

The Summit Chronicle

Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord — Isaiah 2:3

Issue 7 Vol 1

A monthly publication for the Church of Christ worldwide

February 2008

Table of Contents

THE SEARCH FOR ABSOLUTE TRUTH

pg 1 by Jason R. Roberts

NOT JUST A GOOD BOOK

pg 4 by Brad Harrub

STEM CELL RESEARCH

pg 6 by Brad Harrub

THE CANON OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

PT2 pg 7 by Rex Banks

EKKLESIA PT2

pg 10 by Roy Bowen Ward

GOD IN THE MOVIES

pg 13 by Trevor Major

Contributing Writers for this Month's Articles

Rex Banks • Brad Harrub
Trevor Major • Jason Roberts
Roy Bowen Ward

Scripture of the Month

"Come let us go up to the mountain
of the Lord, to the house of the
God of Jacob that He may teach us
concerning His ways. And that we
may walk in His paths"

— Isaiah 2:3

Contact Us

If you have any questions that you
would like answered by any of our
writers, please feel free to contact us
via email on:

SummitChronicle@xtra.co.nz

THE SEARCH FOR ABSOLUTE TRUTH IN A SECULAR SOCIETY

by Jason R. Roberts

In 1987, the distinguished American philosopher and essayist, Allan Bloom (1930-1992), authored an eye-opening book titled, *The Closing of the American Mind*. The thesis of the book is, as the author put it in his preface, "a meditation on the state of our souls." Though severely criticized by many liberal educators, the book became one of Bloom's most celebrated works.

In the opening chapter, he makes a startling claim that gives us some insight into the stark reality that the heartbeat of absolute truth—which once pulsed so lively in our culture—has now virtually become a flat-line in mainstream society:

"There is one thing that a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative. If this belief is put to the test, one can count on the students' reaction: they will be uncomprehending. That anyone should regard the proposition as not self-

evident astonishes them, as though he were calling into question $2 + 2 = 4$."¹

To say that there has been a dramatic change in the cultural landscape of our nation would not surprise even a person with minuscule intelligence. The halls of higher learning, which echo with postmodern philosophy, not only seductively bypass the reasoning skills of many of their pupils, but provide an atmosphere of excellent campaign weather for the devil (1 Peter 5:8). Indeed, agnosticism has become the badge of honor today in most of the educational systems with which we are living. The graduating classes of today, unwittingly, have been indoctrinated with the sinister evil known as secularization. With their diplomas in one hand and their secular worldviews in the other, they are quite eager to pass the secular baton to the next generation of unsuspecting minds. Knowledge is a deadly friend when no One sets the rules.

What Is Secularization?

Without doubt, *secularization* is one of the most powerful conditioning influences in our culture today. Virtually every major decision that affects our mind-molding institutions—even in the highest offices of the land—is made on the basis of a secular worldview. In his intriguing book, *Deliver Us From Evil*, Ravi Zacharias, with a touch of sarcasm and humor, summarizes this new reigning philosophy:

First dentistry was painless,
Then bicycles were chainless,
Carriages were horseless,
And many laws enforceless.
Next cookery was fireless,
Telegraphy was wireless,
Cigars were nicotineless,
And coffee caffeineless.
Soon oranges were seedless,
The putting green was
weedless,
The college boy was hatless,
The proper diet fatless,
New motor roads are dustless,
The latest steel is rustless,
Our tennis courts are sodless,
Our new religion—godless.²

Secularization is the process by which religious ideas, institutions, and interpretations have lost their social significance. In short, “secularization assumes that this world—the material world—is all we have.”³ It provides the steam for running the engine of culture.

Fifty Years at a Glance

A culture steeped in secular philosophy doesn’t get that way overnight. Space forbids us from listing all of the contributing factors which led to this ugly monster which our nation has constructed. Since the ultimate test of any civilization is what we do with our children, perhaps a brief glance back in time will provide some answers as to why *secularization* has become so rampant in our society. The reader may want to pay special attention to the striking connection between what was lost in each generation and what was handed to the next.

First, in the 1950s our young people lost their innocence. This was the decade of freedom. Children were liberated from their parents by well-paying jobs, fast cars and a new wave of music. This new-found freedom quickly erased the innocence of childhood from the hearts of so many. Neil Postman’s excellent book, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, as well as David Elkind’s splendid books, *The Hurried Child* and *All Grown Up And No Place To Go: Teenagers In Crisis* are must reads for every educator and parent. We could summarize all three books with a simple statement: **A hurried up lifestyle results in a throw away culture.**

Second, in the 1960s our young people lost their concept of authority. This was the decade of rebellion. There were protests against the state, the government, and the schools. It wasn’t long before the home and church started to feel the painful aftershock

from this loss of respect for authority.

Third, in the 1970s our young people lost their concept of love. It was a decade that marched proudly under the bright banner of “Free Love For Everyone!” Young people were taught everything there was to know about sex and very little about love, and few were willing to teach them that there was a vast difference between the two. The promiscuous seventies would prove to hold serious consequences for the next decade.

Fourth, in the 1980s our young people lost their hope. With the introduction of the deadly AIDS virus in 1981, and the curtain of the cold war yet to be drawn to a close, many of our young people lost their hope and simply stopped believing in the future.

Fifth, in the 1990s our young people lost their ability to reason. The lines that had been clearly drawn between right and wrong were slowly beginning to erase. Consequently, *moral relativism* and *political correctness* became the catch phrases of this decade.

Sixth, in the 2000’s our young people have lost their purpose. We have many in this generation who simply have no idea why they are here. They have lost the very essence and purpose of life. Sadly, the average young person today finds it easier to relate to a computer than to one of their own family members.

Consider this: If a *decade* of *secularization* can dramatically alter the thought processes of a young person, what can *fifty years* of the same thing do to the soul of a nation? Without question, one of the greatest dilemmas facing preachers today is this: How do you reach a generation that *listens with its eyes* and *thinks with its feelings*?

The Devastating Results of Secularization

What is the deadly fruit that extends from the branches of secularism? **First, there is a loss of shame.** The seductive and subtle messages from the entertainment industry (e.g., movies, television, radio, books), have virtually deadened the conscience of our nation. Consequently, things that used to **amaze** us twenty-five years ago now **amuse** us. Things that used to **shock** us now **satisfy** us. G.K. Chesterton, the famous philosopher and journalist, once offered this bit of advice: “Whenever you remove any fence, always pause long enough to ask yourself the question, ‘Why was it put there in the first place?’” God has erected the fence of shame in every human heart. It is one fence we, as a nation, cannot afford to approach, much less tear down. Unfortunately, deeds and ideas that were once abhorrent to us we now celebrate. The prophet Jeremiah wrote on two separate occasions, “Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush” (Jeremiah 6:15; 8:12).

