



THE MALACHI ABYSSAL

*Abyssal: A*byss"al, a. [Cf. Abysmal.] Belonging to, or resembling, an abyss; unfathomable; from the word abyss, meaning an immeasurably deep chasm, depth, or void: "lost in the vast abysses of space and time" (Loren Eiseley).*

An abyssal is an empty valley that once was probably dry land—and is now under the sea.

It is an empty span, devoid of most common life forms, which traverses from one rim from whence it begins to the other rim from whence it ends. It is a span, significant in time, in which nothing occurs.

The Malachi Abyssal.

The 400 year span of silence from God.

In this modern day, we sometimes have fallen prey to duplications of God's power; substitutions of the true power by trickery, sleight-of-hand, diversion, electronics, and subterfuge.

The reason that we do this is—I believe—that we are in another abyssal similar to the one that began with Malachi and ended in the advent of the New Testament.

This does not mean that God has died, gone away, given up, turned His back, or otherwise abandoned us.

It is, however, much easier to assume erroneously that—based upon thunder and lightnings—that God does not exist. It is much easier to have license to sin—and impunity from which to sin.

BE CAREFUL: it is just this mentality that causes the Second Coming to be like "a thief in the night."

An Abyssal does not mean that we have been left bereft of power—but it does mean that

we must deserve it to wield it; it does not mean that we are devoid of gifts, and fruit—but it does mean that we must pursue these abilities; it does not mean that we are without knowledge of the things of God—but it does mean that we must “study to show ourselves approved...”

It is a period of time in which the test of character that is evinced within this Dispensation of Grace is rendered. The test of character must be assembled according to certain rules, and regulations. Faith must be demonstrated by choice; giving over our wills to God must be accomplished by decision; salvation through Jesus Christ is attained through belief in Him, understanding of ourselves, and the concomitant commitment to living in Him as a born-again child of God.

During this period, we do not measure ourselves against a strict standard or listing of characteristics; it is more about how we feel about who we are, what we do, and the decisions that we make than being graded by test score; however, interestingly enough, there is a comparison of the testing procedure which is salient to this postulation of a second Malachi Abyssal:

When we take a test, one of the first things that happens is that we are left alone.

We are separated from others, given the tools with which to work, and then left alone.

If the teacher helps us at this time, the test is tainted and the results inconclusive.

If they provide us with help in answering questions, how can they tell how much we have assimilated?

Indeed, and especially in this test of character, we must be left alone: hence the postulation by PARRC Research of a second Malachi Abyssal: and it started at the Ascension.

Not as harsh as to say that mankind has been left to its' own devices: but to certainly say that in order to determine our ability to make the proper choices, decide on having the mind of Christ, salvation through grace, and living the born-again life—we must be left alone.

In singularity will the demonstration of these characteristics be ascertained.

I believe that the gifts are alive and well; healing, certain types of glossolalia, and many other miraculous events certainly do occur. Perhaps not in the plenitude that they occurred in periods that were not Abyssals—but they do still happen. We must be on guard for two things, however:

- That we do not fall into the trap of fabricating miracles because we want them so badly—rather than climbing the rough side of the mountain to attain the development and character that God loves and rewards commensurately—and
- That we do not fall into the trap of the “quiet desperation of disbelief—” because our spirits entertain the truth, we honestly know that many of the things we see advertised as miracles are not really such things; we begin to require a sign, or request a miracle, or become weak in our faith because our prayers are not instantaneously answered.

Remember: this time in which we live might just be the ending of an Abyssal.

Here are some thoughts and perspectives on what we call the Malachi Abyssal from other sources—these studies are especially helpful in positing the history and activities during this unusual period:

From “The Silence of God :”

Malachi was speaking these words in skeptical times. It was a time when almost everyone had given up hope of ever realizing the coming of the Messiah. It was a time of evil when people were speaking against God. Malachi writes, "You have said harsh things against me," says the LORD. "Yet you ask, 'What have we said against you?' "You have said, 'It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape.'"
(Malachi 3:13-15 NIV)

Apparently, the majority ceased to listen to God's prophets. Those listening to God were speaking evil of God because they thought life was unfair. When they did worship God, they were mournful in his presence because they believed that the arrogant evildoers and those who challenged God prospered. It was at this point that the prophetic voices of the Old Testament became silent. Four hundred years of silence followed.

Feelings of isolation and confusion grew among the Jews during the 400 years of silence between the closing of the Old Testament and the opening of the New Testament. During those 400 years there had been anti-Christ who claimed to be the Messiah, Jewish wars had been fought, doubt and despair were spread abroad, religion had been corrupted and those who were faithful were precious few. The silence of God had taken its toll. Yet, God's

plan for Christ's birth was very much alive.

Luke opens his book shattering 400 years of silence. Luke begins his gospel precisely where Malachi left off. The final words of the Old Testament speak of the coming of one who would prepare the way for the Lord. Luke commences his gospel with the angelic announcement of Gabriel to Zacharias, an elderly priest, that he and his wife will have a son, a son who will come in the spirit of Elijah the prophet, and who will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and will prepare the way of the Lord. He was to be the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy. "

(Text From The Focus on God web site (<http://focusongod.com>))

From "The History Of The 'Period Of Silence' :"

"Lasting from 400 BC to the time of Christ, this is a time that little is known about from the Bible. It is the so-called "silent period." It's interesting to see how many different things are done in 400-year periods in the Bible: the time between Genesis and Exodus, for example, is another such 400-year-period of "silence."

The name is something of a misnomer since the periods were anything but silent.

The period was preceded almost immediately by the rebuilding of the walls in Jerusalem, which Nehemiah finished around 445 BC. The Persian empire founded by Cyrus would last halfway into this period, to 330 BC, and bring many the Jews home again. Meanwhile people were moving far and wide, exploring the world. The Persian empire dominated the known world - clear across the Middle East and deep into Asia. Carthaginian explorers took 30,000 men and women in 60 ships down the western coast of Africa as far as Gambia, founding 6 new cities.

Pericles was the one to pull Greece together.

In 390 BC the Romans rebuilt Rome; 40 years later they developed the legion, the basic battle formation they would use to conquer the known world. Meanwhile, in the 330s Alexander the Great was already busy doing the same thing; his world empire would reach through Afghanistan as far as India, introducing knowledge of that land. Upon his untimely death, as Daniel prophesied, his kingdom was broken up in 4 parts. Israel was ruled first by Greeks, then the Ptolemies of Egypt, and then by the Seleucids. This final empire would last until about 238 BC. At the same time the Romans and the Carthaginians came into conflict in the early 200s. Hannibal destroyed a Roman army numbering 85,000 men.

During this period, both Aristotle and Plato lived and worked. The first known encyclopedias were developed during this time. The Greek traveler Megasthenes travelled as far as India and published a book about that land. The Greek navigator Pytheas explored the Atlantic coast of Europe and Great Britain. The Great Library of Alexandria was founded.

The early 100s were difficult for the Jews. Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid king of Syria, entered the Jewish temple and attempted to replace the worship of Yahweh with the worship of Zeus. The Jewish revolt by the Maccabees in 166 BC re-established Jewish independence. Meanwhile, the Romans had finally destroyed Carthage and broke that empire forever.

In 112 BC, the Pharisees and Saducees came into existence. By 103 BC all attempts to Hellenize the Jews had been ended. By 63 BC the growing power of the Rome came to Israel and conquered Jerusalem; the Roman general Pompey entered the Holy of Holies but found it empty. From then on Israel was ruled by Rome-approved Kings like Herod the Great. In 58 BC Julius Caesar began his conquest of the Roman Republic.

In 53 BC Rome and Persia fought the Battle of Carrhae. Persia won, and it was one of the major sparks that led to the end of the Roman Republic and the founding of the Roman Empire. The next year saw Caesar's turning point: his army of 70,000 defeated a Gallic army of 250,000 and conquered the 60 tribes of Gaul. He would live just a little more than 10 more years before finally being murdered, but his successors would establish the Roman Empire, which would last for over a century, until AD 68.

So this has been a brief overview to get you situated in each time period. You can remember them this way: start with Abraham, then to Joseph, then to Moses, then to David, then to Daniel, then to Rome. In the coming weeks, we'll look at all of this in the context of examining God's heart for the nations.”

—From the web page of Justinlong.org

From “The 400 Years Between The Old And New Testaments:”

“At the close of the book of Malachi in the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is back again in the land of Palestine after the Babylonian captivity, but they are under the domination of the great world power of that day, Persia and the Mede-Persian empire. In Jerusalem, the temple had been restored, although it was a much smaller building than the one that Solomon had built and decorated in such marvelous glory.

Within the temple the line of Aaronic priests was still worshipping and carrying on the sacred rites as they had been ordered to do by the law of Moses. There was a direct line of descendancy in the priesthood that could be traced back to Aaron.

But the royal line of David had fallen on evil days. The people knew who the rightful successor to David was, and in the book of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, his name is given to us. It was Zerubbabel, the royal prince, yet there was no king on the throne of Israel, they were a puppet nation, under the domination of Persia. Nevertheless, although they were beset with weakness and formalism as the prophets have shown us, the people were united. There were no political schisms or factions among them, nor were they divided into groups or parties.

Now when you open the New Testament to the book of Matthew, you discover an entirely different atmosphere -- almost a different world. Rome is now the dominant power of the earth. The Roman legions have spread throughout the length and breadth of the civilized world. The center of power has shifted from the East to the West, to Rome. Palestine is still a puppet state -- the Jews never did regain their own sovereignty -- but now there is a king on the throne. But this king is the descendant of Esau instead of Jacob, and his name is Herod the Great. Furthermore, the high priests who now sit in the seat of religious authority in the nation are no longer from the line of Aaron. They cannot trace their descendancy back, rather, they are hired priests to whom the office is sold as political patronage.

The temple is still the center of Jewish worship, although the building has been partially destroyed and rebuilt about a half-dozen times since the close of the Old Testament. But now the synagogues that have sprung up in every Jewish city seem to be the center of Jewish life even more than the temple.

At this time the people of Israel were split into three major parties. Two of them, the Pharisees and Sadducees, were much more prominent than the third. The smaller group, the Essenes, could hardly be designated as a party. Not long ago, however, they came into great prominence in our time and took on new significance because they had stowed away some documents in caves overlooking the Dead Sea -- documents which were brought to light again by the accidental discovery of an Arab shepherd boy and are known as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Now, what happened in these four hundred so-called "silent" years after the last of the inspired prophets spoke and the first of the New Testament writers began to write? You remember there is a word in Paul's letter to the Galatians that says, "When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law." (Gal. 4:4) In other words, the time of our Lord's birth was God's appointed hour, the moment for which God

had been long preparing. Some of the exciting preparations took place during that time of "silence," however, and you will understand your New Testament much better if you understand something of the historic events during the time between the Testaments.

After Malachi had ceased his prophesying and the canon of the Old Testament closed -- that is, the number of the books in the Old Testament was fulfilled and the inspired prophets ceased to speak -- God allowed a period of time for the teachings of the Old Testament to penetrate throughout the world. During this time, he rearranged the scenes of history, much as a stage crew will rearrange the stage sets after the curtain has fallen, and when the curtain rises again there is an entirely new setting.

