

THE CHRISTIAN AND
THE SPIRIT DIMENSION

James C Davidson

the Christian and the Spirit Dimension

Also by James C Davidson:

*This Happy Gift of Tongues Hearing God
Revelation - simply*

Biography
a Bairn's War – 1939-45

James C Davidson

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Chapter One - "...seen a ghost..."

"I've seen a ghost!" said my visitor. It was evening – we were in the staff-room of a primary school. I was a Local Authority councillor, and this was my monthly Councillor's Surgery. "So," I thought, since people came to me with

Council problems, 'what is it this time? Is he in a council house and complaining about ghosts because he wants transferred to a more desirable house?' I've known of other councillors having constituents with that problem. But no, it wasn't that.

“It was in my granny's house. One night we saw the figure of an old woman cross the bedroom floor and poke the fireplace, but there was no fire there, never had been as far as I know. Then the figure disappeared before our very eyes. Nobody slept in that room again...”

“And how can the council help?” I asked, intrigued.

But he disappointed me. He dropped the subject and went on to complain about children running through his garden.

Although that constituent came to see me a number of times over the years he never mentioned ghosts to me again, and I never learnt why he raised the subject on that occasion. But his encounter with his “ghost” set me thinking, because I've had experiences over the years with what may be described as the Spirit Dimension. And I've heard of others having similar experiences too.

So I decided to explore the subject of ghosts and poltergeists, and evil spirits and time-slips and Out of Body Experiences and other non-rational, non-physical phenomena that seem to conflict with our rational, every day, material world. And because I'm a Christian I wanted to know how the supernatural or spirit dimension interfaces with religion. And with Christianity in particular. This book grew from that decision.

One outcome of my decision was that I became even more convinced that if man were only a physical being in a purely material universe, he would have no significance. The length of time mankind has been on planet earth is so minute compared to the age of this planet. And this planet is merely another small speck circling a sun which itself is but a small light in the Milky Way, while the Milky Way itself is an inconspicuous galaxy amongst the uncountable host of galaxies swirling in the observable universe. It would be true to say that a purely physical man with his age limit of three score years and ten or thereabout is a very insignificant entity in an unimaginably big universe.

It is man's spiritual nature and the reality of the spiritual dimension that gives man significance.

This book presents evidence for the reality of the spirit dimension in the experience of mankind, and places it within the context of the Christian faith. In Jesus Christ, men and women who are out of touch with God become spiritually alive and live in two dimensions, the physical dimension in thrall to time, and in the spirit dimension, experiencing eternal life that does not die. (1)

While seeking an analogy of our relationship with the spirit dimension, I remembered an experience I had from my days as a councillor. It began when neighbors fell out over the legal implications of when is a fence not a fence and a group of councillors visited the site to make a decision based on planning law.

The object under scrutiny was a small wooden structure ten inches high separating a lawn from the pavement. We stood around the “fence” listening to the arguments for and against it, and without thinking, I lifted my foot over it so now I was standing with one foot on private property, the lawn – and the other on public property, the pavement. And it occurred to me that I was, as it were, in two dimensions at the same time: the private and the public dimensions. And that summed up for me the human situation: we are in the physical dimension of our body and this world and all things material, but at the same time we also have a spirit side to our natures and have the potential to interact with it.

Unfortunately, I've forgotten what we decided about the ten-inch high “fence”.

This book examines evidence that we live simultaneously in both the material dimension and the spirit dimension. And I came to believe that a large part of the crazy mixed-up condition of Western society today is caused by man not having a healthy relationship with the spiritual side to his nature, and because he denies the need for religion. But that came later.

So, to start with, what is religion all about – where did it come from? Some say that religion is man's attempt to come to terms with dying, the promise of a “better hereafter” so there's no need to be afraid of dying, because dying happens to us all. The skeptic would say that death is portrayed as a gateway to whatever paradise the devotee believed in. Another claim – once more popular than it is today – is that religion is the opiate of the masses, a belief designed to deaden the under-classes to the pain of their present miserable existence. According to it, religion promised something better to come after we leave this life, an afterdeath existence where all the injustices of life are put right. This portrayed religion as a political-economic invention. I agreed with this view of religion in

my teenage years but it withered away during my RAF National Service in Egypt's Canal Zone where my disillusionment with the way Marxism translated into contemporary life and a few bullets flying around from unfriendly locals encouraged me to check on this religion business to see if there was anything in it after all.

Or perhaps religion is man's response to an environment which he doesn't understand; sometimes it is pleasant and benevolent, other times capricious and cruel, and perhaps there are ways to control or influence it, even if it involves throwing a teenage virgin into the fiery maw of a volcano that is threatening to blow one's world apart. And at the beginning, this was magic, man attempting to control his environment by the right incantation or procedure. And as the attempts to coerce or control nature often did not work out as hoped, then a more placatory approach developed ... that evolved into religion in which the tribe's magician became the tribe's priest, and people tried to please an important being such as the force or spirit of the tree or river or mountain or the moon or the sun, or a personified being who was like a human being but more powerful than any human being had ever been. But the clever people who give that as an explanation for the beginning of religion can't agree on whether magic preceded religion, or if it was the other way round, or if magic and religion developed simultaneously.

However, I felt the need for a more personally satisfying, less cerebral, experience of religion. I remember at one time standing on the beach at Port Said, Egypt, and looking at the coastline curving away to the north-east and wondering if in Israel there was an answer to be found. I even considered asking when my two years in the RAF were completed if I could be 'demobbed' in Israel. But it was a passing thought and would have been impossible anyway, apart from probably causing a riot with my parents and family back in Scotland.

My journey from atheism to Christianity owes something to a book by Quentin Hogg, later Lord Hailsham, which I bought in the YMCA book-shop of the military base at Ismailia, (it may have been called: "The Case for Conservatism") and my own imagined brush with a fatal illness when back in 'Civvy Street'. It's strange to think that with my left wing sympathies, my buying a book written by a leading Conservative motivated probably by my political curiosity, should influence me away from atheism towards Christianity. But whatever started me on my religious journey, I eventually found a personal faith and became a committed Christian.

And perhaps because of my former atheism, along with my faith, I also had a determination to explore my new life in Christ to its limits. And that perhaps explains why I found it comfortable to explore the spirit dimension from the perspective of Christianity.

So what about this spirit dimension? The Bible tells us that man has a spirit side to his nature. God created man as both a physical and spiritual being. Physically, we have the substance of the cosmos in our bodies, the stuff of stars. According to astrophysicist Andrew MacFadyen: “The iron in our blood comes from supernovas. There's a direct connection between the stars and us.” (2) Or as the Bible puts it: “the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground.”(3) Then God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” The Bible says man is different from the animals because man was created in the image of God, (4) part of which is that man has a spirit side to his nature. And this was amplified throughout the Bible and arguably most clearly spelled out in the closing words of the apostle Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians where he prays for his readers' “whole spirit, soul and body” to be kept blameless at the coming again of Jesus Christ. (5)

In general, mankind has always longed to have some kind of relationship with whatever he regards as god, because the spirit part of him made in the image of God is hungry for fulfilment. As an early Christian, Saint Augustine, described it: “you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” (6) So while religions are the efforts of man to find God, the Bible is the record of God taking the initiative to find man. The Bible, from first page to last, is a testimony to the reality of the spirit dimension.

There is also a great amount of evidence for the reality of the spirit dimension based on its interaction with the material world, both from history and from recent times, evidence that the spirit dimension is actively intruding into everyday life. Some aspects of the spirit dimension are welcomed by Christians and followers of other religions, but some other intrusions are questionable, while others are to be condemned and left severely alone. The reality of the spirit dimension has been proven by its interaction with our everyday world, especially because so many have experienced it in one way or another. This book will examine some of that evidence.

We're going to look now at a phenomenon that suggests strong proof for the reality of the spirit dimension, although I had never thought about it before a

book I'd bought from a Book Club sparked a conversation on the subject while on a train to a Local Government meeting in Edinburgh.

References:

- 1) John 3:16 and John 11: 25
- 2) National Geographic magazine, March, 2007
- 3) Genesis 2: 7
- 4) Genesis 1: 26
- 5) 1 Thessalonians 5: 23
- 6) Confessions I.I

Chapter Two - “NDEs and OBEs”

I was on a train to Edinburgh and to while away the journey - after I'd re-read my committee papers - I started on a book by Carol Zaleski – “Otherworld Journeys – Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times” (1). I'd been intrigued by the title when I saw it in a Book Club I sometimes used. So there I was reading and making notes and occasionally chatting with a Christian I knew from church. My travelling companion, I'll call him Jack, not his real name, saw my book and commented: “My wife had one of those experiences when she was having our second daughter. An out of body experience.”

So he told me about it. Mrs “Jack” was in the labour ward when it happened. As far as she understood her situation she was not in any danger of dying, when she suddenly found herself up near the ceiling of the ward and looking down at herself on the bed and the nurses around her. She had no pain or discomfort, no fear, just a sense of surprise and wonder. How did she get up here? That was her unusual experience – not so much a Near Death Experience – as an Out of Body Experience - looking at herself from above. Then suddenly she was back in her body, and feeling pain and wanting to have the birth over and done with. It was some time before she told her husband about it. She was always reluctant to mention it because she couldn't explain what had happened to her, though it made her more convinced than ever that there was another existence apart from the life in this body.

That was the journey to Edinburgh. And on the homeward journey in the evening, I was sitting with a colleague in local government. He saw my book, and the subject came up again – Near Death Experiences.

“You remember that time I was in hospital having the triple by-pass, Jim” he

began. I remembered it well because I had managed to talk my way into the Intensive Care Unit to see him on the evening after his operation. They were allowing only close relatives in to visit and I wasn't a relative. And when I saw him I thought he was at death's door with all those tubes coming out of him.

"Well," he said, "I had one of those Near Death Experiences during the operation."