When secularism reaches its end, it will invariably produce a generation of men and women who have lost their sense of shame. When a people lose that sense of shame, we are looking into the eyes of potentially deadly weapons. It was Adolph Hitler, who inscribed the following haunting words above one of his many gas ovens in Auschwitz: “I want to raise a generation of young people devoid of a conscience, imperious, relentless and cruel.” He nearly succeeded. When a nation loses its sense of shame, another piece of deadly fruit quickly takes root.

Second, there is a loss of reason. The eighteenth-century Scottish political thinker, Andrew Fletcher said, “Let me write the songs of a nation and I don’t

care who writes its laws.”⁴ Fletcher was pointing out that the artists (musicians) reflect the spirit of the age in their lyrics. That is why there are so many songs depicting violence, sexuality, hatred, etc. The subtle message hidden within modern lyrics has the capacity to bypass reason and go straight to one’s imagination. When that happens, Fletcher reasons, all the laws written by man will not be able to curb man’s behavior! He will become a law to himself, doing “that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6). Ravi Zacharias notes:

In the modern world reason reigned supreme, and it was envisioned that rational man would hold all things together. Now, postmodernism has become the buzzword in academia, the word by which all things have fallen apart, for reason itself is banished as a dinosaur in humanity’s evolutionary climb, and truth is considered extinct... The modern world had emphasized purpose and design. The postmodern world emphasizes randomness and chance. The modern world sought stability in values. The postmodern world sees values as transient and relative. The modern world saw reason as the means and meaning as the end. The postmodern world glorifies in unreason and celebrates meaninglessness. The modern world pursued a synthesis of all disciplines in its search to find unity of truth. The postmodern world focuses on deconstruction and extols the marvel of contradiction.⁵

This loss of reason can perhaps best be illustrated by the comments of the distinguished professor at Oxford University, Richard Dawkins, “To me there is no good or bad. There is no morality or evil. We are all just dancing to our DNA.” Is that so??? Try telling the grief-stricken widow, whose husband died in the World Trade center on September 11, 2001, that

those terrorists were just dancing to their DNA! Try telling a heart-broken mother and father whose sixteen-year-old son or daughter was killed by a drunk driver that he was just dancing to his DNA! Even Dawkins would have to admit the existence of the moral law he unashamedly attempts to denounce. When someone lies to him or mistreats him in some fashion, the moral law quickly surfaces in his heart by the immediate unfavorable reaction he has to it. The truth of the matter is: When reason is eradicated from one’s heart, the results are devastating. Ethics Philosopher, Robert Fitch, expressed it well in these descriptive words:

Ours is an age where ethics has become obsolete. It is superseded by science, deleted by psychology, dismissed as an emotive by philosophy. It is drowned in compassion, evaporates into aesthetics, and retreats before moral relativism. The usual moral distinctions between good or bad are drowned in a maudlin of emotion in which we feel more sympathy for the murderer than for the murdered, for the adulterer than the betrayed, and in which we have begun to believe that the real guilty party, the one who somehow caused it all, is the victim and not the perpetrator of the crime.⁶

Isaiah’s warning is still relevant “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! (Isaiah 5:20-21).

Third, there is a loss of meaning. When shame is eradicated from the human heart, reason is also eliminated. When reason is eliminated, meaning is destroyed. This is the logical end of *secularization*. When a person loses his

sense of shame, his ability to *reason*, and *his purpose*, there is no moral compass by which he can navigate himself through life. He is a lost ship at sea—drifting aimlessly—and is destined to crash upon the rocks of destruction.

What Is Truth?

That question was asked by Pilate many years ago (John 18:38). It is interesting that Pilate was staring into the eyes of the Truth (John 14:6). Before Pilate asked this important question, Jesus told him, “Every one that is of *the* truth hears my voice (John 18:37).

Apart from the voice of God’s Son, we cannot come to the conclusion of what is right and wrong.

Conclusion

The soul of our nation is dying. Unknowingly, America is writing her own obituary column. The secular thinkers of our day are preaching her funeral; the young people have been selected as her pall-bearers, and the gravedigger is none other than Satan, who is waiting patiently to bury her in hell (Psalms 9:17). Christians should exercise their influence to denounce this gloomy scenario and restore sanity from the degenerate worldview of *secularization*.

Endnotes

1. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1987), p. 25.
2. Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us From Evil*, (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1997), p. 22.
3. Zacharias, p. 23.
4. Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994), p. 3.
5. Zacharias, *Deliver Us From Evil* p. 215.
6. Robert E. Fitch, “*The Obsolescence of Ethics*” “*Christianity and Crisis: A Journal of Opinion*” (16, Nov. 1959): 163-65.

Not Just A Good Book

by Brad Harrub Ph.D

Some vehemently oppose its teachings and routinely pull verses out of context to paint a wretched picture of religion. Others are willing to concede it has some historical significance and will at least give it a bit of credibility from a historical perspective. The large majority would even go the next step, and describe it as a “good book” containing “good principles.” But is that enough? How many individuals are willing to cast aside the label of just a “good book” and take that final step of defending the Bible as the Word of God?

Whether individuals are standing around the office cooler, door knocking in foreign lands, or debating devout atheists on television, the subject will ultimately come up as to the validity of the Bible. If you really stop and consider it for a moment, everything (and I do mean EVERYTHING), hinges on this one topic. If the Bible is not real, then how can one know of his/her salvation? If the Bible is not the Word of God, then there can be no absolutes. How do we know how to worship or how to conduct ourselves? If the Bible is not inspired then people are allowed to pick and choose whatever suits them as they pursue the pleasures of this life—in essence they can enjoy a “buffet attitude” towards religion. If the Bible is not God’s method of communicating with mankind, then where does that leave the plan of redemption and the New Testament description of salvation?

Consider the dilemma: The majority of people would much rather paint the world “gray” and be allowed the flexibility of their own judgment, rather than to humble themselves and be obedient servant to Him. Thus, they embrace the idea of the Bible being just a good book—an attitude that allows them to do as they please. Whereas, if the book is God’s Word, then suddenly it is no longer a question of an individual’s likes or dislikes, but rather everything revolves around the Author of that book—God. Man is no longer able to do what is right is his eyes, but rather he must acknowledge that Almighty God has bestowed upon mankind divine edicts that we are to follow—or pay the consequences.

