

THE WITNESS FROM REALITY

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1. IS THERE REALLY A REALITY?

There is something to be learnt from a well organised woman baking a cake. Before she starts mixing the dough, you see her measuring certain ingredients, preparing them where necessary, and then pouring them into separate little bowls. An ignorant person may be confused and wonder what is afoot, since he finds no connection between the various containers and their contents. But all this preparation expedites the mixing process, since now she need not grope about every few seconds for the next ingredient. When its time has arrived, each one slips deftly from the container into the dough.

The first part of this writing may also create a somewhat confused impression and cause the reader to wonder about the connection among the various words and concepts. But take courage: just as in the case of the ingredients of the cake, it may later appear that after all it was worthwhile, and that the seemingly disconnected sections help one another on a road which leads somewhere.

Where did we get it?

The first word which deserves attention may well be the one which appears in the title of the book, namely “reality.” After all, we cannot point at it with the finger and say: “There it is.” How did such an idea occur to our forefathers, and what does it refer to?

Objectors to the title of the book might protest: “Reality has never yet bothered me. I have never yet reflected on it or spoken about it. It might suit pensioners with grey beards who have nothing better to spend their time on. Why should one be saddled with a subject which has left you cold thus far, while there are so many other things clamouring for attention?”

My reaction to such an objection would be: “Precisely how cold has it left you? Who says you have not often reflected on reality, while merely using different words for it? And even if you did not bother about reality in its entirety, how often has one part not been of great importance to you?”

Every evening thousands of people watch the weather report and decide

what to wear next day, and whether it would be an ideal day for washing the laundry. The weather is part of reality – something which we cannot wish away, and about which we may make nasty miscalculations. Many careless people have caused devastating conflagrations by neglecting to consider the circumstances, or the reality, in which they lit a small fire. Deeds which are condemned during a time of peace are accepted in war time. The same deed appears differently under two circumstances. Constantly we allow ourselves to be led by circumstances. And reality includes the *totality of the circumstances* .

And besides, it is not correct for anyone to claim that he never thinks about reality or even speaks about it. From time to time we all use the word, and then it is often qualified as “harsh.” Who is there who never speaks of “harsh reality”? Or we say someone's plans are unrealistic, which means “against reality.”

Let us consider one imaginary example of an ordinary man who uses the word in our own century.

It was still rather early in the morning when Mr. D. found himself embroiled in a very pleasant dream in which he was travelling in a distant country which he had always longed to visit. The dream was so realistic, that he was even unable to understand the speech of the people around him, and that he awoke with a shock when someone addressed him in his own language. He groaned deeply, and then he added with a yawn, “Back to reality.” This was caught up by his son, who was making good progress in the mastery of his mother tongue at that stage . “Back to wha-a-at?” he demanded to know. Mr D. yawned once more. “I said ... ya-a-awn ... back to reality?”

“What kind of thing is that?”

“I ... would not actually describe it as a thing. Reality is ... oh, well ... perhaps one could say it is the opposite of a dream. Not quite, but approximately. It is also the opposite of some other things, like ... yawn ... wishes and ... e ... fairy tales, and plans which do not work out, and other ... fantasies.”

Junior, who was already more awake than his father, but who was not quite sure of the meaning of the words “approximately” and “opposite” and “fantasies,” was clearly intrigued. “What does it look like?” he demanded to know. “Has it got legs?”

“No ... e ... not actually legs. And yet it sometimes feels as if it gives you a kick. At times quite viciously. But tell you what,” Mr D. suggested in an effort to bargain for a respite, “Let's talk about it tonight after supper.”

But there was a last question: “Whom does it kick? Does it kick naughty children?”

Mr. D. instinctively felt that the conversation was drifting in the direction of deep water, and gave no answer.

The opposite.

It has not been recorded what Mr. D. explained to his son after supper. Which is rather unfortunate, for now we do not know whether reality kicks naughty children.

But what did happen, is that D. junior reached a stage where he asked the question “How does one know...?” in many contexts. And so he also asked: “How does one know that the story of Jack and the beanstalk is not reality?” Mr. D's quandary was mixed with a measure of pride on his deeply reflective son, and the best answer he could think of, was: “Since it is impossible.” But if he imagined that that would exonerate him, he was clearly mistaken, for the next question was already awaiting him: “How does one know what is impossible?” Once again there is a gap in the report, and we do not know what Mr. D answered. But we cannot simply leave it there, as we shall see presently. We may have to answer it ourselves, since it is far too important simply to be ignored. The question of reality leads to that of *possibility*. So put this word in a bowl, for we are coming to it.

But a fruitful idea which Mr.D. did in fact place in our midst, is that reality is the *opposite* of certain other things. There are indeed concepts which entered our vocabulary mainly because they play the role of opposites.

Take as an example a proverb which appears in Africa, in which it is maintained that fishes do not know that there is a substance like water.

I do not personally speak fish language, but I find sense in this statement. I can accept that fishes have no word for “dry,” since nothing with which they are acquainted can ever be described as such. But would they have a word for “wet”? Would they ever feel the need for it, since everything they know is obviously wet? If there were no alcohol in the world, we would probably not have a word for “drunk.” But would we have one for “sober?” Would it ever be necessary to say that someone is well, if no one ever became ill?

And that is undoubtedly also the case with the concept of “reality.” Mr. D. was not the first to recognise it as the opposite of something else. Many others wondered about it, at least since the time of the ancient Greeks. That it may be the opposite of a dream, was already realised before the time of the philosophers. In many countries – possibly in all – special significance

was attached to dreams. In probably all these countries a distinction was drawn between two kinds of dreams. On the one hand the ordinary everyday dreams were seen as meaningless, and the dreamer would not think of acting on such a dream the next day. (For example, if someone dreamt of his late friend he would not try to contact him in the morning.) And when it was said that reality is the opposite of a dream, then it referred to this type of meaningless dreams, as also in the case of Mr. D. And yet there was a vague suspicion in many countries that dreams may virtually be *more* real than daily life, and that they reveal truths which are not known to everyone. The Babylonians as well as the ancient Greeks sometimes sought divine guidance by spending the night in a sacred place and hoping for a revelation in a dream. ^(Frankfort, p.20) And we know what role dreams played in biblical times. In Africa great significance was likewise attached to them. But to return to the Greeks: in various places Homer refers to the importance of dreams as revelations sent by Zeus; but what is of special importance, is his account of Penelope, the exemplary wife of Odysseus, who explained the difference between the two types of dreams. She described some as “uncomfortable and confusing things” which deceive us with empty promises. She even specified that they come through a gate of ivory. But there are also dreams which come through a gate of horn and which may be trusted.

This distinction between two types of dreams was possibly found all over the earth. It proves one thing, it is that the distinction between reality and unreality was never a finalised issue.

Plato described the ordinary people as those who dream, and said it was the task of the philosophers to wake them. But Plato is better remembered for contrasting reality with something else, namely a shadow. And the most famous context in which he did this, was in his allegory of the people in a cave who only see shadows of what exists in the real world. He believed even those who imagine that they know reality, and who do not reflect on it deeply, are still in a similar position. This connection among unreality and the dream and the shadow was by no means found among the Greeks alone. Very far from Greece, in certain languages of the Andaman Islands, the words for “dream” and for “shadow” are derived from the same root. ^(Radcliffe-Brown, pp. 167, 304) And this occurred even though neither Plato nor the Andamanese had read Longfellow's famous poem in which the slave's dream is described as “the shadow of sleep.” The contrast between the shadow and reality was also noted by the author to the Hebrews who states that “the law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the

realities themselves.”^(10:1) The shadow is indeed a rough indication of the form of reality, but it is limited to outlines and is contorted by the surface on which it falls. So there are thinkers who say that is how we know reality: like a shadow. It is not a case of knowing nothing about reality, but neither do we ever know very much.

Why so important?

Why is it so important to know as much as possible about reality?

Possibly Robinson Crusoe could shed light on this question. I guess he dreamt about his home in England and about his friends and relatives there about every night. But when he woke up in the morning, he realised that his life and his wellbeing depended on his knowledge of the circumstances on the island on which he found himself. Which plants were poisonous and which were nourishing? Which animals would bite him and which would wag their tails at him or purr like a cat, or could even be killed and roasted? What had happened on the island previously which could be expected to happen again?

The application of this to our own situation is clear. We may dream and fantasise as we like, but bodily we find ourselves in a situation to which we gave the name “reality.” And we feel crawly as long as there are mysteries. And even if we do not feel certain that we can eventually dispel all the uneasiness, we at least do what we can to alleviate it. Not we alone, but even our earliest ancestors.

Our equipment

One of the first useful questions we could ask, is about our equipment for getting to know reality.

One thing is certain: we would have known nothing about it without our *senses*, of which we usually claim to have five. By seeing and hearing and feeling and tasting and smelling we make contact with the reality within which we live. But how far can they take us?

We assume that we need these five senses in order to acquire the necessary information, and if many of us compare our perceptions and discover that they are in agreement, we accept that the information is correct. With our senses we firstly perceive what *exists*. But that is not all, for in addition we constantly perceive *changes*. In other words, we take note of *events*. And not only of what happens occasionally, but also what happens regularly and in a certain order. The discovery of such *regularities* then emboldens us to formulate *laws*. And what we find particularly

enlightening, is that certain things regularly *originate* from certain others. But ultimately the entire process of knowing reality starts with our sense perception.

The smell of a rat.

But now the human being reveals a peculiarity, namely that through all the ages and right around the globe he revealed the vague suspicion that what he gets to know through sense perception and the consequent deductions, does not exhaust the contents of reality. This suspicion is revealed in the aforementioned interest in dreams, and the expectation that there he might obtain knowledge which is not available from his everyday experience. But even if we had never dreamt, there are other considerations and perceptions which may convince us that the whole story about reality has not yet been told. We may even wonder whether we possess all the senses required for that.

How many senses?

We speak of our five senses, and we readily assume that they are the only ones there could be. But what would people who have only four senses think if they had not been informed by others? I once asked a gentleman who had been born blind whether he could form any idea of what is meant by a word like “red”. He admitted that he could not. Of course he knew well that blood is red, that certain flowers are red, maybe even that a post box is often red and that a person may become red with shame, and so forth. But he knew all these things because he trusted people who had told him, and then he repeated their words without knowing exactly what they meant. How would you explain redness to him without using another word which he would find equally incomprehensible? (Now first put down the book and try to do it, even if no one is listening.) Even the word “colour” would be a mystery to him. From what he has been told, he would know that there are different colours with different names. But would anyone be able to explain them to him in such a way that, if he should suddenly receive his sight, he would know which objects are yellow or blue or red? And not only colours would remain unknown to him. If he had to rely on his experience alone, even if he assumed that there is bound to be a body like the sun somewhere which emanates heat, he would never know that there are clouds and stars and a moon. And would he ever even know what it means to see?

Take it further and think of an island populated solely by people who

were born blind, although they have managed to survive. In addition they have never been informed that there are people who can see. Then, suddenly one day, someone with all five senses appears in their midst and starts speaking of the moon and the stars and clouds and colours. What would their reaction be?

Initially, I take it, they would laugh at him. But gradually they might discover that he has the ability to become aware of things at a distance. He might tell them, "There comes So-and-so," and within a few seconds So-and-so indeed joins their company. He also performs other feats which convince them. And so they do not only eventually believe him, but they even start trusting him to do things for them which they cannot do themselves.

But hold your horses with the "all five." We referred to the visitor as someone with all five senses. How confident can we be about that "all"? Our ears and eyes can detect certain waves, and our noses and tongues react to certain chemicals, but there are others which fall outside their scope, but which can be detected by animals. Not only can they hear notes which are too high for us, but eels find their way back to the place of their birth, presumably lead by the earth's magnetic fields; and bats circle around in pitch dark caves without colliding against one another or the walls. And although a dog already enjoys a far keener sense of smell than a human being, it is maintained that a wolf can do even better. And then there are various waves and beams which only affect certain instruments. If that were not the case, we would have no radios, cell phones, remote controls and television sets. There might even be more that we cannot perceive than what falls within our scope. Just like the blind people mentioned above, we are in danger of cutting up reality to make it fit our sensory equipment.

A sixth sense?

Some people indeed claim to be able to perceive what is hidden to others. How would you appreciate the company of a ghost shortly after your marriage? Years ago, when I was a telephone counsellor at Lifeline, a gentleman called and said he had just returned from his honeymoon, but now there was a ghost which was adamant to join him and his bride in their flat. From his description some of the other inmates of the building recognised the intruder as someone who had lived there previously, but whom he did not know himself. I have never experienced anything of this nature myself (a limitation on account of which I experience no self-pity), and the nearest I came to it occurred one evening during my childhood,

when I was present where a lady whom I knew very well, saw how someone was dying far from our home.

The “sixth sense” or “extra-sensory perception” has been studied by a variety of reputable researchers; and two brothers who were both interested in it were Aldous and Julian Huxley. Those who experienced this phenomenon themselves, included people like the poet Goethe and the psychologist Jung. I do not suggest that such perception will open the door to knowledge of a superior kind to that which we derive from our more mundane observations, but the fact that it does occur gives us every reason to be modest when we claim to have fathomed reality. All the more so, since such experiences often provide knowledge of events which still lie in the future.

More calls to humility.

Not only our senses, but even the laws which we formulate with their help, sometimes prove to be more limited than we initially expected. All our experience teaches us that, if any part of our bodies is heated above a certain degree, it becomes unbearable and may even lead to burns. (In my youth I once unintentionally confirmed this rule experimentally by treading in hot ashes!) And yet ceremonies are performed in which people walk over glowing coals barefoot without suffering any harm. Some scientists acknowledge that they cannot explain firewalking, and those who try to do so and who came to my knowledge, do it so unconvincingly that they only prove their own inability.

Or take something more academically prestigious. Today physicists tell us that the set of laws which operate in the quantum world are entirely different from those we are used to and which we formulated from our observations. “Nobody in quantum mechanics talks about impossibilities any more,” says Lyall Watson, suggesting that there might be a connection between the problems raised by this branch of science and the “gifts of unknown things” which he experienced on the islands of the Pacific.^(p. 142) Bill Bryson, in *A Short History of nearly Everything*, refers to Nils Bohr who once commented that a person who wasn’t outraged on first hearing about quantum theory didn’t understand what had been said. He mentions James Trefil’s reference to “an area of the universe that our brains just aren’t wired to understand,” and Feynman’s statement that, “things on a small scale behave *nothing* like things on a large scale.”^(pp.189 – 192) Gideon Joubert describes quantum physics as “a ghostly landscape where unearthly things occur. Everything is unreal. No one knows what happens to things

when they are not looked at.” (pp. 199, 203)

Even though much of this may be above the comprehension of the average lay reader (and, let me admit, the present author), it would surely be a wise investment of our mental activity to reflect on it before we make up our minds on the pivotal question of what is possible and what is not. If we do not state the question clearly it may lie hidden and seriously impair and confuse our thinking. The limitations to our ability to know reality should be seen as a part of reality itself; and to deny this inability and the existence of unknown forces is to deny part of reality. And whoever has refused one part is in danger of jeopardising even what he could have had.

Possibility

The entire reality does not lie spread out before us at this moment. A large part belongs to the past, and many capable researchers spend their lives unravelling it. These include historians and numerous natural scientists, as well as jurists who have to determine during a trial what happened in the past. And one of the most useful concepts which come to their aid is the term “impossible.” If it can be determined that some event or another is impossible, they know that they may exclude it from their investigations with a clear conscience. If someone was shot in Bredasdorp, but a suspect can prove beyond any doubt that he filled up his tank at a garage in Barberton on that afternoon, the alibi is a relief not only to himself, but also to the judge and the advocates, whose field of investigation has now been narrowed.

But just like Mr. D's son, they need clarity on the question “How does one know what is possible?” In other words, how does one know that it is impossible for someone to raise a gun in Barberton and hit someone in Bredasdorp?

In this instance the *potential of the forces and factors* involved is well known. It is known how far a bullet can travel, what the requirements are for an attacker to see his victim, and to aim so accurately that the bullet hits its target. In this case everything is so clear, that no further questions are asked. But it is not always as simple as that. And why not?

Few events can be described as the result of one single factor. To bring about any event, a *cooperation* of forces and factors is usually needed. They should also be *arranged correctly* and follow one another in the *correct sequence*. Such a fruitful arrangement and sequence of factors and forces may be referred to as a *process*. And only when these factors and forces are known to us, may we dare to draw conclusions about what is

possible and what is not.

If something has happened, we know for sure that it must have been possible. Even if we do not yet know what caused it, we know one thing: it could definitely not have been caused by *absent forces*. Just as someone with an alibi could not have drawn the trigger.

So when may it be said that something was impossible? Allow me another little incident.

Undoubtedly about two centuries ago there was an eminent inhabitant of my home town Stellenbosch, who was not at peace with the missionary work done by the Moravian Mission at Genadendal. He complained that on Sunday mornings their bells disturbed his composure. Since about seventy kilometres separate the two places, and there are mountains between them, I crave the liberty to doubt his words and to say what he maintained was impossible.

And yet there came a time when it was no longer impossible to hear such distant bells, and that is with the arrival of the telephone. Someone in Stellenbosch who wished to be disturbed on a Sunday morning, could drop a call to his brother in Genadendal who lived near the church, just when the bells were ringing. "There I hear the blasted bells," he could say.

Today someone in Stellenbosch can hear the bells ringing even much further than Genadendal, in Maastricht in the Netherlands. He can not only hear them, but also see them swinging, even years after the event, and as often as he likes. He can do that with a DVD of André Rieu.

What made the impossible possible?

Simply the availability and arrangement of the required *forces* and *processes*. Fortunately it is not necessary to understand all the details, and for most of us it is undoubtedly sufficient to know that electricity is one of these forces which make the telephone and the DVD player work.

What convinces me that it was impossible for the bells of Genadendal to disturb someone in Stellenbosch two centuries ago, is simply that *the required forces were absent*.

But imagine that I am absolutely convinced that something did happen, and equally convinced that the required forces were wanting. What then?

Then I have to find the shortcoming in myself and admit that I do not know all the forces. And that *unknown forces*, or at least *unknown potentialities* of known forces, were at work. As far as I am concerned, I have come face to face with a *mystery*.

One of the most sobering truths before which a searcher is forced to bow, is the scratchy truth that what is a mystery to him, is *as much part of reality* as

that which is crystal clear before his eyes. He may understand it later, or he may never understand it. Even if he will never find it possible to understand it, and even if he will never be able to express an opinion on its credibility, nothing is changed to the fact that *the mystery is part of reality*.

Even if there are no clear borderlines, a mystery is usually seen as something rather more sublime than something which has merely not yet been discovered, or even as something kept secret. The word is often used in a religious context, and even in everyday use it is usually implied that it is connected with something of great importance, and in addition that it is extremely difficult – and even wellnigh impossible – to unravel. It is derived from a Greek word which refers to someone initiated in certain religious ceremonies; but when we use it, we usually mean that no one knows it, and that we do not even know how to find out.

The mystery of origins

But even the best known and most familiar object of our knowledge may *lead to* a mystery when the question is asked by which road it came. On my desk I see a cup and a saucer. It is well known how they were formed from clay and then baked and glazed. Few people would see it as a mystery, and those who do, may readily be enlightened. It is less well known how the clay originated. And even less how the substances originated from which the clay originated. And eventually we reach something which no one can explain. That applies to the inanimate environment, as well as to living plants and animals. We may ask whether it also applies to certain deep emotions and longings and urges in man's innermost. At one time none of these things existed, and they must have originated in time in some way or another. And these origins are some of the most aggravating mysteries. How did matter originate? And consciousness? And above, all, life?