So he told me: "During the operation, with them working on my chest, I wakened and sat upright on the operating table. I saw everything they were doing – the surgeon was using a semi-circular needle sewing me up – then someone slammed my head back down on the table and put a mask over me – more anaesthetic. Then a strange thing happened. I saw a round opening, like a window, and I was looking down through it at my operation. I was up above yet I was looking down at myself. And as I looked, the opening grew smaller and smaller, narrowing to a small point of light.

I didn't feel afraid – I didn't feel anything, except disappointment because I thought I was going to die and I wouldn't be able to tell my thirteen year old son about my experience."

"My son had recently seen a film called Flat Liners about dying," he continued, "and I wanted to tell him about this. As I was thinking of him, the opening grew smaller and finally vanished in darkness. I woke up in the recovery room."

He went on: "I had a lump on the back of my head where they had forced me back down on the operating table. I've told one or two people about my experience including the senior anaesthetist who came to see me afterwards. But it's not something you go around telling others. They'd never understand or believe it."

I was surprised to learn that the Near Death Experience –NDE – and the Out of Body Experience – OBE – were not so unusual or as rare as I had imagined – judging by what my travelling companions told me. It was only a few months earlier I had first heard of NDEs and OBEs, and that was on a TV documentary programme which I happened to record though I didn't get the opening credits of the programme or the time or date of it – probably sometime late in 2002. I've still got that video.

Since then, I've found more on the web-site of The International Association for

Near-Death Studies, Inc of PO Box 502, East Windsor Hill, CT 06028, USA. And the Christian Research Institute, PO Box 500-TC, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92693, USA. Both provided more information on NDEs. And I've since learned that in some book stores there are whole sections devoted to NDEs. It's a popular topic and I had never heard of it before.

So what about NDEs? First, we ask: what is an NDE? What are the kinds of things that happen and are usually found in them?

Then secondly: Are NDEs common or rare? Under what circumstances do they happen?

Do we know what causes NDEs?

And finally, why have a chapter on the Near Death Experience in this book?

What is an NDE?

The following information I received from the Christian Medical Fellowship web-site for 1997. Dr Peter Fenwick, a consultant neuropsychiatrist at the Maudsley Hospital in England, collected over 300 accounts of NDEs, and listed the features they had in common as:

- A feeling of overwhelming peace, joy and absence of pain
- An out of body experience, floating near the ceiling and able to observe what was happening down below
- Entering darkness, usually a tunnel, and passing along it effortlessly towards a point of light
- A brilliant light that draws the individual towards it
- Meeting a being of light, and a feeling of warmth and overwhelming love
- Sometimes a life review, or a weighing up of past actions
- Occasionally there are appearances of dead relatives
- Encountering a barrier which cannot be passed
- And finally, despite wishing to remain in the blissful experience, being unable to pass the barrier and having to return to this life, often to complete unfinished business, or because loved ones back home needed them.

Here is a fairly typical NDE as told by Mollie E., taken from the internet:

“I had just miscarried with twins at about 4 months and I was operated on to clean the womb out when I came out of the anaesthetic, I was in terrible agony.

Something was pressing against something inside me and I was screaming in

agony.

I could not get anyone's attention, eventually, they came running and hooked up machines to monitor my vitals, the doctors and nurses finally started to operate on me on the bed in the ward. The pain was killing me. I must have gone into shock and my blood pressure was zero and pulse had stopped or was too weak to monitor, when I found myself rising up out of my body.

I looked down and could see the doctors and nurses continuing to work on me on the bed. I knew I was dead, and I could see the bright yellow light at the end of a tunnel, it felt absolutely wonderful, so peaceful, there was no pain only joy and expectation. I recall looking at my body and thinking "I'm not going back into that awful low life thing."

Just as I was going towards the light and leaving the hospital ceiling, a lovely woman's voice said "What about Julie?" Julie was my 4 year old daughter and I had forgotten all about her in my quest to get to the light."

Molly E. was then returned to her body and when she recovered, she told nurses and anyone who would listen to her of her Out of Body experience. She never again had any fear of dying.

Recently, NDEs came up in conversation with a few relatives when one of our number, who had nearly died some years previously during a major operation... (her heart had stopped and it had been difficult to resuscitate her)... suddenly said, quite naturally as if it were a common-place occurrence: "That was something like I had in my operation when they had to bring me back. I remember I wakened in a tunnel of light and I could see it going into the distance and then - it was all over and I wakened in the recovery ward."

I had been researching the subject, unaware that a close relative could provide a personal insight into the phenomenon. But to continue...

Are NDEs common or rare?

Dr Fenwick I referred to earlier collected a database of over 300 accounts of patients he met. Studies reported by Fenwick P, and Fenwick E. in *The Truth in the Light* (1995); Greyson B. *NDEs and personal values* (Am J Psych 1983); and by Owens J. *Features of NDE in relation to whether or* and by Owens J. *Features of NDE in relation to whether or* 33% of patients who had nearly died

experienced NDEs. There are reported instances of children younger than age 7 having NDEs.

This is important because children of that tender age do not think of death or that they will die.

There is a history of NDEs from earlier ages, and some Christians from medieval times have reported experiences similar to what people report today. Carol Zaleski includes in her study of NDEs reference to the writings of the sixth century Pope Gregory and the experience of a Christian named Drythelm whose NDE is described by the eighth century Anglo-Saxon monk the Venerable Bede.

Pope Gregory had written Books of Dialogues, and in his Book 4, which dealt with death and life after death, he included anecdotes claiming to be the experiences of people who had died and come back to life again and detailed how it had been in the after-death situation. His third anecdote on this subject relates the experiences of a soldier who had died and come back to life again the following day. He had been separated by a particularly loathsome river from a beautiful land of meadows thronged with people in white. The means of crossing the river was by a bridge, but it could not be crossed by people who had died while yet in sin, and the river had evidence of people who had fallen in. While the overall tenor of the anecdotes is of urging people to make things right with God and to confess their sins before they died, and as such could be said to have a propaganda purpose - in fact, Gregory saw the experiences as mainly of symbolic meaning - nevertheless, there was sufficient detail and authority behind them as to suggest they may have been stories based on real experiences of NDEs.

Another medieval NDE account is given by the Venerable Bede in his history of Christianity in Britain in which he tells of the experience of one Drythelm who “died one evening in AD696 of a severe illness, yet revived in the morning.” Drythelm tells of his experience while being dead, in which he saw a man of shining appearance who led him through a large valley with hail and ice on one side and flames on the other, and of many souls who were tortured by these extremes of experience. Drythelm is guided right through the valley and eventually to a bright meadow filled with happy people. This was a kind of ante-place before reaching heaven which was even brighter and more beautiful. Drythelm’s experience was so realistic to him that when he recovered he gave away all his belongings and went into a monastery where he devoted the

remainder of his life to serving God. Bede always sought for factual evidence in writing his history and the fact that he included the incident of Drythelm in his history suggests that it must have been based on some actual experience, and was not just an imaginary parable.

In seeking to answer if NDEs are rare, or perhaps experienced only by people of a single cultural background, it is interesting to note the research of Dr James McClenon, whose PhD thesis presented at Elizabeth City State University in North Carolina, was based on a comparative analysis of NDEs and Near-Death Folklore in Medieval China and Japan. The Abstract notes “Equivalent primary features (of NDEs) exist in medieval European and Asian folklore accounts.”

Dr McClenon has done further work on NDEs including analysis of eight NDEs from Central Africa which “supports the argument that universal features exist within this experiential form. Respondents described leaving their bodies and journeying to afterlife realms, encountering boundaries, and communicating with spiritual beings.”

Dr McClenon’s writings were accessed on the internet.

Some claim is made for the experience of the Apostle Paul, referred to in 2 Corinthians 12 verses 1 to 4, as being that of an NDE. Here is a report of that experience as translated in the New International Version of the Bible:

“I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know – God knows. And I know that this man – whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows – was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.”

The NIV editor’s note to the above verses includes these words, referring to the Apostle: “he is unsure whether this rapture (being “caught up”) was one that included the body or one that took place in separation from the body.” Bible scholars usually assume Paul speaks of himself having this Out of Body Experience.

Regarding the aspect of NDEs that usually refer to a place of light, it is significant that in the Christian religion, light is always associated with God.

William Barclay, Presbyterian New Testament scholar and teacher commented on Revelation 4 verse 3 – “And he who was seated on the throne was like a jasper stone and a sardian to look at; and there was a rainbow circling the throne, like an emerald to look at.”

Before identifying the precious stones and the kinds of light they reflect, Barclay says: “It is a familiar Bible theme to see God in terms of light.” (2)

The Old Testament identifies God with light. Three of many references are: “... the Lord will be your everlasting light.” (3) And a curious reference from the Psalms, referring to God’s light – “in your light we see the light.” (4) And again, “The Lord will be my light – He will bring me out into the light.” (5)

The New Testament goes beyond this and clearly links God, not only as giving light, but as being light. In the Epistles we read: “God – who lives in unapproachable light – “(6) ... “God ... called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (7) And... “God is light...in him there is no darkness at all.”(8) In the final book of the Bible, in speaking of the Heavenly Jerusalem, it is said that “the city does not need the sun – for the glory of God gives it light.”(9)

These verses identify God with light, and find an echo in items (d) and (e) in Dr Fenwick’s list of common features of NDEs.

d. A brilliant light that draws the individual towards it e. Meeting a being of light, and a feeling of warmth and overwhelming love

Some indication of the incidence of NDEs may be judged from a study by a Denver, USA cardiologist, Fred Schoonmaker, which suggests that 60% of patients who “die” from cardiac arrest will report having a Near Death Experience. His findings, reported in *Anabiosis* (1979) say that out of 2300 cardiac arrest survivors, 1400 reported having had an NDE. Another finding is the Gallup poll of the 15% of Americans who believe they came close to dying, 34% of them reported having had “an ecstatic or visionary” experience.

So it would seem that NDE’s are not so rare. The experiences told me by my two travelling companions on the train between Aberdeen and Edinburgh support that view, backed by the unexpected revelation from a close relative on her NDE.

So what causes the NDE? And here we find a number of explanations by skeptics who reject the NDE being a supernatural experience but seek to explain

it scientifically.