So, the question becomes: How do we teach the lost that the Bible is more than just a good book? Critics and skeptics love to belittle anyone who views the Bible as the literal Word of God. They are quick to ridicule those who quote Scripture when asked questions about science or nature. They love to feature films calling the authenticity of the Bible into question—such as the current debate about the alleged ossuary of Jesus. Add to this that the majority of the world would like to simply live in a “gray” world where they get to discern right from wrong from using situation ethics. So how

do we effectively teach that God has established clear black and white boundaries?

Before we can teach people about God and the Gospel, we must be able to demonstrate to them the authenticity and accuracy of the Bible. It is one thing to say: “It’s in the Bible.” It’s a totally different thing to say those words, having already established that the Bible is inspired, and thus is the only book to which we should heed in obedience. So what do we tell them? How do we move from simply stating opinions, to convincing them to accept the Truth? What are some tools the average person can utilize in order to teach our friends, family, and neighbors about the accuracy of God’s Word? One of the best tools that demonstrate the inspiration of the Bible is the scientific accuracies that are found within God’s Word. While space will not permit a full review of every incidence of scientific foreknowledge contained in the Bible, the following examples provide strong evidence for the inspiration of God’s Word. Press upon those you study with that these statements were written thousands of years ago, long before man was able to truly discern the validity of this Scriptures. The only way these scientific accuracies could have found their way into God’s Word is via inspiration.

MEDICINE

- Numbers 19:16-18 gives a recipe for antibacterial soap (using the hyssop plant which has antifungal properties) to cleanse after touching a dead person—long before we knew about bacteria and viruses.
- Leviticus 17:15 teaches that an animal that has died naturally is not to be eaten—and today it is against local, state, and federal public health procedures to take an animal that has died naturally to a slaughterhouse. What if the animal had died from rabies, anthrax, brucellosis, yet how did the Israelites know this?
- Leviticus chapter 11 gives restrictions regarding safe foods. Verse 7 specifically points out that the Israelites were not to eat pork. We know today that these scavengers often carry parasites such as *Trichinella spiralis*, the organism that causes trichinosis.
- Deuteronomy 23:12-14 instructed the Israelites to bury their waste. Today we know this is good

hy-giene. However, during the Middle Ages many Europeans threw human waste into back alleys, which allowed micro-organisms to flourish. The “Black Plague” resulted from this carelessness and killed more than 13 million people.

- Genesis 17:12 God commanded Abraham to circumcise newborn males on the eighth day. We know today after years of scientific study that it is on the eighth day that blood-clotting factors (such as prothrombin) are present in their highest amounts. Yet we have this information recorded literally thousands of years earlier.

OCEANOGRAPHY

- Psalm 8:8 details that the seas have paths in them. Matthew Maury set out to chart the paths upon hearing this Scripture. There is a statue of Matthew Maury at the U.S. Naval Academy in appreciation to his discovering something that was already described in God’s Word.
- Ecclesiastes 1:7 tells us that all rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full. This statement, considered by itself, may not appear all that significant. Yet it was made long before satellite images were available to show the distributions of the rivers. Also, when we consider Ecclesiastes 11:3 and Amos 9:6, we realize that the Bible discusses the water cycle long before it was discovered in Europe.
- Job 38:16 God made mention to Job the springs or recesses (trenches) in the sea. Yet it wasn’t until the late 1800’s that we possessed sufficient technology to discover these freshwater springs and deep trenches.
- Genesis 6:15 Noah was given specific directions regarding the dimensions of the ark. That same ratio of 30 to 5 to 3 has been used countless times by shipbuilders to make vessels seaworthy—in fact the U.S. built an entire fleet of boats with those exact proportions. One remaining ship, the U.S.S. Jeremiah O’Brien that was used in World War II is currently docked in San Francisco, CA.

ASTRONOMY

- Isaiah 40:22 describes the circle of the Earth—even though many ancient people, up through the days of Christopher Columbus, believed the Earth was flat.
- Psalm 19:4-6 indicates the Sun has an orbit—a fact that we did not learn until June 1, 1999
- Job 38:19 The Lord describes light traveling in a “way”—a fact discovered by Sir Isaac Newton in the

seventeenth century. So how did the writer of Job know about this

- Job 38:24 God asks by what way is light parted? We know today that light can be parted. Sir Isaac Newton discovered this by passing sunlight through a prism and separating light into seven individual bands of color thousands of years after this verse was written. (remember ROY G. BIV?)

BIOLOGY

- In Genesis 1:11,12,21,24 Moses wrote that things reproduce “after their kind.” We know this to be true today. We have established the laws of genetics and heredity, which ensure that things do indeed reproduce “after their kind.” If a farmer plants tomato seed, he knows full well that he will not be harvesting corn. We recognize this evident truth. But how did Moses know—long years before the science of genetics was discovered?
- Acts 17:25 describes God as the “giver of life.” For centuries men have been trying to “create life” through processes of spontaneous generation. The example most often used is the Miller/Urey experiment performed in the 1950s. Even though men like Spallanzani, Redi, Pasteur, and hundreds of others have proven time and again that spontaneous generation is impossible, evolutionists still keep on trying. But the fact still remains—man has never created living material from non-living material. Paul knew long ago that it was God who gives life. This fact has not changed
- In 1 Corinthians 15:39 Paul also stated that there are four fleshes—those of men, beasts, birds, and fishes. Today, even evolutionists accept this fact of science. These fleshes are indeed different in their biochemical make-up. But how did Paul living in the first century A.D know this?

Science textbooks are telling your children and grandchildren they have “proof,” “facts,” and “evidence.” It is high time we give our children and grandchildren the proof, fact, and evidence that God’s Word is more than just a good book. It is truly the only God-breathed book in existence, and it is filled with examples that support its accuracy and authenticity—examples that demonstrate the power and authority of Almighty God. The only question is will you heed what this inspired Book records?

Article published under permission from Focus Press.

Stem Cell Research

by Brad Harrub Ph.D

Politicians who believe a particular “cause” will increase their odds in a voting booth can often be heard (loudly) beating the drum for that cause on the campaign trail. If a public poll appears to indicate that Americans are in favor of something—a check of the wind, so-to-speak—many politicians adopt that cause with gusto. But occasionally, it would be nice if the politicians would check the facts rather than checking the wind and popular opinion. Americans would be better informed and better served if those nominated for office would educate themselves on the facts.

