reverend Father who is in charge of the school". It is universally known that two wrongs do not make a right.

With regard to the incident the President of God's Kingdom Society, Brother E. T. Otomewo, sent a telegram dated February 14, 1973, to the Catholic Bishop in Kaduna as follows:

"HIS LORDSHIP THE ROMAN CATHOLIC BISHOP KADUNA X I REFER TO NEWS ITEM DAILY TIMES TWELFTH INSTANT PAGE THREE REPORTING VENGEANCE TAKEN ON YOUR SAINT JOSEPH SCHOOL CHILDREN KADUNA BY CHILDREN OF ANOTHER RELIGIOUS GROUP FOR DESTURBING THEIR DEVOTION X IF PUBLICATION IS TRUE LET US PRAY GOD ALMIGHTY NOT ALLOW BIGUTS TURN NIGERIA INTO WHAT WE READ ABOUT NORTHERN IRELAND TODAY X IT IS VERY UNCHRISTIAN FOR YOUR SCHOOL CHILDREN TO ACT IN THE UNRULY WAY REPORTED X CHRISTIANITY AS YOU KNOW IS OPPOSED TO FANATICISM AND VIOLENCE BUT ADVOCATES TOLERANCE GOOD NEIGHBOURLINESS AND PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE AT THIS STAGE I REMIND YOUR LORDSHIP OF ROMANS CHAPTER TWELVE VERSES SEVENTEEN TO NINETEEN AND VERSE TWENTYONE X I HOPE YOUR LORDSHIP WILL THEREFORE TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION TO RECTIFY THE SITUATION AND PROMOTE GOOD NEIGHBOURLINESS --- OTOMEWO PRESIDENT GKS."

Wheat and Tares

An understanding of the parable of Jesus Christ concerning the good seed and the tares is enough to inspire religious toleration and co-existence of all religious groups - good or bad, true or false.

The tares were planted among the wheat by an enemy. And when the servants of the master attempted to remove the tares, he objected saying, "...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." - Read Matthew 13:24-30

In interpreting the parable Christ said that the good seeds were the children of God's Kingdom; the tares were the children of Satan; the harvest was the end of the world; and the reapers were the angels. He added: "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; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall

the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Read Matthew 13:37-43

In the light of the foregoing passage anyone who expresses his religious belief unreasonably by resorting to violence against others is guilty of fanaticism. God through His angels will take steps soon in this our age to deal with false religionists. It will be wrong there fore for any person to go before God. No human is mandated by God to take vengeance on people.

What is more, St. Paul admonished “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” - Romans 12:19, Read also Proverbs 24:29.

WHAT IS THE PLACE OF THE CROSS IN CHRISTIANITY?

Neither Jesus Christ nor his apostles attached importance to the literal cross. When ever they employed the word ‘cross’ for the edification of the believers it was in the figurative sense according to the Scriptures.

There is no one who has a good knowledge of the Bible that will not have a feeling of disgust at the superstitions and unnecessary ceremonies with which the cross has been associated.

In the Roman calendar there are two feasts in respect of the cross. The Finding of the Cross by Helena, mother of Constantine, is a feast kept on May 3, and The Exaltation of the Cross is another feast celebrated on September 14, in memory of the so-called vision of Constantine in A.D. 312. These inventions which are of no scriptural significance are still observed up till today by certain people.

Apart from the Latin cross which is erroneously believed to be the traditional lone on which Christ is said to have died, a variety of crosses have been introduced. According to the Catholic encyclopedic Dictionary, there are (1) Altar Crossbearing the image of Christ which must be on every altar during mass between and in line with the candlesticks. (2) Patriarchal Cross with two cross-bars. (3) Papal Cross with three cross-bars that is carried before the pope. (4) Processional Crosswhich has the figure of Jesus mounted on a shaft of metal or wood and which is carried aloft at the head of all processions with the figure turned forward, and accompanied on either hand by a priest’s assistant with a candle. At the burial of an infant the figure is detached from the shaft and carried so.

Others are Archiepiscopal Crosswhich is similar to a processional cross and is borne before an archbishop; Hand Cross used by some bishops in giving blessing; and the Pectorial crosscontaining relics, suspended round the neck by a chain or cord. And as a part of their religious habit the cross is worn by nuns.

Can anybody show from the Holy Bible the need for these ceremonies and rites associated with a variety of crosses? Of what relevance are they to Christian worship and salvation as taught and exemplified by Jesus Christ and his apostles?