In about 435 B.C., when the prophet Malachi ceased his writing, the center of world power began to shift from the East to the West. Up to this time, Babylon had been the major world power, but this was soon succeeded by the Mede-Persian empire, as you remember from ancient history. This shift had been predicted by the prophet Daniel, who said that there would rise up a bear who was higher on one side than the other, signifying the division between Media and Persia, with the Persians the predominant ones (Dan. 7:5).

At the height of the Persian power there arose in the country of Macedonia (which we now know as Greece), north of the Black Sea, a man by the name of Philip of Macedon, who became a leader in his own country. He united the islands of Greece and became their ruler. His son was destined to become one of the great world leaders of all time, Alexander the Great. In 330 B.C. a tremendous battle between the Persians and the Greeks entirely altered the course of history. In that battle, Alexander, as a young man only twenty years old, led the armies of Greece in victory over the Persians and completely demolished the power of Persia. The center of world power then shifted farther west into Greece, and the Grecian empire was born.

A year after that historic battle, Alexander the Great led his armies down into the Syrian world toward Egypt. On the way, he planned to lay siege to the city of Jerusalem. As the victorious armies of the Greeks approached the city, word was brought to the Jews in Jerusalem that the armies were on their way. The high priest at that time, who was a godly old man by the name of Jaddua (who, by the way, is mentioned in the Bible in the book of Nehemiah) took the sacred writings of Daniel the prophet and, accompanied by a host of other priests dressed in white garments, went forth and met Alexander some distance outside the city.

All this is from the report of Josephus, the Jewish historian, who tells us that Alexander left his army and hurried to meet this body of priests. When he met them, he told the high priest that he had had a vision the night before in which God had shown him an old man, robed in

a white garment, who would show him something of great significance to himself, according to the account, the high priest then opened the prophecies of Daniel and read them to Alexander.

In the prophecies Alexander was able to see the predictions that he would become that notable goat with the horn in his forehead, who would come from the West and smash the power of Mede-Persia and conquer the world. He was so overwhelmed by the accuracy of this prophecy and, of course, by the fact that it spoke about him, that he promised that he would save Jerusalem from siege, and sent the high priest back with honors. How true that account is, is very difficult at this distance in time to say; that, at any event, is the story.

Alexander died in 323 B.C. when he was only about thirty-three years old. He had drunk himself to death in the prime of his life, grieved because he had no more worlds to conquer. After his death, his empire was torn with dissension, because he had left no heir. His son had been murdered earlier, so there was no one to inherit the empire of Alexander.

After some time, however, the four generals that had led Alexander's armies divided his empire between them. Two of them are particularly noteworthy to us. One was Ptolemy, who gained Egypt and the northern African countries; the other was Seleucus, who gained Syria, to the north of Palestine. During this time Palestine was annexed by Egypt, and suffered greatly at the hands of Ptolemy. In fact, for the next one hundred years, Palestine was caught in the meat-grinder of the unending conflicts between Syria on the north and Egypt on the south.

*Now if you have read the prophecies of Daniel, you will recall that Daniel was able, by inspiration, to give a very accurate and detailed account of the highlights of these years of conflict between the king of the North (Syria) and the king of the South (Egypt). The eleventh chapter of Daniel gives us a most amazingly accurate account of that which has long since been fulfilled. If you want to see just how accurate the prophecy is, I suggest you compare that chapter of Daniel with the historical record of what actually occurred during that time. H. A. Ironside's little book, *The 400 Silent Years*, gathers that up in some detail.*

During this time Grecian influence was becoming strong in Palestine. A party arose among the Jews called the Hellenists, who were very eager to bring Grecian culture and thought into the nation and to liberalize some of the Jewish laws. This forced a split into two major parties. There were those who were strong Hebrew nationalist, who wanted to preserve everything according to the Mosaic order. They resisted all the foreign influences that were coming in to disrupt the old Jewish ways. This party became known as the Pharisees, which means "to separate." They were the separations who insisted on preserving traditions. They grew stronger and stronger, becoming more legalistic and rigid in their requirements, until

they became the target for some of the most scorching words our Lord ever spoke. They had become religious hypocrites, keeping the outward form of the law, but completely violating its spirit.

On the other hand, the Hellenists -- the Greek lovers -- became more and more influential in the politics of the land. They formed the party that was known in New Testament days as the Sadducees, the liberals.

They turned away from the strict interpretation of the law and became the rationalists of their day, ceasing to believe in the supernatural in any way. We are told in the New Testament that they came again and again to the Lord with questions about the supernatural, like "What will happen to a woman who has been married to seven different men? In the resurrection, whose wife will she be?" (Matt. 22:23-33) They did not believe in a resurrection, but in these questions they were trying to put Jesus on the spot.

Now there was also a young rebel Jewish priest who married a Samaritan, went down to Samaria, and in rebellion against the Jewish laws, built a temple on Mount Gerizim that became a rival of the temple in Jerusalem. This caused intense, fanatical rivalry between the Jews and the Samaritans, and this rivalry is also reflected in the New Testament.

Also during this time, in Egypt, under the reign of one of the Ptolemies, the Hebrew scriptures were translated for the first time into another language, in about 284 B.C. A group of 70 scholars was called together by the Egyptian king to make a translation of the Hebrew scriptures. Book by book they translated the Old Testament into Greek. When they had finished, it was given the name of the Septuagint, which means 70, because of the number of translators. This became the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible. From it many of the quotations in the New Testament are derived. That is why New Testament quotations of Old Testament verses are sometimes in different words -- because they come from the Greek translation. The Septuagint is still in existence today, and is widely used in various parts of the world. It is still a very important document.

A little later on, about 203 B.C., a king named Antiochus the Great came into power in Syria, to the north of Palestine. He captured Jerusalem from the Egyptians and began the reign of Syrian power over Palestine.

He had two sons, one of whom succeeded him and reigned only a few years. When he died, his brother took the throne. This man, named Antiochus Epiphanes, became one of the most vicious and violent persecutors of the Jews ever known. In fact, he is often called the Antichrist of the Old Testament, since he fulfills some of the predictions of Daniel concerning the coming of one who would be "a contemptible person" and "a vile king." His

name (which he modestly bestowed upon himself) means "Antiochus the Illustrious." Nevertheless, some of his own courtiers evidently agreed more with the prophecies of Daniel, and they changed two letters in his title. from Epiphanes to Epipames, which means "the mad man."

His first act was to depose the high priest in Jerusalem. thus ending the long line of succession, beginning with Aaron and his sons through the many centuries of Jewish life. Onias the Third was the last of the hereditary line of priests. Antiochus Epiphanes sold the priesthood to Jason, who was not of the priestly line. Jason, in turn, was tricked by his younger brother Menelaus, who purchased the priesthood and then sold the golden vessels of the temple in order to make up the tribute money. Epiphanes overthrew the God-authorized line of priests. Then, and under his reign, the city of Jerusalem and all the religious rites of the Jews began to deteriorate as they came fully under the power of the Syrian king.

In 171 B.C. Antiochus invaded Egypt and once again Palestine was caught in the nutcracker of rivalry. Palestine is the most fought-over country in the world, and Jerusalem is the most captured city in all history. It has been pillaged, ravished, burned and destroyed more than 27 times in its history.

While Antiochus was in Egypt, it was reported that he had been killed in battle, and Jerusalem rejoiced. The people organized a revolt and overthrew Menelaus, the pseudo-priest. When report reached Antiochus (who was very much alive in Egypt) that Jerusalem was delighted at the report of his death, he organized his armies and swept like a fury back across the land, falling upon Jerusalem with terrible vengeance.

He overturned the city, regained his power, and guided by the treacherous Menelaus, intruded into the very Holy of Holies in the temple itself. Some 40,000 people were slain in three days of fighting during this terrible time. When he forced his way into the Holy of Holies, he destroyed the scrolls of the law and, to the absolute horror of the Jews, took a sow and offered it upon the sacred altar. Then with a broth made from the flesh of this unclean animal, he sprinkled everything in the temple, thus completely defiling and violating the sanctuary. It is impossible for us to grasp how horrifying this was to the Jews. They were simply appalled that anything like this could ever happen to their sacred temple.

It was that act of defiling the temple which is referred to by the Lord Jesus as the "desolating sacrilege" which Daniel had predicted (Matt. 24:15), and which also became a sign of the coming desolation of the temple when Antichrist himself will enter the temple, call himself God, and thus defile the temple in that time. As we know from the New Testament, that still lies in the future.

Daniel the prophet had said the sanctuary would be polluted for 2300 days. (Dan. 8:14) In exact accordance with that prophecy, it was exactly 2300 days -- six and a half years -- before the temple was cleansed. It was cleansed under the leadership of a man now famous in Jewish history, Judas Maccabaeus. He was one of the priestly line who, with his father and four brothers, rose up in revolt against the Syrian king. They captured the attention of the Israelites, summoned them to follow them into battle, and in a series of pitched battles in which they were always an overwhelming minority, overthrew the power of the Syrian kings, captured Jerusalem, and cleansed the temple. The day they cleansed the temple was named the Day of Dedication, and it occurred on the 25th day of December. On that date Jews still celebrate the Feast of Dedication each year.

The Maccabees, who were of the Asmonean family, began a line of high priests known as the Asmonean Dynasty. Their sons, for about the next three or four generations, ruled as priests in Jerusalem, all the time having to defend themselves against the constant assaults of the Syrian army who tried to recapture the city and the temple. During the days of the Maccabees there was a temporary overthrow of foreign domination, which is why the Jews look back to this time and regard it with such tremendous veneration.

During this time, one of the Asmonean priests made a league with the rising power in the West, Rome. He signed a treaty with the Senate of Rome, providing for help in the event of Syrian attack. Though the treaty was made in all earnestness and sincerity, it was this pact which introduced Rome into the picture and history of Israel.

As the battles between the two opposing forces waged hotter and hotter, Rome was watchful. Finally, the Governor of Idumea, a man named Antipater and a descendant of Esau, made a pact with two other neighboring kings and attacked Jerusalem to try to overthrow the authority of the Asmonean high priest. This battle raged so fiercely that finally Pompey, the Roman general, who happened to have an army in Damascus at the time, was besought by both parties to come and intervene. One side had a little more money than the other, and persuaded by that logical argument, Pompey came down from Damascus, entered the city of Jerusalem -- again with terrible slaughter -- overthrew the city and captured it for Rome.

That was in 63 B.C. From that time on, Palestine was under the authority and power of Rome.

Now Pompey and the Roman Senate appointed Antipater as the Procurator of Judea, and he in turn made his two sons kings of Galilee and Judea. The son who became king of Judea is known to us as Herod the Great. ("Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of

Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?'" (Matt. 2:1, 2)

Meanwhile, the pagan empires around had been deteriorating and disintegrating. Their religions had fallen upon evil days. The people were sick of the polytheism and emptiness of their pagan faiths. The Jews had gone through times of pressure and had failed in their efforts to re-establish themselves, and had given up all hope. There was a growing air of expectancy that the only hope they had left was the coming at last of the promised Messiah. In the East, the oriental empires had come to the place where the wisdom and knowledge of the past had disintegrated and they too were looking for something. When the moment came when the star arose over Bethlehem, the wise men of the East who were looking for an answer to their problems saw it immediately and came out to seek the One it pointed to. Thus, "when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son."

