



Conducted by
Frank Worgan

This month I wish to deal with two questions which, as many of you will readily recognize, are closely connected. One question concerns the origin of the 'Christadelphian' movement, and the other to a doctrine sometimes encountered during a discussion with members of this body.

1. A brother asks, "*When and how did the Christadelphian Church come into existence?*"

The answer to his question, necessarily condensed because of the limited space at our disposal, is that the founder of the Christadelphian movement was a physician, Dr. John Thomas, who was born in England in 1805 and who died in the United States in March 1871.

Origins.

Dr Thomas emigrated from London to America in 1832, when he was 27 years of age, but whilst there he did not practise medicine, choosing instead to become a 'gentleman farmer'.

At that time, he had no religious background and no religious affiliation, but he met Br. Walter Scott, one of the early evangelists of the so-called 'Restoration Movement', with whom he studied for a period of three months and who afterwards baptized him.

During the next 20 years Dr Thomas remained in fellowship with the Church in the United States and was regarded as a very acceptable preacher, visiting churches of Christ in the British Isles on three occasions.

It was whilst he was preaching in the United States that it became known that Dr. Thomas was teaching what were regarded as unscriptural, and therefore, unacceptable doctrines.

Doctrines.

Here are a few examples of his teaching, now accepted by 'Christadelphians'.

1. **How Creation occurred.** God created everything *'out of Himself'*.

2. **The Nature of the Holy Spirit.** A rejection of belief in the personality of the Holy Spirit, and an assertion that the Holy Spirit is merely a *'force'* or *'influence'* exerted by God'. - like *'holy electricity'*, as his faithful lieutenant and successor, Robert Roberts, expressed it in his own book, "*Christendom astray from the Bible*", p.95.

3. **The Nature of the Lord Jesus Christ.** The assertion that the Saviour had no real existence prior to His birth in Bethlehem and that, as the *'logos'*, He was merely an idea or a thought in the mind of God; thus His pre-existence and deity is denied.

4. **The nature of Satan.** A denial of the existence of a personal Devil. Satan is just a *'personification of sin among human beings.'*

5. **The Sacrifice of Christ.** He did not die as our substitute, but as our *'representative'*.

6. **The Kingdom.** Does not yet exist, but will be established on Earth at some future date.

7. **The Nature of the Kingdom.** A version of pre-millennial doctrine, with Christ reigning from Jerusalem, which is to be the capital of the Theocracy.

8. **The Future of Israel.** There will be a miraculous mass-conversion of the nation of Israel, prior to the return of Christ.

9. **Heaven.** No one will go to Heaven. There is no promise of Heaven in the scriptures. The people of God will remain on Earth.

10. **The Fate of the wicked.** The wicked are to be annihilated. They will merely cease to exist.

History.

In 1838 brother Water Scott and other leading brethren requested Dr. Thomas not to propagate these personal opinions, and to this he agreed. But it soon became evident that he was still spreading the unwelcome views, in spite of his promise. This brought him into further conflict with the Church in the United States, and at 42 years of age, in 1847, he repudiated both his baptism and his connection with the Church. When he published this repudiation in his magazine, "*Herald of the Future Age*", he declared that he had *'never been a Christian'*, and he was, therefore, disfellowshipped by the congregations among whom he had previously travelled.

In 1848 Dr. Thomas came to England and, through the influence of the church in London, succeeded in gaining access to the British churches of Christ, who had been given to understand that he was a brother in good standing with the churches in

America.

However, by the time he returned to London, towards the end of his visit, news had been received which revealed that he was certainly *not* in fellowship with the American brethren, yet, when he was questioned on this matter he denied that he had been disfellowshipped. In other words, he lied.

Eventually, when deception was no longer possible, Dr. Thomas tried to justify his dishonesty, claiming that he *'had received nothing from the British churches except a little bread and wine, for which his contributions had more than amply repaid!'*

Thomas's Church.

In 1849, no longer in fellowship with churches of Christ on either side of the Atlantic, he set up his own church in Birmingham, (England), assisted by Robert Roberts, who also became the editor of the new church's magazine, "*The Christadelphian*".

At first, he called his followers, '*The Antipas*', claiming that this was '*a symbolic name for all those who do not deny the faith, but hold fast to the Spirit's name*'. This name was later changed to '*Christadelphians*', a name which he coined himself.