There is also a system of devotion known as “The Station of the Cross” or “The Way of the Cross”. It consists of prayers and meditations on 14 occurrences so-called experienced by Christ on his way to the crucifixion. For The Stations there must be 14 crosses. The devotion is conducted either by the worshipper personally, making the way from one cross to another

and saying prayers, or by having the officiating priest move from cross to cross while the worshippers make the responses. Did Jesus Christ command his disciples to perform the ceremony of “The way of the Cross”? Did any of his apostles do it? Or was there a prophecy that it should be done at later date after the death of the apostles of Christ? The correct answer to all these are certainly in the negative.

One of the well-known learned defenders of the Roman Catholic Faith is John A O’Brien. With regard to “The Way of the Cross”, he, in his work *The Faith of Millions*, stands: “Some of the scenes depicted in the stations are contained in the Gospels; there are others which are not mentioned in the Scripture but which have come down to us through an oral tradition from the first century. **Thus there is no scriptural authority for the three falls of Christ under the Cross, nor for the touching story of Veronical wiping the face of Jesus.**” - Page 475 (Emphasis ours)

But the point is why should these additions of the false stories of the fall of Jesus and of Veronica be made at all when there is no scriptural authority for them? In Proverbs 30:5-6 it is written: “Every word of God is pure... Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.” See also Revelation 22:18, 19

The attitude of holding to the traditions of men contrary to the Scriptures is of the Scribes and Pharisees. And 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 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.” (Matthew 15:6-9) No one, however privileged he may be, has the right to teach what is contrary to the Bible. 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...” - Galatians 1:8, 9

Long before the advent of Jesus Christ the cross had been in use among ancient pagans as an instrument for the punishment of criminals. And so at the time of Christ the use of the word “cross” in a figure of speech to mean self-denial or suffering had come into vogue. Thus Jesus Christ, long before his crucifixion, said to his disciples: “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

Some people have cited this text to bolster up their reason for wearing a cross around their necks and so on. But the text does not authorize anyone to bear or wear the “cross” of Christ. The disciple is asked to take his own cross. Not that of Christ. And if anyone wishes to bear the cross of Christ let him carry a heavy beam or piece of wood like Simon and sweat himself so that he may show how faithful he is to Christ. Not when he is well dressed only to wear a fashionable cross of gold or silver as an ornament.

However, the word “cross” in the text was used figuratively by Jesus Christ. He meant that whoever would be a worthy disciple should be prepared to deny himself in order to meet his demands. He further said: “...If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24 See also Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23) Similarly, St. Paul used the word “cross” to mean the suffering of Jesus Christ. He said: “For Christ sent

me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel; not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.” – 1 Corinthians 1:17

It was also with reference to the suffering of Christ St. Paul said, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” – Galatians 6:14

The instrument used by the enemies of truth and righteousness for the crucifixion of Christ was not of any importance to his disciples. What is of vital significance to Christians is his suffering and death by which he showed an example of faithfulness and loyalty to the Heavenly father and taught the lesson of sacrifice inspired by love for the salvation of mankind. Said St. Peter: “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.”
- 1 Peter 2:21-24

True Christians are concerned with the cross of Christ, not as an instrumental ornament to be displayed or carried about, but in the sense that it is rewarding, edifying to suffer for Christ’s sake. (Acts 5:32-42, Philippians 1:28-29) A spiritual understanding of this builds up faith and other virtues in a true Christian by which he through God’s grace and power, is able to stand against satan’s temptations and share in the sufferings of Christ without regret.

St. Peter admonished: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” – 1 Peter 4:12, 13

The truth of the matter has been made clear enough from the Scriptures in the interest of all lovers of truth and righteousness. It is only when men abide in the doctrines of Christ according to the Bible, they can claim to be the children of light; otherwise they, like the Scribes and Pharisees, who hold to traditions instead of the facts and truth of scripture worship in vain as Jesus Christ clearly stated in the Bible. - Matthew 15:1-14

WHY DO MEN LOVE DARKNESS RATHER THAN LIGHT?

Though all men have the knowledge of good and evil, those who find it much easier to be inclined to evil are by far in the majority. This, obviously, is as a result of the sinful nature of man. Notwithstanding, those to whom opportunity is given to see divine light so as to be saved by God but fail to make use of or identify themselves with the light and prefer to remain in darkness, have no excuse!