Take the last mentioned as an example. Specialists as well as laymen ask how life originated. And possibly it was in a moment of desperation or despondency that some even suggested that it must have originated somewhere in space and was then brought to the earth. Such an explanation shifts the problem geographically, and possibly beyond our reach, but it is hardly a solution, and it merely emphasises how insoluble we find it. But actually more is asked than how life originated, for specialists are even plagued by the more basic question: "What *is* it?" Take any animal and cut off its supply of oxygen. Imagine that within three minutes life has left it. But what has changed physically? Everything that was there four minutes ago is still there. But what has gone, and can it be replaced? One author

who summed up the situation, explained that, since we do not know what life is, we should note what it does. He describes life as a “squirrelly thing.” All these questions convince man that what he experiences daily with his senses, does not exhaust reality. For if anything belongs to reality, its origin must be just as much part of it as its existence, regardless of whether anyone knows how it happened.

Can the mystery be confined?

But can we not prescribe to the mystery when it is welcome? Could we say: “Fine, we are willing to make room for you right at the beginning of the history of reality, but you should not insist on more than that, and today you should behave yourself and not meddle where you are unwelcome.” If I am willing to admit that the perceptible reality originated in a mysterious way, is it at all logical to deny that the same mystery may be functioning today? And if it is possible for one mystery, what about another one? Who counted them, so that we might know how many there are? These are questions which everyone should answer for himself.

There are no degrees of reality which are determined by my knowledge. Precisely because it is lightly overlooked that a mystery is part of reality, it is profitable for someone who takes the search for reality seriously, to pay special attention to the mysterious, and often to think about it. In this way he may be safeguarded against an attenuated image of reality.

Overtaxing the familiar.

There is an old anecdote of two men who were not yet acquainted with a bicycle and who found tracks of one in the soft soil. One solution was that they had been caused by two wheelbarrows. But where were the footprints of the pushers? Eventually a solution was found: someone sat in one wheelbarrow while pushing the other.

The force which was unknown to them, is the ability of the human being to maintain his balance while moving forwards. Consequently something like a bicycle was inconceivable, and familiar forces had to be enlisted in an attempt to find an explanation.

Any attenuation of the image of reality by the denial of some of its aspects can be compared with the situation which arises when some workers in any concern are retrenched. It often leads to the overtaxing of the remaining ones. And in the same way the limitation of the number of forces of reality which should be taken into consideration, often leads to an expectation that the remaining forces should accomplish what lies above their ability.

And in this connection it is helpful to note a deep-seated conviction that often raises its head.

But please not here and now!

A prophet still finds it hard to be accepted in his own town; and when there are rumours of disasters, it is all too easy to feel vaguely: “It cannot happen here.” In many countries in Africa – and undoubtedly elsewhere in the world as well – the belief is encountered that the really potent healers and magicians should come from across the border, since they possess more power than the local ones. But even more than distance in space, distance in *time* has the effect of shifting the frontiers of the possible and establishing the conviction that marvellous incidents could have occurred long ago. Even the first story of the brothers Grimm commences with the words “Long ago, when it still helped to wish ...” Today, we all know, wishful thinking changes nothing. But distance into the past seems to make it possible. Is this kind of belief confined to story tellers of yore? Or is it still found today?

Are the ideas around the big bang not an example of this?

Whenever an explosion occurs anywhere today, everybody asks what caused it. What would we think of a wisecrack who explains, “No, it was not caused: it simply occurred. Explosions are known to do that”? Who would be impressed? And yet many noted scientists affirm today that billions of years ago a point in absolute nothingness exploded and formed the universe. If absolute nothingness could produce something of such stupendous dimensions then, what prevents a very minor explosion today from simply occurring without being caused by anything? Or is the belief that distance into the past makes the impossible possible, still hale and hearty?

The cardinal question is not whether the big bang took place and brought forth the universe. Even if that did happen, the question still remains what made it bang. It may appear as if, even though it might be impossible for the universe simply to originate from nothing, it was somehow easier for a very minute speck of dust (but with wellnigh unlimited potential) to announce itself from nowhere and then to explode and assume its present immeasurable proportions. For some reason or another it seems more rational to accept something like that than that there was an unfathomable personal Creator with power at his command of which we have no idea. But does the fact that such a faith is *easier*, as being more consonant with current thinking, mean that it is *more reasonable*? It is

a simple fact that, even if everything should have originated by means of a big bang, we with our sense perception and logical thinking do not possess the ability to prove that no personal Creator was responsible for it. For thinking which is solely based on our daily human experience, an uncreated Creator might be an impossibility. But for a beginning that took place in any other way, exactly the same problem holds, since we have no experience of anything which can cause something else to originate from nothing. It is sometimes maintained that people who believe in a Creator have virtually painted themselves into a corner, since they cannot go any further and explain where the Creator came from. But is the materialist in any better position? Can he explain what caused the big bang to bang? Or should both of them admit that, depending solely on their own thinking and deductions from their own experience, they share the same spot in the corner? Or should it rather be said they stand before the same locked door where their only hope is that a Witness should come for the other side with the key?

Ultimate reality

As developments were observed and it was noted how things originate from other things, the conviction arose that there is bound to be ultimate reality of which all things consist and from which they originated. Thales, the first renowned Greek philosopher, said this original reality was water. Others gave different explanations. But whether final reality should be water or fire or numbers or whatever, one inevitable question did not remain unasked: How did everything *get started*? And even if we know how everything originated, who or what was responsible for it?

Every nation tried to answer this question with an account of the origin of the world and the things and living beings in it. And almost invariably there was a conviction that a Being or beings who resemble the human being in certain respects, but who obviously surpasses him infinitely, should be held responsible. The best known account is undoubtedly that of the Hebrews, as found in the book of Genesis, of which the scientist and theologian Gerald L. Schroeder says that, "Of all the ancient accounts of creation, only that of Genesis has warranted a second reading by the scientific community. It alone records a sequence of events that approaches the scientific account of our cosmic origins." In contrast to the other ancient accounts, "the match between the statements and timing in Genesis 1 and the discoveries of modern science is phenomenal." (p. 70) The Greeks also had their creation account, but they were undoubtedly the first people who

worked in the direction of an alternative explanation based on their knowledge of the world in which they lived and the forces which they encountered there. This led to the so-called “scientific” approach, which is highly respected at the present time, and which relies on accurate observation of what exists and what happens under specific circumstances, the discovery of regularities and the subsequent formulation of laws of nature. This was done for the inanimate world as well as that section where life is observed. Attempts were made to unravel the origin of the present living or biological world in the light of these laws. We shall return to this, but let us first look at another conviction which has exerted such a grip on human beings, that they could hardly escape the feeling that it is bound to prove an inalienable aspect of reality. This is connected with their *own place* in reality.

2. THE DEEP RIDDLE OF REALITY

Without travelling on many detours, we may point out that man has claimed a very special place in reality for himself. Nor is conceit the only reason for this. Man raises so many additional problems which are not found in anything else. It may be difficult to understand physical matter, but this is also present in man's body. And many desires are a mark of the animal as well as man. Life, and notably animal life, raises many problems – but it is not wanting in the human being. And yet there is so much more which is not found anywhere else. Even if we cannot lay the finger on it and describe it, we are all aware of it.

Obviously man is very small in comparison with many other things, like the globe on which he lives and the other celestial bodies, and even certain animals, especially elephants and whales. His sense of smell is not as sharp as that of a dog, and he cannot dream of flying like a bird, leave alone producing light like a firefly. But he can study the heavenly bodies and the animals and get to know them, and they cannot reciprocate. Give him his due.

If someone still insists on proposing another candidate for the position of masterpiece, I leave it to him or her to present the required credentials. I shall direct myself to those who agree with me that man is the masterpiece of perceptible reality.

But what is it *that makes man unique*? What is there in his behaviour, and above all in his yearnings and strivings and fears, which sets him apart from his fellow members of nature? Various features are more fully developed in man than in any animal. Undoubtedly books may be written on this, of which some heftily dispute what others affirm. Take the example of the conscience. Someone might set out to prove that only man has one. At the end of one of his earth-shaking books Immanuel Kant says that there are two things which fill him with ever increasing awe and wonder, the more he thinks about them, and these are the starry heavens above and the moral law inside him. And we know that little voice which addresses us when we suspect that we have violated the moral law. I must admit that I did indeed think that the conscience is a good example of something which only belongs to man. But I have experience of the deftness with which people can try to prove that beginnings of something which is found in man, are already present in animals. They may point out that a dog also sometimes shows signs of uneasiness and fear if it knows that it has done something which its master has forbidden. Is that not the first stirrings of a conscience? I can foresee that “Yes, but's” will be copiously employed on both sides of the argument. And this applies to many suggestions for elevating man above the other animals.

Various authors attempted to lay their finger on the uniqueness of man. Here are some of their conclusions. Man is the only mammal which constantly walks on two legs. His language is not the same as animal sounds. He makes images of what he sees. He is also very fond of other symbols, for example the figurative use of his language. Man is the only animal that laughs, and the only one that is aware that one day he will die. An especially fruitful observation is that man is willing to sacrifice immediate satisfaction in exchange for a future reward, while the animal wants its satisfaction immediately. That is obviously connected with man's reasoning powers which are so far superior to those of any animal. If he is hungry and has only a limited supply of food, he will not eat everything immediately, while the animal will probably do so. Especially if the food is of such a nature that it can produce more of its kind, like wheat or chickens or sheep, man treats it with care and sacrifices immediate satisfaction for the sake of the future.

But that is merely a subsection of a wider human trait, namely his *willingness to sacrifice one satisfaction for another*. The choice is often between two immediate forms of satisfaction, and is not always as obvious as when an immediate satisfaction is sacrificed for a future one. In most

cases a satisfaction which is generally valued highly is sacrificed for one which surprises and whose attractiveness for the human being may not be obvious immediately. A good deal may be learnt about man by asking: "For what is he willing to make sacrifices?"

The test of sacrifices.

Man often behaves like any animal. He breathes, eats and drinks, scratches where it itches, sleeps, defends himself, procreates, brings forth sounds to communicate something to his friends, and does certain other things as well. And even his choices often differ little from what an animal would take, for example when he chooses the way of least resistance. If they know of two paths leading to a place where they are in a hurry to arrive, one of which is considerably longer than the other, both of them will usually choose the shorter one. The animal will eat the nearest leaves first, and man will pick the lowest fruit first, unless there is a good reason for not doing so. The way of least resistance appeals to both.

But then man also performs actions which are surprising in the sense that they deviate from the actions of an animal as well as from his own customary actions. Usually this is also a deviation from the way of least resistance.

One form of this apparently deviant action is the use of *symbolism*. This addiction has even been proposed as an identifying mark of the human being (e.g. By Suzanne Langer). In the army and in science and commerce, everything is stated as succinctly and as clearly as possible in order to avoid unnecessary confusion. But this will not do for a poet. A girl of Tralee whose parents took proper care to give her a name, and who decided that it should be Mary, is now a rose. The teacher who is already known to all and sundry as "Mr. Price," is now referred to as "Grasshopper." A country has a name which is known to everyone, and those who want to honour it may do so, even in song. But now a piece of cloth of various colours, which in many cases cannot be described as attractive, is hoisted on a pole, and it receives salutes and eulogies and is planted on conquered territory (and even the moon). And the enemies of that country burn it with gusto. And they do not say: "We have done it to a piece of cloth." It is a symbol of a country. A team of young men play against fifteen of another country, and if they win there is jubilation, and even the old greybeards say: "We have won!" The team represents them. There are so many forms of symbolism, that it is hardly possible to do more than to indicate that we are dealing with two components. Firstly

there is a person or a country or whatever is under discussion, and which is known as the “referent.” In the second place there is something else which is connected with it in some way or another. Instead of just using the usual word for the former, reference is made to the latter. And this second component is a symbol. It is often a word, but it may assume many other forms, and is often used with deep emotion. In proverbs and idioms one person or situation is used to represent another. Since earliest times and probably in every country there also existed a kind of symbol game in the form of puzzles. And think of all the stories, for example Aesop's fable of the fox and the crow, which was definitely not told because he was interested in zoology. In 2 Kings 14 is recorded an early example of a king who spoke of a cedar and a thistle in order to warn another one against behaving like the cock of the walk. But the use of symbols demands more exertion than saying what you think outright. It is a sacrifice of comfort.

Speaking of stories: even a person who is not so deeply enamoured of truth that he always speaks it, usually attaches great value to it when he finds himself at the receiving end of a communication. And yet parents tell their children stories when they are very young, knowing very well that not one word is true; and the older children fully realise this, and yet they enjoy what they hear and ask for more. And the parents watch stories on television, quite aware that the characters which ostensibly want to destroy each other, probably drank coffee together after the shoot. Whence this attachment to untruths?

Considerable research has been done in the field of folktales. Researchers (including noted psychologists) realised that, even if the stories should tell us little about history, there is something to be learnt about the people who told them. I want to draw attention to two folklorists, one a German and the other an Englishman, who reach fairly similar conclusions about one type of story.

Wilhelm Laiblin draws the attention to certain folktales of the Brothers Grimm in which an arduous task has to be performed, and he says they are concerned with “the disentangling, arrangement, mastering and curbing of natural vital force, with the creation of order in the deep areas of the soul (*Tiefenseele*), and thus eventually with the curbing and mastering of urges.” And this, he says, is connected with “the integration of the soul in its depth.”^(Laiblin, p. 367) Whoever has experienced turmoil in the depth of his soul, will appreciate a story in which the hero creates order from chaos, whether by pacifying vicious dogs or in any other way. Laiblin's statement that the treasure stands in some relation to integration

in the depths of the soul, is echoed by Joseph Campbell in his *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from the mysterious adventure with power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (p. 30)

Campbell also drops a line which confirms Laiblin's contribution. 'The great deed of the supreme hero is to come to the key of this unity in multiplicity and then to make it known.' (p. 40)

'The integration of the soul in its depth,' says Laiblin. 'Unity in multiplicity,' says Campbell. They also agree that the hero leaves this world in order to go and fetch good things in another, and that in reality this is a journey to the depth of his own soul. Although their conclusions specifically apply to certain stories, the question may be asked whether they have not identified something which is more widely applicable. Is it not possible that other stories express the integration of a variety in some other way? And is it only done by stories?

Take the example of a very busy gentleman who is constantly in search of labour saving gadgets. That is his customary attitude. His car has automatic gears and decides on its own when to lock the doors or switch on the wipers and when to produce squeaks to warn its owner against what he is not always sure what it is. He enters a shop where he may acquire beautiful reproductions of paintings and photos, which are displayed in such a way that he is tempted to obtain one in the easiest and simplest way, namely by buying it and taking it with him. But he looks past them and asks: "Where are your boxes of superfluous botheration?" If he is not clearly understood, he explains that he is in search of a jig saw puzzle. That was also originally a picture. Then the trouble was taken to cut it up into hundreds of pieces with a machine, so that the purchaser might laboriously reassemble it during the time saved with his labour saving appliances. The very last thing he is asking for now is an apparatus which will perform the task for him. After all, the *task* is precisely what he is looking for. This man deviates from his customary love of ease. He spends his money on an apparently unnecessary task. And the task for which he pays consists in creating order from chaos.

The longing for a task is not confined to men. In *The Hidden*

Persuaders Vance Packard writes about a firm which produced a quick mix cake recipe which had all the ingredients in it, and who tried to market it with the instruction: “Merely add water, stir and bake.” The results were very disappointing. Then they marketed the same mixture, but without egg powder, and with the instruction: “Add water and eggs, stir and bake.” And the sales rose. Packard explains that when a woman bakes a cake for her family, she wants to feel that it is *her* cake, and this feeling does not announce itself unless she adds something of her own. Once more a deviation from the usual rule that people like things which save labour.

Examples of human behaviour which differs from that of the animal, as well as of presumably deviant behaviour, may be multiplied. But rather than doing this, we may ask what is the reason for these forms of behaviour. What does the human being expect to gain by firstly revealing more than merely differences in degree from the animals, but also differences in kind, and secondly by deviating from his own customary behaviour? And we may note two attributes of his which are betrayed by behaviour which sacrifices the way of least resistance. Without making any claims to exhaustiveness, and aware that others may lay the emphasis elsewhere, I want to suggest that attention be paid to certain special peculiarities of man which may be seen as drives which urge him to perform deviant actions.

The search for novelty.

When a Hebrew king of thousands of years ago, the inhabitants of a Greek city a few centuries later, and a Russian philosopher of the previous century reveal the same concern, they are evidently on the track of something to which everyone would do well to pay serious attention.

The king, who was widely renowned for his wisdom, sighed: “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again, there is nothing new under the sun.” (Ecc. 1:9) (Coming from a man with a thousand wives, this offers food for thought.)

According to the author Luke, “all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.” (Acts 17:21, A.V.)

The philosopher, Nicolas Berdyaev, of whom we shall hear more, found newness in “every strong gripping experience.” (B&E, p.160) “Real newness which is not merely a redistribution of parts always arrives, as it were, from another world, from another scheme of things,” (B&E, pp. 167,168) he

declared. “At each moment of one’s living, what is needed is to put an end to the old world and to begin the new.” (B&E, p.254)

Animals could not care less for newness. Migratory birds which travel thousands of kilometres twice a year, return to their old nests, although they could have visited new countries. And finches build their nests like their ancestors, even though it should be easy for them to construct something new. The language we speak acquired many new words since my childhood, but doves still coo as always, and dogs still bark in the old way.

But man is constantly in search of what is new. And there are three notable ways in which he endeavours to find it.

By discovering.

In Solzhenitsin's book “Cancer Ward” there is a young ecologist, Vadim, who has only a short while to live. But he is constantly reading scientific books. He believes that he may yet live six months, and he has formulated a theory on the discovery of ore, which has now become an obsession to him to prove before his death, since he believes that it will be of service to geologists.

Man is a seeker, and deep is his joy when he finds something which has remained unknown before. That does not only apply to a discoverer of a new country or a new way to an old one, but also to scientists who discover something which may be added to their existing knowledge, and actually to anyone who discovers something which has not been noticed before.

By surpassing.

Newness may also be acquired by surpassing what exists. It becomes evident that man is an incurable surpasser or outstripper or transcender. For this he is willing to make sacrifices which boggle the mind. And this assumes many forms, for there are many areas where he exerts himself to surpass existing boundaries, not only beyond what he has already achieved himself, but preferably also beyond what anyone else has attained. This may consist in running faster or jumping further or higher, or eating more Vienna sausages in five minutes, or even in performing a difficult task at a younger age than any previous candidate for the honour. The “Guinness Book of Records” may be consulted on this. The participants are convinced that it was not only for Columbus and the other mariners that a new world lay waiting beyond what had already been attained. But as long

as it can be sure of its supply of food and water, the animal is satisfied with the attainments of its ancestors.

By Integration.