It is amazing how God utilizes history to work out his purposes. Though we are living in the days that might be termed "the silence of God," when for almost 2,000 years there has been no inspired voice from God, we must look back -- even as they did during those 400 silent years -- upon the inspired record and realize that God has already said all that needs to be said, through the Old and New Testaments. God's purposes have not ended, for sure. He is working them out as fully now as he did in those days. Just as the world had come to a place of hopelessness then, and the One who would fulfill all their hopes came into their midst, so the world again is facing a time when despair is spreading widely across the earth. Hopelessness is rampant everywhere and in this time God is moving to bring to fulfillment all the prophetic words concerning the coming of his Son again into the world to establish his kingdom. How long? How close? Who knows? But what God has done in history, he will do again as we approach the end of "the silence of God."

—by Ray C. Stedman, www.templemount.org

Now, please read a discourse by an author who believes that we are again in an abyssal:

Silence Again: For Nineteen Centuries

IT MAY BE wondered why, if the fig tree was now condemned to be cut down, it was not cut down immediately. For reasons which are partly discernible in Scripture, God saw fit to

delay the Judgment for a period of forty years, the period from the final rejection of the renewed offer until the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by Titus in A.D. 70. During this interval the performance of signs and wonders steadily declined. Miracles of healing, supernatural deliverances, dramatic and instant judgments, and the gift of tongues gradually ceased to be the commonplace events associated with the ministry of the disciples and apostles, until by the end of Acts they are either no longer recorded or they had, in fact, ceased altogether.

But just as there was a tapering off of these signs and wonders when God's covenant relationship with Israel was suspended, so as the time draws near for that covenant relationship to be revitalized again with the return of the Messiah, once more we begin to detect, with increasing frequency, the reappearance of signs and wonders. This phenomenon is indeed, I believe, one of the most promising and encouraging evidences that the coming of the Lord is near again.

Let us examine this situation a little more carefully.

When the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven and was received out of their sight, the disciples returned to Jerusalem rejoicing (Luke 24:52). A strange reaction this was, surely, to the departing of One so dear to them and so important to them. But just before He left them, He had made a wonderful promise, the promise that they could perform signs and wonders even greater than those He had performed Himself--the fulfillment of a prophetic statement made to them earlier (Mark 16:17,18). These signs and wonders were to include healing the sick, casting out devils, and speaking with tongues. It was as though a reprieve for Israel had been granted and one last gracious effort was to be made by a tremendous public display of divine power to persuade the Jews that the Lord was indeed their Messiah.

The opening of the ministry of Peter and the other apostles must have been so astounding in its immediate impact as virtually to defy adequate record. In Acts 5:12-16 it is written:

And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people...(and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women) inasmuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them who were vexed with unclean spirits; and they were healed every one.

It should be remembered that these were Jews. There were no Gentile believers yet. The ministry of the apostles was still a testimony to Israel; Peter in his first sermon (Acts 2:14)

specifically addressed himself to them and appealed to their Old Testament Scriptures for an explanation of the extraordinary events taking place--including the speaking in tongues as a testimony of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon men and women alike. (31) Evidently the people who heard Peter were deeply moved by his words. When Peter said, "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made this same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:36), the Jews had at once asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" From that day on, signs and wonders were continually performed by the apostles with a view to turning their hesitant inquiry into firm conviction.

But something else was also happening which must have made the perceptive in Israel doubly aware of the validity of the claims these men made for their Messiah. This is the fact that men were not merely being blessed in remarkable ways, but also punished very suddenly. The falling of sudden judgment upon wicked men had been part of the Old Testament record. The most remarkable example was probably the fate of Korah and those who under his persuasion rebelled against the authority of Moses. The account of this event is given in simple but dramatic words in Numbers 16. When Moses knew the full circumstances of the matter, he challenged them as follows (vv. 28-33):

And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the Lord hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind.

If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the Lord hath not sent me. But if the Lord make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth and swallow them up with all that appertain unto them, and they go down alive into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord.

And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground craved asunder that was under them: and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, with their dwellings and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods.

They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation.

Thus was the authority of Moses as the Lord's spokesman demonstrated. Another example may be observed in the case of Er and Onan (Gen. 38:6-10). A similar thing happened with Peter in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, whose deaths were just as dramatic and sudden. The effect of it was that "great fear came upon all the church and upon as many as heard these things" (Acts 5:11). Later on, the apostle James, writing to the Hebrew Christians who had scattered after the first persecution began, seems to have been reflecting the same experience when he warned his readers not to grudge one against another lest they, too, be subject to the same kind of immediate and public divine

condemnation: "Behold, the Judge standeth before the door" (James 5:9).

We encounter another example of instant judgment in Acts 12:20-25. Upon this occasion Herod, dressed in royal apparel and sitting on a throne, made a speech to a large number of people who had caused him some displeasure. In their anxiety to mitigate his wrath, we are told that the people gave a shout saying, "It is the voice of a god and not of a man." And "immediately the angel of the Lord smote him because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms and gave up the ghost." The acclaim must have gone to his head, and although he may not have died on the spot, he was instantly struck down with some terrible disease that terminated his ugly reign.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, addressing himself as James had done to the Jewish people who had been scattered, warned them that they had been witness to very many proofs that the Lord Jesus was indeed the Messiah, having seen the signs and wonders performed not only by the Lord Himself, but by the apostles afterward. Thus he wrote (Heb. 2:3,4):

How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation which at first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him, God also bearing them witness with both signs and wonders and with diverse miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will?

After the great sermon in Acts 2 and some notable miracles in Acts 3, Peter was called to give an account before the Sanhedrin and asked by what power or by whose authority he was doing these things. It was a turning point in the life of Israel as a nation: the authorities, rather than repenting of their former decision to crucify their own Messiah, now set themselves more determinedly than ever to justify their actions and to silence all opposition.

Some days later, Stephen made his final "presentation" on behalf of their Messiah before high priest and the council...and they murdered him.

From that time forward, signs and wonders began to decline. Speaking in tongues appears to have become less and less frequent, as did miracles of healing and also dramatic and instantaneous judgments.

We can trace this decline throughout the Book of Acts until, in Acts 28:25 and following, there seems to have come a terminal point in this respect. Paul said (v. 28), "Be it known therefore unto you that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles and that they will hear it." With this, the Book of Acts comes to a close, and we find no further instances of healing recorded in any of the Epistles to follow. The active covenant relationship of God with His people Israel had come to an end for the present. As a consequence, signs and wonders

which were the customary demonstration of the reality of that covenant were no longer granted to them. The kingdom has been taken from them and given to the Gentiles, who will bring forth the fruits thereof until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Rom. 11:25).

The children of Israel shall abide many days without a King and without a Prince, and without a Sacrifice...

Afterwards shall the children of Israel return and seek the Lord their God and David their King, and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.

Let us trace now, briefly, the course of events after Israel had "sent" Stephen to heaven as their official notice of rejection, so fulfilling Luke 19:14.

In these early wonderful days, very special protection of the apostles had been granted by the Lord. When their exasperated enemies had seized them and had thrust them into the common prison, the Angel of the Lord had come by night and opened the prison doors and brought them forth so simply and so wonderfully that the whole event is recorded in only two verses (Acts 5:19, 20)

The next morning they were back preaching in the temple as though nothing had happened, while the officers themselves were not even aware that their prisoners had escaped. At a later date, when Peter was imprisoned by Herod and under sentence of death the very next day, the same thing happened again. Acts 12:6-10 has the story in its remarkable detail:

Peter was sleeping between two soldiers bound with two chains, and the keepers before the door kept the prison, and behold the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison; and he smote Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee and follow me. And he went out and followed him; and wist not it was true that was done by the angel, but thought he was dreaming.

When they were past the first and second guard they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city which opened to them of its own accord: and they went out and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.

Paul also experienced a similar wonderful deliverance (Acts 16:25ff.), though he did not actually leave the prison until he had established the dignity of his own person as a Roman citizen.

Now the important thing to observe here is that such deliverances occurred only in the earlier years of the ministry of the apostles (including Paul), and they did not occur later

either in Peter's case or in Paul's. Peter was martyred without deliverance and undoubtedly after some indefinite period of imprisonment. Paul shared the same fate--though in his case we know something of the details of his imprisonment in short, we know that he was imprisoned and not miraculously set free. Why the change? Why did God at first move heaven and earth to set His witnesses free, but in the end leave them to their fate? No doubt their martyrdom was to His great glory and perhaps, at the beginning, imprisonment would have totally hindered their ministry. But in Paul's case at least, imprisonment did not have this effect. Indeed, we owe some of the great epistles to this circumstance. Yet I think there is another reason.

I believe that the answer is probably that this kind of dramatic deliverance was still one of the signs and wonders which the Jewish people needed in order to convince them individually, if not as a nation, that Jesus Christ really was what He claimed to be. Once it became apparent that nationally the Jews would not accept this testimony, then God began to turn to the Gentiles. But Jewish believers would probably have refused to accept the Gentiles into the commonwealth of Israel unless signs and wonders had continued as a validation first of Peter's ministry and then of Paul's ministry, demonstrating to them that this "new thing" was acceptable in the sight of God. It is clear that one of the surest and simplest signs in this connection was the gift of tongues. When Peter went to the home of Cornelius and preached the gospel to a Gentile family for the first time, "the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God" (Acts 10:44-46).

Thus it was that God accommodated signs and wonders to the need of the early Hebrew Christians in such a way that they would find it possible to accept Gentile believers as having really been brought into a similar covenant relationship with God. In view of all their background it seems likely that this was the simplest and most appropriate way in which to carry forward their understanding of the things which were beginning to happen, the transfer of the kingdom from Jew to Gentile. Moreover, since Paul was soon to become the great missionary to the Gentiles, it was necessary that some signs and wonders should become known as having accompanied his ministry also. There is little doubt that Paul himself had spoken with tongues as a validation of his calling (I Cor. 14:18), and there were some striking cases of sudden judgment (Acts 13:6f.), raising of the dead (Acts 20:9-12), casting out demons (Acts 16:16-18), deliverance in prison (Acts 16:25f.), from the bite of a viper (Acts 28:3-6), and many miracles of healing (Acts 19:11, 12; 28:8, 9).

Only by such shared experiences was it possible for the middle wall of partition which had hitherto rigidly divided Gentile from Jew to be broken down (Eph. 2:14). Paul could

therefore validate his own ministry to the Gentiles in front of those Hebrew Christians who must at first have had serious doubts. He refers to this when writing to the Romans (15:18, 19):

For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me to make the Gentiles obedient by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem, and round about Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of the Messiah.

Wherever he went, until we come to the crucial point in Acts 28, Paul still preached first to the Jewish people (Acts 13:46; 17:2, 3; 18:4). And as evidence of his propriety in then turning to the Gentiles, he could point out that the same gifts which had been granted to the Jewish Christians were now being granted by the same Holy Spirit to the Gentiles (I Cor. 12:1-11). Not only were the Jewish believers called upon to accept the Gentiles as having enjoyed a like experience, but the Gentiles themselves needed assurance that their experience was of the same nature as that of the Jewish believers. Assurance was needed on both sides. Signs and wonders served this purpose for both. Thus Paul wrote to the Gentiles (II Cor. 12:12) "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds." The Gentiles themselves were thereby convinced that a like Christian experience was now granted to them. Once this conviction was well established, such signs and wonders were no longer essential: they were not necessarily absent entirely, but they were not essential for conviction.