According to the Scriptures darkness is used as a spiritual term or in a figure of speech to mean ignorance, error or evil generally. And light symbolizes knowledge or understanding, truth and righteousness.

In this evil world there are two ways before all men: the way of light and the way of darkness. The former belongs to God Almighty and is identified with truth and righteousness; but the latter is that of Satan the devil and its marks are falsehood and wickedness. So while the good are called the children of light, the wicked are known as the children of darkness.

King Solomon stated: "The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble." - Proverbs 4:19

Spiritual bondage

For the fact that men are born in sin the devil takes advantage of their frailty or weakness and holds them in spiritual darkness. Under that state men are prone to deny the existence of their very Creator, the Most High, Who dwells in the heaven of heavens; worship idols, the works of their own hands; offer sacrifices to the dead who are helpless and have returned to their dust; practise witchcraft, sorcery and magic; commit murder, adultery and fornication; indulge in stealing, lying, drunkenness, bribery and other evils; and are inclined to be filled with malice, envy, hatred and so forth.

This is the way Satan, the prince of demons or evil spirits, holds people in spiritual bondage and blindness. His agents and agencies are manifold. Among his tools are false prophets who see visions of devils and teach for doctrines the commandments of men and the imagination of their own hearts.

It is to the end that the children of God who are in Satan's captivity may be set free and given the light of life that Jesus Christ at the command of the Almighty Father came to this world. This is clearly shown in the prophecy concerning Christ's mission on earth, which prophecy he himself read thus: "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 brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord." - Luke 4:18, 19

The gospel which is the word of God - the Truth - brought by Jesus Christ gives knowledge and understanding. It carries with it spiritual force that makes those who are in spiritual darkness or are blind at the instance of Satan to regain their sight and to be delivered from the devil's bondage. Jesus himself 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. If the son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." - John 8:31-32, 36

Jesus Christ is the truth personified. (John 14:6). He is the light, And 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

Today, many people find it hard to follow Jesus Christ - the Light - because of their worldliness. They want to get rich quick and be socially popular and so they steal, take bribes, commit frauds and oppress the poor. They want to "enjoy" life and this by their own definition means women and drinks with result that they choose night clubs in preference to the assemblies of God.

Even among those who claim to be Christians there are many who are still in darkness. Like the Pharisees they pose to be holy but they stick to false doctrines and traditions of men

contrary to the Scriptures. To them what Christ told the Pharisees still applies. As it is written: “And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And *some* of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.” - John 9:39-41

Men are required by God to identify themselves with the light - the truth - so that they may be saved. But it is a pity that many people are taking the wrong course. In John 3:17-19. It is written: “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

Jesus Christ, in this text, has made it known that the reason why people prefer darkness to light is that their deeds are evil. And he added: “For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. 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

Some people often confess that God’s Kingdom Society (GKS) is preaching the truth but it is their opinion that her rules are rigid and there is “too much” discipline. But can anyone cite an instance of a rule in the GKS which is not in harmony with the Scriptures? Said St. Paul: “We all know that the law is an excellent thing, provided we treat it as law, recognizing that it is not aimed at good citizens, but at the lawless and unruly, the impious and sinful, the irreligious and worldly; at parricides and matricides, murderers and fornicators, perverts, kidnappers, liars, perjurers - in fact all whose behaviour flouts the wholesome teaching which conforms with the gospel entrusted to me, the gospel which tells of the glory of God in His eternal felicity.” - 1 Timothy 1:8-11 New English Bible

As a matter of fact those who like to practise Christianity loosely cannot find the GKS a convenient place for them to hibernate. But sincere worshippers or sinners with contrite spirit who have no pleasure in iniquity are quite happy with the faith.

Demands of Christ

A converted Christian must not entangle himself with the works of darkness but should endeavour to meet the demands of Christ. St. Paul admonished the believers at Ephesus: “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now *are ye* light in the Lord: walk as children of light: And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.” - Ephesians 5:8, 11-12

And St. Paul in his epistle to the Romans stated: “The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to *fulfil* the lusts *thereof*.” - Romans 13:12-14

Another thing that makes some people reluctant or unable to follow the truth is their prominent positions in certain associations and their love for worldly praise and ungodly wealth. Such attitude was shown by some of the rulers in the days of Christ on earth. As it is

written: “Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” (John 12:42, 43) But Jesus Christ said: “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.” - Verse 46

Everyone is to choose for himself between light and darkness. No one can be in the light and at the same time be in darkness. There is no agreement between the two. “For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial (devil)?...” asked St. Paul Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

In the light of the foregoing it is therefore wrong for any Christian who is a disciple indeed to associate himself with any secret cult or have anything to do with idolatry or to have fellowship with false prophets. Chieftaincy titles associated with pagan rites must be denounced by any faithful Christian who wants his loyalty to God and Christ to remain undivided.