At the seaside a little boy and his puppy are both digging in the sand. But which of the two will afterwards try to use the dug out material for building a little castle? A proven way to find new things is by *constructing* or *integrating* or *consolidating* different parts into a new whole. This is done in numerous ways. It explains the undying interest in jig saw puzzles, where people pay for the botheration of constructing a picture which they could have obtained far more easily if it had not been cut up into hundreds of pieces. Children love no toys more than those in which parts have to be assembled, like a Meccano or Tinkertoy set or Montini blocks. When they grow up, they might prefer music, or literature or philosophy, which are all examples of the composition and consolidation of parts. The girls may become housewives who never tire of testing out new recipes in which ingredients are mixed together in a new way. (Which also explains the case of Packard's cake mixture.) In connection with literature I cannot refrain from quoting what Percy Lubbock said of the great Russian novelist, Leo Tolstoy:

His hand is plunged into the scene, he lifts out of it great fragments ... And upon these trophies he sets to work with the full force of his imagination ... he remakes them in conditions that are never known in life ... And then, upon all this new life ... Tolstoy directs the skill of his art; he distributes it in a single, embracing design ...
(p. 18)

To distribute in a single, embracing design is to integrate or consolidate elements which were previously unconnected. So actually the novelist is doing the same as the old story tellers of whom Laiblin and Campbell said that they were seeking for a deep unity. It is not merely the desire of the novelists and the artists, but also of the philosophers, of whom Will Durand said that they “hunger and thirst not (as they think) for truth, but for unity.”^(p.440) So the philosophers were busy constructing systems in which everything could find a place. Even where outstanding individual philosophers are wanting, there is a culture in which strivings are consolidated. Leo Frobenius, the pioneer researcher of the cultures of Africa, describes culture as an activity in which things are *seen together* (*Zusammenschau*), and he says cultural philosophy should be led by an

endeavour to experience things as a unity (*Einheitserfühlung*). (p.37) Integration once again, in whichever continent the culture is found. And what about symbolism in general? In this instance one person or assembly of people, or an important concern or whatever, which is known as the “referent,” is indicated by referring to another which reveals certain similarities with it and which is used as a symbol. But every time this is done, a bond is established between a referent and its symbol. In fact, the word “symbol” is derived from the Greek word *sumballein*, which means “to throw together.” And every time a referent and its symbol are “thrown together,” a contribution is made to the feeling that reality forms a unity.

The objection may be raised that there are also animals which integrate many parts into a whole. What about the birds which build such amazing nests, and the beavers, and above all the bees? Do they not reveal the same urge to integrate as the human being? Superficially there may be a similarity, but there is also a profound difference between the integration of man and animal. Animals do not integrate because the integrating action in itself affords them satisfaction: they do so for practical purposes. And they do not do it any way that differs from that of their forebears. It is instinctive behaviour, and not the result of planning with a view to a final goal. Incidentally it is interesting to note that precisely those primates which are presented as the nearest relatives of man, hardly reveal any inclination to integrate. Beyond arranging a few branches to protect them against the wind, the primates do not even construct an elementary shack. The urge to integrate is the exclusive feature of man.

A note from the far north.

We can hardly do better than ask the Russian philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev what he thinks about the urge to integrate. He was a man who not only thought rationally about his place on earth, but who as it were tested it with his whole being. He writes that during his entire life he never experienced moments of happiness. In fact, he feared them, possibly because he suspected a catch somewhere. And in moments of depression, he says, there was only one thing which brought him relief, and that was creative work. “There is nothing more frightful and hopeless than the tedious and wearisome void of life,” and “there is no issue out of tedium, unless it be the act of creation.” (D&R p. 40) And for him creativity took the form of writing. “I became a philosopher and a servant of ‘theory’ that I might renounce and be relieved of this unspeakable anguish. In the

realm of creativity all things acquire depth, meaning, character and interest, in contrast to the shallowness, insignificance, fortuitiveness and insipidity peculiar to the realm of external fact.” (D&R p.44) It was not the completed books which offered him satisfaction, but the creative act itself. (D&R p.100) For him creation is the reaction of man to God. (D&R p.207) Those who experience creative ecstasy, as it were find themselves in the grip of a superior power. (B&E, p. 177) Creative power witnesses to the possibility that man may be liberated from the chains of humiliation which the burdens of the world force on him, and it speaks of liberation and transformation.” (B&E, p.179) “A new element is added which was not present previously.” (B&E. p. 171) “There is an element of the supernatural.” (B&E, p. 161) “It is more than a rearrangement of parts which were present previously.” (B&E, pp. 167, 168) And he never seems to tire of emphasising the role of newness in the creative act. “In the creative act of man, a new element is introduced, something which was not there before.” (B&E, p. 171) And it is no trivial experience. “In creative newness there is always an element of the miraculous,” he states. (B&E, p.161) “... creative power ... is an end of this world and a beginning of the new world.” (B&E,p.174)

Not all of us would become so lyrical about the creative act, the production of new things; but there can be little doubt that it is a peak experience for everyone. I am reminded of a friend who became very despondent after the death of her husband. But one evening she started knitting a jersey. It gripped her attention, and it was deep into the night when she completed it. And then she realised that here was something which she had really enjoyed. I assume it was a new pattern she had not knitted before. Workers in a factory who knit the same pattern with a machine over and over, will hardly derive the same fulfilment from doing so.

It is not only the actual experience of integration and extending which helps to lift man from his misery, for even the prospect of experiencing them may have this effect. Viktor Frankl was undoubtedly one of the very few who experienced the horrors of the Nazi camps first hand and who then lived to write about it. In these extreme conditions he discovered that the only hope for man consists in believing that his life still has meaning for the future. “It is a peculiarity of man that he can only live by looking to the future. ... And this is his salvation in the most difficult moments of his existence, although he sometimes has to force his mind to the task. (pp.72,73) The gist of his teaching is that man searches for *meaning* above all else. As long as someone believed that there was a valuable task waiting on him, he

was supported in the unbearable present reality. And in many cases a task may be analysed as a process of consolidation in which order is created.

An author who investigated man's irrepressible urge to transcend frontiers, as well as the urge to integrate, is the sociologist Peter L. Berger. He sought for "signals of transcendence," with which he refers to "phenomena that are to be found within the domain of our 'natural' reality but that appear to point beyond that reality." (p.70) He mentions some of these. One is humour, and another is the urge to play, the absolute condemnation of certain deeds, and the experience of ecstasy.

Human existence is always oriented toward the future. Man exists by constantly extending his being into the future, both in his consciousness and in his activity. Put differently, man realizes himself in projects. (p.80)

According to Berger man's most fundamental fear is his *fear of chaos*.^(p.71) That is reminiscent of Laiblin's discovery that certain folktales give expression to the need of "integration in the depth of the soul" and Campbell's "unity in diversity." Chaos is indeed a situation where things are not integrated and where unity in the diversity is lacking.

For instance, he sees *humour* as an instrument with which the "rocklike necessities" of this world are relativised by creating an alternative reality. By laughing at something one virtually elevates oneself above it.

I would also pinpoint another aspect of humour, and here it is specially enlightening to note what tickles little children to laughter. I read once that one of the first things which causes them to laugh, is finding a familiar object in an unfamiliar place. Personally I noted how a little boy laughed when someone who tried to amuse him, looked at him through a serviette ring. He knew such a ring well enough, and he would not laugh if a serviette was pushed into it. He also knew the human eye well enough, and he would not find it funny to see it behind spectacles. But an eye behind a serviette ring! That is like someone barking like a dog or mewling like a cat to amuse him. Such an incongruity is the first step towards chaos. And he laughs to indicate that he does not find it normal. And he relishes his victory and asks for more.

By way of summary: man is the only animal which reveals the deep-seated urge to look for new things by firstly discovering them, secondly by surpassing what exists and thirdly by consolidating existing items into new unities. These then are the distinguishing qualities of the greatest

riddle in perceptible reality, namely man.

And it is among men that the Witness appeared on one occasion. But that could not happen without preparation.

Preparation of the way.

When the Witness appeared on earth as a human being, it did not happen without preparation. He had to be preceded by someone who had to “prepare a way for the Lord, raise up every valley and make low every mountain and hill.” (cf. Is. 40:3,4) In practical terms this meant that his listeners had to confess their sins, that they had to treat their fellow men honestly and openhandedly, and that they should not place their hope on a false foundation. “And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’” he warned them. (Matth. 3:9)

But if there were stumbling blocks on the way of the Witness which had to be removed at that time, it may well be asked whether that is not also true of our own day. And a further question is whether the stumbling blocks have remained the same, or whether they have assumed an entirely new form.

Today it is not very likely that anyone would use his descent from Abraham or anyone else as an excuse for rejecting the message of the Witness. On the other hand there are certain contemporary considerations which serve as stumbling blocks. In order to establish their identity it is necessary to look around and to enquire which objections are most commonly raised against his message.

And undoubtedly one of them is that things were said about the Witness, and that he said things about himself, which are *impossible*. For example, it is claimed that he performed miracles, like being born from a virgin, healing the sick, raising the dead, calming a storm, multiplying bread and fishes, changing water into wine, and even rising from death. Even that is not the end. One of the first things John says about him, is: “Through him all things were made.” (John 1:3) And it is especially on this last point that he is attacked.

Obviously what sticks in many gullets is the claim that everything was created by a human being who can be seen in bodily form. The only way to reconcile his earthly existence with his role as Creator, is by accepting that he also once existed in a form which is incomprehensible to us, and that he adopted the earthly body. The easiest way to get rid of the problem is, however, by denying that his claim is true. And in order to prove that it is untrue, the most satisfying strategy is to present an alternative which proves

that a personal creator was redundant. If it is impossible to prove this for the entire reality, the second best is undoubtedly to do it for one section, and, if it succeeds, to trust that the solution for the other sections are sure to follow.

And ineluctably that leads to one specific individual, namely Charles Darwin. Possibly there is no proof that he deliberately tried to undermine the claims of the Witness; but by offering an alternative explanation of the origin of the biological diversity which is witnessed today, and thereby making the Witness superfluous in that area, he undoubtedly encouraged people to assume that the rest of reality could likewise be explained by referring to processes which are regularly observed in operation at present, without the involvement of any personal Planner. Darwin tried to point out what could be achieved in one area of reality, and thereby gave those who try to explain other areas in like manner, the confidence to say: "Just hold on, we are working on it." In this way Darwin's theory has become a stumbling block on many people's way to the Witness in our day.

Admittedly there were many others who were more outspoken in their opposition to his message. There was Nietzsche, for instance, who flatly said: "God is dead." But the blatant often have less influence than the subtle. And wherever there is a debate between faith and unbelief today, there Darwin is sure to pop up. Consequently his theory has to be investigated in order to determine whether it blocks the way of the Witness.

3. DARWIN'S PLUS.

It is a simple truth that no one can be an authority in all areas of life. And yet everyone is forced to act, and often he does so successfully in an area where he is a mere layman, since he knows at least a part of it. And if a specialist in that area would serve him with advice, and he makes unconvincing pronouncements on the known part, he should not be surprised if his information on the unknown part is also treated with suspicion. That applies to the economy, health, the raising of children, and many other areas where we are forced to take decisions, even if we are only laymen.

So why should that not apply equally to the field of biology? The

average layman, who probably owns no microscope, has never yet seen certain living organisms, and has never yet handled a fossil, is unable to express himself on many matters. But that does not mean that he knows absolutely nothing about plants and animals. In fact, he might know a good deal about the movements and behaviour of the latter.

And as regards Darwin, the heart of his theory rests on that part of biology which is not exclusively understood by experts, namely the *interaction of organisms with their environment*. That includes those influences which the environment exerts on them, as well as the way they are handled. I need not go very far to find an example. Since it is cold today, I am sitting with a hot water bottle on my lap in front of the computer. The ants undoubtedly also feel the cold, so they creep into electric instruments and even carry their eggs into them. That is our interaction with the environment, and we would do it even if we do not know what causes the cold.

It is an error to think that Darwin invented or discovered the idea of evolution. It was in vogue thousands of years before his time, for example with the philosopher Anaximander. Nearer to his own lifetime there were evolutionists, including his own grandfather. And even today there are people who accept that life forms originated through evolution, but who believe that it was directed by an intelligent Designer. And even those who are unwilling to ascribe everything to evolution, usually admit that it did in fact operate within species. They reject macro-evolution but accept micro-evolution. Of that every human being is a proof, since he looks unlike people belonging to certain other races. But what Darwin is known for, is that he proposed *natural selection as the exclusive mechanism*. That is the plus which he added. Just as a human breeder encourages a specific feature in a species to increase and develop, by eliminating from the breeding process those individual animals which do not reveal an incipient inclination in the desired direction, so, he said, nature also operates, with the difference that there is no ultimate goal at the start. What it amounts to, is that animals have to overcome some dangerous threat in order to survive, and that some members of a species are better equipped, or fitter, to do so than others. So these animals survive, while the less fit kick the bucket. There is also sexual selection, where those animals with a better chance to leave a large posterity, for example by getting more mates with their greater attractiveness for the opposite sex, exert a greater influence than the drab ones. But even if that could play a role, it could only apply to a negligible percentage of the organs, namely those which are connected with

procreation. Consequently the dominant factor which drives natural selection is the early death of many individuals which are inferior in numerous respects, before they are able to make a contribution to the future members of that species. In most instances *early death* causes the elimination which is indispensable for natural selection.

Darwinists do not only explain the origin of *physical features* with their theory, but also that of *instincts*.

Although Darwin thought in terms of *normal variation*, like the longer and shorter necks of giraffes, it came to light later that *chance mutations* also take place. As a result of the working of the genes, a new feature sometimes makes its appearance. These mutations are usually deleterious, but theoretically there may also occur beneficial mutations which then develop further by way of natural selection. Actually this offers a useful loophole to a Darwinist faced by a development which he cannot explain. He may simply say: "Behold: the result of a mutation." But that would be in conflict with Darwinism, for Darwin was convinced that all features develop solely by natural selection. Moreover a mutation usually appears in an individual, and it should be explained how it could become dominant in an entire species.

So for Darwin's plus two things are required, namely *variation* and *elimination*. What determines these two aspects of the evolution process?

What makes animals vary? What causes some puppies to be smaller, slightly different in colour, and more aggressive in temperament, than others of the same litter? That leads to the action of the genes and other factors which determine mutation and about which the layman would usually act wisely not to express opinions. Variation is determined in the hidden depths where even experts need special instruments to penetrate.

It is quite different with the elimination aspect. Elimination is largely determined by an animal's interaction with its environment. It operates in the hunt, where the fastest predators catch more prey and the fastest prey escapes, where the giraffes with the longest necks survive the droughts, the otters with the largest amount of webbing between their toes catch more fish than the rest, and the chameleons which are best camouflaged against their background devour the largest number of insects. And in this area the layman is no stranger. Although he may be no biologist, he is not completely ignorant of animals, their habits, their way of living and dying. Although he may not express himself as an expert, he feels free to ask questions and in certain instances even to arrive at his own conclusions.

At least five questions introduce problems with Darwin's theory that

evolution by natural selection was the *exclusive* process responsible for the origin of all the important features of *all* living beings.

Problem 1: Would the service be sufficient?

Darwin mentioned consecutive steps, each of which renders service in the evolution process, and he described them as “finely graduated.” With *each step* there is an addition to some feature or another which causes individual animals to survive or procreate better than others of the same species. Each step is of vital importance. Prof. Richard Dawkins says if anyone finds it hard to believe that the entire evolution process consisted of such steps, he may give his faith a boost by imagining them as very small. “However improbable a large-scale change may be,” he explains, “smaller changes are less improbable. And provided we postulate a sufficiently large series of sufficiently graded intermediaries, we shall be able to derive anything from anything else, without invoking astronomical improbabilities.” (Watchmaker, p. 392) Now undoubtedly he has a point, but there is also another point which he misses. The valid point is that it is indeed less demanding to imagine that a small step *occurred* than a big one. But on the other hand it is far more strenuous to believe that a small one had a *significant effect*. I may find it easier to imagine that a giraffe's neck increased with one millimetre per step than ten centimetres. But on the other hand I find it far more demanding to accept that an additional millimetre made a notable difference to the number of famished giraffes, than the more substantial addition would have done. The consecutive steps each had to deliver considerable immediate service by conquering a threat which eliminated the less endowed animals. Whatever was acquired in this way had to be heritable and it had to spread to the entire species. In other words, the smaller the step, the easier to believe that it took place, but the more difficult to believe that it played such an important role. Think about this, but if you find it a bit vague, we may proceed to the clearer impossibilities.

Problem 2: The absent reconciler.

I was present once where a teacher undertook to train her class as a choir, and she made three boys stand apart. (To be quite frank, I was one of them.) But if you think the reason was that she wanted to form us into a select trio, I have to disillusion you. On the contrary, we were an embarrassment to the choir. I more or less tried to treat it as a joke, but one of the others started crying. I think I know why: he was the one who

stood at the top of the class, and this encounter with the *random distribution of talents or fitnesses* was probably more than he could endure. It is a phenomenon which is already encountered among people at a tender age. The most intelligent are not necessarily the best singers, and the most handsome are not always outstanding in sport. A student who is brilliant in psychology may have problems with Greek. With a possible few exceptions it will be found that if candidates are selected according to ten or twenty criteria, no one will pass the test, since each one is inferior somewhere.

But according to Darwin every individual animal would have to pass far more than twenty tests in order to survive in the struggle for survival. How many? Just as many as the features and organs which evolve. For each of the numerous evolving features demands the elimination of those which fall short, *at very step* that it advances. The problem facing Darwinism would be how to reconcile the interests of the mass of features each staking its claims. When Darwin said the strong must live and the weak must die, he definitely overlooked the fact that each strong one is weak in certain other respects where evolution is required. And so each one would get its chance to be eliminated. And the one which has laid down its life in the interest of one feature, cannot rise again to survive in the interest of another one. They would all lie scattered along the road. And none more dead than Darwinism.

Such a situation where each forward step in the evolution of one organ takes place at the cost of a number of other organs, may be compared with a community in which it is decided that, in order to raise the average standard of living, they should all steal one another's money. (Or even, if they are cannibals, that they should all grow fat by devouring one another).

Problem 3. Absence of early service.

If I could only mention one hurdle to Darwinism, I guess it would be this one.

A farmer feeds little calves and foals and even kittens with a view to what they will deliver one day. But could nature also say, "Give this useless little swelling or outgrowth enough time, and one day it will become a most useful organ."? Lamentably not. According to Darwin, nature is not controlled by an intelligent being who sees into the future. *Each* step in the evolution process should be of service to its possessor. From first to last each renders its service by helping to ensure a numerous

posterity. This service is the driving force without which the evolution process would grind to a standstill. And it consists in the elimination of the unwanted, usually by death. And unfortunately for Darwin's theory there are many examples of stages where an additional step would be of no advantage whatsoever. This is especially obvious at the beginning of the reputed evolution of a specific feature.

It does not apply to all developments. A short additional increase would undoubtedly have helped the giraffe quite as much at the beginning of the lengthening of its neck as at the end. But in all too many instances a *critical point* first has to be reached before a development could be of any value. And now the question is what drove evolution up to that *critical point*.

According to Prof. Dawkins the eye evolved from a light sensitive patch. But of what benefit would the first patch of this kind have been to its possessor? Why should the first patched animals survive better than the unpatched? The patch might indeed have caused a faint tickling when struck by light, or an itching, or even a slight pain. And what then? How would anything inside the possessor of the first light sensitive patch recognise the discomfort as an indication of the proximity of danger or of food, and know what to do about it? If the effect was irritating, it might have caused it to prefer dark places or to turn the patch away from light. But why should there be more food or fewer enemies in dark places, since at that stage neither its enemies nor its prey possessed patches with which to distinguish between light and darkness? For if the patch could not lead to action which made a difference between life and death right at the beginning, it could not have played a role in natural selection at that stage. It would first have to reach a critical point where it enabled its possessor in some way or another to recognise its prey or its foes. And what would take it there?

But let us consider something which renders service to the eye by keeping it wet, namely the *eyelid*. A fish has no eyelids. Under water it does not need them, and if it is taken from there it has more urgent problems to ponder than burning eyeballs. If we descended from the fish, we must have acquired the eyelid somewhere on the way, and according to the Darwinists this must have happened in small steps, with victims lining the road. But what vital difference could the first small steps in the evolution of the eyelid have made? When only 10% of the eyeball was covered, how much better was that than having no eyelid at all? And when 25% still remained open? In other words, of what use were all the little steps before the last few

which covered the eye completely? Only at the end would the critical point of usefulness be reached which could keep the eye wet. How did the eyelid evolve before that point?

The hippo enjoys the extraordinary ability to shut its nostrils and even its ear passages under water. But how much water did they keep out when they could only shut halfway or even three quarters of the way? And if the apparatus for blocking the passages was of absolutely no help then, how did it originate, and how did it evolve further?