As time went on, conversions among the Gentiles seemed to depend less and less upon miracle. In fact, in one place where Paul preached and performed a notable miracle, the effects of the miracle were entirely undesirable. Having healed a man at Lystra in response to faith (Acts 14:9), the local residents were at first so amazed and impressed that they tried to make Paul and his co-worker Barnabas into gods (v. 12). When Paul and Barnabas insisted that they were not gods but men like themselves, the crowd instantly became hostile, and with a little persuasion from certain Jews of Antioch and Iconium, Paul was stoned and left for dead. It seems clear from this time on that miracles no longer played the part of validation which they had when God's covenant relationship with Israel was active.

This fact is borne out in another striking way. We have spoken of the manner in which, as part of these signs and wonders, judgment had been apt to fall very suddenly upon those who, for one reason or another, were tending to undermine the testimony of the apostles to the reality of the Lord's claim for Himself. In the earlier epistles to the Gentiles, and even in the later epistles, to the Jewish brethren scattered abroad, there are a number of intimations that when those who had become members of the household of faith, and had openly declared themselves as such, fell into evil ways which brought reproach upon the name of the Lord, judgment was likely to fall upon them swiftly, especially when the

apostles themselves called upon the Lord so to act. It happened, of course, with Ananias and Sapphira. This is a clear example. But there are a number of limitations: and it is worth just examining these briefly, because toward the end of his life it appears that Paul could no longer depend upon the Lord to act in judgment in the same immediate way whenever he (Paul) called upon Him to do so.

Consider the implications of I Corinthians 11:29, 30. Here we have a picture of the young church, some of whose members were evidently making the Communion service an occasion for irreverence, provoking Paul to write:

He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh condemnation unto himself...for which cause a number are weak and sickly among you and many sleep.

There is no doubt as to the meaning of the word sleep. The Lord had taken these people home. In a similar manner, James wrote to the Hebrew Christians to advise them to take upon themselves the duty of correcting the behavior of those among them who, knowing the Lord, nevertheless were bringing reproach on His name. Thus he wrote (James 5:19, 20):

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turneth the sinner back from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death.

Not all were thus persuaded and rescued from judgment, for in II Peter 2-1 we read that false teachers "who privily brought in heresies which were to be condemned" by denying the Lord that bought them, had brought upon themselves "swift destruction."

In writing to the Christians in Rome, Paul said (Rom. 8:13):

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

I'm sure that the promise did not have reference to eternal life, but for this we certainly do not obtain by our own efforts in mortifying the deeds of the flesh. Paul was surely speaking of escaping the punishment of sudden destruction. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews was speaking in the same vein when he wrote (12:9):

Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us and we gave them reverence. Shall we not rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live?

Christian behavior may not always have been so extreme that the Lord found it necessary to act in swift judgment, for as John says (in I John 5:17) while "all unrighteousness is sin, there is a sin not unto death." Nevertheless the effect of only slight misbehavior, while the church was still as it were an infant in stature, was sometimes such as to lead weaker brethren into more grievous sin, with the correspondingly greater penalty--that they were removed. Thus Paul wrote in Romans 14:14, 15:

I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself, but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died.

In pagan worship it was customary to take offerings of meat or live animals to be slaughtered in reverence to the idol. The priests lived off the sale of this meat to the public, after it had been presented. In these special "market places" (referred to as "the shambles") the best meat could either be purchased or actually eaten on the spot at reduced cost. Poorer Christians apparently took advantage of this supply of cheap food in order to save money, but they thereby tended to give the impression that they were condoning the offering of sacrifices to idols. This was becoming a cause of stumbling to younger Christians. Whereupon Paul wrote (I Cor. 8:10, 11):

For if any man see thee who has knowledge sit at meat in an idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him that is weak be emboldened to eat these things which are offered to idols; and through thy knowledge [i.e., you knowing what you are doing] shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died?

Much more serious seems to have been the tendency for the Christian community in Corinth, that most wanton and morally degraded of all cities, to accept the low standards of behavior of the community and, even worse, to allow themselves still greater liberties--perhaps on the grounds that they were not under the law. Paul wrote to them,

It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and a kind of fornication which is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And you are puffed up and have not rather mourned that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you....

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have no way of knowing precisely how soon sudden acts of judgment began to become less frequent.

Looking at the date of the epistles which contain such references as these, one has the feeling that later epistles refer to such judgments rather as possibilities than certainties: they seem to remain as certainties rather longer in the epistles to the Hebrew Christians, and perhaps this is not so surprising. Among Gentiles on the whole, threats of sudden destruction seem seldom to have had the force of persuasion that signs and wonders had with the Jewish people. As Paul said, in effect, the Jews seek a sign: the Greek-speaking Gentiles are more concerned with rationalization (I Cor. 1:22).

At any rate, it seems to me that we do have some evidence that even this sign of "sudden judgment" was beginning to pass out of the church's experience in the later epistles of Paul. As is apparent from the above references, Paul was quite assured in his own mind that if he but handed over some particularly disobedient individual to Satan for the destruction of the body as a warning, God would honor his action. But we find in I Timothy 1:19, 20 that he was concerned with some who were by their behavior and persuasive powers leading weaker Christians to make "shipwreck" of their faith, "of whom were Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered unto Satan," as he says. But one year later, Alexander at least was still at large, unhindered in his destructive activities (II Timothy 4:14, 15).

This would be about A.D. 66. Thirty years later, even the small remaining groups of Hebrew Christians were no longer experiencing such sudden judgments, if we are to be guided by the implications of III John 9-11, where the behavior of some members of local churches was atrocious, and yet unchecked by any divine intervention. Even Paul's ministry of healing seems to have failed toward the end: as in the case of Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:27) and of Trophimus (II Tim. 4:20).

It would seem, therefore, that little by little all the signs and wonders which marked the ministry of the Lord and the early witness of the apostles, miraculous healings, speaking in tongues, extraordinary deliverances, and sudden judgments, were becoming rare indeed. They had persisted until the Jewish authorities had finally made their choice and rejected their Messiah, and they continued with less and less frequency once the transition had been made from an exclusively Jewish church to a predominantly Gentile one. We do not know positively that miracles became less common, nor speaking in tongues: we can only judge by the fact that they receive almost no mention in the later epistles. A great "silence" gradually descended upon the world in so far as any public manifestation of divine power and interference in human affairs was concerned. Indeed, the silence seems all too frequently to pertain now even in the matter of the experience of the individual, and the fact proves to be a stumbling block in the minds of many thoughtful people.

Sir Robert Anderson has written eloquently on this circumstance. He observed: (32)

If in the days of His humiliation, a poor crippled child had been brought into His presence, He would have healed it. And I am assured that His power is greater now than it was when He sojourned on earth and that He is still as near to us as He then was.

But when I bring this to a practical test, it fails....this poor afflicted child must remain a cripple. I dare not say He cannot heal my child but it is clear He will not.

In the days of His presence on earth in Palestine, geographical and physical barriers

prevented many from coming to Him for healing. On one occasion only by breaking up the roof could He be reached (Mark 2:1-5). So there were limitations to His ministry But now the situation is entirely different. He said, "Lo, I am with you even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). He is everywhere now. And one would therefore suppose that miracles ought to be occurring everywhere in the world with even greater frequency than ever. But we meet with silence for the most part.

Men may intellectually reject the concept of God as being contrary to reason, but emotionally men are more likely to reject the concept of God because, did He exist, He could not but act on man's behalf in the face of many of the tragedies of life. To quote Anderson once again, writing in the last century: (33)

If it were merely on behalf of this or that individual that God failed to interfere, or on one occasion or another, belief in His infinite wisdom and goodness ought to check our murmurings and soothe our fears. And, further, if as in the days of the Patriarchs even a whole generation passed away without His once declaring Himself, faith might glance back and hope look forward amidst heart searchings for the cause of His silence. But what confronts us is the fact, explain it how we may, that for eighteen centuries, the world has never witnessed a public manifestation of His presence or His power.

We may not entirely agree with Anderson that the world has witnessed no public manifestation of His power. There have been events affecting the lives of thousands of people which seemed to those who witnessed them to have the stamp of divine Providence upon them: the unusual dead calm of the English Channel, for example, during the last war when it came time to recover the Allied Forces from Europe after the first great setback. But the millions of Jews and great numbers of their sympathizers who were put to death without mercy during the same war shrink these few possible examples of Providence into comparative significance. In the presence of the stern and dismal facts of history, the expectancy of miracle in the days of the early church had faded away, for God seems to have become passive and often unavailable to such an extent that to many He is for all practical purposes nonexistent. Because of the absence of divine activity in a manifest way which all men can see, God appears indeed to be dead. Even the most earnest believer must wonder sometimes why God is so silent.

One cannot help but mark the contrast even in Acts between the early and the later chapters. Measured by years, the total period embraced is comparatively brief: but in terms of divine intervention, the end of Acts seems to belong to a different age from the beginning.

It is so easy to suppose that because the child of God is so highly favored, so very specially the object of the Father's concern, if he will only walk in the Lord's way he will always

prosper and be preserved from harm and delivered in distress. The Lord often does deliver, and as Sir Robert Anderson said, He always can. But certainly He does not always do so. As Gresham Machen said, after quoting Paul's triumphant cry, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (34)

These words constitute a veritable battle cry of faith; they might have served as the motto for countless heroic deeds. Trusting in the God of Israel, men fought mighty battles and won glorious victories; the Lord of hosts is a powerful ally.

Jonathan thought so, when he and his armor-bearer made that foolhardy attempt upon a garrison of the Philistines. "There is no restraint to the Lord," he said, "to save by many or by few." David thought so, with his five smooth stones from the brook and his great boasting adversary. "Thou comest to me," he said, "with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel." Elisha thought so, when he and his servant were shut up in Dothan. The Syrians had sought to take his life; he had revealed their plans to the kin of Israel; and at last they had caught him fair. When the servant of the prophet arose in the morning, the city was all surrounded by the Syrian hosts. "Alas, my master," he said, "how shall we do?" But the prophet was not dismayed. "Open his eyes," he said, "that he may see." And the Lord opened his eyes, and behold the hills were covered not only by the Syrian armies, but also by the fiery horses and chariots of God's protecting care. The apostles thought that God was a powerful ally, when they testified in the council of the Jews: "We must obey God rather than men." Luther thought so on that memorable day when he stood before kings and princes, and said--in substance if not in word--"Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me. Amen."

In these great moments of history the hand of God was revealed. But alas, the thing is not always so plain. Many prophets as true as Elisha have been surrounded by the armies of the aliens, and no fiery horses and chariots ever put in an appearance; five smooth stones from the brook, even when slung bravely in the name of the Lord of hosts, are not always able to cope with modern artillery; many men of God as bold as Peter, as sturdy as Luther have testified faithfully to the truth, and, being unprotected by the favour of the people or by wise Gamaliels or by friendly Electors of Saxony, have gone to the stake for their pains. Nor does it always seem to be true that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. Persecution sometimes seems to be crowned with a tragic success. As when pure religion by the use of physical weapons was largely stamped out of Italy and Spain and France, so often the blood of the martyrs seems to be shed in vain. What is true, moreover, in the large arena of history is also true in our workaday lives. Sometimes, in times of great spiritual crisis, the hand of God is revealed; there has been a signal answer to prayer; deliverance has come in wondrous ways when expected least. But at other times prayer just as

earnest seems to go unanswered, and faith seems set at naught.