John the apostle wrote: “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” - 1 John 1:5-7

What is required of those whose evil deeds scare away from the light of salvation is **repentance** so that they may be partakers of the blessings of Jesus Christ. But to continue to have fellowship with the works of darkness will in the end be fatal. - Romans 1: 21- 25, 28-32

WILL THIEVES ENTER GOD`S KINGDOM?

A person who through evil influence and who for want of the knowledge of God is guilty of theft, may obtain the mercy of God if he proves to be genuinely repentant. But for a robber who scorns God`s warning or who is unrepentant there is NO forgiveness in this world or in that which is to come. Therefore, any thief who has the opportunity to repent and serve God but fails to do so, will **CERTAINLY NOT BE SAVED IN GOD`S KINGDOM.**

Theft is defined as the taking and carrying away of the property of another person without his consent and with intent to deprive the owner of the use and benefit of it.

Ancient records are replete with incidents of theft, and so it is a crime that dates from antiquity. But with the increase of knowledge in this our age and the invention of lethal weapons, which science and technology have made available even to lunatics, the crime of stealing has assumed more dangerous dimensions.

There are thieves in every country, and they always constitute a menace to the happiness and peace of law-abiding people in any community. There had been cases of stealing, burglary or robbery in this country as in other parts of the world in time past but of late they have been so rampant and the methods and weapons employed by thieves so sophisticated that the people

are really frightened. It is fear and excitement that engendered public outcry for the execution of armed robbers in this country.

Decree

As the robbers continued to intensify their anti-social, ungodly activities, it became necessary that the Federal Military Government should take stern measures to stem the tide of robbery. The Robbery and Fire-arms (Special Provisions) Decree was promulgated in 1970, stipulating that any person found guilty of armed robbery as defined under the Decree could be executed in public. Since then executions of armed robbers have been taking place in different parts of the country.

However, for some time now the execution of armed robbers has become a subject about which different opinions have been expressed. There are those who are in favour of its continuation but some others take the opposite view. On our part we are concerned with religious aspect of the matter. We are therefore treating this subject purely against the background of the Holy Scriptures.

We have noticed that on most occasions, if not all, when armed robbers are to face the firing squads certain clergymen, as reported, do perform certain rites during which they bless the robbers. Recently the Daily Times (August 9, 1971) reported that at Port Harcourt, as a condemned robber stood a few moments from execution, a clergyman offers prayers for forgiveness of confessed sins. "Make your peace with God now, the Pastor gently urged."

This is just an act of sanctimoniousness the propriety and spiritual merits of which, from a scriptural point of view, is open to question. Some of the robbers and even some other people may have the wrong notion that such clerical prayers or blessings would make the robbers enter the Kingdom of God.

On Saturday July 17, 1971, the execution of two robbers as reported by the SundaySketch (July 18, 1971) took place at Ibadan, capital of Western State. One of them was alleged to have told his fellow robber, "If we meet in heaven it will be a better world, and if we come to this world again, we shall know how to play our cards."

That the robber made the utterance out of ignorance there is no doubt. Heaven is not a place for thieves, not even the earth in God's Kingdom! Every thief should therefore take warning from this. The utmost he can do in his own interest if he wants the mercy of God is to desist forthwith out of real contrition from stealing otherwise his deathbed repentance or prayer will be of no avail.

Some people make reference to one of the malefactors who were crucified with Jesus as a "good" thief and say that he was taken to heaven. The facts are recorded at Luke 23:39-43. We agree that thief unlike his fellow robber was penitent and Christ's utterance shows the extent of grace bestowed on him which he shall enjoy but on Resurrection Day in God's Kingdom on earth. (Matthew 5:5; 6: 9, 10) And so to say that he is in heaven is false being unscriptural. We shall go into details when next we take this as a subject in a subsequent issue of the Advocate.

The Law

As long ago as the days of Moses the prophet in Israel, God Almighty gave in plain language this law: "THOU SHALT NOT STEAL" (Exodus 20:15; Leviticus 19:10) The law is against

any kind of stealing, pilfering, picking of pocket, fraud, embezzlement, burglary, shoplifting, highway robbery and so on.