For instance, embryonic stem cell research has been a political hot button for several years. Many elected officials and celebrities take pleasure in locking arms together and demanding that the government fund embryonic stem cell research. To hear their rhetoric, one might believe that these cells harvested from human embryos could not only cure Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease, but also give us peace on Earth and resolve gridlock on the nation’s interstates. Surely the average person can see through this political grandstanding. [One wonder’s how much money the abortion lobbyists have funneled into this debate to keep the issue in the headlines.]

In reality, we know today that those embryonic stem cells are totally unnecessary. Stem cell research can continue without the destruction of innocent embryos. Adult stem cells provide the answer. Initially, the controversy was allegedly whether or not the stem cells were “pluripotent”—meaning cells that have the ability to become almost any cell in the body. These special cells can become healthy heart tissue or nervous tissue which could potentially be used to treat congestive heart failure or various brain disorders respectively. Currently stem cells are collected from four different sources: adult tissue, umbilical cords, aborted fetuses, and leftover embryos stored from

in vitro fertilization procedures. The real controversy surrounds where the stem cells are collected from.

Prior to 2001, it was believed that only embryonic stem cells—that is, cells collected from aborted fetuses or embryos—were pluripotent. However, in the past six years, several peer-reviewed research studies have clearly shown that **adult** stem cells are also pluripotent. In fact, in January 2007 researchers demonstrated they could derive human stem cells from the amniotic fluid surrounding babies in the womb. Adult stem cells collected from this method would potentially provide an endless source of stem cells that are easily available for research.

According to *USA Today* staff writer Elizabeth Weise, “The researchers at the Wake Forest University School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, N.C., were able to get the amniotic cells to differentiate into fat, bone, muscle, blood, nerve and liver cells.” **Simply put, we do not need embryonic stem cells.** The current “score” is 72 to 0—meaning there are currently seventy-two conditions successfully being treated using **adult** stem cells (see <http://www.stemcellresearch.org/facts/treatments.htm>), whereas embryonic stem cells have still yet to show any benefit in treating human conditions.

Dr. Mae-Wan Ho wrote a paper comparing the “score” between embryonic (ES) and adult stem cells. After reviewing studies employing embryonic stem cells she concluded: “These latest results show that the ES cells need to be genetically modified and extensive manipulation *in vitro* before they can be transplanted safely. Direct transplant of ES cells are known to give rise to teratomas (tumors—BH) and uncontrollable cell proliferation. There is already evidence that ES cells are genetically unstable in long term culture, and are especially prone to chromosomal abnormalities.” This is not exactly the scorecard that the media has been presenting the general public.



For a more detailed review of the stem cell controversy please see the January 2006 issue of *Think* available online at www.focuspress.org

The American people should be bold enough to hold politicians and the mainstream media accountable: “Why promote embryonic stem cells if the adult stem cells work?”

Why do individuals continue to promote the “potential” benefit of embryonic stem cells when it has been unmistakably shown that adult stem cells are working better? What does this tell us about the value our society is placing on human life? Have we forgotten that the first step toward the Nazi Holocaust was when physicians began to selectively determine which lives were worth living? Much of the moral decay we are witnessing today is a direct result of society in which human life is no longer valued. Robert Reily observed: “The problem is that, by denying the possibility of a relationship between God and man, atheism also denies the possibility of a just relationship between men... Human life is sacred only if there is a God to sanctify it. Otherwise man is just another collection of atoms and can be treated as such” (1988). Children (and adults) need to be taught that life is precious, and reminded that God views life to begin before birth (see Isaiah 49: 1,5; Jeremiah 1:5; Psalm 139:13-14; Job 3:13-16, etc.). Otherwise, without intervention, society will continue to treat humans as simply a collection of atoms—and we will continue to watch the onslaught of needless deaths.

Brad Harrub is a Director of Focus Press and co-editor of Think magazine.

The Canon of the Old Testament (Part 2)

by Rex Banks

(b) Moses and the Rest of the Pentateuch.

On five separate occasions we are told that Moses wrote a book at God's command.

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Write this in a (the) book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven'" (Ex 17:14)

"Moses wrote all the words of the Lord ... And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people" (Ex 24:4, 7).

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel'" (Ex 34:27).

"These are the journeys of the children of Israel . . . And Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of the Lord" (Num 33:1, 2).

"And Moses wrote this law and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord" (Deut. 31:9).

Thus from its inception the Mosaic covenant was inseparably linked to certain written records which were publicly promulgated and delivered into the hands of the priests for safekeeping and custody. Other significant statements in the Pentateuch relating to this

authoritative collection include the following:

Ex 40:20 Then he took the testimony and put it into the ark, and attached the poles to the ark, and put the mercy seat on top of the ark.

Deut 31:9 So Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel.

Deut 31:24 It came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete,

Deut 31:25, 26 "Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, 'Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you.'"

Deut 17:14 -20 "When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,' you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses ... Now it shall come about when he (the future king) sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. It shall be with him and he shall read

it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel."

From the outset the Mosaic writings were to be placed reverently beside the Ark of the Covenant and were regarded as Israel's standard of faith. The nation's king was to treasure these writings and thereby "learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes." What's more, later books show that these writings were received as authoritative revelation. R. Laird Harris points out:

"Joshua many times speaks of Moses as God's 'servant,' the 'man of God' to whom God gave commandments. He mentions the Law of Moses (8:31; 23:6) and indicates that Israel is bound by that book...

The history of Kings gives us many such references. David charged Solomon to keep God's laws 'as it is written in the law of Moses' (1 Kgs 2:3). Amaziah acted 'according unto that which is written in the book of the Law of Moses...'

Ezra and Nehemiah have too many references of this sort to present in detail. Ezra was a 'ready scribe in the law of

Moses which the Lord God of Israel had given" (Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible).

(c) Post Mosaic OT Writings.

Arguing for "a progressive recognition of the (OT) books as they emerged from the hands of their writers" Walter C. Kaiser points out that "there was, a passing of the mantle, as it were, from one writer to another" (The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable and Relevant?). For example we are told that following his final address to the people, Joshua, Moses' successor "wrote these words in the book of the law of God" (Josh. 24:26). In due course "Samuel told the people the ordinances of the kingdom, and wrote them in the book and placed it before the LORD (i.e. in the Tabernacle)" (1 Sam 10:25). Kaiser points out that "a veritable chain of verses in Chronicles" demonstrates the passing of this mantle. For example we read that David's history was recorded in the books of the prophets Samuel, Nathan and Gad, (1 Chron 29:29) that Solomon's history was recorded by the prophets Nathan, Ahijah and Iddo (2 Chron 9:29) and that the work of Rehoboam was composed by the prophets Shemaiah and Iddo (2 Chron 12:15). (See also 2 Chron 13:22; 32:32 and 33:18, 19). These and other passages illustrate the fact that "a succession of prophets passed the baton from one to another, thereby setting up a stream of thought and an indication of where to look for that which was to be regarded as canonical" (ibid).