Consider the fish once again, for it lacks something else which we possess. A fish has no knees or elbows or knuckles in its fins. For every joint to have originated, a rigid bone had to divide at some point. In order to divide it had to become weaker there, for instance by becoming thinner than the rest of the bone. But if this had to occur in small steps, the process would offer no advantage for many generations, since the bone would still be unable to bend. For a long time each joint would be nothing more than a place in the bone which was becoming increasingly breakable. And what vital advantage would a weak bone offer above a strong one? And in addition a kind of hinge would have to be added step by step. It boggles the mind.

The elephant can get hold of something by gripping it between the upper and lower parts of its snout. (On television it was shown how one of them even took hold of a painting brush and painted dots with it.) But how did it acquire this prehensility? The upper and lower parts must have developed the ability to approach each other. But when they started developing this ability, they could still not grip anything between them. A critical point first had to be reached where they could get hold of something useful, before natural selection could take over. What brought them to that point?

And the length of the nose offers the same problem. Only after a critical point could it benefit from lengthening. The trunk has to bend double for food as well as for water. Before it reached the stage where this became possible, of what advantage was the length?

Or meditate on the pitcher plant which catches insects. If it evolved from a leaf which slowly changed into a pitcher, how many insects would it have caught when it was no more than a rolled leaf? What service did the early steps offer? Would the flies not have laughed at it?

The Venus fly trap catches its prey by bending double in a jiffy. What could it catch when it could only bend partly and very slowly? Not even one percent of a fly.

This problem was noticed quite early. Even in Darwin's time the

palaeontologist G.J.Mivart asked, “What would be the utility of the first rudimentary beginnings of such structures?” (Darwin, p. 191) Darwin, however, did not consider this an insurmountable problem. Quite recently Prof. E.C.Olson expressed it as follows: “One of the kinds of puzzle that has often plagued students of evolution relates to structures which have evident functions once they are completely formed, but which would seem to have no use whatsoever during the time of formation and integration of the parts.” He applies it specifically to the origin of wings. In the case of insects, for example, he admits that there exists almost no information on the evolution of the ability of some of them to fly. “It would appear that in an ancestral type some flaps or folds appeared on segments on the back of the head. Two pairs of these developed into wings. It may be supposed that, when they originated, these folds had some other function, but what it may have been has not been even guessed.” (pp. 174, 175) What we do know, is that it must have been a vital role, for the evolution process is not concerned with trifles. But is there any other organism where such folds play a vital role?

Prof. Olson's “some other function” lays the finger on attempts which are sometimes made by dogmatic Darwinists who assume that Darwin *must* be right, to explain problematic cases. According to this, natural selection can take place in two or more phases, with each phase solving a different problem. It is admitted, for example, that at the beginning of its evolution the elephant's trunk could make no contribution towards bringing food to its mouth. But, it is then asked, is that the only service a lengthened nose could render? One author mentions the possibility that a slightly lengthened nose could have boosted the animal's sexual attractiveness, or it could have strengthened its sense of smell (which the elephant does not need any way for finding its food) or the volume of its trumpeting. After attaining a certain length in order to satisfy one of these requirements, the nose started bringing the food and then evolved in order to do it better.

The problem with this explanation is that it does not make the situation any simpler, but rather more involved. The survival of no other animal in the African bush is dependent on one of these three provisional functions of the nose. How would chance not have to be overtaxed if precisely the one species which, on account of the size and form of its mouth, would at a later stage require a very long nose in order to reach its food, previously had need of a more moderately long nose in order to fulfil a function which no other animal required.

Undoubtedly numerous similar examples may be found of developments which could render no service at an early stage by

promoting survival. Such an evolution process in which the driving force is absent during the early stages, would be like an electric train scheduled to run from Cape Town to Johannesburg during a power cut-off as far as Kimberley. A non-starter if ever there was one!

Problem 4: Absence of the special protector.

At each step natural selection depends on the elimination of certain animals which succumb to a threat, while others of the same species overcome it thanks to a slight advance in the evolution of some feature or organ. The task of the threat is to eliminate the inferior animals which retard progress in the evolution process.

But now there are certain threats which, were they to appear in a specific geographical area, would inevitably endanger an entire group of species which would be equally vulnerable. And if it should be claimed that a specific feature of one of these species should be attributed to this threat, while it clearly did not influence other species, we have once again struck a mystery.

The giraffe once again. Even if fossils could be unearthed of giraffes with all the intermediate necks from the shortest to what it is today, and they would moreover be found in the sequence demanded by Darwin's theory, that would not yet prove that natural selection was the sole mechanism responsible for their evolution. Picture an early giraffe of approximately the size of another sizable leaf-eater, for example a kudu, with a neck and legs like one of them. This is what the *proto-giraffe* should have looked like at one stage according to Darwin. But between this archaic form and the present giraffe there must obviously have been a mass of *intermediate* forms which gradually increased in length as the droughts eliminated the shorter ones. These intermediate forms were not yet tall enough to survive all the droughts, so they had to kick the bucket or become unable to procreate, while the taller ones survived and their posterity continued increasing in length until they produced our present giraffe. And yet the intermediate forms were all much taller, and consequently in a much better position to survive, than the kudus and the zebras and the impalas and the little duikers and all the rest which never evolved in length at all. How is it possible that the intermediate giraffes died because they were too short, while the far shorter species were oblivious to the droughts? When they were already far fitter than all the other leaf eaters, they still had to die, while the members of the even less fit species were presumably blissfully unaware

of any problems. But the fact that the smaller species did not all starve to death simply proves that the severe droughts which were needed to goad the giraffes into natural selection never occurred. There was no threat of elimination which could make natural selection possible.

It would be enlightening to wonder about other examples of animals with outstanding features whose origin Darwinists ascribe to a role which they played in survival in the past, while other species managed famously without them. Consider the otter and the bat. And even man.

A situation in which one species is decimated while others which are more vulnerable survive, is like a fire which destroys the rafters and the floor and the furniture but leaves the papers unscathed.

Problem 5: The absent matchmaker.

Good matches are not only essential in marriage. Accurate coupling or coordination is indispensable in many areas, and not the least in technology. Take as an example the mighty Airbus. It is finally assembled in Toulouse, but by no means purely French, since its components come from at least ten factories in four different countries. And yet they fit so neatly, that thousands of people are willing to entrust their lives to the completed product. Now imagine that someone were to visit the factory and ask one of the workers: “Bon jour, monsieur. Could you tell me in which country the plan for this mighty aircraft was drawn up?” His informant looks somewhat taken aback. “No, there was no previous planning. In each factory an inner urge was merely felt to produce something, and then everything was carted this way, and when we assembled it, voila, there stood a giant aircraft.” If my French were more fluent I would tell such a person that I expected more sophisticated jokes in his country.

And yet something equally preposterous would have been needed in nature if Darwinism were a fact.

As in the case of human inventions, successful cooperation is also often indispensable in nature. Michael Behe uses the term “irreducible complexity” for this phenomenon in the biological world, which he then compares with something far more modest than a giant aircraft, namely an ordinary mousetrap. There are only a few parts, and if any one is missing the trap will not catch a single mouse. He mentions a number of examples in microbiology which indeed sound impressive, but fortunately there are also more elementary instances in plants and animals which are no less convincing.

There is a general interdependence of organs, parts of organs and

features in every animal. But the indispensability of cooperation is especially striking in the case of certain animals where two or more unique organs or features are dependent on each other in order to render service, while, since they are of different types, they would have had to develop independently up to the stage where cooperation became possible.

If I often mention the elephant, remember that it is undoubtedly one of the most difficult animals to overlook. And once more it offers an example. In the first place it needs a prehensile snout for grabbing the food, and secondly it has to be long enough to bend double and reach the mouth. Apart from the previously mentioned problems which each of these attributes would encounter on its own before it could render service, their need of *cooperation* offers another. If the trunk lacked either of these abilities, even if the other were fully developed, it would be as useless as a mouse trap without a spring. What profit would the elephant derive from a short nose with a prehensile tip, or a long one without it? In fact, if the nose did no more than increase in length, it would have been a nuisance by dangling in front of the mouth when the elephant grazed. And if the nose were indeed prehensile, but so short that it could only grab objects and release them again, the elephant would be able to do little more than amuse itself. During a long early period of evolution the two features, namely length and prehensility, would not be connected to each other in any way. Each would have to set off from its own incipient inclination and pass through a long period of solitary development before they could cooperate. In the absence of a preceding plan which already existed before the onset of their evolution, there would have been no connection between their separate abilities. How did they evolve in the same species? One of them could just as well have originated in the elephant and the other in the rhino. From a colossus to a little insect known as the bombardier beetle. This little creature defends itself by spraying a liquid at boiling point on whoever infringes on its beetle rights, and so advises him rather to try his luck elsewhere. And yet the beetle is not connected to the power network. Two liquids are brought together immediately before the spraying action, and they react on each other in such a manner that a temperature at boiling point results. Obviously these two liquids have to be kept strictly apart while still in the insect's body, or the reaction would take place there, with stewed beetle as the result.

In this Prof. Dawkins sees no threat to Darwinism. The two liquids, he explains, were already present in the insect's body, where they served other purposes. "The bombardier beetle's ancestors simply pressed into

different service chemicals that already happened to be around.”(Watchmaker, p. 105) Note the word “simply”. Now how simple could it have been?

What was obviously necessary, was that the two critically correct liquids among all the available ones had to be selected and gathered in separate containers, since they cannot be ejected unless they are firmly enclosed. In whatever way this happened, the gathering, the preparation of the containers and the storage of the liquids up to this point would still be of absolutely no immediate advantage to the insect. Gathering two of its liquids and storing them in two containers would not in any way make it produce more little beetles. And these two containers had to be situated close to each other, or they would be unable to cooperate at a later stage. In addition they had to be situated in the part of the body where they may best be used for defense. For example, it would be futile if they were situated on the back. Each container needed a kind of nozzle. If the reaction had to take place inside one of the containers, it should have sturdy walls for resisting the heat and the pressure. The necessary muscles had to be supplied or adapted in order to compress the contents. Everything had to be placed under the control of the owner in order to activate it at the right moment. And to crown it all, all these things were executed in small steps, each of which caused dead beetles to line the road. And yet Prof. Dawkins says, “Simply”!

There was a promise to return to the light sensitive patch. The question was put earlier of what value it would be right at the beginning, but now we rather want to consider its construction. Michael Behe points out that the patch with which Prof. Dawkins starts, is already a very involved organ which consists of different cooperating parts. But even if we leave aside these complications, there is something else to note. According to Prof. Dawkins the patch was protected by a transparent fleece which subsequently became thicker in the evolution process and formed the transparent inside of the eye. So there were actually two patches in the same place: a light sensitive one with all its mysteries, and a more modest transparent one above it. Transparent fleeces do not simply appear on all kinds of places on the body, and I am not aware of any other such patches on the skin. Neither, however, is it merely nothing, but something. And something can only originate from something else. Nor could it have landed there from an external source, for example by being blown or smeared on the skin, for then it would not be inherited and would have no connection with the evolution process. The only way it could have originated, according to the theory of Darwinism, is by a mutation which

was the result of the chance action of the genes. This means that two cooperating patches, a light sensitive one and a transparent one, appeared in exactly the same spot on the body where they needed each other, by sheer coincidence. And that takes some doing.

Did I say, “The same spot”? But is that the whole story? How many animals have only one eye? What would have been required is not one light sensitive patch, but *two*. And by chance they would have to be situated symmetrically. And the transparent fleeces would also have to appear symmetrically in exactly the same places.

Coincidence would actually have to do even more than that. Is there any other place on the body where the eyes would have been better situated – or even equally well – than where they are at present on most animals, which is rather high up on the front of the head? I can think of no better place. And coincidence would have to realise that.

When we consider the astronomical coincidences which would have been required for the eye to develop by natural selection from a light sensitive patch once, Prof. Dawkins places the cherry on the cake by maintaining that this happened no fewer than forty times, and maybe even sixty times! ^(Mount Imp. p. 127) Forty to sixty times two symmetrical patches made a chance landing on two other symmetrical patches which had already made a chance landing on the most felicitous part of the body. And that was but the beginning of the evolution of the eye.

Anyone who wants more examples would do well to consult internet on the large variety of carnivorous plants. The question has been asked what the pitcher plant and the Venus fly trap could have done at the beginning of their evolution. But that is not the only problem in connection with them. The latter's leaf can fold double in one tenth of a second. For this it would need a kind of spring, whatever it might look like. The trap shuts when two special hairs are touched simultaneously, or if one of them is touched twice. In some way or another this activates the spring. Without the hairs the spring is useless, and without the spring the hairs serve no purpose. And the leaf has pricks on its edges which serve as bars which keep the prisoner incarcerated. Without these bars even the cooperation of the hairs and the spring would have been pointless. But neither would the bars be of any value without the other two.

In order to realise what a situation would be like where two or more unique parts evolve separately up to a point of possible cooperation, think of the Airbus once again.

What could have saved Evolution?

There appears to be a vague conviction that, given enough time, more or less anything may happen at least once. And so someone might suggest that sufficient time could save Darwinism. "Remember," he would say, "that the evolution process did not take thousands of years, but billions. And during such a long time many things may happen. Even something which only happens once every few thousand years would have occurred many times. Every feature could have evolved by one step and then waited for the next one for millennia, giving the other features a chance to take their steps without interfering with the first one."

But what would that amount to? Elimination would still be essential. And the elimination of individuals which are inferior in one respect would still imply eliminating animals which are prime specimens in some other respect.

Nor would billions of years solve the problem of the useless first steps. It would just mean that the first steps are shifted further into the past; but if they were of such a nature that they did not yet serve their possessors, they would have been as profitless as ever.

Additional time would not explain how certain species can be influenced, while others which are more vulnerable, proceed unhindered.

Would additional billions of years offer any assistance to nature's matchmaker by making it easier for features to develop towards the point of usefulness where they may be united with their partners? What it would do, would be to increase the length of their inability to render a service.

What about those who are satisfied with something less than full-fledged Darwinism? Imagine that it could be proved beyond the possibility of a doubt that all living animals evolved from the same original organism up to the present variety. Even if Darwinism cannot be saved, would it not at least be possible to pull a few strings for a more general theory of evolution?

Then we would still have to ask what could have been responsible for the evolution, since natural selection alone would not have been equal to the task.

And where should we go for help, but to our old familiar method of extrapolation? According to this we reason that familiar forces and processes also operate in the unknown. Newton, for example, decided that the force of gravity which he observed under the apple tree, also operates in the most distant realms. What phenomenon do we know from our own experience from which we may extrapolate in our search for something

which could have driven evolution?

In other words, what would have been able (1) to make it happen in many small steps, (2) to avoid clashes among the numerous features which would have to develop simultaneously, (3) to make evolution work right from the first steps even when such steps did not yet offer any advantage, (4) to limit it to certain species, even when others had no less need of it, (5) to bring together the different interdependent components after they had evolved independently over a long period?

I know of only one way in which this could have been done, namely by an intelligence which knew from the beginning what the end was going to be and which could have put the process through all its paces.

Confirmation for the conclusion that intelligence and foreknowledge would have been indispensable comes from an unexpected quarter, namely from Prof. Richard Dawkins.

In a book written to prove that there was no planning involved in the origin of life forms, he introduces his readers to a “computer monkey”. This is a computer which has been programmed to behave like a monkey. (No connection with the divers unsolicited monkey tricks which my own computer often volunteers to contribute.) Just as a monkey which simply hits the keys without worrying about the letters which result from its action, this computer simply had to bring forth any random letters. He asks how long it would take for this electronic monkey to type a sentence of 28 letters and spaces from “Hamlet” by trying again and again. “To put it mildly,” he says, “the phrase we seek would be a long time coming.” This method of trying to type the sentence he calls “single step selection,” since the computer monkey starts from scratch every time and makes a single attempt to type the sentence. Evolution could not have worked in this way, he concludes. But he says it is a different matter if every attempt builds on the previous one. For in contrast to single step selection there is also *cumulative selection*. Once again the same number of letters are typed at random as a start. Now the sentence is copied repeatedly, but each time with a chance mistake. After each attempt the computer examines the new product and when a letter appears which agrees with the target phrase from Hamlet, such a letter is not erased again. Then the process continues from there. Whereas the correct sentence would be “a long time coming” with single step selection, the computer completes the same task in a jiffy with cumulative selection. By extrapolating from his findings in his experiment with the computer monkey towards what would presumably have happened in nature, Prof. Dawkins reaches the conclusion that single step selection

would never have got the evolution process off the ground. “If, however, there was any way in which the necessary conditions for cumulative selection could have been set up by the blind forces of nature, strange and wonderful might have been the consequences. As a matter of fact that is exactly what happened on this planet.” (Watchmaker, pp. 56-60)

But what, in fact, are the conditions for cumulative selection? What was added to single step selection in order to make it work?

In cumulative selection, according to Prof. Dawkins himself, there was repeated *investigation* and *choosing* on the ground of agreement with a *target phrase*. That is what the computer monkey did in order to attain success, and what nature should therefore do in order to make evolution by natural selection work. But how did the computer monkey succeed in doing that? How could it recognise agreement with a target phrase after each trial, unless it had this target phrase stored somewhere in its bowels right from the start?

And how could it have got there, unless it were placed there right at the beginning by an intelligent being who was aware of the final outcome?

We even know who that intelligent designer was. His name was Richard.

If we now extrapolate into events in nature from this experiment in which an intelligent designer played the key role, what would the lesson be?

But as soon as we have discovered an Intelligent Designer, other questions emerge, and in this case we should not put them to Darwin, but to ourselves. Let us look at a few of them.

- Since the Designer shares in man's intelligence, and moreover in such a measure as to make man look insignificant in comparison, *would it be surprising if he should also share some of his other attributes*, especially those attributes of which man is most acutely aware in his clearest moments?

- Since we became aware of him by attending to his works, what else can we conclude, than that, in addition to boundless wisdom he should also possess immeasurable power to execute his plans?

- Once we have become aware of him and realise who he is, one of the consequences is that all values are determined by him. Would it be surprising if man should be of special significance and value to him? Would it be surprising if it were very important to him what this creature does,

what he wants to do, tries to do and neglects doing?

- Although it would obviously depend on him whether and where he wants to use evolution, what would prevent him from only using it occasionally or even dispensing with it altogether?

- Is it for us to decide whether it would be by any means easier or more convenient for him to make major events occur over long stretches of time rather than instantaneously?

- Since it must have been he who originally put the most inexplicable phenomenon, namely life, in his creatures, would it in any way be a problem to him to let it return to where it was before? Or to let it originate in some other way than by the cooperation of male and female?

- Would it be surprising if he should *want to communicate with man*, and that he should employ *more direct methods* than revealing himself in his creation? Would there not be a form of communication which reveals similarities with man's conversation with his fellow humans? Would it not also be possible for him to speak to one human being through another?

- Would it be surprising if he who made man to share certain attributes with him, *also made other creatures* which bear some resemblance to their Creator – perhaps even in larger measure than man? And is it impossible that, like the Creator himself, they might be of such a nature *that man cannot perceive them with his senses*? In other words, is the existence of *invisible spiritual beings* something which should surprise man? And is it impossible that, although some were faithful to their Creator, others rebelled against him just like man? Is the existence of angels and demons contrary to what we have learnt about reality?

- Would it be surprising if he should sometimes waive the usual laws of nature*? Once acceptance of a Creator of the universe becomes inevitable, *what remains impossible for him*? And if such baffling events could have taken place in the distant past, is there any logical reason why events which seem impossible to us and which may be described as miracles, can not occur today? We are back with the question whether possibility is determined by distance in time.