Jesus Christ, during his earthly ministry confirmed the law. It is therefore binding on Christians. Someone came up to him and asked: "What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" He replied: "But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." "Which?" the man further asked, Jesus then said: "Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, THOU SHALT NOT STEAL..." - Read Matthew 19:16-19

Jesus himself said that the laws of God hang on love - the love of God and that of one's neighbour. (Matthew 22:35-40) So stealing is a clear manifestation of lack of love. St. Paul said: "For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." - Romans 13:9, 10

In the days of old certain principles were set out to guide the judges in Israel in dealing with cases of theft. Sometimes thieves were made to restore double, fourfold or fivefold what they stole. If a thief was detected in the night endeavouring forcibly to break into a house and, in repelling his assault he was killed there was no case of murder; but if the thief was slain after sunrise the killer was punishable because it would have been possible for the robber to make full restitution. Thus it is written: "If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep; he shall restore double." - Exodus 22:1-4

The penalty for a person found guilty of stealing his fellow-man and trading on him was death. - Deuteronomy 24:7

Curse

There is no blessing whatsoever in stealing. Whatever wealth anyone acquires through robbery is under curse. Concerning robbers it is written: "For they know not to do right, saith the LORD, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; An adversary there shall be even round about the land; and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be spoiled." - Amos 3:10, 11

As regards the curse of thieves and false swearers, Zechariah the prophet recorded a message he received from God thus: "Then said He unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth shall be put off as on this side according to it; and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it. I will bring it forth, saith the LORD of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name, and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof." - Zechariah 5:3, 4

Paul the apostle of Jesus Christ stated categorically that no thief will inherit the Kingdom of God. He wrote: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of

themselves with mankind (homosexuals), nor THIEVES, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God.” (1Corinthians 6:9, 10) It can be clearly seen here that it is not only unrepentant thieves that are cursed but adulterers, drunkards, homosexuals are also cursed. But a thief like any other sinner can repent as to obtain the mercy of God and lead a clean life. And so St. Paul having seen that in some Corinthian Christians added: “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” - Verse11

A Passionate Appeal to Robbers

We therefore appeal most passionately to all thieves in this country and elsewhere to refrain from this dirty and deadly game of stealing or robbery - more so with violence. God and Jesus Christ are against you. The Government and all men of goodwill are against you. You also know that you are doing an evil work - that you are wicked and your hearts condemn you - and that is why you hide not wanting to be caught. John the apostle stated: “For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemns us not, then have we confidence toward God.” - 1 John 3:20, 21

You might have been pushed into this obnoxious crime of robbery by circumstances of hardship or unemployment; may be you have lust for riches - you want to be like Chief A or Mr. B who is in control of money and you consider stealing to be a short cut to your goal of carnal desires; or you may be a victim of evil communication through bad company. (1 Corinthians 15:33) Which ever circumstance is your case, satan the devil is your inspirer leading you to certain destruction. Whoever is a child of God must resist such temptation and He will bless him. - James 4:7-10; 1 Peter 4:8-10

We take this opportunity to recall the words of a certain young man said to be a product of a Government College, who was executed publicly in the East Central State as reported in the Nigeria Observer of July 21, 1970. The robber was quoted as saying, “I was induced to commit these crimes by bad company and dishonest friends, including a woman. Now I have fallen a victim because I failed to honour the words of my parents. Other boys of my age, below and above, should get themselves warned.”

Thieves, please take note of this: God loves you and will not want you to fall into the trap of satan and his agents who would always entice you with carnal things. And so God through King Solomon gives this wise candid advice: “My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: cast in thy lot among us; let us; all have one purse: My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: for their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood... So are the way of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof.” - Proverbs 1:10-19

If you are stubborn and will refuse to pay heed to this godly admonition you will have yourself to blame because you stand to lose even your life in the end. The Bible states: “The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them; because they refuse to do judgment.” (Proverbs 21:7) Again King Solomon said: “Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul: he heareth cursing, and bewrayeth it not.” - Proverbs 29:24

If you postpone your repentance to tomorrow you may die before then – and that without mercy. It may be your aim not to continue in the crime throughout your life-time but to stop, maybe, after you may have acquired some amount of “wealth” you have set as your target. We assure you that you are being incensed by satan to continue in sin and be the enemy of God and men to your own hurt. You may not live to enjoy the “wealth” you are craving for and so in the long run you gain nothing, **RATHER YOU LOSE EVERY THING!**

Lesson

You have a lesson to learn from the experience of a certain robber who was executed at Ibadan on July 17, 1971. The Daily Sketch (July 19, 1971) reported that the robber had saved £5,000 two months before the time he committed the crime for which he died. The robber was quoted as saying. “I have now been able to save up to £5,000 out of the £10,000 I need before I give up this business.” You can see how the very devil has made a fool of him, and he died without a good name. Can he make use of the ill-gotten savings of £5,000 now that he is gone into the grave? Certainly not.