It is proper for the child of God to accept this fact, to follow Job's example, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him!" (Job 13:15). This is surely triumph indeed. The Lord told His disciples that two sparrows were sold for far less than a single cent! Yet "not one of them falls to the ground without your Father" (Matt. 10:29). Not one of these tiny creatures whose value seems so small falls in its flight without what? Without our heavenly Father knowing it, or without our heavenly Father permitting it? Both surely. He must know He could prevent. This much is absolutely certain. But evidently there are times when He doesn't prevent. Can we trust Him or ourselves--even when we fall to the ground? Throughout the intervening centuries since these words were spoken, countless numbers of the Lord's children have learned that God may allow us to fall to the ground while still asking us to trust Him. It is a hard, hard lesson.

This silence has persisted for almost two thousand years, and its otherwise unaccountableness has often been one of the most distressing problems for Christian philosophers. "When they call, I will answer" has been in some way and to a very large extent replaced by "The heavens shall be as brass." Privately, the life of the believer may be as filled with divine interferences as any chapter of the Old Testament or the Gospels, but publicly, even in Christian nations or those nations which at times in their history have some right to call themselves such, the display of God's power in the performance of miracles, of healings, of deliverance, of sudden judgment, of speaking in tongues has been absent. I do not mean that men have not been wonderfully saved and that individual Christians have not had marvelous experiences of the Lord's providential care throughout these silent centuries. What I do mean is that millions have been persecuted and slaughtered and languished in prison: and millions of innocent people--men, women, and children--have suffered untold agonies: yet, while the wicked have gone unpunished, God has seemingly been deaf to their cry. It is one of the great problems of the church age, that God should remain apparently unmoved by human suffering.

Perhaps a little light, then, is shed on this tremendous problem in view of what has been said thus far about the special covenant relationship which God established with Israel. As we have already seen, it was prophesied that Israel should be for many days with neither priest nor king, cut off from God in a very special way because of their rejection of the Messiah. It is during this time of suspended covenant relationship that such signs and wonders are in abeyance. It is a striking thing that forty years elapsed between their final rejection of the Lord by the martyrdom of Stephen and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by Titus.

The number forty in Scripture represents a time of suspended judgment. Jonah warned

Nineveh it would be destroyed in forty days (Jonah 2:4). The wilderness wanderings occupied forty years (Num. 32:13), and Jeremiah was called to warn the Jews of the coming destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar just forty years before the blow fell. It seems to me that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews was aware that this time of pending judgment was nearly come for the nation in Palestine. He could speak of the daily sacrifices still being offered in the temple (Heb. 7:27; 10:11), so we must assume that the veil of the temple which had been rent when the Lord died (Matt. 27:51) had in the meantime been repaired again. Nevertheless he pointed out that the old order was just about to come to an end, that the order which was even then decaying and waxing old was about ready to vanish (Heb. 8:13). It is not without significance that the Book of Acts appears to end only a few years before this Judgment overtook the Holy City and the temple. This marked, in short, the point at which God imposed upon Himself the virtually complete silence which He has since maintained with respect to "signs and wonders."

It marked something else also. With the demolishing of the temple and the practical destruction of Judaism in Palestine, the Hebrew tongue, the language of the Old Testament, became virtually a dead language. With the death of the Hebrew tongue, the whole culture which went with it passed into abeyance. With its passing, the basis of the Old Testament covenant ceased to have any spiritual meaning. Such is the close bond between culture and language.

With the passing of the temple and the priesthood and an order of worship which had, in a real sense, localized God as a national deity in much the same way that the Gentile nations had localized their gods previously, the confining nationalism of Judaism was finally destroyed. In a similar way Alexander had broken down the religious nationalism of the Gentile world; only he had done it more peaceably. For Israel, due to their strong attachments to Jerusalem and the temple, a more drastic remedy had been required.

For some reason, the Gentile nations, unlike the Jews, never seemed to have asked for any very manifest demonstrations of the reality of their gods. On the other hand, it is clear that Israel's history had so profoundly influenced the Jews in their thinking that signs and wonders had become the hallmark of the reality of their covenant with the Lord. This was never true of the Gentiles. We may suppose that the performance of miracles would be a strong argument to unbelievers at the present time, but experience seems to show that this is not really the case. If any clear demonstration of this should be required, it is surely to be found in the events predicted in the Book of Revelation for the end of the present age. For here we read, especially in chapter 11, of all kinds of signs and wonders more dramatic and more awesome even than those which at times the children of Israel had witnessed, and yet the record foretells that the nations do not repent. I think we must assume that although there is every appearance that the silence of God in the face of human suffering allows men

to confirm themselves in their unbelief, if God were habitually to manifest Himself as He did in earlier days the effect would not be to lessen unbelief but only to harden it. The greater the display, the more determined would be their unbelief, as the events in the Book of Revelation seem to show.

Prospect?

But now it is difficult to read contemporary reports of the current "religious scene" without becoming aware of the increased interest in and renewal of some of these signs and wonders again. We not only hear more and more frequently of a recurrence of the phenomenon of speaking in tongues, but we also begin to see the reappearance of faith-healing on a new scale. Here and there through the centuries there have been reports of miraculous healings, and particular places have gained notoriety by reason of them-- Lourdes, for example. There can be little doubt that there is some truth in these claims, however we may choose to account for them. By and large, however, the few individuals healed among the many who went were deliberately seeking healing for themselves. What has been happening more recently is that people are now being healed who were not specifically seeking healing, who by their own testimony did not even have faith, and who in not a few instances, for all their being healed, still did not at once become believers. This is a circumstance that has been authenticated a great number of times in the case of the ministry of the late Kathryn Kuhlman. (35) It is therefore a recurrence of something which must have been comparatively common when our Lord was present on earth: for example, only one of the ten lepers is ever heard of again and there is no reason to assume the others actually took the Lord as Savior. The paralytic beside the Pool of Siloam did not even recognize the Lord at first when He found him in the temple. A careful reading of a number of these New Testament healings will show that men were healed sometimes without any requirement that they believe, and they went away healed without any expression of personal faith. Furthermore, we are reading now quite frequently of people who have been healed in their own homes, caught almost unawares, whose experience remarkably parallels some of the New Testament instances.

In the matter of speaking in tongues--although there is much controversy still as to the meaning of it--it can hardly be doubted that the phenomenon superficially parallels the experience of the early church in Acts subsequent to Pentecost, especially at Corinth. The parallelism suggests that it was a real phenomenon, whatever it means. And coupled with the increase in healings, it may surely be taken as an evidence that signs and wonders are beginning once more to be displayed as public manifestations of the reality of God's power and presence. Could it be that the purpose is to warn the Jewish people that the time of their rejection is drawing to a close? Could it be that it is an invitation to them to look once more to their own Scriptures, and to study the times and the seasons, for the coming of their Messiah again may be drawing nigh?

What a wonderful thing it would be if we who know the Lord should see these signs, and perhaps some of the other signs that were once part of God's witness to Israel, being fulfilled increasingly in order to advise us that we should begin to prepare ourselves for the second coming of our Lord--in the same way Israel was told by John the Baptist to prepare themselves for His first coming.

There is no question that just before Jesus' return there will be a tremendous recurrence of signs and wonders. Revelation 11 is a striking illustration of this, foretelling as it does great judgments and mighty spectacles in the sky and on the earth such as man has never witnessed in the past. Yet characteristically, it seems as though the Gentiles will be largely unmoved by them all--terrified perhaps, but not driven to repentance or faith. Signs and wonders seldom have engendered saving faith among Gentiles. They have only confirmed or encouraged a faith that was already alive. For Israel as God's special people, they served only to validate the constancy and reality of His covenant relationship with the nation as a whole. Whenever that relationship has been in abeyance, they have ceased. This, I believe, accounts for God's silences.

The first period of silence lasted only 400 years. Perhaps this was all the time it required for the civilized world to lose entirely the restraining and corrective influence of the light of the Old Testament before plunging into almost total darkness and despair. It was time for God to enlighten man further. The light of the New Testament was so much more brilliant than that of the Old, that it has taken almost two thousand years, or five times as long, for the same process of degeneration to bring the world to the sad position it was in when the Lord came the first time. Surely the coming of the Lord draws nigh once again.

References:

31. Although there is no unequivocal evidence of speaking in tongues in the Old Testament, it is sometimes argued that such an event occurred in connection with Saul (1 Sam. 10:6-9). This passage has all the earmarks of a genuine conversion experience, accompanied by anointing by the Holy Spirit. The end result was that Saul became a new man, and the overt evidence of this was in his giving vocal expression, which is termed "prophesying." It is reasonable to suppose that such prophecy would be an insufficient sign of anointing unless it involved something more than merely foretelling the future. In Acts 2:17, Peter quotes Joel 2:28f. and seems clearly to be equating the word prophesy in this passage with the experience of speaking in tongues which was then causing so much amazement (Acts 2:11, 12). If Saul began to speak in an unknown tongue, and if this was interpreted by the onlookers as a sign that Saul was now one of the prophets, this suggests that the prophets were known among other things as people who had upon occasion the gift of tongues."

32. Anderson, Sir Robert, *The Silence of God*, Pickering and Inglis, London, 11th ed., n.d., p. 24.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

34. Machen, J. Gresham, *What Is Faith?*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1946, pp. 66f.

35. Kuhlman, Kathryn, *I Believe in Miracles*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1969.

Corrections, June 10, 1997.

From “Hidden Things of God's Revelation” by Arthur C. Custance, www.custance.org

I guess what I—and Mr. Custance are both saying—is that we are in a type of “Revelation Abyssal” at the present time.

Make no mistake about it—we are in an abyssal.

His facts only illustrate the things that we do not wish to admit because we do not have the proper answers to address the subject: the view from a height.

This study is meant to give you that view; Mr. Custance has gone a long way toward doing that—now we should look at his statements basically on the “Problem Of Pain” in the last nineteen hundred years.

The following three essays—from a PARRC Research property called “Through A Glass, Darkly,” written years ago, will be strung together to present a perspective through which we may proceed.

First the excerpt called ***“Trials, Tribulations, And The Will Of Man:”***

“Trials, Tribulations, and the Will Of Man.

What is “will?”

Why is it so important?

This question might hold the answer to not only this specific interrogative, but to questions that are of utmost importance to the people in this day and age.

ANNO DOMINI. The "Year Of Our Lord."

The time arriving with the birth of Christ, until now.

What is the connection between these days, and the matter of will?

That is the purpose of this book; to explore the importance of will, how it affects our everyday lives, how it mobilizes the power of the Holy Spirit; how the lack of proper will causes negative occurrences in the lives of good, even Christian, people; how, therefore, to understand negativity in our lives; how, through understanding it, we can enrich our lives, bring the power of God to life in them, and sail away from the otherwise logical-seeming premises that indicate that God has turned His face away from us--or worse.

Philosophers throughout the recent years have come to some rather disturbing conclusions concerning God. These conclusions are based upon quasi-logical assumptions, and seemingly empirical evidence. We will study some of these philosophers in this book. Without understanding man's will, and its place in this period of anno domini, these philosophers seem alarmingly correct. They, however, have not considered the matter of will. With the consideration of this central and extremely important issue, God comes back to life, and we can understand our position relative to Him <and Him relative to us> and the times with crystal clarity.