Some Scientific attempts to explain NDEs

There is Carl Sagan's explanation. For him, the NDE is simply the unconscious reliving of the trauma of the birth experience, the tunnel through darkness to the light, the feeling of euphoria, even the white clad or glowing beings out in the light – being the passage down the birth canal and the emergence in to the labour ward with nurses and a doctor waiting to greet the new-born infant.

But this hardly explains the life-review or the weighing up of past actions many NDE's contain. And developmental psychologists tell us that the perception of new-born babies is of a buzzing blooming confusion, hardly the basis for the clear-cut perception reported in many NDEs. Child development theorists include those who say the new-born child is born with unspoken wisdom that develops through exposure to its environment, or that the infant's consciousness comes into being by learning from the experiences of exposure to its environment. There are other child development theories but what they all have in common is that they start with the new-born child having to develop from its initial "innocence of knowledge", and having to develop visual perception after it comes into the world. They do not support Carl Sagan's theory.

Dr Jeffrey P. Long in his contribution on the internet under the title: "NDE Medical Explicability Controversy" dated 1/20/02, commented on the "marked lucidness of the experience." He goes to say that what was common to many NDEs was that the experience was "far more conscious than humanly normal." That aspect of NDEs does not sit well with the NDE being a re-activation of the memory of the experience of being born, the buzzing blooming confusion of the newborn infant.

Other explanations of NDEs that deny they are a spiritual experience come under two general headings: (1) Drug induced hallucinations, and (2) Medical or physiological phenomena.

(1) Drug induced hallucinations

Lysergic Acid (LSD) has been suggested as an explanation because users of LSD often speak of religious or out-of-body experiences under the influence of the drug.

The great majority of the people experiencing NDEs, however, do not use LSD. In addition, the use of LSD often creates highly personal hallucinations, with little in common with other LSD-induced hallucinations, while NDEs are remarkably consistent over age groups, cultures, and even centuries apart. Another point is that people using LSD know that their perception is being distorted, while NDEs speak of very clear, realistic perceptions.

Morphine and heroin can induce a blissful or heavenly experience. Their after-effects are often nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, inability to concentrate and decreased vision, but these symptoms are absent in NDEs. Other recreational drugs have after-effects of paranoia and depression, neither of which occurs after NDEs. The use of anaesthetic drugs such as halothane, surital, nitrous oxide and Nembutal may result in the patient hearing and remembering fragments of conversation while supposedly unconscious, but no claim has ever been made for these drug hallucinations.

The anaesthetic Ketamine has been said to cause out-ofbody experiences, with subjects seeing mirror images of themselves, but these OBEs are usually frightening and not pleasurable, contrasted with the pleasure experienced in many NDEs.

(2) Medical or physiological explanations

Autoscopic Hallucinations can be caused by brain tumors, strokes, or migraines and they consist of being able to see an image of one's self although it is usually only the upper part of the trunk, head and shoulders that is seen. This, however, is very different from the OBEs experiences in NDEs, in which you are not seeing something outside yourself, but you are outside your body and you see your own body, usually lying in bed.

In autoscapy, you are in bed ill and you see a copy or partial copy of yourself at the other side of the room. In NDEs, you are looking down at yourself in the bed.

Endorphins, which are the bodies' natural painkillers are suggested as a possible means of relieving stress or pain, and therefore a blissful experience, but endorphins are never claimed to have caused hallucinations that could be likened to the NDEs.

Depersonalization is a psychological theory that says when facing personal

annihilation the mind creates a transcendental experience to help the organism face its destruction and still feel good about it. But depersonalization is a theory that has never been tested against NDEs, and it does not explain the similarities of the NDEs of people from different ages and cultures. Another attempt to explain NDEs medically is to say they are caused by hypoxia, or lack of oxygen in the brain.

Hypoxia is claimed by some to cause euphoric experiences, but medical studies of people who have had NDEs have reported no lack of oxygen in the blood, so hypoxia was not present.

A well-publicized explanation of NDEs is that of a Bristol University psychologist, Dr Susan Blackmore. She says that the tunnel of light is caused by the retina at the back of the eye becoming starved of oxygen, with nerve cells beginning to fire at random. The fovea which has most visual perception cells continues firing off when the outer cells are closing down, and one is left with a tunnel of light gradually narrowing to a point of light. This explanation is linked to the brain being oxygen starved or a temporal lobe seizure, but these would cause distortion of perception and even a feeling of drunkenness, and that is not the reported experiences of NDEs. They don't feel either distortion of perception or drunkenness.

Dr Blackmore links the oxygen starvation with a release of endorphins, but NDEs have been experienced by people who have not experienced oxygen starvation.

Another aspect of some NDEs is that they may involve not a happy blissful state, but a frightening or "hellish" experience. Maurice Rawlings, a Christian cardiologist, in his book "Beyond Death's Door"(10) says that from his research, about as many frightening as blissful experiences are reported by patients who have had NDEs, some of them encountering demons or Satan and other negative experiences of the afterlife. None of these attempts adequately explain scientifically the NDEs of thousands of people. We are left with no rational explanation for NDEs.

Finally, here are two examples of NDEs that defy all those attempts to explain the NDE experience as drug induced, or of psychological or physical origin.

Two unexplained examples of Near Death Experiences

(a) Pam Reynolds.

Dr Michael Sabom tells of a patient, Pam Reynolds, who had a giant aneurism on the under-side of the brain operated on in Barrow Neurological Institute. To treat the aneurism, the brain had to be in effect killed off. She was completely covered with green surgical cloths, with only a small part of her head uncovered. Yet in her NDE experience, she was above the operation table and she saw the instrument for opening up the skull and said it looked like an electric toothbrush. That surgical tool was shown on TV, and Pam Reynolds' description was verified. She also heard conversations and was able to repeat them later. Yet her ears had plugs in them to record any activity in the brain, so that she would not have been physically able to hear anything. And her brain had been shut down for the operation. Her experience cannot be explained in terms of any of the above proposed explanations of the NDE, and is strong evidence for the separation of the mind from the brain.

(b) Vicki Naratuk

Another NDE experience was that of Vicki Naratuk who was born blind. When asked if all she could see was blackness, she replied that she did not see blackness.

She saw nothing. Sight of anything, including of blackness, was not an experience she had ever had. I saw this lady on TV – and it looked as if her eye-sockets were empty – yet she claimed to have had an NDE, following a car accident. And in her NDE, she was looking down on her body on the bed and saw people working on her.

She saw and recognised her wedding ring, she saw things like the colour of her hair, and heard the medical people discussing her. One thing she remembered was one of the staff saying: “We can’t bring her back.” Then she was outside the hospital, looking down on trees, people, birds – she saw beings of light: “I couldn’t imagine what light was like.” Then she was sent back into her body. She is totally blind, but in her NDE, she could perceive visually. Culture, experience, medical or psychological or drug induced explanations do not explain away the NDEs of Pam and Vicki.

Why is this chapter in this book?

I believe that NDEs are one more proof that man has a spiritual side to his life,

operating in tandem with his physical life. And I believe that this spirit existence is not dependant on his physical brain. The activity of the brain and the awareness of mind are not the same thing. There is something in addition to the brain, something that is aware, something that continues after this physical body ceases to exist.

The Bible speaks of our whole being as composed of body, soul (or mind) and spirit. There are NDEs and OBEs which defy scientific or natural explanation and the reality of these experiences give strong support for the reality of man having a spiritual side to his existence, and thus warrant inclusion in a book on the subject of the spirit dimension.

So let's turn now to the spirit part of man's nature. And we'll focus on a phenomenon experienced by mankind worldwide from many different cultures and religions, and from some who would claim not to be religious.

References:

- 1) Otherworld Journey : Carol Zaleski (1987) Oxford University Press
- 2) The Revelation of John : W. Barclay (1976) Saint Andrew Press
- 3) Isaiah 60: 20
- 4) Psalm 36: 9
- 5) Micah 7: 8 and 9
- 6) 1 Timothy 6: 16
- 7) 1 Peter 2: 9
- 8) 1 John 1: 5
- 9) Revelation 21: 23
- 10) Beyond Death's Door: Maurice Rawlings (1991) New York: Bantam

The internet is a useful source of information on NDEs and OBEs, if used discriminately.

Chapter Three - Mysticism

Mysticism is a result of the spirit side to man's nature. Here are two definitions of mysticism: “Mysticism is to experience intuitive knowledge of transcendent dimensions, beyond the phenomenal or material concrete objects of ordinary perception. The mystic sees things that are not part of ordinary experience.” (1)

And another definition, one from Evelyn Underhill, a well-known Anglican mystic of the 19th and 20th centuries: “Mysticism, according to its historical and psychological definitions, is the direct intuition or experience of God; and a mystic is a person who has, to a greater or less degree, such a direct experience – one whose religion and life are centered, not merely on an accepted belief or

practice, but on that which the person regards as first hand personal knowledge.”

And to bring mysticism into the experience of the everyday man, we have the words of St Augustine of Hippo: “You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

The restlessness of our heart or spirit is the mystical awareness within us of a need for God. A mystical awareness that responds beyond the phenomenal or material concrete objects of ordinary perception, experiences of seeing things that are not part of ordinary experience, the experience of a firsthand personal knowledge by intuition or experience of God – and these experiences are instances of the spirit dimension breaking into the material world of everyday life.

But on the other hand, the skeptic who does not believe in a spirit dimension, who claims that the material existence is all there is to reality, that skeptic would describe these experiences as hallucinations.

A definition of a hallucination would include sensory perception that is not related to any stimuli in the external world – “seeing things” in other words although there is nothing there to see – or hearing, smelling, or touching what “isn’t there” – there being no external stimuli. Such a skeptic may dismiss ghosts as hallucinations or electro-magnetic memory images (whatever that may mean) and poltergeist phenomena as emotional energy centred usually on disturbed teenagers (although such psycho-kinetic energy is not explained) and such-like as tricks of the brain and the eye, or drug-induced. We will consider these phenomena in later chapters. But the one who does not believe in a spiritual dimension to existence has to make personal leaps of ‘faith’ in the suspension of his own critical faculties, so that he can accommodate his so-called rational explanations.