I might add that the name does not mean what he apparently intended it to mean, which was, '*Brothers of Christ*'. The latin suffix, '*ians*', turns the name into '*Followers of...a brother of Christ*'. (Compare '*Christ ians*', Acts 11:26).

Dr. Thomas died in 1871, and was buried in Brooklyn, N.Y. He had planned to move back permanently to England and had returned to the U.S., from a visit to England, in order to make preparations for this move, but died before his intention could be realized.

The leadership of the organisation then fell into the hands of Roberts, his understudy and collaborator, who was born in Aberdeen in 1839. Roberts himself died in a hotel in San Francisco 1898 and was buried by the side of his master in Greenwood Cemetery, Brooklyn.

Note. Brother David King, who had contact with John Thomas during his visits to London, wrote a tract entitled "*The History and Mystery of Christadelphianism*". I regret that my own copy has 'gone astray', but anyone who can come obtain a copy of this tract will find it very informative.

2. This serves as an introduction to the second question recently sent to me by a sister in the Church, which asks:-

"If everyone born into the world has an immortal soul, why does Jesus offer eternal life to those who believe in Him?"

You will realize, I am sure, see that the question relates to doctrine no. 10 in the list I have already presented. On p.24 of his book, Robert Roberts states that, in the scriptures, '*of the doctrine of the immorality of the soul there is not the slightest mention*'.

The Nature of the Soul.

Well, this does not surprise me, because the term, '*immortal soul*' is not found in the scriptures. In fact, the expression is an example of tautology, that is, of saying the same thing in different words. We do not speak of '*wet raindrops*', or '*red rubies*', because raindrops *are* wet, and rubies *are* red. *Wetness and redness* are the essential characteristics of raindrops and rubies respectively. Similarly, it is superfluous to use the word *immortal* when speaking about the soul, because in the scriptures immortality is shown to be the very nature of the soul.

'Life' and 'Destruction'

Our sister calls my attention to eleven New Testament passages, in which 'eternal life' occurs 7 times, '*immortality*' three times and '*life*' 1 time, all of which clearly

show 'life' to be the eternal destiny of the faithful. The matter is summed up in her reference to 1st John 5:11-12, which states, '*He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son shall not see life.*'

The destiny of the righteous is eternal life, whilst the fate of the wicked is eternal death, and the difference between the final destinies of the believing and unbelieving is explained in 2nd Thess. 1:7-10, where we read that when Christ returns, He will '*be glorified in His saints and marvelled at in all those who believe*, whilst those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel, shall '*suffer the punishment of eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power*'.

Contrary to what Dr Thomas thought, the word '*olethros*', which has been translated as '*destruction*', does not mean '*annihilation*'. According to the recognised authorities, Moulton and Milligan, in the first century the word was used to speak of '*ruin; the loss of all that gives worth to life*'.

Their destruction is '*from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might*'.

This eternal state of the wicked is also described in the scriptures as '*the second death*'. Unfortunately, the meaning of the word '*thanatos*' - '*death*', - is also often misunderstood. It does not mean '*cessation of existence*'. It means '*separation*'. For example, when he was separated from his father, the prodigal was said to be '*dead*' Luke. 15:24.

Similarly, physical death is the separation of the soul - the true personality - from the body. Hence Paul speaks of being '*absent from the body*', but '*at home with the Lord*'. 2nd Cor. 5:1-9.

The 'second death' is eternal separation from the Presence of God.

Conclusion.

Therefore, the answer to sister's question is that when the Lord Jesus offers eternal life to those who believe in Him, He is promising that those who follow Him shall live eternally in the Presence of God, whilst those who reject His offer of salvation must, of necessity, be banished eternally from His Presence. He tells us, that when He sits on His throne of judgement, some will '*go away into eternal - aionios - punishment, but the righteous into - aionios - eternal life*' (Matt. 25:31-46).

Consequently, the question at issue is not, whether or not the wicked continue to exist after the death of the body, but the *quality* of that existence.

We must notice that the 'duration' of the '*punishment*' is the same as that of the '*life*', so that those who deny that the punishment of the wicked is *eternal* must also, logically, deny that life of the redeemed is *eternal*.

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