•What prevents him from *alternating* deeds which appear natural to us, with others which we cannot explain and which we would describe as supernatural? What are natural selection and the other mechanisms but his tools, and what prescribes to him when to use which?

•Is it impossible that he might have purposes which we cannot comprehend, and that many of his deeds as well as his omissions may be forever unfathomable to us?

One thing is certain: if we want to take the knowledge of reality seriously, not a few of us will be faced by a major reassessment of standpoints

If I were to accept Darwinism under group pressure or any other form of duress, the questions I have mentioned would come and haunt me. If I consider the facts I have mentioned calmly and to the best of my mental ability, the greatest achievement I can ascribe to Darwin is that he pointed out a process which sometimes operates in nature. If his theory is proclaimed authoritatively, it may sound convincing, but a penetrating and analytical view makes it crumble. I cannot force others to agree with me, but if anyone wants to bring me to different views, let me suggest that he should commence calmly and clearly with the questions I tried to ask calmly and clearly. Thereafter we may continue the conversation.

But finally we still only know reality in part, we are still looking “through a glass, darkly,” and if we only have our own extrapolations to rely on, we can only proceed as far as suppositions, and we are faced with a deep mystery, a closed door.

Unless someone should come from the other side with the key.

But what happened to the moral law?

What are the implications of the difference between Darwin and the Witness for the primeval question about what is good and what is evil?

We are concerned with the choice between two rival views on the all-inclusive reality within which every mortal finds himself and within which all his actions are performed. Since circumstances determine whether an action is right or wrong, and the two conceptions offer conflicting information on the circumstances in which the actions take place, it inevitably means that they will lead to different opinions on what is right and what is wrong. In both cases details may often be vague, and we may have to put up with a choice of the lesser evil. But at least there is clarity on the starting point of both.

According to one point of departure man is the work of a Creator who punishes those who resist his will, but who shows infinite love to those who accept it, and who wants to lead even the weakest and most unattractive to become like him increasingly. Progress consists in cooperating with him and showing the love received from him to others. And that includes the poor and the weak, the sick and despised.

According to the other point of departure man is the product of a process which is based on the elimination of the weak. Darwin spoke of “one general law: the strong must live and the weak must die.” If he was correct, what would it mean to cooperate with reality?

It is scarcely necessary to wonder, for in the previous century a giant effort was undertaken to test it. If Hitler had not received so much opposition, we might already have seen the result of the extermination of the weak.

And yet it is possible that we would not have known for a certainty. It is extremely risky to argue backwards from results and to decide whether a policy was right or wrong, for often a minor error causes an undertaking to flounder, even if there was no mistake with the starting point. What is more reliable, is to enquire whether the starting point itself was sound, and whether reality was interpreted correctly. And we have the good fortune to know that it is precisely on this point that Darwinism has to be ignored, and that it is consequently unnecessary to enquire further into the results of its consistent application in practice. When a theory has been stillborn, it is pointless to ask what behaviour it would have prescribed if it had lived.

4. THE WITNESS AT LAST

It is undoubtedly high time to attend to the Witness who forms the subject of our discussion. And right at this early stage of the introduction a difference may be noted between him and the person who obstructs the way to him in the minds of many moderns, namely Charles Darwin.

One difference between Darwin and the Witness is that the mechanism proposed by the former is familiar to all of us. We all know – or we may readily find out – how natural selection works. We know that parents bestow their qualities on their children, and we also know that certain features keep animals alive, while those which lack them often fail to make the grade. And we also understand the subsequent arguments based on these observations. But then we can also determine that various indispensable preconditions for Darwinism were lacking at certain stages. Consequently we may confidently decide that Darwin, who declared that this mechanism was responsible for all vital features, had it wrong. But the Witness tells us about forces which we cannot perceive with our senses, and whose first principles we cannot test ourselves.

So what now?

And yet it is not quite a new problem. There are also other contexts in which it sometimes happens that someone offers vital information which the recipients cannot verify directly. And yet they have a solution which does not leave them completely stranded and which at least helps them to determine the value of his contribution. They ask how accurate he is in other declarations which can indeed be verified. *His reliability in the field of the unknown is tested with reference to his declarations on what is known.* That applies to a witness in a law court. His testimony on an event which he alone witnessed, loses weight if he adds to it a lot of nonsense on something with which everyone is familiar. It also applies to a medic: if his diagnosis leads him to announce that the patient is suffering from an ailment which can only be removed by an operation, the sufferer cannot decide whether that is indeed true, but he wants to know two things which are indeed known. In the first place he wants to know the doctor's success record with his diagnosis and treatment of previous patients. In other words, he wants to test his *deeds*. But he also listens when the doctor speaks about the limited field that is known to him, whether basic health principles, or even an entirely different field, like politics. Is he a reliable judge of what happens in those fields? And in

order to test his general reliability, the patient evaluates his *words*.

Francis Schaeffer uses a comparison which ties up with these examples. It more or less sounds as follows: we have gone to climb the Alps, and we find ourselves on a narrow ledge when the dark overtakes us. Remaining there during the night would mean freezing to death, but neither can we dare to proceed further in the dark. Then a voice reaches us: “You cannot see me, but I can see you. I know these parts like the palm of my hand. A short distance below you there is a wide ledge, and next to the ledge there is a cave in which you may spend the night. Simply jump, and you are saved.” Now our lives depend on the question whether he is reliable. But how can we determine that? The best option, and most probably the only one, is to question him about matters with which we are indeed familiar. We may ask him about landmarks and conditions. If it is found that he speaks the truth about all of them, it is an encouragement to believe him in this instance as well. And to jump!

But the Person who has to be tested in our case made pronouncements on much more than cancer or a crime or a part of Switzerland. His claim is that he does not only *know* everything, but that he *made* everything. All the more reason to expect him to know this domain, which includes *all of reality*.

In order to test someone who claims to know a certain domain, it is not satisfactory to question him about its simple aspects. The higher his claim to knowledge, the more involved the questions become which are put to him.

How may this be applied to the Witness who is now the subject of our discussion? For he made declarations about himself which no other sane person would dare to make. He said that he had come from heaven – a realm which we cannot imagine for ourselves, but which is bound to be infinitely exalted above our own earthly abode in many respects. We cannot verify whether he was correct, for we do not possess the required knowledge of heaven. He claimed to enlighten us on his Father in heaven, but we are tied to the earth. But we may test his general reliability by asking questions about the most involved section of reality which is not entirely unfamiliar to us. And since man is this section, it boils down to determining what he knows about the human being. It has been said of him: “He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.” ^(John 2:24) Can the truth of this claim be established? For instance, is he aware of the deep human yearning to acquire new things by means of discovery, surpassing and especially by integration?

His knowledge of man is not only revealed by direct pronouncements on man. Just as a teacher's knowledge of his pupils is revealed by the way in which he instructs them, so Jesus's knowledge of man is revealed by the way he addresses them.

Did Jesus himself ever suggest that such a test should be carried out, and specifically that his insight into a familiar domain should encourage us to believe what he tells us about the unknown?

The earthly and the heavenly

A pivotal text which usually attracts very little attention, is John 3:12. "I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe," he said to Nicodemus, "how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?" In other words, faith in his words on earthly matters is a prerequisite, or at least a preparation, for faith in his pronouncements on the heavenly.

A large part of the teaching of Jesus proceeded in this manner. His disciples could not understand why this was necessary. "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" they asked him. ^(Matth. 13:10) Matthew goes as far as saying that "he did not say anything to them without using a parable." ^(13:34) In these parables he used earthly items as symbols of heavenly truths. The seed of the sower represented the word of God, and so did the yeast which the woman mixed into the dough, while the father in the parable of the prodigal son was meant to teach something about the Father in heaven.

It was after he had fed his listeners on ordinary earthly bread, that he encouraged them to seek the heavenly. ^(John 6:27) After asking the woman at the well for water, he offered her living water. ^(John 4:7-15) It is to fishers of fishes that his offer was made to make them fishers of men. ^(Mark 1:17) And as a general principle he announced: "Whoever can be trusted with very little can be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?" ^(Luke 16:10,11)

But although Jesus usually used parables when speaking to the crowds, he did indeed speak about certain "heavenly things" more directly to his disciples and even to other individuals and groups. And of special significance are the moral standards he set before them and which had to be satisfied here on earth. Anyone who was willing to use his common sense could see that these admonitions worked towards his own welfare and that of society as a whole. If anyone treats other people as he would be treated himself, he sets an example; and if everyone follows it, he would

indeed be privileged to live in a model society. Even those who doubted that the meek would inherit the earth, just had to look around them to see how many of the haughty and the brutal who would acquire the earth in their own way, eventually lost everything against opponents who were similarly disposed. “But whoever thinks things through to the end perceives the wisdom of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, and acts accordingly,” says Jürgen Moltmann. ^(p.127) The question for someone who hungered and thirsted for righteousness was not whether what Jesus said about the earthly things was correct, but whether he himself was willing to take the plunge and obey. And when he had accepted the earthly, he was better prepared for the heavenly.

So where was the problem then?

Why did people not simply accept what He said?

One of the features of the Witness which could have puzzled his listeners, was that he preached and demonstrated humility, while yet making all but modest claims about his own origin. And I have found that, even while accepting his message leads into a deep mystery and many questions, the result of rejecting it is even far more devastating. For me such a rejection would indeed be spiritual death.

In connection with his apparent lack of reticence about his identity, J. Oswald Sanders notes “five things which every human teacher before and since has done but which Jesus never did.” In the first place “no word He spoke was ever withdrawn or modified, nor did He ever apologise.” Other characteristics were that “He never sought advice from even the wisest men of His day Nor did He ever confess a sin. ... He never troubled to justify ambiguous conduct”.. and “He never asked or permitted prayer for Himself.” ^(p.12)

At a later stage he says the following:

In an article proclaiming Christ as the Pre-eminent Authority, the late Dr. W.B.Riley notes: (a) His speech was without hesitation. (b) His utterances were without equivocation – He never employed language susceptible of different constructions with intent to deceive. (c) His affirmations involved finality: His “I say unto you” closed the discussion. There remained no higher authority to whom appeal could be made than the Prophet par excellence. His word was the end of controversy. (d) He neither needed nor used counsellors. (e) His declarations amounted to mandates. ^(p. 108)

Leslie Badham points out that Jesus

claims for his words a final authority; asserts that on man's love and obedience to him depends their final destiny; looks into the future and sees all the nations of the world gathered before his judgment seat and presents himself as man's Judge and Saviour.
(p.211)

Others commented on the contrasts in his life and behaviour. Oswald Chambers points out that he knew man so well that he trusted no one and yet never despaired of anyone, ^(Utmost, July 30) and Emil Brunner draws attention to "the intense sternness of moral judgment" in contrast to "infinite forgiving love," ^(p.366) and "his nearness to men and yet his remoteness from them." ^(p.367)

Jesus made claims about himself which no other sane person would make, and castigated the hard hearted in no uncertain terms; and yet he said, "I am gentle and humble in heart." ^(Matth. 11:29) Was he conceited or was he perfect? Was it megalomania or a true reflection of the reality of his identity? Where did he come from?

There are millions of people who would believe Jesus if he would only be willing to accept a more modest position than he insisted on. A great prophet? Yes! The greatest teacher of all? Indeed! The most noble man who ever lived? By all means! But surely not that he spoke the truth when he said who was.

Emil Brunner deals in great detail with various individuals and ideologies who grant Jesus the highest position among the great teachers of history. And yet they merely regard him as the ultimate among others of the same kind. Jesus becomes a "religious genius".

Such a man is first among equals, and no intensification of the value of his qualities can make him anything else. He is, and he remains, separated as by a deep gulf from that which Christian religion means by a Mediator..... Religious hero-worship is still universal religion, the religion of general revelation, and is therefore in opposition to the Christian faith, in exactly the same way as any kind of idealism, mysticism, or system of ethics. ^(Mediator, pp. 39,40)

What Brunner said in his way, C.S.Lewis phrased in his pithy and almost

blunt – but very descriptive -- fashion.

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (Mere Chr. pp. 52,53)

Jesus definitely denied being an extrapolator who attempted to discover what God is like by making deductions from human experience. He claimed to be a messenger and a witness. John says of him, “... God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” (John 1:18) And Jesus himself said, “No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father.” (John 6:46) “Thus the stumbling block of revelation is this:” says Emil Brunner, “it denies that divine truth is a continuation of human thought.” (Mediator, p.104) In other words, there is no hope of starting with human thought and expecting to reach divine truth eventually by climbing upwards with determination and perseverance.

Jesus did not start with the data offered by life on earth and argue from there to ultimate reality. The person who tries to do this and has made further progress than others, is what Brunner calls a “religious genius” who “is like a genius in every other realm: he represents nothing more than humanity raised to its highest point – no less, but also no more.” (p. 39)

Jesus claimed to have come from behind the closed door, from the Source of all that exists, or what might truly be called Ultimate Reality, which to man is also an ultimate mystery. Moreover he claimed that Ultimate Reality is personal, so he referred to him as God. He also announced that God is compassionate and that he loves mankind, so he not only referred to him as his own Father, but even taught people to call him by that name. Now all this might still have been forgiven him, had he not gone further by announcing that he was the Son of God. He even said that whoever had

seen him, had seen the Father. ^(John 14:9) This was regarded as unpardonable blasphemy.

Obviously it is easy for anyone to say such things. Many people go around making statements about themselves and about God. Even when someone says, “I have been sent by God,” it is not outrageous, for, after all, the prophets were sent by him, so why should it be inconceivable that at any time he may be sending many lesser servants on special missions, even unimpressive individuals? But if someone says he is the Son of God, or that he is God himself, people might either become infuriated, or smile at him and point at their heads. So was this Witness not somewhat demanding when he expected people simply to accept his word for such seemingly extravagant claims? How could he expect them to jump into the dark and believe him without asking questions?

But the truth is that he didn't. In fact, as noted before, he proposed tests for determining his reliability.

The Witness's own tests

It is a misunderstanding that God expects people to initiate a relationship with him by first offering him blind faith, in exchange for which he will then grant them certain benefits in return. If we look at the heroes of faith we find that it was God who initiated the relationship by first granting them *something which could create faith*. We are not told how God spoke to Noah and Abraham and the others mentioned in Hebrews 10, but they knew for a certainty that he had spoken. When Gideon faced a challenge to his faith he was first given the opportunity to experiment with a fleece of wool. ^(Judges 6:37) And those who were censured for their lack of faith were witnesses of previous acts of God, like the obstinate Israelites in the desert, and Thomas and the other disciples. They were not reprimanded for failing to believe at their first encounter, but for doubting whether God could do what he promised even after they had seen what he had done before.

And Jesus acted on the same principle. He never expected people simply to accept what he said. He even went as far as saying that if he failed to meet certain conditions, they should *not* believe him.

What were the conditions he said he would meet?

His works.

One condition was that he would do what other people could not do. “The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me,” he said. ^(John 10:25) “Do not

believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.”^(:37, 38) The importance of his deeds is emphasised where he says, “If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles ...”^(John 15:24) Repeatedly we read that people believed when they saw his mighty deeds.^(John 2:23) Even his disciples “put their faith in him” when they saw the first miracle he performed at Cana.^(John 2:11) Obviously they must already have had a measure of faith in him, or they would not have followed him. But this miracle was a confirmation. When John the Baptist started doubting whether Jesus was really the Messiah as he had believed and even proclaimed to others, Jesus told his delegates to go and tell him what they had seen, namely that people were being healed of all types of diseases.^(Luke 7:18-22) Even after his departure the miracles were still meant to confirm the words of his followers.^(Mark 16:20) So convinced were they that signs and wonders were to endorse their preaching, that they prayed for them to take place.^(Acts 4:30)

Undoubtedly many of us would wonder why Jesus did not perform even more miracles and more spectacular ones, and why he does not perform many more today. Surely that would shut the mouths of all those who dispute his claims. Why does he expect his followers to proclaim his word against so many obstacles, if he could simply stun their audiences into faith by performing sensational actions?

Philip Yancey pays attention to this question and explains that God wants love, and that miracles do not produce it. He reminds his readers that even where miracles did occur many people still refused to believe.^(Searching, p.133)

In the time of Jesus some people were convinced by his miracles, but of others it is written, “Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.”^(John 12:37) Some who saw him heal the sick said they wanted a sign from heaven.^(Matth.16:1) Or they said if he came down from the cross they would believe in him.^(Mark 15:32) They wanted to choose which miracles they would allow to convince them. Yancey says the miracles attracted crowds and applause, but rarely encouraged repentance and long-term faith. In this connection Badham explains that even an earthly parent does not want to tyrannise over his child, but rather appeals to his reason and experience.

Can we still test his deeds?

What about us who cannot see him with the eyes, can we still witness his deeds today? Does he still convince people with his miracles?

After all, Jesus promised emphatically that his followers would do the same works that he did, and even greater ones, to his glory. ^(John 14:12) On the other hand he also prophesied that certain people would perform miracles in his name although they never knew him and were evildoers. ^(Matth.7:22,23)

Even today it is reported that people are healed miraculously in answer to prayer, even from diseases which baffle the medical profession. Almost every day it may be watched on various television stations, where people appear who claim that they have been healed of all types of diseases in answer to prayer.

The easiest reaction, and in fact the most probable one in the light of the present popular attitude, is obviously to say that it is all play-acting, and that the people who claim to have been healed were never really ill. There is another less drastic explanation. If these people are not actually confirmed liars, at least they have been misled themselves, and their healing may be ascribed to suggestion, as in the case of a placebo. Even hypnosis might have been involved. Their faith in a Higher Hand might have had the effect of relieving tension and even a headache. And since they felt better, they might even have got rid of other ailments. But this, runs the explanation, is merely the result of positive thinking, and no Superior Being is involved. It is also pointed out that many ailing people are prayed for without recovering. They are brought on wheel chairs and leave on wheel chairs. That in itself obviously proves nothing, just as the fact that many go to a hospital and do not recover, does not detract from the fact that many are helped. If something truly remarkable has occurred, it adds nothing to the explanation to point at occasions where it did not happen.

The real reason for the rejection of the testimonies of those who claim to have recovered in answer to prayer, is that it is regarded as impossible. Subconsciously there is even a conception of various degrees of possibility. A testimony of relief of headache may possibly be accepted, but if it is a case of cancer, it is a different matter entirely. The claim which I personally find hardest to swallow, is that certain metal implantings were changed to bone in answer to prayer. Is that not a somewhat tall order? In a case like that we are dealing with things like elements and atoms. It is as if the willingness to believe has come to a halt. Even those who might accept the occurrence of other healings, may feel that their faith is being overtaxed.

Since I have not investigated the matter *in loco*, I do not want to

express a conviction on the truth of the report. But I want to wonder how logical such a reaction against it would be. If someone does not believe in the least that people may be healed in answer to prayer, it is obvious that he will also reject instances where it is claimed that metal changed into bone. On the other hand, should he believe that various diseases are healed in answer to prayer, who, does he believe, was the healer? And if it is he who originally created heaven and earth, what logic is there in a denial of his ability to interfere with the atoms? Who can say to him: "Thus far and no further! It might have happened long ago, but not now"?

For those who have got rid of the conviction that distance in space or time makes the impossible possible, there is a choice between two consistent standpoints. One of these is that it was equally possible for elements to come to being long ago and today. The other is that it was equally impossible.

But in that case, how did they originate?

I have a feeling that the last word has not been spoken on this issue. But we may continue thinking about it.

His words.

But although Jesus expected people to believe the contents of his words on the strength of the *miracles* he performed, there is something more to note. It is evident that his *words* in themselves impressed people no less forcibly than his deeds. One of his disciples on the way to Emmaus described him as "a prophet, powerful in *word and deed* before God and all the people." (Luke 24:19) Both the deeds and the words convinced people.