The Christian accepts what is common to man and explains it in the words of St Augustine of Hippo: “you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” St Augustine was referring to an experience common to all mankind.

All of us, from the beginning of time, have been restless until we get in touch with what we consider to be God or whatever term we use – the Great Truth, the

Ground of our Being, the Infinite, or whatever. And that explains the existence of so many religions, because mostly they have been about man seeking God. The religion(s) we find in the Bible – Judaism and Christianity – are the record of God seeking man.

In Biblical religion, God seeks us.

Mysticism has been around from the beginning of the history of religion. At first it was the special attribute of the shaman, perhaps as the trance that allowed him to leave his body and converse with what he believed was the divine spirit. Early traces of mysticism can be found in the mystery religions of the Middle East, spreading west towards the countries bordering the Mediterranean, and east towards India and farther east. In Buddhism, the devotees hope to progress by mystic meditation and self denial, ultimately to the ninth heaven of Nirvana, and in China, mysticism was experienced by followers of Taoism. Mystic shamanism was prevalent in both Australian Aborigines and New Zealand Maoris. Wherever there has been religion, men and women have sought a deeper religious experience.

Sometimes the mystic experience was induced by consuming a sacred plant or mushroom or ergot. Or again, controlled breathing or dancing – for example, the whirling dancing of the Muslim mystics, the Sufis – enabled the seeker after spiritual enlightenment to experience the nearness of the divine and so lose themselves by passing away into God. This desire to become one with God, to lose oneself with God, was sometimes considered blasphemy by orthodox Muslims because a cardinal belief of Muslims is that God is one and there is no one beside God. A Muslim mystic, al Hallaj, was tried and executed in AD 922 because he said that Allah had come to dwell in him.

The whirling dancing of the Sufis may be contrasted with the Ghost Dances of the North American Indians in the late 19th century when a religious revival movement was initiated by Wovoka, a prophet and mystic of the Paiute tribe. The movement's purpose was to unite the Indian tribes to reject the corrosive effect of the white man's culture along with its alcohol and weapons and technology that was threatening to obliterate the culture and beliefs of the Native Americans. The Ghost Dancing was a slow shuffling dance in which both men and women danced, and it could go on for hours, even days, with singing the only musical accompaniment. No musical instruments were used, unlike the normal Indian dancing which was fast and accompanied by rhythmic beating of

drums.

The revival came about following a vision received by Wovoka purporting to show how the Ghost Dance should be performed, along with a revelation of the end days when the white man would be destroyed from the earth following a natural catastrophe. The dead of the Indians would be resurrected and their old ways would be restored.

The Ghost Dance revival ended at the Battle of Wounded Knee when the practitioners of the Ghost Dance believed that by wearing buckskin shirts marked with sacred symbols they would be impervious to the bullets of the white men, and thus fortified, they were emboldened to challenge the white men soldiers. The buckskin shirts offered no protection from bullets, there was a massacre and the new religious movement was crushed. Its memory is still cherished, however, among present day North American Indians.

Javanese society has had a long history of mysticism, firstly in the original animistic religion of the land, then through the influx of Hinduism, and in more recent centuries from Islam. On occasions the mystics have adopted or borrowed from all three religions so nominal Muslims may also retain belief in lower spirits of animals and plants while retaining worship of Allah, as God over all.

But the Javanese mystic whatever his religious background believes that the individual is in touch with the spiritual, and his aim is to experience unity with God.

He will attempt this by prayer, fasting, sleep deprivation and ascetic practices. Mysticism and seeking contact with God is a part of contemporary Indonesian life.

In recent days, a Minister of Religious Affairs instigated a treasure hunt at a protected heritage site in West Java because he was told by a psychic that great wealth was buried there, sufficient to clear the country's total foreign debt, many billions of dollars-worth. At the time of writing there is no word yet of the treasure having been found.

Mystics are of different backgrounds and cultures and religions or of none at all. It is not easy to identify the context of the alleged mystical experience of John Lennon of the Beatle's music group. While most mystics followed religious or semi-religious rituals in their efforts to get in touch with God, John Lennon is

believed to have started his mystic quest through the use of hallucinogenic drugs believing they had opened up to him a view of a higher spiritual state. For a while, John Lennon sought guidance from the mystic Maharishi Mahesh Yogi but later appears to have abandoned him as guide to the higher life. Devotees of Lennon claim he had a mystic progression in which he identified with Jesus and cite as evidence the cover of the Beatles' album, Abbey Road, on which Lennon was seen dressed all in white as Jesus is sometimes depicted, and his claim in the early days of their popularity that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus.

The experience of John Lennon suggests a possible division in the description of mystics, by categorizing them according to how they first access the mystic experience. On the one hand, there would be those who seek the mystic experience by special rituals or experiences, such as rhythmic breathing, or the ingesting of hallucinogenic drugs, while on the other hand, there are those who are overtaken by a transcendental experience without actually seeking it.

The first category of mystic experience is in danger of being dismissed as merely hallucination brought on deliberately by artificial means, and may owe little to the direct intervention of the spirit dimension into the material world of the seeker.

The second category may more closely align to a genuine religious experience, in that the individual was neither seeking nor expecting it, and may not even have been aware such an experience was possible. An example of the involuntary spiritual experience may have been that of Saul the Pharisee on the road to Damascus to persecute the Followers of the Way (the early Christians) and which completely changed his life from that time forward. (2)

A significant characteristic of the transcendent experience of the Christian mystic is that while he will feel closer to God and have what he would describe as a personal experience – sometimes as the most real experience he has ever had – he never loses sight of Christ as Son of God, and never confuses the Fatherhood of God with an Infinite Otherness that cannot be described, or the Holy Spirit as a vague Influence linking all creation into a Pantheistic Oneness. In other words, Christian mystics' transcendent experiences of God reflect accepted Christian beliefs. Almost invariably, they are theologically correct. Or to put it another way, it is the awareness of the Christ as Lord and Saviour and the Father-God of the Bible and of the Presence of the Holy Spirit that defines the experience as one of Christian mysticism.

In that sense Christian mystics have the advantage over the Kabbalah mysticism of Judaism that finds difficulty in experiencing a oneness with a Jehovah who is transcendent, with whom even Moses the chosen law-giver was only allowed a back-view of God.(3) Christianity proclaims God the Son who came as a man with the purpose of revealing God to mankind, and fulfilling God's plan of restoring man to oneness with Himself.

In fact, Jesus Christ tells us that God the Father desires to be at one with His followers: "Jesus replied: 'If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'" (4) and in the prayer of Jesus: "I pray also for those who will believe in me ... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us ... I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me." (5)

Against a background of such teaching, Christian mysticism is not only to be expected, but even more, its absence would be remarkable. There have been scores of prominent Christian mystics - a handful of these are referred to here - and innumerable ordinary Christians never considered mystics but who have had mystical experiences. In the New Testament we find Paul the Apostle with his Damascus Road experience and his later being caught up to paradise - "whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know". (6) Another mystic is the writer of the Book of Revelation - Jesus' "servant John" (7) who experienced visions and mystic experiences while "in the Spirit" and recorded them at the command of Jesus. But we can also go outside the pages of the Bible to meet with Christian mystics.

One of the best-known Christian mystics was St Francis of Assisi. He was the son of a wealthy Assisian cloth merchant and his youth was marked by his love of pleasure and excitement, while his parents indulged his every whim. But about twenty years of age, he fell very ill and became aware of how empty his life was. He diverted from pleasureseeking to serving in a military career, but while he was preparing for this, he had a dream in which he saw a hall hung with shields each of which bore a design of the cross. A voice came to him in the dream, saying: "These are for you and your soldiers." Francis thought this meant he would be a great soldier but a second dream sent him home from his intended military career. From then on, Francis began to seek a more meaningful life, a life in which religion increasingly played a part.

Allied to this was a concern for the poor and the outcast. About this time Francis experienced a 'watershed' encounter with a leper. At first the sight of the leper disgusted him, but then he was able to see the suffering human behind the repulsive exterior, so he embraced the man and gave him money. Later, Francis heard a voice while he was praying, commanding him to repair a house that was falling into ruin. He took this to refer to a nearby wayside chapel, the chapel of St Damien's. And from these first tentative steps of service and self-denial, Francis eventually founded what became known as the Franciscan Order. Significant in the life of St Francis is that he did not seek mysticism. Experiences came to him, whether it was during sickness, or in night-time dreams, or during prayer. But they were life-changing, and they led him to turn his back on a worldly and what would have been a wealthy life, to a life of poverty in the service of his fellow-men and of Jesus Christ.

Some three hundred years later, two well-known 16th century Christian mystics are St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross, contemporaries and colleagues, both of whom today would be described as from a Spanish background. As a young girl, Teresa came early to think of God and spiritual things, largely brought about during bouts of illness. She entered a Carmelite Convent and it was after this that she had what has been described as religious visions in which the exterior senses were not involved. These visions were seen as divine initiatives, and strengthened her and eventually led her to found a Carmelite convent. About this time, John de Yepes, son of poor silk weavers, was finding God and committing himself to the service of Jesus Christ. He entered the order of the Carmelites. His devotional life was marked by fellowship with God, and on occasions he received messages about what direction his future service should take. He was invited by Teresa to become director and confessor to the Convent of the Incarnation of which she was the prioress.

Neither he nor Teresa had a trouble-free life and often suffered persecution from fellow-Christians, but both were true to the vision they believed came from God, and both had a significant influence on the development of the devotional life of the convents and monasteries they served. Again, neither Teresa nor John, later known as St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross, actually sought mystic experiences, though they both earnestly sought a closer walk with God.