There is no reason why anyone should continue in this business of robbery. You may muster devilish courage as to be prepared to die. Your parents, your wives, children or loving friends would not want to lose you - no, not with the stigma of robbery! You must think on these things and on the fact that even after your death the reproach remains in your family. And St. Peter admonished: “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a THIEF, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody....” 1 Peter 4:15

God’s Judgment

Moreover, the execution is not the end. That is the punishment of the Government of the land. More serious is God’s judgment and punishment you will still face at the resurrection. Said St. Paul: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” - 2 Corinthians 5:10

In Daniel 12:2, 3, it is written: “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.” And Jesus Christ declared: “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 (like stealing), unto the resurrection of damnation.” (John 5:28, 29) Before such condemnation there will be judgment. – Hebrews 9:27

If you refuse to take warning and die as a robber shame and contempt will be your lot. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the living God.” “For our God is a consuming fire.” - Hebrews 10:31; 12:29

Robbers, what then does God require of you? **IT IS REPENTANCE NOW!** God has said: “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die...” (Ezekiel 33:11) And the prophet Isaiah stated: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” – Isaiah 55:7

We have done our duty and may it please God that His word herein contained may sink into the hearts of men so as to make sinners repent.

WOMEN CHARACTERS OF THE BIBLE (3) - HANNAH

The righteous are never forsaken. Provided their confidence in the Almighty God remains unshaken their desires are granted. This was vividly illustrated in the story of Hannah whose sorrow and reproach was replaced with boundless joy and honour by the Lord. And so in continuation of the serial on “Women Characters of the Bible” (vide issues Nos. 7 and 8) Hannah is our choice in this issue.

HANNAH

Hannah was one of the two wives of Elkanah. The name of his other wife was Peninnah. Though Hannah was barren she was the favourite of their husband. But Peninnah had children. - 1 Samuel 1:1-2

By reason of Elkanah’s love for Hannah he always made her portion better than that of Peninnah at the time of offering year by year. And because Hannah had no child she was reproached and provoked so much that she wept and refused to eat. Then Elkanah said to her: “Hannah, why weepest thou? And why eatest thou not? And why is thy heart grieved? Am not I better to thee than ten sons?” - 1 Samuel 1:4-8

Hannah knew and believed that it was God Almighty who could give her the desire of her heart and make her happy. She needed a child. So she went into the temple, and in the bitterness of her soul prayed soberly to the Lord. She vowed and said: “...O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of Thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget. Thine handmaid, but wilt give unto Thine hand maid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.” -1 Samuel 1:9-11

As she continued to pray silently in her heart, Eli the priest who sat beside the doorpost of the temple observed that her lips moved but her voice was not heard. He thought she was drunk, and said to her: “How long wilt thou be drunken? Put away thy wine from thee.” But Hannah answered: “No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine hand maid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.” - 1 Samuel 1: 12-16

The priest, no doubt, was impressed by the godly attitude and intelligent answer of Hannah. Despite the fact that she was rebuked for what she was not guilty of she showed a humble spirit and wisdom. Eli, the priest, then asked her to go in peace and prayed that God should grant her request. (1 Samuel 1:17) Hannah had faith in God as was manifest in her devotion. After she had prayed and received the blessing of the priest she went home and did eat, and her countenance was no longer sad. In God’s due time Hannah’s prayer was answered. She conceived and bore a son whom she called Samuel meaning, “Asked of God”. - 1 Samuel 1:19-20

After she had weaned the child she brought him with offerings to Eli, the priest, and reminded him that she was the woman who stood in the temple praying in his presence. She

said further: “For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I ask of Him: therefore also I have lent him to the Lord.” - 1 Samuel 1:24-28

So it was that Hannah fulfilled her vow by giving her child Samuel to God as devoted. Samuel grew and became one of the great prophets of God in the days of old.