The purpose of this book, then, is to reconcile man to God, and God to man, in an era when He is apparently silent to the great masses of mankind. His silence is the barometer to many which determines His existence.

This book is meant to inject a theory which I believe strongly enough in to indicate that, within its provinces, the issues of God's seeming death, God's seeming long-term non-existence, the existence of sin, the instances of suffering of "good" people, the instances of flourishing of "bad" people, and many other illogical circumstances can be resolved.

This book deals with the existence of God, and the empirical evidences; with the existence and resurrection of Christ, and its proofs; the existence, nature, and work of the Holy Spirit in anno domini, and our understandings and expectations.

It deals with the trials of man; the suffering, and the reasons for it. It deals with the Tribulation, the coming period of time on earth which will embody the most destructive and evil time it has ever seen.

It deals with the ultimate status of man, and his future. It deals with tough questions, and gives tough answers.

This book is written to come to the aid of the Christian who needs help in their daily walk; for the person who is atheist, or agnostic, to provide information which should be considered.

So often we see strong Christians, empowered by the Holy Spirit, living the kinds of Christian lives we wish we could lead. We see people healed--cured of drug addictions, cancers, schizophrenia—by the power of the Holy Spirit. We see and hear strong men and women of God who, empowered by the Spirit, lead sterling lives of service to God.....

.....then we look at ourselves.

We see that we encounter much difficulty when trying to quit smoking; we cannot even quit overeating--much less, based on the power of the Spirit alone, conquer a cocaine or heroin habit. We feel less than worthy--failures as Christians.

We despair--sometimes we give up.

We are surrounded by people speaking in tongues--seemingly evincing the power of the Spirit we so desperately desire--which seems to elude us.

Our ignorance, and our despair, lead us away from God.

Because we look at our "pitiful" selves against the strong Christians around us--on television, on the radio--and the Godly standards they rightly give to us--seeing how we do not seem, in many cases, to measure up to them--we give up.

Because we do not understand the things we should--and despair because of it--we die a spiritual death which takes us away from God—but mercifully never takes Him away from us, or our salvation.

This book is for you.

This book is to give you hope. To give you facts, which strengthen your faith. To show you a way to stronger spiritual existence. To show you that God is not dead. To comfort you, and give you insight into suffering and its causes.

This book is to reach out for all the Christians who may be by the wayside; to those who need to take the next few steps toward God; to those people who do not know Him at all. To rectify what may be the biggest obstacle to you, and others--how your own will decides your closeness to God, and His power in your lives.

These things are hidden away; things which we must ardently seek, in order to find. Desperation has been my motivation--the desperation to know God, and understand His plans which He reveals to us; the desperation to defend Him, in these silent days. Desperation which has forged my faith, and made it strong.

Which can allow us all to see through the veil which separates us from the truth.

I Corinthians 13:12 (NASV): "For now we see in a mirror, dimly; but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully....."

I Corinthians 13:12: (KJV): "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known....."

A MATTER OF WILL:

Premises:

Let's not deal with religion (man seeking God): let's deal with Christianity (God seeking man). The activity should be to usward, not Godward; thus, the name humanocentric deism, and not deistic humanity!

1) There are three eras of man: Old Testament (Deism), The Time Of Christ (Christocentric deism), and the Church Age (Humanocentric deism) 2) The Church is literally Christ on earth: it can create, according to the power of the Spirit, as it WILLS

3) As proof, the Church is called "the body of Christ"

4) The Trinity is composed of three parts: Body, or The Father (I AM); Mind, or Will, in Jesus--the creative force; and the Heart in the Holy Spirit--the doer of things

5) Jesus came to usher in the era of humanocentric deism--the age of the will of man. In this era, God has withdrawn, Jesus has withdrawn--and left the Holy Spirit to move upon the face of the abyssal of silence with a still, small voice-- which is passive (potential) (whereas both God and Jesus are kinetic, or active)

6) *The Trinity of God has seen fit to visit the earth one at a time--and in all instances, lived here in one form or another. In the Old Testament (deism), He lived here, in the Ark of The Covenant, in the temple or abroad. In the deistic stage, He DID things: destroyed people, liberated people, etc.--active, kinetic.*

In the time of Jesus, He lived here in the body of a man; in this time, He prepared us for humanocentrism--or the era of the will of man. He was sacrificial; He atoned, justified, rectified, compensated, and forgave pell-mell. He, in essence, compensated for the age of will, in which man would reach his greatest level of spiritual instability.

And now—like unto the Malachi Abyssal—we are in the Revelation Abyssal.

In The Church Age, He lives here in the Holy Spirit, in our HEARTS; passive, potential. He is liberated the same way Jesus liberated Him--by our wills. If we decide to believe on Christ, and that anything we ask in His name will be done, we approach the kingdom of heaven. The closer we get, the more the Holy Spirit is energized to DO.

7) *In this age, man creates; he is the literal Body Of Christ. As we will, things are done. Satan has no power to create, except through us--and needless to say, vyes for our time accordingly. When we do Satan's will, we allow him to create evil through us!*

8) *The World, The Flesh, and The Devil vye against, accordingly, God, The Holy Spirit, and Jesus. Both the World and God are tangible; The Holy Spirit and the Flesh (the unholy spirit) deal with the desires of a man's heart; Jesus and Satan both deal with the thoughts of a man's mind!*

9) *Prophecy is the way that God allows Himself to be active in this era of humanocentrism! By saying how things will be, according to His omniscience, He allows Himself to work kinetically during a time when only will prevails: He made provision for His will for us to enter in! Comparison: we give our wills to Him for Him to work through us: He makes His will manifest to us through prophecy, and in both ways, His will is done on earth.*

10) *A Matter Of Will is the full description of humanocentrism--including the origins of the original struggle between God and Satan which the philosophers do not deal with.*

11) *Jesus (Will, or Mind), and Satan (Will or Mind) is the good vs. evil portion of the analogy above: it is interesting that the first sin was Will: the infamous "I Wills" that Satan proclaimed to God. This can be taken as proof of the efficacy of this analogy.*

12) *Satan could not kill 6,000,000 Jews: killing, as in the giving of life, is creative, and Satan cannot create: so he got Hitler to do it! Satan: the ultimate Puppet Master.*

13) *Having the mind of Christ, and the Will of Christ, are inseparable--because they are the same!*

14) *If we give our wills over completely to God, as Jesus did, we would be sinless; it is the giving over of our wills to Satan that CREATES sin!*

15) *God DECIDED to create the earth, as an example of roles; Jesus said, because you desire it, I WILL it to be so; the Holy Spirit says, because you will it, I will DO it!*

16) *The Kingdom Of God is here--now; meaning accessible to all who ardently seek it. It is where the unleashed, full power of the Holy Spirit to DO, for us, can be found. Only through Christ can the kingdom be entered; it is a kingdom of mind and heart, and does not involve death. We are told it is here now--for us--within us—and with it the dead may be raised, the sick healed because of our will for it to be so, and our having shown ourselves worthy by entering into the "kingdom" where the power to do so is found!*

17) *Preparation for the Kingdom is by the giving over of one's will, so that God can use us; preparation of one's body through fasting, and one's mind through prayer.*

18) *We are told to have the mind of Christ; it is the dominion He operates in; Satan, who also operates there, uses a man's mind--establishes strongholds*

19) *Our will is random--like the universe--and would tend to support the degradation of things. God imbedded commands, as mentioned earlier, called prophecies, which assure that the degradation does not carry us outside of the bounds of the freedom which will allows--freedom which is sometimes evidenced as decisions against God.*

20) *Some will not be comfortable with humanocentric theism: they want God to be "active"--kinetic: "acts of God," etc. If this is not so, they find it hard to believe in Him. A matter of Will allows us to be humanocentric, and have a viable, living Lord following His Divine Plan to completion! It is the reconciliation of God to this age--the reconciliation of deistic and humanocentric deism which works extremely well!*

21) *Christocentrism, or Messianic Deism! The middle ground between deism (Old Testament) and Church Age (humanocentric deism). Now we have the THREE!*

22) *Deocentrism (the Will Of God, as a state of being, qualified), Christocentrism (The Will Of God Made Flesh, quantified: the Will of Man first given to God by choice), Humanocentrism (the will of man/the reflected will of God: "more blessed is he who believes and has not yet seen....")*

23) *Angelocentrism (angels without will; Satan's I Wills), perhaps! The time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, which contained the time of Lucifer's fall.*

24) *Trinitocentrism (the Will, as a state, qualified, not a person, again; The Godhead, on earth together for the first time since creation), perhaps! During the Millennium.*

25) *Totalocentrism (the Will Of God, qualified and quantified), perhaps! During Eternity.*

26) *"Your faith has made you whole;" Worries some people because it seems to imply that the person healed himself, instead of by Christ's power. Not to worry--He was establishing the matter of will, the kingdom of heaven, and the scenario which was to follow Him--being the conforming of your will to God, and through that faith "telling the mountain to move, and it will move!" by the power of the Holy Spirit--mobilized through faith/will in/given to God.*

27) *Faith is the manifestation of the giving of your will, through belief and decision; grace is the manifestation of God's will to redeem His people, through His forgiveness; Christ is the manifestation of God's grace, the vehicle by which it is brought to us; salvation is the manifestation of grace, accepted through faith, regenerating the believer in Christ.*

28) *The Body Of Christ (which is the true Church, the true believers, born-again) is the manifested will of God in the humanocentric era (in other words, having given our wills over to God), evidenced by the Body being Christ, inseparable, who was the living Will Of God.*

29) *The true church continues to strive to give itself over to the manifest will of God--which again, is Christ*

30) *Approaching the kingdom of God--in which literally all things are possible--is like the speed of light; natural constraints seem to apply, and only Christ Himself actually resided completely there while on earth. If we were truly in it--snakes couldn't kill us—nothing could, for the power of God would protect us. We limit ourselves—and in doing so, make manifest death through disease, accident, etc.*

31) *If it were possible for a person to enter the "capital city" of the Kingdom of God on earth, some manifestation would occur to show the person's worthiness other than miracles, which are earthly signs: true righteousness is found in the divorcement from earthly things, and the result would be the passage of Elijah and Enoch directly to heaven--and Jesus, of course.*

32) *Lightning strikes which kill; car accidents which maim; children which are lost. These are manifestations of living here on earth—a place which has been relegated "with thorns." Most of us are far away from the kingdom of heaven, which theoretically (taking into account the above) would place us above these things. In the absence of a true, completed relationship with God through Christ, we are left out in the cold.*

Axiomatically, it is possible that even then, even when we reach it, we might still get hit by a truck. In the humanocentric era, God (the I AM) does not interfere; we are literally at the mercy of the world ("...in the world, ye shall have tribulation..."); we are told not to worry, but to persevere, and if the lightning comes, to know why.

Death is a necessary part of living; it is our impression of it, our anticipation of it, the view of it, the sometimes circumstance of it, what it leaves behind, which frightens us, and seems horrible.

Perhaps the kingdom of God raises us up above the apparent horror; and when the blade descends, we don't feel it!

It is my opinion that the axiom is more accurate than the statement.

After the above-mentioned statements, the groundwork for "A Matter Of Will" has been laid....

....and the following information can be given to finish the patina of the theories espoused here:

GOD, SUFFERING, AND BELIEF

The Howard Burckle book, God, Suffering, and Belief has many strong, logical and pivotal statements in it which bear out the premise for will. The first thing to do is get them into this manuscript for use.