Some hundred years before St Teresa, a lady of Norwich, England, of whom we know very little, was earnestly seeking to know more of God, seeking to experience the Passion of Christ and to understand God's love for mankind. She

is known only as Julian – family name and background unknown – except that during illness, she received visions of the Passion of Christ. She recovered from her sickness, and began to share the spiritual revelations she had received. Many of these are contained in a book she wrote, *The Revelations of Divine Love*. She is now known only as Lady Julian of Norwich, but the mystic revelations she received helped to focus the thoughts of contemporary and later Christians on God's love and mercy.

The writer and artist, William Blake, (1757-1827) is also recognized as a mystic. As a child, he experienced visions of angels, including that of the Angel Gabriel, and visions of the Virgin Mary. His poetry and art reflected these religious experiences and his humble trade of engraver allowed him to reproduce visions in permanent form for his reader-ship. He was not a significant influence in the development of the Christian church except inasmuch as he brought to the public's attention the concept of religious vision and the mystic experience.

If William Blake was not a major influence on the church of his day, the same cannot be said of our next mystic, Evelyn Underhill, (1875-1941). Michael Ramsey, one-time Archbishop of Canterbury, said of her: "She did more than anyone else to keep the spiritual life alive in Anglicanism in the bewildering years between the wars."

Evelyn Underhill was the daughter of a barrister, and later married a barrister. Early in life she had a hunger for things spiritual and constantly sought in the direction of the Church satisfaction for this need. Her life seems to have been a continual awareness of the presence of the Spirit of God as being God interacting with man, and she wrote of her spiritual search and her awareness of God in various books and articles that made an immediate impact on her generation. For a short time she had looked toward the Church of Rome, but turned from it and found her spiritual home in the Church of England.

Through her writings she was invited by the Anglican Church to conduct spiritual retreats, and she often began these retreats by saying that if we are to grow closer to God we must recognize that God dwells within each one of us. She would quote St John of the Cross who said that "In every soul, even that of the greatest sinner, God lives and substantially dwells." But while God is close to each one of us, for that closeness to become real and actual for us, we must willingly surrender ourselves to God and to the implications of that surrender. A kind of personal "Here am I, Lord, send me," of Isaiah, (8) or the implicit self-

giving to service by Saul on the Road to Damascus when he said: “Who art thou, Lord.” (9)

Evelyn Underhill’s mystic journey may be described in her own words: “as if a hidden directive power, personal, living, free, were working through circumstances and often against our intention or desire, pressing us in a certain direction, and moulding us to a certain design.” (10) She spoke of a great spiritual universe surrounding us of which most of us are not aware, no more aware of it “than the pressure of air on our bodies, or the action of light.” (10) and in commenting on the youthful Francis of Assisi’s search for God, she said: “we realize with amazement what a human creature really is, a finite centre of consciousness which is able to apprehend and long for Infinity.” (10)

In speaking of religious conversions she referred to the transformations of character, manifestations of a lifechanging power, evidence that “a force from beyond the world really breaks in upon the temporal order with disconcerting power.” (10)

An example of this life-changing power was included in a programme that appeared on UK television (11) during which a one-time “hard man” of London’s East End when faced with the imminent breakup of his marriage and the nervous break-down of his wife, brought on by his intemperate life and alcoholism and use of drugs, allowed a former colleague “hard man” but now a Christian to lay hands on his wife for her healing. His first instinct, in his own words, had been: “You lay hands on my wife and I’ll break your arms.”

But he permitted his wife to be prayed for, and the miracle happened. The instantaneous transformation in her brought the husband to his knees and to prayer, asking Jesus Christ to forgive his sins and to change him.

In the early hours of the next morning, while he was still abed, he was wakened from sleep and saw what he thought was a face in a cloudy vision in the corner of his bedroom, and a voice audibly promised him that he would be freed from alcoholism and that “Everything is going to be all right!” And it was so.

He became an enthusiastic member of a local Pentecostal Church. He is a living example of the surprised-by-joy mystic experience of so many everyday Christians, an experience that springs upon them and which entails a surrender of self to God and an about-turn of life to go from then on to live as God directs.

Now if I may be permitted to share with my readership a personal experience. At the time, I had been a Christian for some twenty-five years. From my earliest days as a Dr Billy Graham convert, I had spent time, usually at the beginning of the day, in prayer and reading the Bible. In those early days following my conversion, I was hungry to learn everything possible about Jesus Christ and my new faith. I read every “religious” book I could get my hands on. I borrowed from the local lending library a book about the Oxford Group, written by Frank Buchman. Buchman introduced me to a new idea, that of listening to God, preferably at the beginning of the day, writing down His instructions, then obeying them. So I decided to do that, and the practice had become second nature for me in the succeeding decades although I don’t always write down what I take to be God’s messages. Those early morning prayer-times and Bible study and listening to God had become part of my life and they were my way of getting in tune with Jesus Christ for the day ahead.

So one dark winter’s morning, with the glow of the fire in the fireside dancing on the ceiling, I prayed. I was despondent because there were problems that were getting me down and I could think of no way of dealing with them. And as I prayed, open to whatever God wanted to say to me, I suddenly felt the presence of God. The room was transformed into the ante-room of Heaven, and what were uppermost in my prayers were not my circumstances but the Love of God and the certainty that He was in control. I had the assurance that I was living in the will of God, that the meaning of Romans 8 verse 28 was real in my life: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” That was transcending being a verse in the Bible; it was an experience of the presence of God. And I was perhaps for some thirty minutes - in the words of the hymn writer – “Lost in wonder, love and praise.”

The glow of that experience was more real to me than the glow of the leaping flames on the ceiling, and in that glow I saw everything in a new perspective, God’s perspective. I went forward with joy into the day ahead and to whatever the future held, and traces of that experience remained with me and have never fully left me though it happened many years ago. Was that a mystic experience? I had never thought of the idea of the mystic and mysticism at that time. And I suspect that countless Christians have had similar experiences without thinking of them as being mystical experiences. They are “par for the course”, so to speak.

So what marks out the mystic from the every-day religious devotee? Some assiduously seek the mystic experience and perhaps they find it, but for others, the mystic experience finds them. Are there triggers for the mystic experience? I cannot approve the use of drugs, such as John Lennon is alleged to have used – that is simply an update on the shaman and his ergot - although certain physical or breathing exercises appear to be effective for devotees of Yoga and Sufism. The late Sir Alister Hardy, well-known academic and founder of what is now the Religious Experience Research Centre of the University of Wales, listed twenty-one so-called “triggers” or causes of the mystic experience after questioning over 3,000 people who claimed to have had mystic experiences.

The most common ‘trigger’ was depression or despair. Second most-common cause was prayer and meditation, and followed in descending order by seeing natural beauty, then taking part in religious worship.

There were seventeen other less common ‘triggers’ in descending order of frequency but whatever the cause of the experience, some mystical aspects were common to all the participants. The pervasiveness of the mystic experience does give added weight to the statement of Augustine of Hippo at the beginning of this chapter: “You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

Man’s mystic experiences, from different cultural and religious back-grounds, give added proof to the existence of the spirit dimension that surrounds us and to which the spirit side of man’s own nature instinctively aspires. But when we remember that the Christian is someone made spiritually alive by the Holy Spirit and in whom dwells Jesus Christ the Son of God, then so-called mystic experiences are not to be a source of surprise but to be accepted as the natural interactions of a child with his Father. In fact, what would be surprising would be if Christians did not have mystical experiences.

There are other spirit dimension phenomena the Christian may encounter and next we’ll look at one of these that Jean and I experienced in Hong Kong . . .

References:

- 1) The free on-line encyclopaedia – Wikipedia
- 2) Acts 9: 3 - 8
- 3) Exodus 33: 23
- 4) John 14: 23
- 5) John 17: 20-23

- 6) 2 Corinthians 12: 1f
- 7) Revelation 1: 1f
- 8) Isaiah 6: 8
- 9) Acts 9: 5
- 10) "The Spiritual Life" Evelyn Underhill
- 11) "Don't get me started" UK Channel 5 TV documentary, 7.15pm Tuesday, 13/September/05

Some items of information in this chapter were collected from internet websites.

Chapter Four - Poltergeists

It was a warm Hong Kong evening in 1978, sometime after ten o'clock. Jean and I arrived back at the Salvation Army centre in Kowloon where we were responsible for a number of activities that included a Thrift Store, in addition to my post of Supervisor of S.A. schools in Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories. We had been at an inter-church prayer meeting. We lived on the second floor and to reach our flat went along the veranda at the front of the building, passing the Thrift Store that opened on to the veranda.

As we passed the Store, its door began to shake as if someone inside it were desperately trying to get out. But if someone for some inexplicable reason were inside at that time of night, all they had to do was turn the latch on the Yale lock and the door would open. We were surprised, halted in our tracks. What was this? The door was now noisily banging and threatening to burst open. So I called out – "Who's in there? What's wrong?" But there was no reply, just the door thrusting wildly. Jean and I conferred, and we reached a decision: I called out loudly: "In the Name of Jesus Christ, I command you to stop!" And it stopped.

Then I unlocked the door – I usually carried keys for the Store with other keys – and we went in. The place was warm, still, airless – all the windows were tightly shut – and in darkness. We switched on the lights and searched the Store from end to end but there was no one there. But what was there were Chinese images of demons and spirit-beings that had come in that afternoon as part of a lorry-load of goods.

So Jean and I prayed for Jesus Christ to protect and cleanse the Store from any alien spirit influence. Then we took the images of demons and dumped them in waste bins in the compound at the back of the Centre. We told no one at the Centre of our experience and to our best knowledge there were no more disturbances in the Thrift Store.

So what was it all about? We don't know, but this may be an appropriate place to introduce the subject of Poltergeists. A Poltergeist – the word is from the German for “noisy ghost” – is defined in the Concise Oxford Dictionary as “a noisy mischievous ghost, especially one manifesting itself by moving physical objects.” Poltergeist activity has been around for a long time. The *Annales Fuldenses* (circa 858AD) has the first recorded instance of poltergeist activity. It tells of how a farmer and his family near Bingen on the Rhine were plagued by a poltergeist. Stones were thrown, walls vibrated, fires combusted, crops were burnt and voices accused the farmer of having sex with the daughter of one of his employees. The poltergeist followed the farmer wherever he went so that he was no longer welcome at the homes of neighbors.