It was to the credit of Hannah that in her hour of need and temptation she did not resort to idols, witches or wizards for aid as nominal faithless worshippers do but rather turned to the Most High in prayer and was steadfast in her faith. The life of holiness which Samuel led was clear evidence that he was really a gift from God Almighty to his parents.

Impatience and lack of faith are responsible for the backsliding of many women who profess to be Christians today. It pays to fear God and to wait on Him. (Psalm 37:4-7) There is much to learn from the experience of Hannah. She proved to be a godly and faithful woman, and her heart’s desire was granted by the Lord. Yes, Jesus Christ said: “And all things, what so ever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” –Matthew 21:22

WOMEN CHARACTERS OF THE BIBLE (2)– RAHAB

Rahab was a woman of Jericho and she was a harlot. The story of how she got God’s favour through faith and, consequently; saved her father’s household from trouble is one of the great lessons.

After the death of Moses the prophet, God commanded Joshua to lead the children of Israel to the land of Canaan. Before they started to go to Jordan, Joshua sent two men to spy out the city of Jericho. The two men came to Jericho and lodged in the house of Rahab. (Joshua 2:1) The house where she lived was beside the wall of the city. - Joshua 2:15

When the king of Jericho heard that two men of Israel came to search the land, he sent to Rahab to bring them out. She hid the men in the roof of her house and said that two men truly came to her but she did not know from where they came. She said further that when the gate of the city was to be closed, at dusk; they went out but where they went she did not know. She urged the men of the city to pursue them quickly on the way to Jordan in that they would overtake them. (Joshua 2:3-5.) So the men pursued them, as she advised, and the gate was shut.

Rahab then came up to the spies of Israel on the roof of her house and said: “I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side of Jordan. Sihon and Og whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.” - Joshua 2:8-11

She begged the spies to swear by the LORD that as she had dealt kindly with them, they in turn would deal kindly with her father’s house, and save alive her father and mother, her brothers and sisters, and all who belonged to them. The men told her that if she did not reveal

their mission then they would deal kindly and faithfully with her when God would give the land to Israel. – Joshua 2:12-14

Then Rahab let them down over the wall by a rope through the window and advised them to go unto the hills and hide there three days until the pursuers of Jericho had returned; then afterward they could go on their way.

The spies assured her that they would keep their oath. They said that when Israel would come into the land she should hang out the very rope in her window and gather into her house her father and mother and brother and all her father's household. They said to Rahab: "And it shall be, that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we will be guiltless: and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand be upon him." Rahab answered: "According unto your words, so be it." – Joshua 2:15-21

After the spies had gone away Rahab bound the scarlet rope in her window through which she let them down.

The time came that Joshua led the children of Israel to capture Jericho. The whole city was burnt down but Rahab and all in her father's household were spared according to the oath of the spies because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. - Joshua 6:20-25

Faith

The most impressive thing about Rahab was her faith in the almightiness of Jehovah, the God of Israel and of all the world (Psalm 89:11), which made her take sides with the Israelites. It is not enough for anyone to claim to have faith in God; what is important is the work of righteousness by which the claim can be justified. Thus James the apostle wrote concerning Rahab, to wit: "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." - James 2:20, 24-26

It must be pointed out clearly that prostitution is a sin (Leviticus 19:29, Deuteronomy 23:17, 18, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11) but women who indulge in that life of sin can repent and obtain the mercy of God as Rahab did. Prostitutes who repent of their sins and serve God are better than hypocrites. And Christ told the Pharisees: "...Verily I say unto you. That the publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you..." - Matthew 21:31

Though Rahab was originally a woman of a mean character, her faith in God brought her to fame for which she was greatly rewarded. She became one of the faithful women of old who will inherit God's Kingdom. St. Paul said. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, After they were compassed about seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace." - Hebrews 11:30, 31

And so the emphasis from the good example of Rahab is on faith and good works.

WOMEN CHARACTERS OF THE BIBLE - SARAH

Under divine inspiration King Solomon stated that the price or worth of a virtuous woman is far above jewels, and that her husband safely trusts in her. “She openeth her mouth with wisdom (God’s wisdom), and in her tongue is the law of kindness.” - Proverbs 31:10-11, 26

Wisdom is an attribute that goes not without knowledge. Undoubtedly, lack of spiritual knowledge is a major factor responsible for the pit falls or errors into which not a few women have fallen. The female Christians of today have much to learn from the experiences and lives of godly women of old in the Holy Bible for their spiritual development in the knowledge of salvation and in holiness.