Even when Jesus was only twelve years of age, "everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers." (Luke 2:47) On a certain occasion the temple guards were sent to take him into custody, but they returned without him. As a reason for their hesitation they did not mention the fact that he performed miracles, but rather that "no man ever spoke like this man." (John 7:46) Luke tells us that "the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God." (5:1) And then there was the notable occasion when many of his followers left him, and he suggested to his disciples that they might want to do the same. That was when Simon Peter, ignoring the many astounding miracles he had witnessed, answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (John 6:68) The impact which the miracles made on Peter cannot be denied, commencing with the large draught of fishes they hauled in at the command of Jesus, (Luke 5:1-10) and including the raising of the dead. And yet, when it came to giving a

rationale for his attachment to his Master, Peter thought of his *words*. They were words of eternal life which he had not encountered anywhere else – neither with the Jewish teachers, nor with the Romans or the Greeks or any other nation. Even if he might have been at a loss to explain exactly why they had such a powerful appeal, he somehow detected a “coherent intelligibility” in them. And they also cohered with his deepest needs.

Many teachers went around proclaiming all kinds of things. And yet people realised that Jesus spoke no ordinary words. One of the first things that Mark tells us about them, is “And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.” (Mark 1:22)

When people saw a priest or a pharisee in his clerical robes, they more or less argued, “This is a person with religious status, so his words should be taken seriously. If they fail to impress us the fault undoubtedly lies with us, for they are spoken by a man of rank.” The status of the speaker gave power to his words. But now the exact opposite happened. Here was a man whom most people did not know; and those who knew him had even less regard for him, because they recognised him as the son of the local carpenter, and all his family members were living among them. He had no status which could lend authority to his words. And yet, when he spoke they could not stop listening to him. Instead of the speaker’s status giving power to his words, the impact of the words gave status to the speaker.

What Paul said later about himself also applied to this itinerant Teacher: “.... by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” (2 Cor. 4:2) It would appear that Paul was no eloquent speaker, and that his writing was more impressive, for people said, “His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.” (2 Cor. 10:10) He did not commend himself by presenting any credentials that could give him status or that could be expected to command the attention of his listeners. Even if he did, it is very likely that they would not have believed him, just as we would hardly be impressed by an unpretentious stranger who knocks at the door and introduces himself as a cabinet minister. But without saying much about himself, and without holding his listeners spellbound, Paul brought to light the truth, and many people recognised this as the truth.

If you want another example of an unimpressive teacher whose words had power, think of the man who went ahead of Jesus and who introduced him to the people as the Lamb of God, namely the aforementioned John the Baptist. There is something intriguing in the effect which he had on one

specific man, namely Herod. Imagine the most powerful man in the country being confronted by an uncouth fellow who had no standing whatsoever, no possessions, no influential friends, and who survived on locusts and honey. Herod had every reason to dislike John, for the pauper made no bones about the fact that the king was living in sin with the wife of his brother. Herod did indeed imprison him. But then Mark tells us something surprising, namely that “Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man.” (6:20) Even that could be explained, as well as the fact that “he was greatly puzzled” by John’s pronouncements (or, as some manuscripts have it, “he did many things”). But the most astonishing part is this: “Yet he liked to listen to him.” The helpless convict rebuked and mightily disturbed the potentate, and yet the latter liked to listen to him! Why was that? Why should a king enjoy being dressed down by a down-and-outer? We know how certain people flattered Herod. Shortly before his death he made a speech and drew the comment, “This is the voice of a god, not of a man.” (Acts 12:22) That, of course, was a very judicious thing to say, just as it was expedient to appreciate Nero’s poems. No doubt the king often received similar accolades from opportunists and sycophants. But deep down in his heart he knew there was one man in his kingdom who would not lie to him. His longing for reality was stirred by the “coherent intelligibility” of this fellow’s words. And since something inside him needed reality, he liked to listen to John. Unfortunately there were other things he liked even more.

What applied to Paul and to John the Baptist was all the more applicable to the words of Jesus. Both his *deeds* and his *words* were intended to convince people. Of his own words Jesus said that they were spirit and life, (John 6:63) that they had been given to him by the Father (John 17:8) and that they would outlast heaven and earth. (Mark 13:31) He also promised his disciples that if his words remained in them, their prayers would be answered. (John 15:7)

I would not venture to attempt a full explanation of the power in the words of Jesus. It may be one of those things which human beings can never completely understand. Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice,” (John 10:27) and in this there may be a deep mystery. And yet we may note a few things about the words of Jesus which undoubtedly contributed to convince his listeners that he was reliable.

John Polkinghorne (a physicist as well as a priest) makes an important statement in connection with science and theology. He remarks, “Ultimately each must defend its claim to be in touch with reality by an appeal to the

coherent intelligibility it achieves through its insights.” (p. xii) In other words, if a message forms a unified whole which can be understood, it carries more conviction than if it can be shown to contradict itself or even merely to consist of disconnected sections. That does not only apply to a testimony in a court of law but in every area of our experience. Pannenberg says: “The highest degree of reality belongs to that which promotes the unity of all the reality which we can experience.” Man, the integrator, finds his faith stimulated by an integrated and coherent message. So much more if this message can also integrate whatever tortures him by its disintegration. Such an integrating effect may often be experienced subconsciously even if it is difficult or too deep to formulate in words.

●Step by step from the known.

A competent teacher realises that his information should be offered to his pupils in a certain order. “From the known to the unknown” goes a time-tested rule, and “from the concrete to the abstract.” No one was more aware of the importance of this principle than Jesus.

Not only was the teaching of Jesus about heavenly things preceded by what he himself said about earthly things, but we have noted that his entire mission had to be preceded by that of another man; namely John the Baptist. Jesus said of him that no man born of woman was greater than he. (Matth. 11:11) That should be an encouragement to take a good look at what John regarded as his calling, namely to “prepare the way for the Lord” and to “make straight paths for him.” (Luke 3:4) How did he do that? By telling people to look at themselves and to become aware of their misdeeds. That is why there had to be confession of sins. (Matth. 3:6) On the positive side he preached social concern. Clothes and food should be shared with the needy, there should be no dishonest gain, violence and false accusations, or discontent with what one had. (Luke 3:10-14) By teaching these things John was preparing the way for the Lord. But let it be noted that his entire message stood in relationship to life here on earth. John taught no “heavenly things”. But his teaching was a preparation for them. By teaching people that they were sick he prepared them for the great Physician, whom he also had the privilege of announcing when he said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

Someone might try to convince us that certain crucial ideas only occurred to Jesus later in his career, and he might try to prove this by pointing out that he did not express them earlier. But is that the only explanation? Is it not just as possible that he did indeed teach them earlier,

but that they were not recorded? But even more importantly: did he not deliberately withhold them from his followers until he considered them ripe to receive them? If a teacher only teaches his class something in November, does it prove that he did not know it himself in February? “I did not tell you this at first,” said Jesus, “because I was with you.” (John 16:4) And even at that stage he said, “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.” (:12)

Depth.

Some psychologists compare the human mind with an iceberg, which may appear enormous, and yet the section that we see is only a small part of the whole. And so, they say, the obvious emotions and desires of people are only a small part of what goes on inside them. Underneath their perceived emotions there are processes and tensions which cause them to act as they do. They say we know very little of a person by merely noting what he says and does. We should look much deeper. People may act in a certain way which astonishes their friends. Even children may behave in ways which their parents simply cannot explain. But then a psychologist points out that such behaviour might have deeper roots, for instance a desire to attract attention or take revenge on their parents or whatever.

God also looks deep into the human heart. Even in the Old Testament we find a very clear statement of this principle. God sent Samuel to anoint one of the sons of Jesse as king. But Jesse had eight sons. Naturally Samuel considered the eldest one first. When they entered he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is before him.” But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart”. (1 Samuel 16:6,7)

Jesus likewise insisted that “Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” He stated that the widow who contributed two copper coins to the temple actually gave more than the rich who gave from their abundance. (Mark 12:41-44) He did not only see the money they put into the box, but also the money they had at home and in the bank. And he also saw the attitude within their hearts. He did not only ask, “What do they do?”, but “Why do they do it?”

People saw the religious leaders of those days, and they also saw the conspicuous sinners. They praised the former and condemned the latter. But what did Jesus say? He said the religious leaders were like people who cleanse the outside of a cup while leaving the inside dirty, and like tombs

which are beautiful on the outside but full of dead bones within. ^(Matth. 23:25-28)

When Jesus spoke, people realised that his words dealt with deep realities, and they could not ignore them. They either accepted them or they became angry. (And some who became angry at first, accepted them afterwards.)

One of the most penetrating things that Jesus said which proves his deep knowledge of the human being, is found in Matthew 11:29, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Is there not some mistake here? Surely, when a yoke is put upon an ox, it may expect work, not rest. How could Jesus promise rest which comes by taking up a yoke? But what the human soul needs, is to find meaning in life. (That is the essence of Viktor Frankl's contribution to our knowledge of man.) And one of the surest ways to attain it is through meaningful work. Creativity was the only thing that offered him relief from anguish, said the Russian philosopher Berdyaev. How did Jesus persuade his first disciples to leave their work and follow him? He offered them a more meaningful work. He said to them, “Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men.” ^{(Mark 1:17).}

He did not say the work they were doing was worthless. On the contrary, he helped them to do it more effectively by telling them where to cast out the nets. But then he offered them an even better work. He appealed to their deepest need. Jesus helped them to do their own work as fishermen by telling them to “put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.” ^(Luke 5:4) Did he intend his advice on fishing to serve as a parable which should be applied to their work in his service, and has the deep water got a symbolic meaning? Whatever the case may be, we know that Jesus again emphasised depth, for example when he spoke of the outside and the inside of the cup, ^(Matth. 23:25) where he described the seed sown on the rock as withering because it had no deep soil, ^(Matth. 13:5) and when he told the story of the builder “who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock.” ^(Luke 6:48)

The listeners who were told that the human being is not defiled by what enters him but by what comes from his heart, ^(Matth. 15:18) could truly testify of his word that it is “living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” ^(Heb. 4:12) It probed into the depths of the soul.

Even his way of presentation testifies to the truth of the statement that “he did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a

man.” (John 2:25) Although he did not completely avoid abstract terms, he knew that symbolism and stories touch the human heart where abstractions are powerless. Imagine that, when the scribe asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29) he had answered, “Anyone in need who comes your way, regardless of his nationality.” How would that have compared with the impact which the parable of the Good Samaritan has exerted to the present day? “Morality in terms of abstract theory has a cold and limited interest,” explains Badham, “But Jesus made it vivid by showing it in the lives of men.” (pp.42,43)

Essentials.

Integration does not merely mean that we take a little bit of each part of our makeup and then mix them. That would be like baking a cake with one cup of flour, one cup of essence, one cup of baking powder, and one cup of salt.

A major part of the human being’s anxiety is the result of ascribing excessive value to things of secondary importance and neglecting the weightier ones. Such a person’s priorities are in disarray.

Imagine that a child has a wart on his finger, and he also has pneumonia. He is very ill and he has a high temperature. What would you think of his father if he took great trouble to get the wart removed, while completely ignoring the serious disease which may take the child’s life?

When Jesus was on earth he found people who were living in obvious sin. Everyone knew this, and the sinners knew it themselves. There were the publicans, those who collected taxes for the Romans and who cheated the people by gathering more than they should and keeping part of the money. And there were the prostitutes, the women who lived immoral lives for the sake of money. Everybody knew that they were living in sin. And yet Jesus said these remarkable words to the religious leaders, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you.” (Matth.21:31)

The Pharisees rarely did something which seemed wrong in the eyes of the people. They tried very hard to keep the law of God. So where did they go wrong, then? They went wrong in considering the less significant matters as the most important. They did not treat bad things as good things, but they treated small good things as the biggest good things. Their priorities were wrong. They were like the father who worries about his child’s wart and neglects the pneumonia. Listen to these words in Matthew 23:23, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law,

justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!”

These people attached very great importance to very small matters, but they ignored the more important ones, the “weightier matters of the law”. When they harvested two handfuls of herbs, they would carefully divide it into ten parts and give one part to God, but they did not care much for justice and mercy and faith. Now Jesus did not say they were wrong in giving ten percent of their herbs, just as he did not say they should swallow gnats. He said, “These things you ought to have done.” But what he emphasised was that they were soothing their consciences with these trifles while neglecting other things which were far more important. That is why he asked them the question, “Which is greater?” Note the following quotation from Matthew 23:16-19:

Woe to you, blind guides, who say, “If any one swears by the temple, it is nothing; but if any one swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.” You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? And you say, “If any one swears by the altar, it is nothing; but if any one swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.” You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

We also find a good example of the question “Which is greater?” where Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman. She asked him whether the right place to pray was in Jerusalem or on the mountain in Samaria. Instead of saying which was the right place, he told her that a time would come when they would not pray in either of the two places. In other words, the *place* is entirely immaterial. On the other hand he said the Father was seeking people who would worship him “in spirit and in truth.” The *attitude* is fundamental, and both those who insisted that Jerusalem was the place to pray, as well as their opponents who said it was the mountain, were straining out gnats and swallowing camels.

Jesus did not only tell people, “These things are right and those are wrong,” but he also said, “These things are less important than those, and it is a fallacy to concentrate on the less important ones at the expense of those which are more important.” And he also told people what is the most important thing to do: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his

righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matth.6:33)

Disregard of status.

One thing which impressed people about the words of Jesus, was that he did not adapt them to please people. One of the religious leaders said so very clearly. “Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to what they are.” (Matth.22:16)

These religious leaders were not honest in their intention, for their plan was to trap Jesus in his words. And yet what this man said was entirely true: Jesus did not pay attention to what people were. Their status did not matter to him. He did not change his message in order to please the elite. Think of the rich young man who came to Jesus, and whom he told to sell all he had and to give it to the poor. He did not reason, “It is good to have rich friends, so I shall make it easier for the young man.” When he chose his disciples he chose them among the unassuming fishermen. He delivered a great sermon to Nicodemus, who was an important man, but he also delivered a great sermon to the Samaritan woman.

Perhaps most important of all: he was not swayed by large numbers of people. It is one thing to make bold statements before a sympathetic crowd, and quite another to make them in the company of a few people who ask penetrating questions. How did Jesus deal with crowds? We often read that “when he saw the crowds he had compassion for them”. (Matth.9:36) He did not see a crowd as followers who should be excited and called to action. How many speakers of our day, do you think, pity the crowds which they have the opportunity to address?

Did Jesus ever have the support of a crowd? There is little doubt that there was one day when he could have called a crowd to some kind of action if he wished. He could undoubtedly even have told them to rebel against the Romans. No doubt many people were waiting for just such a call from him. He was riding towards Jerusalem on a donkey, and people were shouting, “Hosanna!” and casting their clothes before the animal’s feet. So this was his chance to give a command! But what do we find him doing on the donkey? We find him weeping. “As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes.’” (Luke 19:42)

Jesus often spoke to crowds, but when he called them to action, it was individual action. Some of his great sermons were delivered to crowds, but

some of the most famous ones were delivered to small groups or even to individuals, like Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman.

Children in the audience.

Not only did he welcome children when the disciples would have driven them away, ^(Matth.19:13,14) but he added that the kingdom of God belonged to them, and that those who wanted to enter there should become like them. ^(Matth.18:3) Milan Machoveč says in this regard:

The child as example – that is indeed something quite new in the history of religion and actually also in the history of culture. Before Jesus it never happened anywhere on earth that childhood was presented as a human value, as an example of humanity. When the figure of a child appears in the literary documents of Asia and Europe before Christ, then it is always as something incomplete, consequently second rate, and unimportant in relation to human values. ^(p.117)

The reason why the child is held up as an example by Jesus is that it is more receptive to “the one thing needed” in preference to the “many things” referred to in Luke 10:41. ^(p.118) It is not a case of pitying the immature, but deals with “the need of every fully mature person to oppose the tendencies of the egoistic class interests or civilisation with its fetishes, which are so destructive to human beings.” ^(p.120) Emil Brunner calls Jesus “the discoverer of the child,” and explains, “The child is indeed human absolutely, human without any additional quality, without any achievement which distinguishes one human being from another. Hence for Jesus the child is the closest illustration ... of the true attitude of man towards God.” ^(Mediator, p. 367)

How is this esteem for the child to be harmonised with the requirement that God should be loved with all one’s mind, with Paul’s admonition to “stop thinking like children in your thinking be adults,” ^(1 Cor. 14:20) and with Peter’s exhortation to “prepare your minds for action”? ^(1 Peter 1:13) The question how an adult can change and become like a child is reminiscent of the problem of Nicodemus when he heard he should be born from above. In what respect should a mature person become like a child? Would that not imply a willingness to accept everything on authority and render oneself defenseless against all the deceptions doing the round? Surely one feature

of a child is that it is readily misled. And Jesus himself said, “Let no man deceive you.” (Matth. 24:4) Could he have commended children for their gullibility? What is more, Jesus gave certain instructions which no child could obey and asked questions which only an adult could answer.

How then can an adult become like a child? He can do so by discovering that, despite the many things that he knows, there are innumerable things of which he *is* not only ignorant, but which he *can* never discover with his own efforts. In other words, by the admission of a mystery.

Devoid of bribery.

Jesus never made the way of righteousness easier than it was in order to attract people. He said to all, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:27)

The heart of the message of Jesus is that he offers salvation as a free gift. We cannot deserve it, so he has deserved it for us. That is the heart of his message. But we cannot receive a gift if our hands are full of other things. And he made it clear that we cannot accept his gift if there are things which are worth more to us. Now at first this may seem hard to accept, but the more we think about it the more we realise that it is logical. Although his words may be hard, they have the ring of reality.

Power without violence

Matthew, who is especially fond of referring to the Old Testament, says that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which said, “He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets.” (Matth.12:19, Is. 42:2) People who are not very sure of their own message often shout at the top of their voices. Or they curse and use other words which shock some of their listeners. Moreover, they sometimes use physical violence to make people accept their words. There are strong messages and weak messages. The weak ones have to be bolstered up and protected in various ways. They need shock tactics or external force to spread them. We know of such religions and ideologies which relied and still rely heavily on the use of military power. Even people who had bogus ideas of Christianity sometimes used force to spread their views or to prevent defection to something else.

Jesus believed in the power of his message. He never in any way suggested that force should be used to spread it. When he appeared before Pilate he said, “My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of

this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews.” (John 18:36)

Before he went to Gethsemane he said his disciples should buy swords, but when they told him there were two swords, he said, “It is enough.” (Luke 22:38) Now everyone knew that two swords were not enough to resist those who would come to arrest him, especially in the hands of fishermen who had undoubtedly seldom handled a weapon before. Moreover, when Peter started fighting Jesus said, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” (Matth.26:52)

Why then did Jesus want them to take the two swords if they should not use them? I think the answer is exactly this: he wanted to show them that the sword should not be used on his behalf. If they had no arms, the disciples could afterwards say, “Oh, if we only had swords!” But now he showed them that even if swords were available, they should not be used in his service. The strength of the gospel lies in itself. When Jesus sent out seventy disciples, he said, “Behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.” (Luke 10:3) Through the centuries since that time, and especially in our own time, multitudes of lambs have been torn asunder by the wolves, but the message goes on. And Jesus said of himself, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12:24)

Jesus even warned against swearing an oath to confirm one’s words. Some people taught that certain oaths are binding while others are not. (Matth. 23:16-18) Jesus called this blind foolishness (:17) and said nothing more was needed than “yes” and “no”. (Matth. 5:34-37)

There is one incident in the gospels which might create the impression that Jesus did indeed use force to get his message across, namely the events which took place when he drove the money changers and their clients from the temple. And yet there is something very remarkable about this incident. Can you imagine an entire group of hard-boiled businessmen plus their clients allowing a single man with a whip to overturn their tables and their counters and drive them from the places they had been occupying for years? What would happen at a street market in your town if a solitary individual should appear with a whip and try to dislodge the vendors from their posts? It is of course possible that the vendors feared the crowd if they should oppose him, but I think there is something else to it as well. It seems the explanation for his success was that his action was largely symbolic. The power which overwhelmed them was not in his actions, but in the words he spoke and his quotation from the scriptures: “Is it not written:

‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers’.’” (Mark 11:17) The words of Jesus went straight home and those who heard them recognised his authority. They might even have felt guilty. But this was not because his actions lent force to his words – rather the other way round.