Slightly more recent, by a few hundred years, is the account by a monk called Gerald who wrote “The Journey Through Wales” towards the end of the twelfth century. He is quoted in “Borderlands” by Mike Dash. (1)

“In these parts of Pembroke, in our own times, unclean spirits have been in close communication with human beings.” Then it goes on – “they have been in the habit of manifesting themselves, throwing refuse all over the place, more keen perhaps to be a nuisance than to do any real harm... a cause of annoyance to both host and guests alike, ripping up their clothes of linen, and their woollen ones too, and even cutting holes in them. No matter what precautions were taken, there seemed to be no way of protecting these garments, not even if the doors were kept bolted and barred.”

Among the many recorded instances of poltergeist activity is the well-known and meticulously documented case of the Epworth Poltergeist that has never been satisfactorily explained. The events happened towards the end of 1716 in the Wesley family home, the parsonage in Epworth, England, the house in which the well-known brothers, John and Charles Wesley, were born. (2)

Mrs Wesley kept notes of the happenings that were heard and witnessed by all members of the family – the sounds of feet walking about the house, someone groaning, glass being broken and bags of coins dropped on the floor, although no glass and coins were involved. It was all sounds, but heard by many and these sounds happened for some weeks. The poltergeist activities eventually stopped and no satisfactory explanation was ever forthcoming.

A more up-to-date and more famous poltergeist was one that manifested itself in

Enfield, England (2), from August 1977 to April 1979. It was investigated and witnessed by the Society for Psychical Research and by the police. On one occasion, a Woman Police Constable Carolyn Heeps witnessed a chair moving some four feet towards a kitchen door with no obvious human aid. The police eventually decided to discontinue their investigations but promised “to keep an eye on the house”. Things flew around in that house, sounds and various voices were heard, and Janet Harper, a young girl, who was thought to be the focus of the poltergeist activity, was recorded on camera levitating.

Another poltergeist was named “Fred” by the family he appeared to adopt for a while in Pontefract, England, (2) between August 1966 and the summer of 1969.

There is a long list of what “Fred” – also known as “Mr Nobody” – did. His misbehaviors included noises and speaking with different voices, grabbing someone and leaving marks on her throat, and hiding a white mohair coat under a pile of coal (and the coat didn’t have a mark on it when uncovered – which sounds a bit far-fetched). “Fred” was responsible for dozens of completely unexplained phenomena, mostly of a nuisance nature – such as a mattress thrown off a bed while the witness was lying on it – green foam from taps when they were turned on – and so on. A bus driver who was driving his coach past the house on one occasion had just pointed out the house to his passengers and said: “That’s the haunted house!” when his bus abruptly stopped, apparently of its own volition. Other unexplained phenomena included a strange glow around the house at night, a glow that was seen by a number of witnesses.

A well-documented case of poltergeist activity is that connected with an 11-year-old girl in Sauchie, a Scottish village of just over 3,000 population. Virginia Campbell was staying for a short visit at her brother Thomas' house while her parents were away and as she prepared for bed in the evening of 22 November, 1960 she was frightened by large knocking noises in her bedroom. Her brother and his wife played down her fears and sent her back to bed but when the noises started up again they also heard them. Thomas said they were like the sound of a heavy ball being thrown on the floor.

Early evening next day, while Virginia was sitting in her chair, a sideboard leaned over near her about five inches from the vertical then slowly returned to its upright position. In addition to Virginia, Thomas and his wife also witnessed this event.

Over the next few weeks, local doctors, a church minister and a school-teacher also witnessed the strange activities. The apparent poltergeist activities followed Virginia to school and on one occasion, her teacher, Margaret Stewart, was annoyed that Virginia was not joining in the silent reading of the class and appeared to be fiddling with her desk top. But on Ms Stewart's investigation she discovered that Virginia was in effect trying to hold down her desk lid which was being forced open and up from within. There were more instances of poltergeist activity, both at school and in her home, and it was now being widely reported in the media of the time, but the activities finally ceased some three months later at the end of January, 1961. That there was strange apparently inexplicable activity is not doubted because too many credible witnesses saw it, and also it was obviously centered on Virginia. What was causing the activity has been disputed. That it was caused by human intervention, faking, in other words – has been ruled out by serious investigators such as A.R.G. Owens of Cambridge who said: “In my opinion the Sauchie case must be regarded as establishing beyond all reasonable doubt the objective reality of some poltergeist phenomena.” Dr Owens went on to say: “There is no evidence indicating the separate existence of 'the poltergeist' as a discarnate entity. The phenomena are consistent with production by forces emanating from the child or else resident in space – and 'triggered off' by some influence emanating from her.”(3) There have been many other cases of poltergeist activity that were investigated by serious academics, but usually, whoever studies such happenings begins from an already fixed viewpoint – either that the poltergeist is a spirit entity or elemental, or that the causes of the activities are linked to the emotional state of the HAP or human agent poltergeist and involves laws of physical science that are not yet understood.

We'll look at two more cases that were fully investigated.

The first has been called the Miami Poltergeist and centers on a 19-year-old Cuban refugee, Julio Vasquez. The novelty gift shop where he worked became the scene in December, 1966, of an inexplicable rise in the number of broken beer mugs, glasses, ash-trays, and so on. The staff were near panicking after a few weeks of witnessing articles of the shop's ware flying off shelves at impossible angles and smashing on the floor. Whatever was causing the rise in number of breakages, it was obviously not of human origin, although the disturbances always happened when Julio was nearby, and never happened when he was absent.

Police were called in and an investigation took place. Internationally renowned

parapsychologist Dr J G Pratt of Duke University and staff counted some 224 paranormal events, and tests suggested that the force that was causing the objects to fly around did not follow the expected laws of electromagnetism. And another puzzling aspect of the incidents was that the energy or whatever was moving the objects seemed to be more powerful when Julio's back was to the objects. But the parapsychological experts who examined Julio and studied the phenomena at first hand concluded that while fraud was not involved, nevertheless there was a human component to the happenings. This was largely based on the incidents taking place only when Julio was present, and when he left the business, the incidents stopped.

Julio was suffering emotional stress at the time – his step-mother wanted him to leave the family home and he was unhappy at work and did not like his employers.

Another leading American parapsychologist, William G Roll, studied at first hand the poltergeist activity surrounding Julio and found he conformed to significant traits of the psychological profile of the HAP – human agent poltergeist. Julio was later arrested for stealing a ring from a jewellery shop, was jailed, and when released, found work in a petrol station, was shot in an armed raid on the garage, and was unable to work afterwards at heavy labor. Although he was offered money if he would submit to further parapsychological tests he refused because he did not want to become a guinea-pig for scientists. What is indisputable about the Miami Poltergeist occurrences is that there was no human instigated fraud involved in the phenomena but that they were centered somehow on a nineteen-year-old teenager.

A final example of poltergeist activities to choose from the many hundreds of recorded instances is the Rosenheim Poltergeist, because it is one of the most investigated. In 1967, Annemarie Schneider was an eighteen-year-old secretary in the law office of Sigmund Adams in the Bavarian town of Rosenheim. When she was in the office, phones would ring when no one was calling, even when the phones were switched off, thousands of calls were made from the office without human intervention, for a while five calls were being made a minute to the automatic clock that speaks the correct time, light bulbs burst, others detached from their holders, there were rappings and other noises, cabinets and heavy furniture moved of their own volition. Electrical firm Siemens investigated and found nothing wrong with electrical equipment. Police, engineers, journalists and finally parapsychologists, investigated and found no

fraud was involved but that somehow, Annemarie was the focus of the disturbances. During the time Annemarie was working away from the office there were no poltergeist happenings but they did recommence at her new place of work but on a lesser scale, and eventually they died out. Again, this was a poltergeist incident that defied explanation unless one involved a theory of the interaction of the mental state of the HAP with theoretical physical laws that had not yet been scientifically identified or explained, or contact with a spirit dimension.

In effect, the materialist proposed a theory that had not been proven scientifically, in preference to accepting the explanation that forces of a spirit nature were involved.

It was a case of making up one's mind beforehand that there was no spirit dimension involved in poltergeist happenings, and proposing a possible physical law to explain these happenings without having any scientific evidence to back up the newly hypothesized physical law.

Here are three proposed causes of poltergeist phenomena. First is the possibility of human fraud; in other words, the so-called poltergeist activities are purely of human origin. And there is no doubt that some so-called 'poltergeist' activities are simply caused by humans. One instance that comes to mind was of a young girl discovered climbing out of her bedroom window during the night to perform poltergeist rappings in another part of the family home. She had for some time created a state of alarm within her family by her nocturnal activities. In the UK, officials from public housing estates occasionally encounter "fraudulent" poltergeist activities in houses where the tenants want a transfer to a more desirable house or district. To support the fraud hypothesis, the senior official of a public housing estate quoted statistics showing that while local authorities provide houses for 32 per cent of families in the United Kingdom, it was that 32 per cent of families that provided 86 per cent of poltergeist cases throughout the country.⁽¹⁾ Most of the foci of poltergeist activities were in families who had only recently moved into their new homes. These could be frauds, enacted in order to get a transfer to a more desirable house or neighbourhood. Or it could be genuine instances of "poltergeist" phenomena where a family undergoing emotional stress is finding it difficult to settle into a new district, for whom the stress then sparks off the "psychokinetic" activity. Or perhaps it was that the emotional state of the individual makes him an easy target for psychic interference, assuming that is, these disturbances are caused by spirit entities.

However, the “Enfield Poltergeist”, “Fred of Pontefract”, Virginia Campbell of Sauchie, and the Miami and Rosenheim Poltergeists were rigorously studied both by skeptics and those who believed in a spirit dimension, and activities were witnessed by many people including the police and others less easily persuaded by anything purporting to be of a supernatural origin, and in each of these, human fraud was completely ruled out.

So we are left with two possible explanations: first that an as yet undiscovered law of physics not too distanced from the law of electro-magnetism, may be involved, a law that in some way is tapped into involuntarily by people in an emotionally vulnerable state, especially by teenagers.