In order therefore to excite the interest of women in particular in the study of the Scriptures and help their faith in the Lord we are publishing a series of sermons written in a plain language on some women characters of the Bible beginning with Sarah the wife of faithful Abraham.

WHO WAS SARAH?

Sarah was the wife of Abraham. She was formerly known as Sarai but when God promised to bless her and make her “a mother of nations”, He changed her name to Sarah, which means a “princess”. - Genesis 17:15,16

She was a godly woman who proved to be a very good example for all other women. Sarah was the mother of the Jewish nation. As a wife she was obedient and submissive to her husband. When Abraham went with her to Egypt because of hunger, he feared that Pharaoh might kill him and take her to wife being a good-looking woman. So he advised Sarah beforehand that she should say that he was her brother so that the Egyptians might not kill him. Truly, as soon as they arrived in Egypt the fame of Sarah’s beauty reached Pharaoh and she was taken to his house with intent to marry her. God was angry and He punished Pharaoh and his household with plagues, and consequently, Sarah was returned untouched or undefiled and without blemish to Abraham, her husband. Read Genesis 12:10-20

A similar incident happened again when Abraham and Sarah went to Gerar according to Genesis 20:1-18. For the fact that Sarah was a fair woman Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent and took her. But when he had not gone near her or demanded sexual intercourse of her, God warned him in a dream that he would die because the woman he had taken was another man’s wife.

King Abimelech pleaded innocence and explained that Abraham had told him she was his sister and she confirmed that he (Abraham) was her brother. The king said he had acted with integrity. God agreed that he did it with a clear conscience but added: “I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her.” He warned him to send the woman back to her husband who, being prophet, would intercede for him so that he might not die.

So the king rose early in the morning and told his servants the whole story in regard to God’s reaction and they were afraid. He also called Abraham and queried as to why he treated him so. Abraham then declared: “...Because I thought, Surely the fear of God *is* not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake. 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.” - Verses 11, 12

The discretion of Abraham made him not to die before his time and God helped him. Yes, the Bible says, "Discretion shall preserve thee." (Proverbs 2:10, 11) Again it should be appreciated that what Abraham said was true. Sarah was truly his sister; and brothers do marry their sisters in those days when God had not, by law, forbidden incest. The law against such marriages was later enacted by God at the time of Moses the prophet, according to Leviticus chapter 18.

Sarah was restored pure to her husband. There is no doubt that because the ways of Abraham and Sarah were pleasing to God, He protected her from being corrupted.

These events show that Sarah was a woman who feared God and who was faithful and loyal to her husband. She was not attracted by the riches and worldly glories of the Pharaoh of Egypt or King Abimelech of Gerar to forsake her husband.

St. Peter admonished Christian women to be chaste and to serve God with fear and meekness. He added that it was so the holy women of old trusted in God and subjected themselves to their own husbands. "Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye (women) are, as long as ye do well..." -1 Peter 3:1-6

When Sarah saw that she had no child she suggested to her husband to marry her own handmaid by name, Hagar, and said that it might be they would have children through her. Abraham agreed and married Hagar the Egyptian girl (Genesis 16:1-3) This shows that Sarah had a godly mind for her husband and was not selfish as some women are.

When Hagar was conceived she became proud and she despised Sarah her mistress. Sarah did not take the law into her hands to deal hard with her. She complained to her husband and got his permission before she dealt hard with Hagar. Instead of Hagar to humble herself to Sarah she ran away but the angel of God met her by a spring of water in the wilderness on the way to Shur and said to her: "Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands." (Genesis 16:4-9) This shows that Sarah was an orderly woman who had high regard for her husband and that her action against Hagar was approved of God.

Sarah was a good housewife and was hospitable. When the angels of God visited Abraham at the time they were to go and destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of their heinous sins she played her part actively in entertaining them. There again God repeated His promise through the angels to bless Sarah with child in her old age. - Genesis 18:1-15

Sarah was a woman who had faith of God. Concerning her it is written: "Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised..." - Hebrews 11:11, 12

Sarah was 90 years old when she gave birth to Isaac: her only child who was a child of promise. (Genesis 17:15-22, 18:9-15, 21:1-7) Although she was barren until her old age, she was patient, kind and loving and remained faithful to her husband. She died at the age of 127 years. Many Christian women of today learn to be like Sarah in faith, purity, patience and obedience.