Self-revelation.

When the infant Jesus was taken to the temple to be circumcised, the aged Simeon pronounced certain prophecies about him. “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against,” he said, “so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.” (Luke 2:34, 35)

And indeed, Jesus proved to be a revealer of people’s deeds and the thoughts in their hearts.

“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did,” the Samaritan woman told her friends. (John 4:29) By revealing her own past to her, and even telling her exactly how many husbands she had had, Jesus convinced her that his knowledge was beyond the ordinary. In the same vein Paul later also said that if an unbeliever should enter a church where prophecy came to its right, “the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God ...” (1 Cor.14:25)

These revelations did not always take the form of statements. They often came as questions, and of special importance are the instances where Jesus asked the question “why?”

There were even people who were afraid of being asked this question and who tried to dodge it. When Jesus asked the Pharisees from whom John the Baptist got his authority, they were caught in a dilemma. They were too scared of the people to say that it came from men, but on the other hand they were afraid to say that it came from God, for then Jesus could ask them why they had not believed him. They tried to sidestep his “why?” And so they rather said they did not know.

On occasion a rich young man came up to Jesus in such earnest that he fell down on his knees before him and asked, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus began by asking him, “Why do you call me good?” (Mark 10:18) It is possible that this made the young man wonder, “Indeed, why *do* I consider him good? After all, there are many other teachers, so why do I not fall down before one of them? What is so good about this one? And *how* good is he? He is surely good enough to merit my falling down before him, but is he also good enough to get rid of my wealth

in order to trust him with the rest of my life?” And sadly he decided against the bargain.

During the trial of Jesus before the high priest one of the officials was not satisfied with one of his answers, so he struck him in the face and demanded to know whether that was the way he answered the high priest. It was then that Jesus asked him, “If I said something wrong, testify to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?” (John 18:23) Many people struck Jesus on that day, but we do not read that he spoke to any of them, except this man. He was indeed privileged, for if he followed up the question it could lead him to the discovery of realities about himself. If he asked himself, “Why did I strike him rather than point out what he had said that was wrong?” he could have discovered that he was very uncertain of himself, and that that was the reason why he resorted to violence. Many people do that to hide their own insecurity, and those who do not use violent actions, often employ violent words in the form of abusive language which they hope will shock other people. So this man was given a chance to ask himself why he behaved like that, and so to get to know more about the reality about himself.

After his resurrection Jesus found Mary weeping near his grave, and he asked her why she was weeping. (John 20:15) Now this is a question routinely asked weeping people, but if Mary had gone into it she might have learnt something about herself. What bond was there between her and the man in the grave? He was no relative of hers, so why should she be so upset? When Jesus called her name she answered him with one word which means “Teacher”. She was evidently one of those who not only marveled at his miracles but who was deeply stirred by his words. And it is quite conceivable that the prospect of forfeiting his words in future was one of the major burdens on her heart.

But undoubtedly the best known and most dramatic incident occurred yet later, when Jesus had already left the earth. A young man went around taking the followers of the Nazarene in custody, forcing them to renounce their faith and casting them into prison. He was well educated and a dedicated and outstanding champion for the Jewish religion. When people saw him, they probably said to themselves, “Here is a young man who knows what he wants.” He created the impression of unswerving consecration to the task he had taken on himself. Until he was confronted by the “why?” of the One whom he was persecuting. What happened on the way to Damascus that day when he heard the voice asking him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” had an influence on history which is

impossible to calculate.

But a statement was added to the question, namely “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” (Acts 26:14) Who else would have guessed that this single-minded young man was actually in combat with uncertainty, and that there was something that he found hard? But the question “Why?” and the revelation of his inner turmoil formed part of a vision which made him turn round in his tracks. The façade was ripped away from the cocksure champion and a pitiable struggler was revealed who was battling to ward off thoughts which might cause him to doubt.

The living and active word which was sharper than any double-edged sword, did not only penetrate and judge the thoughts and attitudes of the heart, but also brought them to light for those who were willing to face them.

Unspoken words

Milan Machoveč says:

But ideas can only inspire when they stand in an organic coherence with the human being himself. The “doctrine” of Jesus did not set the world alight on account of some manifest superiority of the theoretical programme, but above all while he was himself identical with this programme, while he himself exerted an inspiring influence.
(p.93)

In the very first sentence of his gospel John refers to Jesus as “the Word”. But how can a person be a word? He can be a word in the sense of being a message. And Jesus claimed to be a message to his disciples, even where he did not only use words to announce truths to them. He communicated a message to them by what he was and what he did.

In the first place he conveyed a message to them by *setting an example*. During the last passover feast, when everyone was undoubtedly waiting for someone else to wash his feet, Jesus got up from the table and started performing this lowly task himself. John highlights a tremendous paradox in this, for he says he did this because he “knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God.” (13:3) And when he considered his incomparable position, he humbled himself for the lowliest task which was usually performed by a slave. And he explained to his disciples: “I have set you an example that

you should do as I have done for you.”^(:15)

But the Living Word did far more than show his disciples what he expected from them. Towards the end of his ministry one of his disciples, Philip, who rarely appeared at the forefront of events, had one great request. He had heard Jesus speak of the Father so often, that he had one desire: “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”^(John 14:8) The answer Jesus gave him is one of the most momentous announcements ever made: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”^(:9) In other words, during the time that they followed him, his disciples had seen as much of God as any human being can desire to see. In his first chapter John said, “For the law was given through Moses: grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”^(:17) When John wrote this he might well have had Philip’s request in mind, for he says, “No one has ever seen God, but God the one and only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.”^(:18) He made him known, not only through what he spoke, but also through what he showed them. Grace and truth, John says, is what came through Jesus. In the books of Moses the law was emphasised, but now it was grace and truth.

Jesus told a parable to reveal the difference between the law and grace. It is found in Matthew 20. A landowner went to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed with the first group to give them a denarius each. Then he went again three times and hired more labourers. However, he did not stipulate exactly what they would receive, but only said, “Whatever is right.” When they also received a denarius, naturally the first ones complained. But they had no legal right to be dissatisfied, for their employer had kept his word. And then he said these striking words: “I want to give ...” The God whom Jesus introduced was a God who wants to give. In John 3:16 Jesus told Nicodemus that God had given his Son. “Do not be afraid, little flock,” he told his followers, “for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”^(Luke 12:32)

So now his disciples could claim that they had learnt something about God. When they saw Jesus calming the storm, they saw God at work. But equally when they saw that he had compassion on suffering folk, on the sick, on the blind, on the crowd, on mothers with little children. In these they also saw the attitude of God towards man. But likewise when he rebuked the proud and the hypocrites. Grace had truly come, but also truth, even truth which offends.

The enigma once again

The supreme enigma of perceptible reality, we have already concluded, is man. In short it amounts to the necessity of determining whether Jesus knew man: firstly because he addressed his message to people, and secondly because man is the most involved item of the subject on which he spoke.

Can we test the truth of this statement? How could we, unless we knew ourselves what is in man. Even if we should only know a small part, it may help us to determine whether his knowledge of the masterpiece contributes towards convincing us of his reliability.

That brings us back to our conclusion about the true nature of man: that he is pre-eminently an *outstretcher* and *surpasser*, and secondly an *integrator*; and that these are methods of obtaining satisfaction for the great desire which distinguishes him from the animals, his yearning for *newness*.

We would expect a Witness from ultimate reality to be aware of these ideals of the masterpiece. Moreover, we would expect them to mean a good deal to him, since he incorporated them in his masterpiece, and that they would also feature prominently in the contents of his teaching.

So what do we find?

The great Surpasser

What role did surpassing play in his case?

The creation of man was an example of surpassing. Up to that stage creation followed an ascending line, but the surpassing creation took place when God said: "Let us make man in our image." (Gen. 1:26)

But of Jesus himself Paul tells us that God gave him a name which is above every name. (Phil. 2:9)

The Great Integrator

Jesus came and lived and died for one ultimate purpose, namely integration or unification. Salvation was necessary in order to lift people out of their disintegrated condition, but the final prospect was that eventually they would be united with Him.

This integration takes place on various fronts. In reaction to the words of the high priest Caiaphas, John comments that Jesus would die, "not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one." (John 11:52) When Jesus prayed his great prayer for his followers, his request was not that they should be loyal to him or faithful to his teaching, although obviously that was also in his mind. But the burden

of his prayer was “that they may be one as we are one.” (John 17:11) He stretched out further to include “those who will believe in me through their message,” (20) and once more his prayer was “that all of them may be one.” (21) Paul takes up the theme when he reminds the Ephesians “that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel.” (2:12) However, he continues, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one ... His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two.” (:13,14,15) He did not merely unite people who were already not too far removed from one another. No, he expressly stretched out to those who were “far away”. He also made it very clear that he had not come to call those who merely needed a bit of extra polishing to make them fit for the presence of God. On the contrary, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Mark 2:17) And obviously all integration of people was made possible by the central theme of the gospel, namely his sacrificial death by which he reconciled God and man. But Paul goes even further than that. Jesus did not only come to create unity among people. The apostle has a vision of a far more inclusive unity when he thinks of the reason why Jesus came to live and die on earth. “...to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Eph. 1:10) “... and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven...” (Col.1:20) This is a point which Jürgen Moltmann emphasises.

... this eschatological vision of Paul’s becomes the impressive picture of the cosmic Christ, through whose Wisdom everything was created, through whose blood everything has been reconciled, and through whose exaltation all things will be “gathered together.” (p194) Through this transition resurrection has become the universal “law” of creation, not merely for human beings, but for animals, plants, stones and all cosmic life systems as well. (p. 258)

Paul was convinced that “in him (Christ) all things hold together,” (Col.1:17) and that such ultimate consolidation was “the mystery of his (God’s) will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ.” (Eph.1:9)

How do we recognise an account as truth? One consideration is always whether the different parts form a unity without contradicting one another. This unity may reveal itself through the account’s “organic coherence with the human being himself” as Machoveč puts it, or through Polkinghorne’s “coherent intelligibility.” That gave them confidence to trust him.

Integration on many fronts would be the final outcome of accepting Jesus and obeying his commands. This was not only the result of his words, but above all of what he did, namely to die on the cross. But we may well ask whether, in addition to the long term integration which resulted from accepting his words, people ever experienced that his words had an immediate integrating effect, and that this helped to convince them of his authority. Did his words produce a minor immediate integration which convinced them that they could trust him with the overall integration which he promised to accomplish?

This was undoubtedly the case on many occasions, but the immediate integrating effect of the words of Jesus is seldom if ever more poignantly illustrated than in the incident where two disciples were on their way to Emmaus and were joined by a Stranger. These two people found their whole world shattered. On the one hand they were Jews who expected a Messiah who would save them from their earthly enemies, who varied from time to time, but who were at that moment the Romans. On the other hand they dearly loved Jesus, and they believed that he was the one who would drive the oppressors out of their country. They had a neat scheme in which they could conveniently accommodate him. But now it seemed he had fallen right out of it and had disappeared into the grave. The word “chaos” is an apt description of their thoughts. And here they met a man who was not only a stranger, but seemingly a very ignorant one who was unaware of the events that had taken place in Jerusalem just previously. Moreover, he was not very tactful, for he called them “foolish men and slow of heart to believe.” (Luke 24:25) There was nothing to recommend him to them. And yet, when they listened to his words, their hearts “burned within them.” (:32)

What did these words do then? They restored the shattered world of the two disciples by proving to them that Jesus did in fact fit into the promise of the Messiah, but that it did not happen in the way they had anticipated. For the first time they saw that his victory had to come through suffering. “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (:26) He integrated the prophecies of their nation with the events which had taken place recently. And this integration made their hearts burn.

Nowhere is this emphasis on integration better illustrated than in the summary which Jesus gave of the law. The scribes who asked him which is the greatest of all the commandments undoubtedly expected him to single out one of the ten. But Jesus looked deeper, and went straight for the essential, namely the attitude, which should be one of love. Love towards

God and man is what the divine law requires. Admittedly there are people with different types of spiritualities. While one individual may know a good amount of theology with his mind and see how various truths fit together, it is possible not to be moved emotionally when thinking of God, or even to harbour a negative feeling towards him. On the other hand it is possible to experience a strong positive emotion towards God, and even to express this in song and in other ways, and yet to understand very little of what God is doing or what he wants man to do. While the theologian with his books and the emotionalist with his praises may both be so engrossed in their respective occupations that they very rarely do anything of practical value, there are also those who know almost nothing and who feel even less, but who decide that God wants them to be active in good works.

Which of these approaches is the correct one? Judging by the criterion which Jesus set down, everyone who emphasises one aspect to the exclusion of the others is on the wrong track. He referred them to Deuteronomy 6:7: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” But according to all three evangelists who report the incident, he also added something not found in the book of Moses: “and with all your mind.” In the teaching of Jesus all the faculties of man should be consolidated by love for God. This is not to deny that some people may be more intellectually inclined than the average and others may be more emotional or more practical, and that all kinds are necessary in the service of God. (Specialisation was already practised in the early Christian church, when deacons were appointed in addition to the apostles.) But whatever an individual possesses in the line of natural endowments should be fully employed in the love of God. Instead of crippling one another each faculty should augment the others. Understanding who God is and what he demands and what he offers will increase the emotional attachment to him and serve as a spur towards action in his service. Every part of the human being is included: the heart, the soul, the mind and the strength. All the parts should work together as one whole and towards one purpose. What is more, every individual should also live for the others. That means integration in society.

Man, the masterpiece, we have noted, reveals two major yearnings which he does not share with the animals: to extend and to integrate. Both these aspirations are addressed by the contents of the words of Jesus. On the one hand it takes the listener further into reality than any other words he has ever heard — right to the heart of the Creator. On the other hand it takes him to the most miserable human beings whom he should love and serve.

These words proclaim integration in every connection in which the human being may find himself. Is it a wonder that a man who has heard them directly from the Speaker, when asked whether he would not prefer to leave him, should ask, “To whom shall I go?”

Meaningful history.

Man searches for meaning. But can the life of any individual have meaning if the entire course of history is meaningless? “The problem of creativeness leads on to the problem of history,” says Berdyaev. (B. & E, p. 194)

When the angel announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds he said a few important things about him: that he was Christ the Lord and that he would be for all people. But it is readily overlooked that he also said, “Today in the town of David.” (Luke 2:11) That placed Jesus right inside history. He was born at a specific time and in a particular place, and after him things would not be the same as before. He was not just an eternal principle.

Wolfhart Pannenberg emphasises the importance of history, and much of what now follows is taken from his book *Glaube und Wirklichkeit*. It is only the God of the Bible, he maintains, who gives meaning to history and the future. In what he calls “cultic societies” everyone looks back to the past, to the origin of the world, to the traditions of the forefathers; and strenuous efforts are made to attain harmony with the past by replicating some of the early events. Cultic people live with their backs towards the future.

The Greek gods similarly had no future perspective. No one expected the inhabitants of Olympus to act differently in future from what they did in the past.

Although the Greek philosophers did not look back like the cultic people, neither did they look towards the future. For them the eternal realities were timeless, and when they spent their time contemplating them, they lived in an eternal present. Or to quote Berdyaev, “To the ancient Greeks the world was a cosmos, to the ancient Hebrews it was history.” (B. & E., p. 197) For the former it was important that everything should be arranged in a neat totality, but the latter asked where everything was leading to.

And there is reason to believe that Jesus came at just the most opportune point in history. Leslie Badham comments on “the extraordinary timeliness of Jesus’s coming.” He points out that he came at “the one moment in history that was most likely to favour the reception, the understanding, and the spread of the Gospel.” The Jews had progressed towards a level where they could appreciate the teaching of Jesus. But not the Jews alone.

The Graeco-Roman world was also literally at its wit's end for a credible faith. The old polytheisms had had their day. Their confused mythologies alienated the better minds and baffled the simpler. If ever the death of old beliefs opened the doorway to the new, this was the time. ... There was a demand for a religion that at one level could meet the exacting demands of philosophy, and at another could free men from the gross superstition and emotionalism of the mystery cults, and at still another level could meet the demands for an improved moral code... Any religion hoping to be all-embracing had thus to satisfy a threefold demand – the demand of philosophy, the demand of the emotional side of man's nature, the demand of rising ethical standards. ...The religion of Jesus met every such need. (pp.180-182)

When we read the words of Jesus as recorded in the gospels, we are struck by how much he said about the future. He said he was coming again. But he also said that before that event there would be appalling tribulations.

Pannenberg also points out that the future perspective of the Scriptures became increasingly inclusive. At first it merely dealt with what would befall Israel, then other nations were included, and in the end it is said that the cosmic world will also be renewed.

Words of life

“The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life,” Jesus said. (John 6:63) That is in accordance with what Peter said when Jesus asked whether his remaining disciples did not wish to forsake him as some others had done. Jesus alone, he said, had the words of eternal life, so to whom should they go?

What did Peter mean by “eternal life”? No doubt he had in mind the issue of immortality, of living after physical death. Who else could offer him this? The Old Testament says very little on this subject, and it does not seem to have figured largely in the minds of Peter's own people, who would hope for little more than a long life on earth and many children to remember them afterwards. The Greeks seem to have given more thought to it, and they had accounts of Charon taking the souls of the departed over the river Styx on his ferry. But what comfort did they offer the ordinary individual? Berdyaev remarks in this regard,

To the Greeks the gods were immortal, whereas man was mortal. The virtue of immortality was recognized as appertaining to heroes, to demigods and to supermen. But this was tantamount to ascribing immortality to the divine and denying it to the human. (Berdyayev, D&R, p. 292)

Could the Greek philosophers not do better?

Plato had no sense of the immortal destiny of man, for the conception of immortality applies not to man but to the “universal soul.”

In contrast to the Greeks, whether traditionalists or philosophers, he concludes that

Christianity alone proclaims immortality for the whole of man, for all that is truly human and truly divine in him. (p. 293)

But whether Peter had his own people and the Greeks in mind or not, it is possible that he had already meditated on the meaning of the question, “What is life?” And even if he had not done so verbally, he might have found some intuitive answers. He might have noted that wherever there is physical life there are various types of extension. Everything that lives is either becoming bigger or has done so in the past. It also extends by producing more of its own kind. And he might have noted that this extension is accompanied by integration. The body takes nutrients from the food which it eats and assigns places to them within its own makeup. At death the opposite process is set in motion as it disintegrates. Procreation also results from integration, namely that of the male and the female members of the species. He might have become aware that the spiritual life of man is also marked by many forms of extension and integration, and that this often leads to the experience of something new. Undoubtedly eternal life would likewise be marked by integration, but per definition it should not come to an end, whether at death or any other point in time.

Both the idea of renovating or restoring to its pristine condition, and that of innovating or creating something which has not existed before, figure prominently in the gospel. It is not without reason that the account of the life and death of Jesus and what followed on it is known as the *New*

Testament. In the first chapter of his gospel John spells out what this newness was about. “For the law was given through Moses:” he says in verse 17, “Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” Paul takes up the same theme where he speaks of serving “in the *new* way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.” (Rom.7:6) The author to the Hebrews states that Jesus opened “a *new* and living way” by which man may draw near to God. (Heb.10:20) He gave his disciples a *new* commandment: that they should love one another. (John 13:34) He spoke of his message as *new* wine which had to be poured into new wineskins. (Matth.9:17) “This cup is the new covenant in my blood,” he said at the last Passover. (Luke 22:20) Already in the Old Testament special value was attached to a *new* song, (e.g. Ps.33:3, 96:1, Is.42:10) and in the very last book of the Bible this theme is taken up again. (Rev.5:9, 14:3) Likewise special emphasis was laid on a *new* name. (Is.62:2. Rev.2:17, 3:12) In his vision of the *New* Jerusalem John summarises everything by reporting that “he who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making all things new!’” (Rev. 21:5)

How does he solve the chaos?