Finally it is very significant that less than eight decades after the book of Jeremiah was written, the prophet Daniel describes this work as "the word of the LORD to Jeremiah" (Dan 9:2).

Significantly Daniel tells us that Jeremiah's writings were "in the books," (plural) a clear reference to a collection of writings which he receives as Scripture. Earlier Jeremiah had acknowledged the words of Micah as the product of inspiration (Jer 26:18). Again and again various prophets affirm that they are declaring the authoritative word of God (e.g. Isa 8:5; 31:4; Jer 3:6; 13:1; Ezek 21:1; Amos 3:1). On three occasions (Ex 24:4, 7; 2 Kgs 23:1-3; 2 Chron 34:29-32; Neh. 8:9, 14-18; 10:28-39; 13:1-3) all or part of the Pentateuch is proclaimed as God's word. Thus there is good evidence that the formation of the canon was directed by God, and that the divine source of certain writings was recognized from the moment these documents were produced. Of course modern critical scholarship, driven by anti-supernatural bias rejects this testimony and insists that purely naturalistic processes account for the OT canon. Let's look briefly at this flawed approach.

Modern Critical Scholarship and the Canon

Those who are committed to naturalistic explanations for the origin and development of scripture argue there is no clear line of demarcation between the Bible and other ancient writings. They insist that the present canon evolved in a haphazard, undirected manner and is simply an accident of history. Unswerving loyalty to their philosophical principles forces them to reject any suggestion that Moses could have placed the testimony in the ark at God's direction, that Joshua could have possessed the Law of Moses and so on. Applying the evolutionary

principles of 19th century Darwinism to scripture, many argued that "every idea in the Bible started from primitive and childlike origins and, with however many setbacks and delays, grew in scope and height toward the culmination of Christ's Gospel" (Harry Emerson Fosdick, The Modern Use of the Bible). Attempts by liberal scholars to explain the threefold division of the Hebrew canon (above) graphically illustrate their commitment to this approach.

Briefly the three divisions of Hebrew Scripture are held to represent three separate stages in the composition of the various books. Allegedly "the Torah arose in successive accretions starting at 850 B.C (the earliest written document), combined with a later document between 750 B.C and 650 B.C; then at the time of Josiah's reform, Deuteronomy became the first unit of the Pentateuch to achieve canonicity being formally accepted by both king and people (2 Kgs 23)" (Gleason L. Archer A Survey of Old Testament Introduction). One highly influential liberal Bible commentator R H Pfeiffer wrote that "no book (of the Old Testament) was ever regarded as God's Word before 621 B.C. (2 Kgs 22-23)" (Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible). According to Pfeiffer, prior to this date "none of (the Old Testament authors) expected to have his book canonized as scripture any more than Homer, Virgil, Dante and Milton expected to have their works either canonized for their religious teaching or declared 'classic' for their literary greatness." In Pfeiffer's view "the dates of the publication and canonization of the Pentateuch ...are unknown, but may be a considerable time after the restoration of the temple (516 B.C)." As the story goes, the priestly and

ritual sections were written under Ezekiel's direction initially, and this activity continued down to Ezra's day.

Supposedly the next division (the N^obhⁱ'im, or Prophets) was gradually assembled into a list about 300-200 B.C. while the third division (the K^eth^ubhⁱm, or Writings) was collected even later. Allegedly while "tentative canonization of this third group of books was doubtless achieved between 150 and 100 B.C. ...final ratification was deferred until the ...council of Jamnia in Ad 90" (Archer). Exhibiting the unjustified confidence characteristic of liberal scholars, Pfeiffer assures us that "none of the literature preserved in the OT was written for the purpose of being included in a canon." Allegedly

"From time to time some parts of the existing literature were collected in bodies of canonical literature. It is only an accident in transmission that only this canonical literature (except for those apocrypha which had been written in Hebrew) has come down to us" (Pfeiffer).

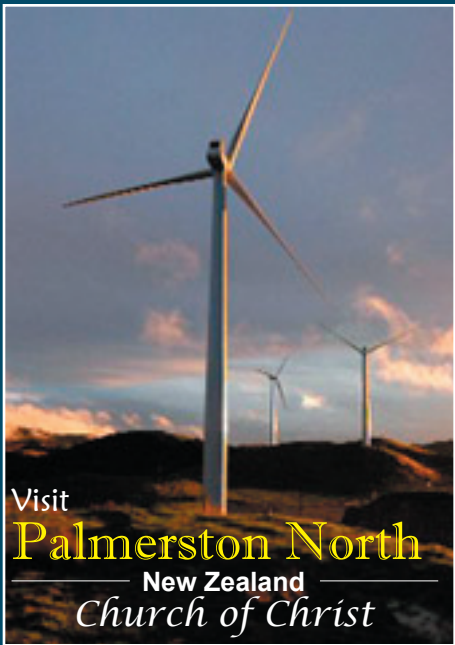
Now this approach to the OT canon, which represents the prevailing stance of modern critical scholarship, stands in marked contrast to the orthodox Jewish and Christian view (above) which takes seriously the claims of Moses and his successors. But let's not forget that because the former is rooted in anti-supernaturalism, its adherents work within a philosophical framework which requires them to posit a naturalistic explanation for the origin and development of the OT and to ignore the internal evidence from scripture. Let's also keep in mind that such liberal

theories were spawned in the pre-archaeological era and simply collapse in the light of modern discoveries. As K.A. Kitchen points out:

"The theories current in Old Testament studies, however brilliantly conceived and elaborated, were mainly established in a vacuum with little or no reference to the Ancient Near East and initially too often in accordance with a priori philosophical and literary principles. It is solely because the data from the Ancient Near East coincide so much better with the existing observable structure of Old Testament history, literature and religion than with the theoretical reconstructions, that we are compelled—as happens in Ancient Oriental studies—to question or even to abandon such theories regardless of their popularity. Facts not votes determine the truth."

(For further information see our Archaeology and the Old Testament).