Support for this hypothesis, which we may call the HAP (human agent poltergeist) theory, may be found in the pages of the Journal of the Society for Psychical Research (1974, p.434): from an article entitled “Psychotherapy and the Poltergeist” by the late Scott Rogo: “The evidence suggests that during a disturbed family situation, frustrations and hostility occur and can find no normal outlet. Instead, this hostility is projected in a manner similar to the psychological mechanisms of ‘acting-out’ and ‘displaced aggression’ but on a parapsychological, not a psychological, level. This breakthrough of repressed hostility then takes the form of psycho-kinesis which works out the frustrations, etc. of the agent without his realizing the fact.”

The article then goes on to say that the poltergeist phenomena are therapeutic. At this point, experts are imprecise as to how the heightened nervous condition of the individual – usually young people, particularly girls – so influences the laws of physics. It should be borne in mind, however, that it is not sufficient to label activity as “psychokinesis” without explaining how psycho-kinesis “works”. It is not enough to cover up one’s inability to explain what is causing a phenomenon by coining a name for it, even although it sounds more impressive if the name sounds ‘scientific’, preferably derived from Latin or Greek. For example, if one were to say that the poltergeist activities were caused by “mind-propelled movements”, this would not sound persuasive. But to say that the phenomena were the result of heightened emotional stress of a teenager resulting in psycho-kinetic activity, that sounds impressively scientific. But what one has done is to replace the English word “mind” with the Greek word “psycho” and the English words “powered movements” with the Greek word “kinesis” When we combine them together, we get “psycho-kinesis” And that sounds reassuring as if it were a scientific explanation.

Sometimes cited as supporting the theory that a new exotic law of physical science may be causing the poltergeist activities is the work of Canadian free-lance investigator John Hutchison who claims to have discovered a number of what may be considered paranormal physical laws, such as that of anti-gravity and a perpetually working energy source, that he calls the “Crystal Battery” or “Hiroshima Cells”. This energy source consists of a mixture of Rochelle salts, Gallium, Iron Pyrite and Germanium cooked and with an electrode placed in its centre. Unfortunately, attempts by serious scientists to replicate his findings, and even his own attempts to do so with an audience, have not been successful. Hutchison's credibility was undermined when a demonstration he did for a Discovery TV channel documentary was later found to include doctored results, such as a free-flying toy UFO being suspended from a string, and apparently anti-gravity demonstrations being unmasked as upside-down film of objects flying upwards because the camera had been filming upside-down. Hutchison later admitted he had been “creative” in his demonstrations because of the pressure on him to provide film for the documentary. The end story is that no physical laws have to date been satisfactorily demonstrated that replicate the poltergeist activities.

Perhaps the main difficulty for the supporters of the psycho-kinetic explanation of poltergeist activity is that in some rigorously investigated cases, part of the poltergeist activity has been “voices”. This was true of the first recorded case of a poltergeist, that of the Bingen farmer, who was accused by voices of having sex with a daughter of one of his employees. It is also the case in the poltergeist activities in the Epworth home of the Charles and John Wesley in the early eighteenth century where one of the manifestations was that of human groaning sounds. And again in the Enfield and Pontefract cases of more recent times where a significant feature of the poltergeist activities was that of human voices. It is difficult to see how a physical law controlling movement could provide human voices speaking identifiable words.

The alternative explanation of the poltergeist is that of a spirit force interacting in some way with a human. This force may be a spirit entity with intelligence, a spirit being, in other words, but not a ghost. It may be useful at this point to explain why a poltergeist is unlikely to be a ghost. Ghosts are usually considered to be long-term phenomena whereas poltergeists are usually short term, their activity sometimes lasting just a few months; ghosts do not normally interact with people, poltergeists are very invasive, thrusting themselves on people and their environment; ghosts are seen but they don't do anything physical,

poltergeists are usually not seen but their activities are very visible with cups or chairs being moved around. And ghosts are not fixated on certain individuals, whereas poltergeists are focused on an individual, usually an emotionally disturbed teenager. It may be appropriate to refer to the claim by one author that poltergeist activities prove there is life after death. But that would only be true if poltergeists were the spirits of people who had once lived but were now dead. There is no suggestion from any of the poltergeist occurrences referred to here that such is the case. If the poltergeist activity is partly due to spirit influence, there is no need to suggest that the spirits of once-alive humans are in any way involved. It is best to not make more claims for the significance of poltergeist activity than the evidence available suggests. (4)

So what is the spirit dimension explanation of a poltergeist? This is that a spirit being, normally confined to the spirit dimension, can intrude into the physical dimension by means of an emotionally vulnerable person being open to their advances. Having the opportunity to express itself in the material dimension, the entity continues to do so in a physical way, until the opening in the vulnerable person's emotional defences is closed perhaps by approaching maturity, after which the spirit entity is effectively barred from further interaction with the physical dimension. Then the poltergeist activity ceases.

Another explanation is that a spirit force, sometimes called an "elemental" not an actual spirit being, is drawn into interaction with the physical dimension via the emotional condition of a vulnerable person, but this is very similar to the psycho-kinetic explanation, merely substituting a spirit unknown-force with a physical law unknown-force, and both of these explanations ignore the existence of voices in poltergeist activities, in which the phenomenon of voices speaking or making allegations indicates the activity of an intelligence.

Some support for the first of the two spirit dimension explanations above may be drawn from research in Canada, widely reported as the Philip Phenomenon. In this research, in the early 1970s, the Toronto Society of Psychical Research invented a ghost who was supposed to be that of a fictitious 17th century English aristocrat.

Members of the Society would sit around and exchange information about this fictitious person and try to call up the ghost to come and converse with them. And eventually it did, and they were able to ask questions and get rapping sounds from the "ghost", one rap for "yes" and two raps for "no". Strange

happenings took place such as lights turning on and off and the table moving by itself round the room, and even on occasion trapping members in a corner of the room.

Another group using the same methodology invented and communicated with another fictitious ghost, that of an imaginary French Canadian girl who died as a spy in Nazioccupied France during World War II. In 1974, both groups held a joint Christmas party and decided to call up “Santa Claus” and of course, they were able to communicate with a spirit entity. Or was it the combined emotional power of the groups accessing an as yet unidentified physical law? Or was it a spirit entity taking the opportunity to access the material dimension because of the combined receptivity of the individuals? If there had been human-sounding spirit voices included in the phenomena, it would have clearly suggested the involvement of spirit entities. As it is, it does not advance the knowledge of the nature of the poltergeist beyond what already exists. However, it does suggest that if one opens oneself up to the spirit dimension one may get more than one bargains for, that a spirit force may attach itself like a parasite to a human who is vulnerable to such attachment because the human has a spirit component as well as the physical and the mental sides to his being.

A fictional story of such an attachment was “The Exorcist”, written by William Blatty who based it on apparent poltergeist activity that plagued the life of a boy, 13-year-old Douglass Deen, of Mount Rainier, Washington State, USA. (2) Other accounts say the boy’s identity was never revealed, he was known only as “Robbie Doe”, and he did not live in Mount Rainer but in the Cottage City suburb of Washington, DC.

The young lad exhibited some of the phenomena that were credited to the girl in “The Exorcist”, though his head did not spin round – but witnesses claimed he did levitate and pee prodigious amounts of water on witnesses, and he also spoke Latin, a language he did not know. The church tried to help this boy, as did both Georgetown Hospital and St Louis University, with spiritual, medical and psychiatric help.

It was only after thirty attempted exorcisms by a Jesuit priest that the boy was released from the persecution by the spirit or poltergeist. Apparently the poltergeist or whatever was afflicting him revealed it was “a fallen angel”. The climax came that night when a masculine voice claiming to be that of St Michael the Archangel broke in and commanded the “fallen angel” to leave. The lad then

sat up in bed and said: “He’s gone!” and added that he had seen St Michael the Archangel with a flaming sword. He was now free of the disturbances. One account about the lad says that in later life, his marriage ceremony was performed by the same Jesuit priest who officiated at his release, but this may be fanciful. And it is claimed that this is the only official exorcism by a member of the Roman Catholic Church in the USA.

Skeptics will often attempt to explain away experiences such as these. For example, there is the “expert” who claimed on the internet, that although he never witnessed “The Exorcist” manifestations, that it was all a hoax, and the so-called rappings were simply the boy bouncing on the bed. The “expert” did not explain many of the phenomena including the levitating, and the speaking of Latin. These phenomena were simply ignored. The debunking of poltergeist activities by experts often does not stand up to scrutiny.

It is not enough to say that poltergeist activity is sparked off by the emotional state of someone present. Such an explanation must explain the laws of physics involved. It is not scientific impartiality to allow one’s own bias to direct one’s conclusions.

This chapter began with a personal account of what happened in our Salvation Army centre in Kowloon in 1978. Let me add another personal account, but one I’m not involved in because it happened to my wife, Jean, when she was a small girl.

She was about ten years old, it was Christmas time, and through a relative who worked in a food provisions factory, she was given a ticket, coloured pink and with a number on it, her admission ticket to a party for children in the work’s canteen on the Saturday afternoon before Christmas.

But the admission ticket was also the ticket that entitled her to a toy from the Christmas tree and the large pile of gifts lying around it. And what caught her eye was a doll’s house. It was wonderful, and she longed for it, but was realistic enough, and pessimistic enough, to believe she wouldn’t be the lucky girl to get such a prize.

But she did get it! When the tickets were picked out, her ticket was the one that had the number on that doll’s house.

And she loved that doll’s house. She would lie in bed at night and admire it. It

stood on a bamboo table by the window of her room. The trouble was that the table seemed to have a life of its own. It was often found to have moved, even ending up by the fireplace at the other side of the room. But Jean loved to look at her doll's house with its windows all lit up and shining bravely in the darkness of the night.