These [] brackets will be used in the editorial text to clear up breaks in the references; these < > brackets will be used to include comments from the editor, myself.

"We shall consider the four forms of suffering--the faces of absurdity, we might call them--which seem to pose the greatest threat to belief in God. Some persons today see all humanity as abandoned in a spiritually empty, purposeless and ultimately destructive universe.

Others are stunned because God seems to have betrayed His people into the hands of genocidal murderers.

There are others who think that perhaps God hates their racial group and has locked them within a social system dominated by racist oppressors. There are others who say the Father God regards women as inferior to men and sanctions women's suppression.

Whether we can confront all the faces of absurdity and still feel justified in believing in God remains to be seen. Abandonment we can deal with well enough, I think. It is the absurdities of genocide, racism, and sexism which are most threatening to belief. Theologians have neglected them--fled from them, actually. We have not come to terms with the murder of the Jews and the oppression of blacks and women, and I doubt that we can do so successfully without giving up certain venerable assumptions about what God does in the world."

*'In 1959 [Alasdair MacIntyre] wrote an acute little book called **Difficulties in Christian Belief**, which focuses on the problem of evil as the chief obstacle to believing in God. The problem arises, MacIntyre says, from the logical inconsistency among the three statements "God is Omnipotent" "God Is wholly Good" and "Evil occurs in the universe." He examines five standard solutions having to do with evil which are sometimes thought to remove the inconsistency: 1) evil is punishment 2) evil is discipline 3) evil is education 4) evil is a consequence of free will, and 5) evil is mystery.*

MacIntyre weighs each of these possibilities and concludes that they all fail. <First of 'Editor's Notes:' Without the consequence and scenario of "A Matter Of Will," these authors are close, but do not have the tools to finish the picture. Such is the purpose of this document--to show how will is the answer.>

Then he considers a sixth possibility, that evil occurs because God has created the world as a place for self-determining agents to exercise responsible choices. God wishes human beings to be capable of moral failure and of refusing to grow. Thus, God will that the world be a place where both good and evil are possible, and although he does not desire evil, he does in a sense will it. 'For God will that men should do what they will, even if it is not what God would wish them to do.' <He has just, in a rough form, stated

the outline purpose and basic premise of "A Matter Of Will.">

MacIntyre assesses this argument; and, although he finds it not beyond criticism, he endorses it. It will serve because, with it, we can 'see in outline how the facts of evil have their place in the Christian scheme and how we are not faced by a stark contradiction at this point.' At least it provides a basis on which those who already believe in God may continue to do so without involving themselves in sheer irrationality.'

'Jean-Paul Sartre says.....God does not exist.....; Martin Buber declares.....God is in 'eclipse'.....; Dietrich Bonhoeffer says.....this is a 'post-Christian period'.....; Alistair Kee terms it a 'post-religious era; Theodore Roszak describes Christian-scientific culture as a 'spiritual wasteland.'; Catholic philosopher Michael Novak call this the 'experience of nothingness'.

Not everyone admits to such feelings of desperate spiritual isolation, and those who do may not attribute them to the absence of God. Nevertheless, according to many of our foremost theologians, these feelings are pervasive and profound." <Underlining the urgency of "A Matter Of Will," which points out why these feelings are present: what the Divine Master Plan was (in my estimation) and how this situation is resolved.>

'Along with the indifference of the world goes a sense of purposelessness. Human history does not flow toward a meaningful goal; the living forms on this planet seem to have no reason for existing; the vast inanimate world gives no evidence of having been deliberately created. The world presents itself as a vast collection of mystifying stellar systems mindlessly pulsing to pointless rhythms.

On the planet Earth--and where else, we do not know---life just happens to have emerged. <All this seems apparent to him who knows not God, and His plans; I do not presuppose to know God's mind, or understand His plans, but through 'A Matter Of Will' we may emerge from the darkness of inner despair>

I am convinced that the absence of God from the center of our lives, and the intense feeling of abandonment that is latent in this, is one of the salient spiritual maladies of our day. Paul Tillich is surely right that 'meaninglessness' is the dominant form of the 'threat of nonbeing' in the contemporary Western society. People in this society do have extraordinary difficulty living in such a way that God plays a direct and vitalizing role in all they do and feel. Too often even those who say that they believe in God reveal by their timorous and self-preferring behavior that their belief is not rooted in the deep soil of God's presence. If genuineness of belief is measured by the degree to which persons derive the strength and guidance for their daily lives from their relation to God and

through God correlate their short-range and self-centered desires with a universally fulfilling global purpose, then belief is indeed rare.'

'I am convinced that no one is entitled to believe in God who has not faced and accounted for the basic negativities with which Camus deals <accepting the condition of abandonment as the essential condition of humanity--and proposing to live nobly despite this absurdity>.'

'The world contains not only natural beauty and human nobility, by the twin evils of death and suffering, which ultimately control our fate.'

It should be plain to all who are honest that the world is fundamentally structured not only to nurture but to injure and, finally, destroy us <impersonal: the same water that slakes our thirst, drowns us; the fire that cooks our food, warms our homes--kills us>.'

'When the world does not value us, we become free to value ourselves.'

When the world assaults us, we act. We decide not to accept indifference and murderous hostility. We 'rebel.' As we do so, we discover that there is reason to value ourselves, that we are beings of extraordinary worth. We do not merely decree that we are of value; we discover that we are so.'

'First, by the direct testimony of our senses we are sure that there are objects before us; there is a world.'

What the world is, we are most unsure. Even science in the end proves to be a tissue of probabilities and cognitive constructs. 'Poetry,' Camus calls it. Second, we know we exist and that we feel and think such and such.

The human 'heart' is to this extent open to itself. <I think, therefore I am> With an intuitive directness we grasp the existence of ourselves and the flux of feelings and thoughts that compose our conscious life.

Third, we know that our situation is absurd <The reason that this author calls it 'absurdity' is that, without an understanding of 'A Matter Of Will,' it seems only to be so>.'

'Everything depends on the sense in which the plague <from Albert Camus' novel, The Plague> is in accord with God's will. Only something willed for humanity's benefit or for the benefit of the entire creation should be loved, and I do not think this can be said about the plague. Although plague is a part of God's creation and thus a consequence

of God's will, it is not, I think something God willingly decrees for our benefit. It is, rather, an unavoidable accompaniment of the system; we must bear it, but we need not love it.'

'Not every event which seems unintelligible to our human, all too human, intelligence, is God's direct intention. The world contains not only mystery (that is, more than humanly intelligible, divinely-wrought occurrences), but outright irrationality; and part of the human task is to distinguish them.'

'I should say that it is God's will that we should struggle against them, that we should fight to preserve life. This holds true even though by God's will we are mortal' <Only indirectly; man's original sin is what made him mortal; it is man's will which accounts for that mortality>'

'For [the creature], dying is an essential ingredient in living, and it is as important to die well as to live well.'

'When we permit ourselves to think openly about the Nazi assault upon Jewry, we see concretely what is meant by absurdity. Here was institutionalized irrationality, organized destructivity, programmed nihilism--the ultimate in the sadistic use of human efficiency.'

'How can the Holocaust possibly be reconciled with the traditional belief that every human being is precious in God's eyes and that Jews are especially beloved? How can destruction of such diabolic magnitude occur in a world ordered by a God of love and justice? <'A Matter Of Will!>'

'What we shall do, therefore, is try to comprehend how the Holocaust could have occurred if, as the Bible teaches, the world is ruled by a God of wisdom, justice, and power who loves all humanity and cares for Jews as His special people. <'A Matter Of Will!>'

'[Emil Fackenheim] agrees with Rubenstein that the absurdity of Auschwitz seems to belie the presence of the God of history. Nevertheless, he refuses to give up wither God or the belief in Jewish chosenness.'

'The time for the Messiah to come <for the first time, for the Jews> was then <at Auschwitz>; a Messiah who is able to come but who at Auschwitz did not come, has become an impossibility <Outside of 'A Matter Of Will!>.'

'The basic evidence is the satanic nature of nazism. The Jew was 'singled out by a

demonic power which sought his death absolutely, i.e., as an end in itself.' No Jew--not even the most convinced secularist--can escape this much of the supernatural. Jews know 'that the devil, if not God, is alive.' Further, all should recognize that this absolute negation must be countered with an absolute affirmation.

Someone must will Jewish life as totally as the demons of nazism will Jewish death.'

'What human being can understand how the just and loving Lord of all humanity could choose to deliver Israel from slavery by drowning his other children, the Egyptians? What human mind can comprehend a God who is at once transcendent and immanent, eternal and linked with time, unchanging and involved in historical process?'

'If God is Truth, then whatever happens in God's world must have an explanation accessible to some degree to every rational creature. <I believe He is making some of the answers known through 'A Matter Of Will!>

Even the Holocaust must be intelligible. Neither its admitted uniqueness nor its unparalleled savagery can entirely block our understanding. Although the Holocaust is in some ways unique, it is not entirely unlike what happened to Jews in earlier tragedies <The Roman Coliseum> and to what has happened to other peoples <The enslavement and oppression of blacks>. It is best understood, in Michael Wyschogrod's words, as 'a first among equals.'

'A God who exercises total control over absolutely everything that happens and exercises His will regardless of the inclinations of those affected is not supreme goodness but sheer power--awesome but not deserving of worship. A God deserving of worship shares power with His creatures, allowing them, as far as possible, to make their own decisions, teaching them to decide wisely, controlling them by helping them control themselves <in this era>. Perfect power nourishes that power in others, thus bringing new and greater power into being.

Through His creatures' deeds, He calls into being absolutely new, voluntary motions. He gives existence to independent, living images of Himself.

Thus, divine perfection implies <self-imposed!> limitation. Being perfectly powerful, God allows rational creatures room to think and choose for themselves. God makes them able to be wrong as well as right, foolish as well as wise; God arranges the world so that creatures can initiate and carry through projects both creative and destructive. God exercises 'adequate' power, as Charles Hartshorne says; that is, God does for the world everything which can 'be done and need be done by one universal or cosmic agent

<found within the work of the Holy Spirit, the agent for this era> and leaves to 'local agents' the power and right to do as much as they can for themselves.'

'Again and again in the biblical narrative God's will for humankind is negated; and each time God sends someone through whom the alienation is overcome <using man to do His will corresponds with man's will being the determining agent in God's action--obedience, in other words--and 'A Matter Of Will' is fulfilled>: Noah, Abraham, Moses, the Judges, the Prophets, Saul, David, Solomon <Jesus!>. Surely this view of a God who can be temporarily thwarted by human beings is at least as Jewish as Christian.'

'If enough human beings respond to the inducements of God <'A Matter Of Will!>, God will overcome our destructiveness. What God cannot <by predetermined choice, or will not!> do is override our free determinations by some magical intervention <in this era>.'

As Jewish theologian Eliezer Berkovits observes, 'God cannot as a rule intervene whenever man's use of freedom displeases Him <in this era>.' To do so would abolish good and evil, and man as well.'

Whoever says that Auschwitz absolutely should not have occurred and that God should, at all costs, have prevented it, says that human beings should not exist.'

The Holocaust occurred because God wills radical evil as a possibility in this world and because human beings, contrary to God's primary intention, willed to translate that perverse possibility into actuality. The Holocaust occurred because God, willing it as a possibility and human freedom as an actuality <in this era>, had to concur in its actualization.'