A place which is known for often serving as venue for a chaos, is a desk. (When I note that mine is exceptionally neat, I know that my wife was active there.)

There are two ways of relieving a desk of a chaos. One of these consists in merely removing everything; and the easiest way to do this is by dumping all that it contains on the floor. Then, at least, the desk is no longer chaotic. But of what use is it then? In the other case all the unnecessary things are first removed and the useful ones then arranged by finding a place for each. Another preferential place for a chaos is the human mind and its thoughts. There are ideas and convictions and desires and longings and fears which often militate against one another. Our deepest misery is often caused by a failure to fulfil one of them. This has led some deeply reflective people through the ages to the conviction that it serves man best to cherish no longings and desires, in order to avoid future disappointments.

A person who makes progress with this exercise increasingly becomes like a barren desk on which, admittedly, there is no chaos, but neither anything else. Nor is there any order, for there is nothing that can be ordered.

Set against this the words of Jesus: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10) Paul speaks of “God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.” (1 Tim. 6:17) What he prescribes is not an emptying, but integration which aims at a purpose. “So whether you eat or

drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God,” he writes to the Corinthians. ^(1 Cor. 10:31.) There is indeed a laying off of many things, but it does not happen without discretion. “Everything is permissible,” he writes in verse 23, “but not everything is beneficial.” He compares the situation with that of an athlete who lays off everything for the sake of a prize. ^(1 Cor. 9:25) The writer to the Hebrews likewise speaks of throwing of everything that hinders in order to win the prize in the race. ^(Heb.12:1) On the other hand, Paul describes a religion which says: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!” as “harsh treatment of the body” and worthless. ^(Col. 2:21-23)

What it all amounts to, is that the value of every act of self-denial is determined by considering what it is done for. Even Jesus endured the cross “for the joy set before him.” ^(Heb.12:2)

Not “what?”, but “who”?

The human being wants certain things, and he wants to know certain things. But he does not find that enough, for he also experiences a deep longing to stand in a certain relationship with others, which means that whatever he experiences should be mutual. He attaches values to other people, and he is willing to give anything in order to be appreciated by them in return.

It is noteworthy that Peter should ask, “*To whom* shall we go?” For him it was not merely an intellectual choice among competing systems of thought, but a personal one among different masters. The other people who had left Jesus undoubtedly merely returned to the traditional Hebrew religion as expounded by the priests and the wise men. Could Peter not do the same? But was there any teacher who could compare with Jesus as regards his attitude and his love for his followers? And what did they have to offer an individual in the line of eternal life? In the Old Testament God is often described as eternal, but the only eternal promise that man received, was that his posterity would live in the land and be blessed in other ways. There might have been a vague awareness that a person’s soul would have a continued existence after his bodily death, and that the quality of that life was connected with his behaviour on earth, but this never received any special emphasis. How did this compare with the promise of Jesus that he would take his followers to himself and to their Father in heaven?

So to whom else could Peter go? Could he test the Romans? How attractive were Pilate and the Emperor and the local Roman soldiers? And what did they have to offer besides military might? Would one who had been called to become a fisher of men, ever be satisfied with being a killer

of men? Even their vaunted *pax Romana* or Roman peace was no more than an absence of active warfare, more or less like kicking two dogs to keep them from fighting each other. Then there were the Greeks, of course. They at least had higher aspirations than conquering the world. But their religion, with all the in-fighting among the inhabitants of Olympus, no longer appealed to thinking people. The philosophers might be worthy of more respect, and indeed Plato had invented a scheme which he not only considered eternal, but which actually consisted of an integration of all the myriads of ideas in a pyramid with the idea of virtue at the top. A very neat scheme, maybe, and more appealing to the questing mind than Zeus and company. But then, it only contained ideas. And life does not consist of *ideas* of bravery and cowardice, of love and hatred, of virtue and evil, but of brave and cowardly *people*, of *deeds* of love and hatred, and of *progress* towards virtue or evil. How much inspiration could be derived from arranging abstractions? There was still the option of looking up those who dealt in magic and who astounded people with their feats. But what would that lead to besides waiting for the next show? How did it promote love and unity among the spectators? Where was the integration?

It is not impossible that Peter was influenced by the words found in Deut. 30:19, where God tells the children of Israel: “ ... I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life ...”

Choosing life does not depend on the ability to say what it is. The author was correct who described it as a “squirrely thing”. We note that it is always accompanied by certain features, and that extension and integration are included among these. And yet there is always something in addition on which we cannot lay a finger. But when life is at stake we do not wait for definitions before we take a choice. Even the tiniest animal goes into action, even if it only consists in taking flight. And yet there is one great reality that threatens all man’s joy: the absolute certainty that his life on earth will end. Says Michael Green:

Our tame, mollycoddled society has come to regard death as the greatest of all misfortunes that could happen to a man; something to be deferred as long as possible, then to be glossed over with soothing paraphrases. We are not only afraid of meeting death, we are afraid of talking honestly about it. It is the forbidden subject of conversation in today’s runaway world. (p. 104)

Malcolm Muggeridge calls death “the twentieth century’s dirty little secret.” (p.101) “It is a remarkable fact,” says Emil Brunner, “that

modern religion ignores the problem of death. Our classical writers, and in particular their chief, Goethe, avoided the question of death as much as they avoided the problem of radical evil.” (*Mediator*, p. 566)

But what is the result of remaining silent on the surest reality that we have to face? We can never rid ourselves of the awareness that it is there, waiting to pounce on us at some moment or another. We know only too well that all our efforts to ignore it will one day prove to be futile. What we need is not to forget but to overcome. There must be some assurance that death is not the end of our existence.

The Witness never avoided the subject of death. On the contrary, he often spoke quite frankly about his own death and that of his followers. His own death was a certainty which he mentioned even if it caused grief to his friends. (*Math. 17:23*) But it also contained a note of triumph, namely the promise that he would be raised to life again. Nor was death forced on him, for no one took his life from him, but “I lay it down of my own accord.” (*John 10:18*) And not only did it concern him, but his followers as well, for “I lay down my life for the sheep.” (:15) “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” (*John 15:13*) Here is the ultimate victory over death: accepting it deliberately, not because life has become unbearable, but for the sake of his friends. Such a death has meaning. Yancey writes of John Donne:

“A turning point came for Donne when he began to view death not as the disease that permanently spoils life, but rather as the only cure to the disease of life, the final stage in the journey that brings us to God.” (*Survivor*, p.209)

And then comes the climax: Jesus did not only die for his friends in the sense of diverting death from them, like a swimmer who drowns while saving the life of another, or like someone who places his own body between a flying arrow and its target. What he did, was to open the way to eternal life after the death of the body. “He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die,” he said. (*John 11:26*) This is why Peter and millions of others since his time have staked their all on the reliability of the Witness. If someone should have asked the disciple, “Give me a definition of eternal life,” he might not even have understood what was wanted. He might have told the enquirer how his spirit had expanded as his interests were extended from earthly to heavenly things, from catching fish to catching people, from a narrow nationalism to

a willingness to include the Samaritan woman (and, at a later stage, the Roman Cornelius), and in many other ways. He might have mentioned other words and events which may be classified as forms of integration. But it is doubtful whether the fisherman would have been more able to offer a systematic rationale for his choice then, than on the occasion when he started sinking and called out, “Lord, save me!” But suppose that you insisted: “Please, Peter, would you mind defining the term ‘eternal life’?” Perhaps he would have said something which occurred to him at the moment, like “life which never ends”. But if he thought about it deeply, he might have realised that it was “better felt than telt.” If he knew enough Greek he might even have used the word *mustirion*. And if he suspected that you were gloating over his inability to say precisely what it was which meant so much to him, he might have asked you, “How can you expect me, a fisherman, to say what eternal life is, if the best brains of your own century cannot even say what is meant by ordinary life?” And he might have added: “But when your life is at risk, do you first look for a definition before you take a decision?”

Peter knew quite well what was required for the life and health of his body, and that offered him the best analogy for recognising the needs of his spirit. It was also because he placed his faith in the Witness that Paul was able to say, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” (Phil.1:21)

If Jesus preached a sermon by the circumstances of his death, what did he say with his last words on the cross? Can any human being imagine the depth of the darkness in which he was enfolded when he said, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Paul says that eternal punishment will consist in being “shut out from the presence of the Lord.” (2 Thess.1:9) This is what Jesus experienced at that moment, on the only occasion when he asked his Father “Why?” Did he receive an answer to his question? We are not told that he did. And yet it could not have been long afterwards that he breathed his last with the words, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” (Luke 23:46) These words were echoed by the first martyr, Stephen, when he was stoned by the angry mob. “While they were executing him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’” (Acts 7:59)

What message does it have for us of the present day? In the 1940’s there appeared Pär Lagerqvist’s book *Barabbas* which received the Nobel prize. The position of modern man is portrayed there in the life of the man who was chosen by the populace above Jesus of Nazareth when Pilate gave them a choice. The Swedish author depicts him as an uncertain individual who always tries to join the Christians but who never succeeds in doing so.

In the end he is crucified, and his last words are, “In your hands I commit my spirit.” Despite all his uncertainties, when it comes to the last moment, this is his only hope. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,” said David, “I will fear no evil, for you are with me.” (Ps.23:4) All this might sound sentimental to some, especially those who are hale and hearty and cherish a vague confidence that the moment of death is still far ahead. But when we take time to meditate on the last inescapable reality, and we think of all the uncertainties and the things we do not know, what greater solace is there than the benign presence of Someone who does know?

Our own efforts.

But is it necessary to wait for the prospect of approaching death before we can discover something about God? Do our own efforts to discover him not contribute anything that is valuable?

There has been considerable argument around the question how far our human thinking, starting from what we know and experience, can take us towards knowledge of God. One extreme standpoint is that nothing in our own experience leads us in such a direction, and that all our knowledge of God comes exclusively through revelation in the Bible. But this is clearly in conflict with David who praised God “because I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14) and Paul’s statement that even the heathen could learn about the might and power of God in creation. He told the people of Lystra that God “has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their season.” (Acts 14:16) To the Romans he writes that “God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.” (Romans 1:20) And the Athenians were told that God expected men to “seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him.” (Acts 17:26) In our own day this question would obviously be phrased as “Can science lead us to God?” And in this connection it is instructive to note what has been said by a man who devoted his labours both in the scientific and the religious fields. Polkinghorne says in this regard,

... the intelligible and delicately balanced structure of the world does raise questions which transcend the purely scientific and to this extent the laws of contemporary physics can, in their modest way, prove “mediators of divinity”. They provoke an intellectual restlessness which will only find its quiet in a deeper rationality than

that provided by natural science.^(p. 67)

The “intellectual restlessness” is provoked in those who pursue these studies and find each observation clamouring for an explanation. This continues until they reach the point where they can no longer explain with the tools and the data at their command. And so they are prepared for an answer to reach them from another direction. In that sense science may be said to lead towards God: by exhausting and eliminating other options. It may almost be compared with a drowning man who has reached such a point of exhaustion that he is willing to give the life saver a chance. A devoted seeker becomes increasingly convinced of his inability to attain an exhaustive knowledge of ultimate reality. But there are a few things which he cannot doubt and therefore has to believe.

- He cannot doubt his inability.

- He cannot doubt that there are areas of reality which he cannot know with his five senses.

- He is forced to believe that there is an Intelligence behind nature as we know it, and that he has power at his command of which we humans have no inkling.

- He has no doubt that the Witness whom we have met in this book was the most wonderful person who ever lived, that he deserved the claim “I am the truth,” and that he knew the human being as no one else. Of all the earthly things about which he spoke there is none about which he made more penetrating statements than about the masterpiece – man. More than anything else this deep knowledge of man and his deepest yearnings evokes a response within the listener and convinces him that the Witness may also be trusted when he speaks about those things which he cannot verify with his own abilities.

- With his own human abilities he can recognise him as the consummate human being and the supreme teacher. But how can he do that without accepting the contents of his teaching? And that brings him to the fact that he said he was the Son of God. And he also said that he was the Mediator between God and man and the Saviour of man. These things man can only believe because he takes the word of the Witness for it. And one of the reasons why he is willing to take his word for what is ultimately beyond

man's ability to verify for himself, is that he is so convincing about what may in fact be verified. The truth that he speaks about earthly things is a reason for believing what he says about heavenly ones.

●What about the mystery?

Shall we ever get rid of the mystery? Shall we ever reach a place where everything is crystal clear? Or shall we always have to admit that it is an inevitable part of reality?

Already in Deuteronomy it is written: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children for ever." (Deut. 29:29) Centuries later Paul declares: "We know in part and we prophesy in part," (1 Cor. 13:9) and "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror. (:12) He looks forward to the day when our knowledge will be complete, but we are not there yet. And any serious thinker has to admit that at times he is overwhelmed by what he does not know.

Undoubtedly the most aggravating problem with which we still have to wrestle, is why there is so much misery in the world. The theologian Heinz Zahrnt says the problem of suffering is the objection which influences most people against Christianity in our present day. (*Warum*, p.304) F.R.Barry agrees with him, "The most obstinate and indeed the ultimate obstacle to belief in God and Christianity is the presence and the destructive power of evil, in the world and in the lives of men." (p. 107) Undoubtedly it is also the greatest mystery to those who believe in him. "If there is a God who is both loving and omnipotent, why is there so much suffering on earth?" they wonder. It is the problem which already exercised the mind of Job. His friends offered a facile answer: suffering is a punishment for sin. (This was also evidently in the mind of people in the time of Jesus, like those mentioned in Luke 13:4 who imagined that the tower of Siloam had chosen the worst sinners to fall on. His disciples also asked him whether a certain blind man's affliction was the result of his own sins or of those of his parents. (John 9:2)) The result of the view of Job's friends, Zahrnt points out, is that people will serve God merely for the sake of the benefits that might accrue to them. In contrast to them Job's faith and devotion may be described as "religion of reality" (*des wahren Seins*.) What troubled him most was not his terrible suffering, but the fact that he found no meaning in it. For him religion was not a blissful emotion, but the clarification of the world by God, whatever it may lead to. When he realised that the universe cannot be controlled by man, he committed himself unconditionally to God. The prophetic summit appears in Job 19:25,26: "I know that my Redeemer

lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.” (We may add :26: “And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God.”) Even in the Old Testament the theme is found that there will eventually be salvation from suffering. God is a fellow-sufferer who stands with man in his suffering and wants to bring it to a good end. For the cause of suffering, says the author, he is unable to give a theological explanation. It behoves Christians to speak humbly about the hidden things of God, and not as if they possess all the knowledge. But since God stands with man in his suffering, we should also stand with others in theirs, rather than fret about the origin of suffering. ^(p.304 et seqq.)

Job had to cope with two afflictions simultaneously: his aggravating skin disease and the mystery why God allowed it. His friends had neither. What is remarkable about Job, is that his question was never answered, and that he yet appears to have been satisfied. The reader is told about the wager between God and the devil, when the latter intimated that Job’s devotion was merely motivated by the desire to receive earthly benefits. But Job receives no explanation of his suffering. What he does receive, is a revelation of the majesty and wisdom of God, by referring him to the celestial bodies and the animals. We are not told exactly which thoughts passed through Job’s mind before he reached his ultimate conclusion, but I want to guess that it might have been somewhat as follows: “God asked me where I was when he laid the earth’s foundations. ^(38:4) Indeed, where was I? What do I know about the reason why he even made the earth, quite apart from the question how he planned it and how he made it? The same applies to the animals: why are there so many kinds, how did he design them, and how did he cause them to be brought forth by the earth? As far as I am concerned, I evidently need the sun, and maybe the moon, but all the other stars appear redundant. And I do not need crocodiles and hippos, leave alone snakes and scorpions. But God knows the answers to all these questions, and it is enough for me that they form part of his plan. And now about all the misfortunes that have befallen me: does the same not apply there? Is it not enough to know that God is in control?”

Chesterton calls the book of Job “one of the colossal corner-stones of the world” comparable to the Iliad and Greek tragedies. “Indeed the Book of Job avowedly only answers mystery with mystery. Job is comforted with riddles; but he is comforted.” ^(p.113)

In the end we may have to agree with Barry that “to ask about the origin of evil is probably asking a question that cannot be answered.” ^(p.119) Although we may not hope ever to solve the problem of suffering and

evil, there is one consideration which is worth our attention. According to the biblical account, God did not create evil, but he left open the possibility of its entrance into his creation. It depended on man whether he wanted to have the knowledge of good and evil. Could God not have created him in such a way that he had no desire for it? Undoubtedly he could, but what would have been the difference between man and the animals if he did? As C.S.Lewis would say, the fall of man was the price God paid for creating a being with a free will. And at a very early stage God told Cain, “Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”
(Gen.4:7) Had there been no possibility of sin, there could have been no mastery of it, and man would not have been the exalted creature that he is. He would have been little different from the animals.

There are many indications that human suffering does not please God. Jeremiah remarks: “For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.” (Lam. 3:33) He also says, “Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore my heart yearns for him, I have great compassion for him,’ declares the Lord.” (Jer. 31:20)

Jesus gave no formula to get rid of all the problems, including the one of suffering. But, as we noted before, it was not he who brought the problem. Even if he had never come, or if we refuse to believe in him, we would still be forced to recognise a Designer, and we would still wonder why he did not exclude suffering from his creation. The mystery would remain. Like Job, whose question was never answered but who was satisfied nonetheless, the followers of the Witness arrive at a place where they have to trust that God alone knows the answer, but where they are given a task to perform. In the case of Job it was to pray for his friends. In our own it may include serving them in other ways as well.

One conclusion should be clear: every day that we worry about what we do not understand, is a day lost for concentrating on what has indeed been given to us to master. And as we concentrate on what has been given to us and master more of it, we may find that, although the mystery will always be with us, it becomes less significant and troubles us less.

The followers of the Witness do not receive answers to all their questions. Like Job, they reach a point where they have to admit that there remains a mystery. But if they reflect on their own deepest need and they listen to his voice, they find themselves in last analysis confronted with a choice between death and life. And they can only choose life.

The Witness said those who believe in him have eternal life. But what

does it mean to believe in him? It obviously includes trusting and obeying him. And it also includes accepting the gift of eternal life which he brought from ultimate reality and for which he laid down his own life.

How does one accept a gift like that? There is no standard formula to impress him who looks at the heart. Obviously words will be used in prayer, and one person might help another to find an appropriate expression. But the most obvious way to accept a gift like this is by heartily and sincerely thanking the Giver, not only with words but with the entire life. For if anyone believes that the Witness is truly what he claims to be, it would be entirely incongruous to follow him with half a heart.

If anyone experiences a desire to come to him, there can be no greater encouragement than the fact that this longing is mutual. The image of God presented in the Bible is not that of a detached Potentate who has indeed made an offer to man to come to him, but who does not care much about the reaction to his invitation. We see him as the father who runs to meet the prodigal son while he is yet far away, who goes to seek the lost sheep, who weeps over Jerusalem who will not allow him to gather her children like chickens. There is joy in heaven when one sinner is converted. And it is he who sends out his servants with the message: "Everything is ready: come to the wedding."

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Comment will be appreciated. You are welcome to make unaltered

printouts for other interested people. Follow-up material is a possibility. It is envisaged that the bibliography will be completed.
? Abraham Kriel 2011

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