Conclusion to Part 2: Intent upon eliminating supernatural elements from Scripture, liberal scholarship ignores many statements in the OT which provide valuable clues about the process of canonization. However those who are unencumbered by radical theories of historical development and who are therefore able to give credence to the Biblical record find abundant proof that the canonical books of the OT books were recognized as inspired documents by God's people from the time they first appeared. (Continued next issue)



Visit
Palmerston North
New Zealand
Church of Christ



Come visit with the members of the
**New Plymouth
church of Christ**
www.churchofchrist.org.nz

Come share the
fellowship, the
love, the joy and
the wonderful
atmosphere that is
only found in the
family of Christ.

NEW PLYMOUTH
New Zealand
Come join us!

Ekklesia (Part 2)

by Roy Bowen Ward

NEW TESTAMENT USAGE

Ekklesia occurs 114 times in the New Testament,⁴¹ being found in Matt, Acts, Rom, 1 Cor, 2 Cor, Gal, Eph, Phil, Col, 1 Thess, 2 Thess, 1 Tim, Phile, Heb, James, 3 John, and Rev.⁴²

Its use, however, is somewhat different from that which we have seen generally in the pre-Christian history. Although *ekklesia* sometimes denotes merely an actual assembly, for the most part there is a real sense in which the *ekklesia* exists whether assembled or not. This is not a development which can be detected prior to Christian history, and the charge is probably to be explained strictly as a Christian phenomenon.

The hypothesis of J. Y. Campbell may well be true: "The probability is that at first they used it [*ekklesia*] as an obvious name for those simple 'meetings' which were the most conspicuous distinctive feature in the life of the early Church..."⁴³ The next step was the application of the term to the body of people habitually meeting together. Early Christians could have used *sunagoge*; James 2:2 seems to indicate that some did. Even Ignatius and Hermas later used it to denote the gathering of the church,⁴⁴ and Epiphanius states that the Ebionite Christians used *sunagoge* instead of *ekklesia*.⁴⁵ But *sunagoge* had by the first century, A.D., assumed too much of a technical status, denoting the religious assemblies of the Jews, these Jews themselves, and the places where they assembled. But *ekklesia* was not tied down to any group, much less to a religious group. Though used in the LXX, it was not distinctively Jewish; it was a term meaningful to Jew and Gentile alike. And, if Campbell's hypothesis is correct, then the primary use of *ekklesia* was local, its universal usage being secondary.

ACTS. *Ekklesia* is used 23 times by the author of Acts. In two instances (19:32,40) it refers to the mob of people at Ephesus. In this passage it is also used to refer to the

assembly which met regularly (*ennomoi*) at Ephesus (19:39). Once *ekklesia* is used in the speech of Stephen (7 :38) to designate the children of Israel gathered at Sinai, echoing perhaps Deut. 9: 10 where the LXX has *ekklesia*.

In the remaining passages *ekklesia* refers in some sense to the institution of Jesus Christ. It comes closest to its classical usage in 14:27 where the assembly is actually gathered at Antioch to hear Paul and Barnabas. In the rest, *ekklesia* means more than the actual assembly; it is also the people who assemble. Thus "great fear came upon the whole church" in Jerusalem (5: 11) ; there is a "great persecution of the church in Jerusalem" (8:1) and "Saul was laying waste the church, entering in house to house" (8:3).

In every case, with one possible exception, *ekklesia* is explicitly or implicitly used in a local sense: it is the assembly (assembled or not) at Jerusalem (11:22; 12:1, 5; 15:4, 22), at Antioch (11:26; 13:1; 14:27; 15:3), at Caesarea (18:22), and at Ephesus (20: 17,28). This local use is emphasized by the use of the plural, *ekklesiai*, when referring to churches in a larger area: in Syria and Cilicia (15:41) and in areas of Asia Minor (16:4). The one possible exception to the local use is the statement in 9:31: "So then the Church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, having been strengthened." But even here there is good textual evidence for the plural, rather than the singular.⁴⁶

In this possible exception (and a textual variant of 15:41 which has the singular) there is the beginning of another development in the meaning of *ekklesia*: the universal usage. If the singular reading [170] is correct, and *ekklesia* is used in a universal sense, then we have the local and universal usage here side by side (as also in Paul). But Schmidt rightly points out that there is no indication that the *ekklesia* is divided into *ekklesiai*, or vice versa. "It is rather that if the *ekklesia* is found in a certain place, even through

the mention of *ekklesiai* by the side of it, it can not be affected by this."⁴⁷ Thus, in this development, *ekklesia* can mean any portion of Christians: from a local group to those in a larger geographical area, and, by extension, to those throughout the world.

Pauline Epistles. *Ekklesia* is used 62 times in the Pauline epistles.

In Paul's first letter to Corinth he uses *ekklesia* several times according to common usage; denoting an actual assembly: "For first when you have come together in an assembly, I hear there are divisions among you" (11:18; see also 14: 19, 28, 35). But in most cases the reference is to the institution, assembled or not; *ekklesia* has become a technical term.

The *ekklesia* is often local: the church at Cenchreae (Rom 16:1), at Corinth (1 Cor 1: 2; 2 Cor 1:1), at Laodicea (Col 4:16), and at Thessalonica (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1: 1). When speaking of a larger geographical area Paul uses the plural: the churches of Asia (1 Cor 16:19), of Galatia (1 Cor 16: 1; Gal 1:1), of Macedonia (2 Cor 8:1), of Judea (Gal 1:22; 1 Thess 2:14). Paul also uses *ekklesia* of smaller groups, such as the household church of Prisca and Aquila in Rome (Rom 16:5), that of the same couple in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19), that of Nympha in Laodicea (Col 4:15) and that of Philemon in Colosse (Phile 2). These can evidently be called *ekklesia*, even while calling the total group in the city *ekklesia*.

Only once did the author of Acts add a descriptive genitive to *ekklesia*, and that (in reference to the church at Ephesus) was a quotation from the Psalms: "the church of the Lord" (Acts 20:28). But Paul often adds a descriptive genitive, usually *tou theou* (of God) . Twice he adds *tou Christou* (of Christ), once *ton ethnon* (of the Gentiles), and once *ton hagion* (of the saints). The salutations of the Thessalonian correspondence are particularly descriptive: "to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and in our Lord Jesus Christ." Even when Paul does not use a descriptive

genitive, it is usually to be understood, in accordance with Paul's doctrine of the *ekklesia* (see *infra*). It should be noted that *tou theou* is used with the singular, *ekklesia*, in reference to a local church. Paul addresses "the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor 1:2). Paul does not mean that the church of God is limited to Corinth, nor does he say, "the church of God, that part of which is at Corinth." As Schmidt rightly points out, "the Church is not primarily an accumulation of individual congregations of the whole community, but every congregation of the whole community, however small, represents the Church."⁴⁸

It is in Paul's letters to the Ephesians and Colossians that *ekklesia* receives its fullest doctrinal expression, and at the same time is removed the furthest from the classical usage. Already *ekklesia* has been used to designate the people, whether assembled or not. But in most cases the use was still local; these people could and were actually assembling. But in Eph. and Col. *ekklesia* is used of the people without respect to the possibility of actually assembling.