Given genuine human self-determination, it is inevitable that God be involved in the evils which flaw this world, and it is inevitable that the world be flawed. The first is so because God makes us free, knowing that we will sin <in this era>. The second is so because only God can be absolute perfection.'

'The term 'evil' is reserved for those feature of the world which develop out of the world's intrinsic imperfections. The world is not evil, but it is vulnerable to evil, and sooner or later it will be marred by it. Evil, then, is the loss of some appropriate value already possessed, or the failure to acquire some value needed or innocently desired.'

'At the same time, there is no need to say that God wills the evil of the evil events. As Alasdair MacIntyre points out, there is an ambiguity in the sentence, 'Everything happens by the will of God,' which can be eliminated if we say that 'God wills that men

should do what they will, even if it is not what God would wish them to do.'

Thus there is a reservation in God's willing the world. God consents freely and fully to our right to do what we will, but resistingly to any evil we do. For the sake of creaturely creativity, God exposes the divine good to contradiction.'

God willingly allows the frustrations of His aims, assumes the ultimate responsibility for the evil that is done, opens Himself to the suffering which comes with the world's suffering. This is the price God is prepared to pay and the measure of the high value God puts on the world <a price He did pay--in Jesus, sacrificed for the sins of the world>.'

'I am agreeing with Berkovits when he says that God is obliged to create the possibility of evil <represented by the existence of Satan> in order to establish the possibility of good <or the choice to do good versus evil>; however, I am going beyond that and saying that indirectly God also creates the actuality of evil <in Satan, presumably>.'

'God does not infallibly control human history--that is, He does not deal with human beings in the same way He deals with atoms and galaxies--because this cannot be done. Human beings are categorically different from atoms and galaxies. The very concept of a totally manipulated human being is a contradiction, a nonsensical concept, as incapable of actualization as a round square <especially so in this era>. If God wants this world, He must will the evil <indirectly> which His creatures enact.'

'I do not think that this commits us to saying that Auschwitz is a good thing and that the world would be deficient without it; but it does imply that the world would be deficient without the possibility of Auschwitz, because it would not be a place where freedom carries the maximum of risk and persons bear the full consequences of their actions.'

'The Holocaust speaks not only to Jews but to all human beings, and it tells of the radical evil which has been in the world as a possibility from the beginning and which threatens us all, at all times. Because of the Holocaust, we know the depths to which humanity can fall.'

'Blacks should accept no cosmology which does not give human beings full responsibility for their own affairs. Human beings must choose their values and goals, make their decisions, initiate and carry out their projects.'

The next quotes should be taken in the context that I mean them, even if Burckle did not mean them this way. I believe that God The Father, the I AM, is who should be referred to in the following passages. It is the Holy Spirit, with His unique mission, who is active today:

'Humanocentric theism.....within these positions we do not look for God to do anything. This is what makes it possible for human beings to be functionally ultimate.....it envisions the world without God <again, as I said above and I want to be clear on, this refers to God The Father>.....the God of humanocentric theism does no more in the world of humankind than if He did not exist at all. Humanocentric theism is a world in which (1) by God's 'purpose and plan' human beings enjoy 'an exalted status,' with full recognition of their freedom; (2) God creates human beings as 'co-determining' centers of power within Himself and in doing so gives the 'most authentic expression of His sovereignty;' (3) the highest human good is conceived as a process which stresses human activity and choice; (4) God gives human beings such independence of Himself that they are functionally ultimate relative to their own history; and (5) God's omnipotence is redefined to 'fit the requirements of the freedom of God and man,' this being understood in terms of God's benevolence in granting this freedom.'

In humanocentric theism, God is active in human history. God offers cosmic support for every constructive venture.'

'If God can persuade us to forego our destructive tendencies and apply our energies to beneficent ends, God will have created an incomparably rich new reality. If God does finally fully win our love, He will have carried through one of the greatest of all possible projects <and defeated Satan at his own game> and proved Himself as powerful as reason and goodness allow.'

Offering but never fully giving Himself, God leads us constantly toward better conditions. It is difficult to imagine a cosmology better able to elicit a vigorous, free human activity than this one founded in a God who is Himself loving and just and who calls on all free creatures to be loving and just, too.'

Human beings, in their 'creative potential,' are in the 'image of God' and thus are clues to what God is.'

'In this, she [Mary Daly] fits very well into William R. Inge's category of humanocentric theism, and she also confirms my conviction that God can accomplish His aims for the human race only through human beings <consistent with Jesus becoming human>. Human courage is the fulcrum of divine creativity in human history.'

I believe that human beings have an innate and virtually inextinguishable sense of rightness about this--about what is fair and humane--and thus about what God essentially is. Also, we need to elevate radically our own understanding of what it means to say

that God is that being than which no greater can be conceived. We know that God cannot be willingly involved in anything which degrades or destroys and can only work for the preservation and enhancement of every manner and form of positive value.'

'I have tried to show that (1) the loneliness and mortality of human beings in this vast universe do not necessarily imply that God is either hostile or nonexistent, and (2) that the diabolical cruelty which some human beings inflict on others because of religious, racial, or sexual bigotry does not necessarily that God is either indifferent or malevolent. I have tried to break the logical hold of absurdity and show that one can believe in a God who is benevolent, wise, just, and adequately powerful--without falling into irrationality.'

'Consider the alternatives which face the person deciding between belief and unbelief. To believe in God is to see oneself within the safety of a universe which is governed by a compassionate, all-powerful Creator, while to decline to believe is to see oneself carried along blindly by galactic tides which care nothing for human beings. Obviously, the former is vastly easier to accept. In a God-tended world, one has a well-defined place, a purpose, and a protector; one is a person of worth; and one can rely on God to guarantee a triumphant outcome. The God-less world, by contrast, offers only laceration, despair, and loneliness.'

'The decision about whether to believe in God, if made thoughtfully and unreservedly, requires as much fortitude as any decision one is capable of. If one is wrong and there is no God, after all, the direction of one's entire life has been fundamentally mistaken. One has erred on the most important issue of all, the question of what human life is about and the spiritual qualities by which life is best organized and conducted. If there is no God, the believer has, 'like the donkey, fed on the roses of illusion.'

'Moreover, believers bear a special hardship. They suffer not only the evils of existence which all humans suffer but the anxiety of knowing that these very evils also count against their religious beliefs. Every evil is both a pain to be borne and an item of prima facie evidence that humankind's deepest beliefs are illusory <therefore, the great need for 'A Matter Of Will!>. There is no way to avoid this double jeopardy, for believers can neither ignore the evils before their eyes nor deny the belief that all things are providentially ordered. As believers, they are committed to the proposition that God is at work keeping peace and maintaining the bonds of mutual concern which are deeper and more lasting than the obvious forces of dissension. For the Christian, at least, this is not a mere hope, but an affirmation of present truth. In Christ, God has overcome meaninglessness, removed guilt, conquered death.'

The problem, of course, is that much of the evidence available in everyday life is either neutral or seemingly contradictory to this. Millions of human beings exist without meaningful goals, live without forgiveness for their transgressions, and die without expectation of survival.'

Those who have experienced the incredulous and patronizing gaze of friends who do not share their belief that God is at hand moderating the pains and disharmonies of the world know how naive their beliefs seem to many others whose judgments they respect. The point here is simply that believers carry burdens which are not often noticed: their hopes are as heavy as Sisyphus' <a character from Albert Camus' The Plague> despair and require as much courage to sustain.'

'Ethically, too, belief poses problems. Believers are faced not only by whatever ethical standard fits the situation they face, but also by the Holy One from which the standard derives. God not only gives the law, but commands us to obey it; God lays a claim upon each individual to act; to do this deed, here, now. The God of religion is active goodness. His nature is to be constantly sponsoring what is good. God establishes the possibilities and conditions for enhancing what already exists, and, also, for introducing fresh goods; moreover, God interacts with those creatures who are capable of rational choice, striving to persuade them to join in the venture. To believing persons, the world is a portentous cosmic drama. In some ways it is tragic, in some ways, joyous; but always full of potential meaning.'

'Believers live not only under self-imposed standards and social conventions which they can alter or ignore with relative impunity, but under independent, universal standards which make a claim upon them irrespective of human preference.'

'All who have seriously wrestled with belief and unbelief and tried conscientiously to make their own commitment know that the leap of belief must be constantly repeated. In one respect, 'leap' is a poor metaphor since it implies that the leaper's feet soon touch solid ground, which is not so. Perhaps 'flight' would be a better image. A bird flying or a fish swimming, at once buoyed by a fluid and propelled by its own efforts, suggests the continuity and repeated movement of belief. We 'let go' of our frightened dependence on proximate certainties and break out of the cramped system in which we have found security. We detach ourselves and begin moving in new ways. Whatever the analogy, genuine belief in God involved 'dreadful,' constant, lifelong exertion <without the presence of the Holy Spirit, or the joy of Christ, supposedly>. To begin to believe is to begin to be a self, to dare to act as an eternal spirit.'

In addition, the life of belief is subject to the usual problems which all persons face.

Believers are not exempt from the ordinary human difficulties and sorrows. They must still work for their bread and endure the slow shipwreck of their psychological selves. They too worry about their children, grieve for those who suffer, regret their personal perfidies, and sorrow over the despoliation of the planet.

They too become ill and die.'

'Every moment of our existence is filled with profound danger. Our vital supplies of air, water, and food could be cut off or lethally contaminated at any moment; we are never entirely safe from fire, storm, and disease, from thieves and murderers, from mayhem on the freeway, or from nuclear obliteration. These real possibilities threatened all of us, and they strike some of us irrespective of whether we believe in God. God's rain falls on the just and the unjust. Although believers hold that God will eventually turn all evil to good and that they will taste this good, they do not assume that in the meantime they will suffer less than those who do not believe in God.'

'Shall we then conclude that belief is categorically more courageous than disbelief? The argument seems to lead there, and I am bound to say so.'

The Malachi Abyssal. A period of silence from Malachi to the New Testament.

The Revelation Abyssal. A period of silence from Acts to the present day.

Periods of time when God was relatively silent. When He spoke through the Holy Spirit, in whispers.

Periods of time when God does not help, because you are taking a test....

Periods of time when God seems to be the teacher that is out of the room: will you stay in class and study through obedience alone?

Periods of time when the character of people was tested. Times when character was found wanting.

Periods of time when we could come to gross, incorrect conclusions—such as “God Does Not Exist.”

Periods of time when the heavenly power runs slower than normal, and the tendency is to fake miracles.

Periods of time when the qualifications and demands on the saints are very, very high.

Periods of time when fundamental belief works best. When not believing in what sounds good is best.

Periods of time when listening to the “still, small voice” is the very best policy.

Periods of time to literally try our souls. Periods of time that literally lose men’s souls.

Periods of time when many feel as though they can sin any sin—with impunity and lack of punishment.

Periods of time when many decide to join the other side. Periods when the traitorous join the adversary.

Periods of time—when it is most important to believe, to have faith, to work, and live for Christ.

*Periods of time when miracles will still happen—using those who show good Christian character. **Will you make Jesus proud of you during this period of silence?***

Remember Jesus Himself said that in this world we would have tribulation—but “Behold, I have overcome the world....”

Be of strong faith; be of good cheer; and be of strong character!

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