Ekklesia was already a technical term for the institution of Jesus Christ. But the term itself was rather neutral—not particularly expressive of the doctrine concerning that institution. Especially here in Eph. and Col. *ekklesia* is grounded into the doctrine of the institution and made to carry in itself the doctrinal implications. Paul's device for accomplishing this is the use of two important parallel terms, some (body) and *gune* (wife). By these terms Paul clearly shows the intrinsic connection of Jesus Christ and his institution (*ekklesia*)-it is like head and body (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:24), like husband and wife (Eph. 5:21-33). In these terms Christ and the *ekklesia* become almost identified. Christ is the head of the body, but the body is not just a rump-it is "the fullness (ple?) o/w) of him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:22). Christ and *ekklesia* are like husband and wife, but he adds, "the two shall become one flesh" (Eph. 5:31).

Here one does not need to add *tou Christou* to *ekklesia*, for in the term itself must now be included Christ as an essential

connotation. Again the comments of Schmidt are well stated:

... the *ekklesia* as the *soma Christou* is not a mere association of men. . . . Definitive is the communion with Christ. To sharpen tills point one could say: A single man can and must be the *ekklesia*, if he has communion with Christ.⁴⁹

This being so, the classical meaning of "assembly," "gathering" has been superseded by the more dynamic, Pauline definition: *ekklesia* = body of Christ, or even, Christ himself!

This usage of *ekklesia* in Eph. and Col., although non-local and related emphatically to Jesus Christ, does not remove it from reality. There is no "invisible" *ekklesia* here, as distinguished from the "visible" one. That Paul calls this institution "holy," etc. (Eph. 5:27), does not remove it from reality; those who compose the *ekklesia* are exhorted to be "holy" (Rom. 12:1; etc.) and are, indeed, called "holy" (*hagioi*: saints--Rom. 1:7; etc.). In Eph. 3:10 mention is made of the mission of the *ekklesia*, but this is a real and earthly mission.

Other N.T. Books. In the other N.T. books, excluding the gospels, *ekklesia* is used 26 times. It is found 20 times in the Revelation, always in the local sense, referring to the seven churches of Asia. James and III John also use it in a local sense (Jas 5:14; III John 6, 9, 10). Once in Hebrews (2:12) it is used in a quotation from Psa 22:22 where *ekklesia* simply stands for *qahal*. The only passage where *ekklesia* stands for a heavenly institution is in Heb [172] 12:23. But here it is probably not used according to its N.T. technical usage, but simply in its common meaning: an actual assembly. It is here coupled with *paneguris*, which the RSV translates, "festal gathering."

Gospels. *Ekklesia* by name is found in only one of the four gospels, Matthew, and in only two passages in that gospel (16:18; 18:17). This argument from statistics is often the first argument put forward in attempts to disassociate Jesus from the *ekklesia*. However, this question involves not only the word *ekklesia* but also the

thing itself. Recent scholarship⁵⁰ has shown the *ekklesia* (without name) to be an integral part of the teaching of Jesus.⁵¹ The question remains as to why *ekklesia* by name is scarcely used in the gospels. This term seems to be generally reserved for the time after the resurrection-ascension of Jesus as the Christ. Note, for instance, that in Luke-Acts *ekklesia* never occurs until after the events of Pentecost. There is an understanding that *ekklesia* is, strictly speaking, a post-resurrection institution.

Matt 18:17. The two occasions of *ekklesia* in this passage must be understood in its common usage: an actual assembly (so translated in RSV). And that assembly is, no doubt, present rather than future, Jewish rather than Christian. Hort states, "The actual precept is hardly intelligible if the *ekklesia* meant is not the Jewish community, apparently the Jewish local community, to which the injured person and the offender both belonged."⁵² But Hort also says, "The principle holds good in a manner for all time,"⁵³ and thus this passage found application in the church.⁵⁴

Matt 16:18. Although many problems have been raised concerning this passage,⁵⁵ the scope of this study limits us to the question of the usage of *ekklesia* as it here stands, and to the question of what precisely did it mean. The problem is a perplexing one, if our survey of the pre-Christian history of *ekklesia* is correct. If *ekklesia* meant only an actual assembly up until Christian usage converted it into a technical, religious term, then the statement here: "Upon this rock I will build my 'meeting' (*ekklesia*)" does not make much sense.

(1) There are several possibilities that Jesus spoke Greek, using this Greek word, (*ekklesia*), and that it did have a significant meaning.

(a) It is possible that *ekklesia* had attained a religious connotation prior to this time in some may not traceable in the sources we have. This word might have been capable of meaning assembly in a more universal sense with religious overtones: the People of God. If such is true, *ekklesia* fits well the context: "I will build my People of God,

i.e., the new Israel.”

This view is, of course, the prevalent consensus of most commentators: that *ekklesia* had a religious connotation. But they seek [173] evidence for this view from the LXX, where a closer investigation reveals no such evidence. The development, if true, must lie elsewhere.

But it is difficult to support even this hypothesis in the face of the failure of N.T. writers to employ this term in proving that this new institution is the People of God, the new Israel. If it had developed this connotation in a Jewish milieu, surely Paul and Peter would have used it (Rom. 1-15; 1 Pet. 2:4-10). Usage in Acts and elsewhere also stands against this view.

(b) A second possibility is that Jesus Himself gave to the term *ekklesia* its new significance, either on this occasion, or elsewhere in His ministry. A definition of *ekklesia* in Messianic terms would give it the depth of meaning expected in this passage. The juxtaposition of *ekklesia* and *basileia* in the following verse might suggest that such a definition was made by Jesus. However, this hypothesis is weak in that this definition is nowhere to be found, either here or in any passage in the gospels. Would such an important definition be omitted? Usage in Acts and elsewhere oppose this view also.

(c) A third possibility is that in using *ekklesia*, Jesus used a synonym for *sunagoge*, using it in antithesis to this Jewish institution of His day, and borrowing by association the connotations of *sunagoge*. *Sunagoge* would fit this passage well, since it was a technical term denoting the Congregation of God. It even referred to the building where the Congregation met, and the figure of “building” would be quite aptly associated with *sunagoge*. But Jesus could not use *sunagoge* because of its Jewish limitations.⁵⁶ Then he used a synonym in the way that he might have used *sunagoge*, and the connotations would thus be transferred to *ekklesia*. This hypothesis is possible, but probably is a bit too clever to be true!

(2) If we dismiss these hypotheses, we are left with one other possibility which seems, indeed, more convincing. This possibility is that Jesus did not say “*ekklesia*” but rather the equivalent in the Aramaic language.⁵⁷

The possible Aramaic equivalents include: *gehala*, ‘*edhta*’, *ciburra*, and *kenishta*. With all four of these words is associated the idea of the People of God. ‘*edhata*’ may be ruled out since it does not occur in the Targums. Of the other three, the most common term was *kenishta*: gathering, assembly, place of meeting (synagogue); this term was also applied to the Great Synagogue.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the Syriac version (3rd century, A.D.) uses *kenushta* regularly for *ekklesia* and *sunagoge* (though Matt. 16:18 is not extant in this version), and the Palestinian Syriac version (*Evangelium Hierosolymitanum*--no precise date) also uses *kenushta* for both Greek words. Of this latter version Schmidt, following E. Nestle, states, “The dialect of *Evangelium Hierosolymitanum* differs considerably from the ordinary Syriac, and it possibly stands relatively close to the language of Jesus and his disciples.”⁵⁹ Schmidt, McNeil,⁶⁰ etc., therefore prefer *kenishta* as the original.

[174] Whether it was *kenishta* or one of the other available words, it would be meaningful here in this passage. Each would convey the idea of the People of God, an idea fully in keeping with the figure of “building,”⁶¹ and each would be a term with Messianic overtones, in keeping with the *basileia* in the following verse. When Matthew later recorded his gospel in Greek, *ekklesia* would be the natural and only possible translation of the Aramaic. *Sunagoge* would have been eliminated as being a limited, Jewish term. But by Matthew’s time *ekklesia* was the technical, religious term in usage to designate what Jesus earlier promised to build. For Matthew’s readers *ekklesia* was natural and meaningful.

APOSTOLIC FATHERS

Ekklesia in Matt. 16:18, in Paul’s doctrinal expositions, etc., is used in a general or

universal sense. Elsewhere the majority of instances are of local usage. This local usage continues in the literature of the Apostolic Fathers. I Clement is a letter from the *ekklesia* of God sojourning at Rome to the *ekklesia* of God sojourning at Corinth. Ignatius begins his letters in a similar way, as also Polycarp, and the Martyrdom of Polycarp from the church in Smyrna. Didache⁶² and the Shepherd of Hermas⁶³ also know this local use.

There is, however, an increasing tendency to use *ekklesia* in referring to the church universal. This is explicit when Ignatius adds to *ekklesia* the adjective, *katholike*⁶⁴ (general or universal⁶⁵), which later becomes a technical term: the Catholic Church. The universal idea is even more emphatic in the Martyrdom of Polycarp where the universal *ekklesia* is in the *oikoumene* (the whole habitable world, i.e., ecumenica).⁶⁶

The *ekklesia* appears in the visions of the *Shepherd of Hermas* as a holy, ancient Lady,⁶⁷ and as a Tower.⁶⁸ This Church is cleansed and purified, and after the wicked are cast out, she is one body, one understanding, one mind, one faith, one love. This unity of the church is found in Ignatius where God, Christ, and Church form a single entity,⁶⁹ which is in connection with the church officers: “without these [deacons, bishop, presbyters] it is not called a church.”⁷⁰

II Clement, so-called, describes the *ekklesia* as pre-existent, the “*ekklesia* of life,” spiritual, but made flesh—as the Logos.⁷¹ Though the words have a Pauline sound, the tendency here is better described as a Gnostic development⁷² or the Semitic belief of the pre-existence of certain things, such as the tabernacle.⁷³

Part 3 in the March issue of The Summit Chronicle

**Do you have a Biblical question
you would like answered?**

Send it to us at:

SummitChronicle@xtra.co.nz

God In The Movies

by Trevor Major

It is rare for me to comment on movies I have never seen. It is rarer still for me to mention a movie, and then warn readers away, otherwise I'd be writing negative articles all day long. After all, Hollywood insists on churning out a product that is either unsuitable for Christian eyes and ears, or simply not worth our entertainment dollars. Rare exceptions in the last few years have included silver-screen adaptations of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

Tolkien and Lewis stand out because of their profound commitment to a theistic world view (although not to New Testament Christianity as such).

At the opposite end of the spectrum is Philip Pullman. If Lewis' *Narnia* is an allegory of the Gospel, Pullman's trilogy for children is an allegory of the anti-Gospel. His first installment, *The Golden Compass*, looks like a glitzy family movie. At first glance, he seems to have the Roman Catholic Church in his sights, what with references to priests, cardinals and the like. Keep in mind, however, that militant atheists don't care whether one church is closer to the Bible than another.

As far as they are concerned, *all* religion is bad. Now that the movie is out in time for Christmas, Pullman is trying to be oh-so diplomatic, but he has been crystal clear in the past. "I'm trying to undermine the basis of Christian belief," he told the *Washington Post* back in 2001. "My books are about killing God," he told *The Sydney*



Morning Herald in 2003. Indeed, by the end of the three-part series, the weak and incompetent god-figure perishes in a gust of wind. Screenwriters have tried to soften Pullman's harsh rhetoric, but we don't need to fund his openly anti-God agenda.

The other disappointment this holiday season is *Beowulf*. Trailers promise an action-packed adventure, and I was looking forward to seeing this old epic brought to life on the big screen. Unfortunately, virtual nudity and other inappropriate themes demonstrate once and for all that "PG-13" has become the new "R."

Further, in this Hollywood version of the story, Christianity is consigned to the cowardly and cruel. Tolkien, who almost single-handedly revived the study of *Beowulf* for modern audiences, would have been shocked. In the original version, characters refer to God in a very positive light, and some writers have speculated that the story introduced pagans to Christian ways of thinking.

Again, each of us can send a message to Hollywood by spending our entertainment dollars elsewhere.

(This article appeared originally in the December 9, 2007 edition of *Banner of Truth* — the weekly bulletin of the Alkire Road Church of Christ.)

Trevor Major is the Director of the Ohio Bible Institute.