Her parents were disquieted by the moving of the table, and coming in to her room one night, their concern changed to shock. The doll's house was all lit up – but there were no candles or bulbs or anything in it that could provide the illumination. Their home was gas-lit; electricity had not yet been installed: there was simply no way the doll's house could be lit up naturally. Jean had taken the illumination of her toy house for granted, accepting it as all part of its wonder.

Mum and Dad took immediate steps to resolve the situation. The bamboo table was thrown out. Jean never knew where it went, but she wasn't concerned because she was allowed to keep her doll's house. It never lit up again but she loved it just the same, even without its illumination.

Was that the result of the emotional energy of the small girl, perhaps because she adored her toy so much? That sounds hard to believe. But if she was the cause of the nighttime illumination, why did the lighting-up stop when the table was discarded? Or was it a poltergeist activity?

So-called scientific and rational explanations of poltergeist phenomena demand an unquestioning faith in concepts such as psycho-kinesis and the out-workings of frustrations although these explanations have not been justified in terms of scientific impartiality. But another explanation would be that spiritual entities are involved.

And such an explanation would be evidence for the reality of the spirit dimension.

In the next chapter we turn to the nineteenth century experiences of a family whose poltergeist phenomena led to a wide-spread practice that is expressly forbidden in the Bible and which is still prevalent in this 21st century – that is the practice of consulting with spirits of the dead.

References:

- 1) "Borderlands" by Mike Dash (1997) Heinemann
- 2) "The Encyclopedia of Ghosts and Spirits" John and Anne Spencer (1992) and various web pages

- 3) A.R.G. Owens "Can We Explain the Poltergeist?" (1964) New York: Helix Press/Garrett Publications
- 4) Victor Zammit (2006) "A Lawyer Presents the Case for the Afterlife"

Chapter Five - Communicating with the spirits?

Spiritualism, the practice of trying to communicate with the dead or the spirit world, is an activity focused on the spirit dimension. The practice is as old as pre-history and as new as tomorrow's newspaper. Modern spiritualism in the western world developed from poltergeist activity that began in March 1848 at the home of a farmer named Fox in New York State. The experiences of the Fox family, such as unexplained knockings during the night, had been witnessed by the previous occupants of the house. But there was a new departure that marked it out as different from usual poltergeist manifestations when Fox's youngest daughter, Kate, set up a system of communication with the poltergeist or 'spirit visitor'. She communicated by means of a code of rappings so that the 'visitor' could answer Kate's questions. During these question and answer sessions, the 'spirit visitor' claimed to be the spirit of a man who had been murdered in the house.

Thus began the modern practice of holding séances to communicate with the spirit world. Kate, who later became Mrs Fox-Jencken, spent much of her later life, as did another sister, Maggie, holding séance-sittings both in the USA and in England. Although their séances were a useful source of income for them, in the long run, their final outcomes were less than happy. But the sittings became a popular past-time on both sides of the Atlantic, and became more widespread following the 1914-18 War when relatives wanted to make contact with what they believed were the spirits of the loved ones who had died in that conflict and from the flu pandemic of 1918-19 that killed more people than the War had – something between twenty and forty million world-wide.

This desire to be sure of survival after death led to the formation of many spiritualist associations or churches, at present calculated to be over 300 in the U.K.

Kate and Maggie, with their sister Leah as manager, toured widely, holding séances, and although they were often challenged and tested to determine if they were frauds, no evidence was ever found to question the reality of their claims to communicate with the spirits of the dead.

Committees of skeptics were formed to discover if the girls' communicating with

the dead was a sham – on one occasion an investigating committee of women examined the underwear of the girls to check if they had hidden on their person any means of making the rapping the noises said to be communications from the spirit world – but no fraud was ever detected.

The sisters often had 'spirits' appearing in their séances or tables levitating and even claimed to communicate with spirits of former famous personalities. On one occasion when they said they were communicating with the spirit of Benjamin Franklin, a spectator commented that Franklin had apparently lost his command of good grammar, to which Maggie retorted in bad humour that she had never understood grammar.

In 1888, Maggie famously publicly confessed that all their communicating with the spirits of the dead was a sham, a fraud, and Kate who was present chose not to contradict her. Later, however, Kate did contradict Maggie and continued to do public séances. It was later claimed that years of alcohol abuse and suffering had prompted Maggie to make the confession and in 1891, Maggie also withdrew her denunciation of spiritualism as a sham. It was also claimed by supporters that the 'false' confession by Maggie had been motivated to get back at their sister Leah from whom they had become estranged.

Leah had earlier turned her back on Maggie and Kate after marrying a wealthy and respectable businessman. Leah was a wealthy woman in her own right from the fortune she had amassed from the spiritualism work of her sisters during her time as their manager. Kate and Maggie were less fortunate: both died penniless, Maggie aged 59 and Kate from alcohol related illness in her 56th year.

Despite controversy over the genuineness or otherwise of the Fox sisters' claim to contact the dead, spiritualist churches sprang up in both North America and in the UK. A recent newspaper article spoke of members in one UK spiritualist church who dedicated their infant daughter to a spirit and sought its protection for her throughout her life. In this instance, the spiritualism initiated by the Fox sisters revealed a link with necromancy. Spiritualism in one form or another has been part of the human experience since the beginning of history, most often as a form of necromancy from which it may have developed. The main difference between spiritualism and necromancy is that in spiritualism, attempt is made to contact the spirit of a dead loved one by a relative, perhaps as part of the grieving process, and to be reassured about the well-being of the dead loved one. In necromancy, attempt is made to contact the spirit of a dead person in order to

get help or protection or information that will benefit the one making the attempt, or someone on whose behalf the attempt is being made. In that sense, the example of those members of the spiritualist church who sought the protection of a spirit for their child throughout her life were more truly practising necromancy than the spiritualism of the Fox sisters although their attempt to get protection took place within a spiritualist church.

Examples of necromancy can be traced back to the Babylonians and other early civilizations.

Babylonians who practiced necromancy were called Sha'etammu, and the spirits they communicated with were called Etemmu. Necromancy is implied in the Greek story of Odysseus going to Hades, the abode of the dead, in an attempt to raise spirits to gain information from them.

To do this he used a spell from Circe, but he was unsuccessful. Such an example from ancient Greek literature is an indication of the Greek culture's acceptance of necromancy as a practice.

One of the earliest civilizations that laid great store on the dead and their ongoing place in the overall scheme of things, and especially of the relationship between the dead and the living, was the Egyptian civilizations, dating from about 3000 BC (the Archaic Period) to its gradual demise following successive invasions by the Assyrians (671 BC), then by the Persians (525 BC), and finally by Alexander the Great (332 BC). But for some two and a half millennia, the Egyptian religion placed importance – the level of importance fluctuated in different Dynasties and rules – on the state of the dead. Pharaoh was the god-king and he was the only one who could converse directly with the gods, but the upper classes (and because the archaeological remains were originally put in place by the upper classes, they alone could afford the funerary rites and so on) also sought to ensure the immortality of their souls. The Egyptians believed that the survival of the human soul required the continued existence of the body that the soul had left at death, and to attain this, mummification of the body was essential. The desiccated mummies in museums around the world testify to the varying success of those procedures. Ironically, the peasants who were by far the majority, as always, simply buried their dead in the ground, and it was often these simple burials with the corpses in direct contact with the hot dry sand that preserved better the dead remains because the circumstances hastened the desiccation of the corpses.

What evidence there is does not suggest a great deal of respect for the dead. In fact, the dead appear to have been blamed for woes rather than lauded for the good circumstances of life, and there are recorded instances of letters intended for the dead that were letters of complaint. In addition, it was quite common for the tombs of the upper classes to be robbed quite soon after the entombment, even by the undertakers or their associates, and archaeologists 'discovering' tombs in recent centuries, often found evidence of graves having been raided on a number of occasions, and even the mummies being torn open with the intention of stealing their grave jewelry. So there was not universal respect for the Egyptian dead in those long-ago millennia, but there is no doubt that there was a belief in life after death and a degree of attempted communication by the living with the dead.

The UK parents of the child who sought a spirit's protection for their child throughout her life is reminiscent of the practice of those North American Indians who seek a guardian spirit through fasting and waiting in secluded places for the spirit to show itself in a vision and by means of which the successful supplicant thereafter considers himself to be linked with a spirit from the spirit dimension. In modern Haiti, devotees of the Voodoo religion, a religion derived from the encounter of traditional African religions brought over to Haiti by slaves, with Christian influences, regularly practise the manifestation of the spirit world through the channel of the human being. Attempting to contact spirits of the dead is a world-wide practice as old as history itself.

During the witch trials of the Middle Ages, one of the accusations brought against the witches was that of calling up spirits from the dead. Down through time, mankind has believed that man has a spiritual side to his being and that his spirit survives physical death. So it has been a logical step for him to try and contact the dead, either to get comfort for the bereaved or to gain some benefit from the assumed superior knowledge or power of the spirit being.

Aristotle and Plato both believed in a spiritual or soul aspect of man as distinct from his physical body. Philosopher Rene Descartes said the soul was different from the body; the German rationalist Leibniz said there was a spirit world of psychic beings or level-three monads, highly developed beings with self-consciousness and reason that survived the death of the body. None of these individuals would be described as Christian, or particularly religious, but they had in common the belief in a spiritual existence as distinct from the physical.

The islands of Orkney, Scotland, have a large number of important archaeological sites including Skara Brae, a stoneage village dating back some 5,000 years, millennia older than the Great Wall of China, and possibly an ancient community when Stonehenge and pyramids of Egypt were being built. Another important archaeological site on Orkney is the Culween Hill Tomb, where the skulls of twenty-four small dogs had been found along with human remains. Outside the tomb is a display board that reads: "The Neolithic religion seems to have included belief in the influence of the dead upon daily life..." There is a great deal of other archaeological evidence to suggest our stone-age ancestors believed in a spiritual existence after death, and that there could be some form of interaction between the living and the dead.

In another Neolithic tomb there were clay vessels that may have contained food and drink, possibly intended "as provisions for the dead in their after-life, or tributes to longdead ancestors or offerings to the spirit world" as its display board said. It is qualified, however, by the addition of: "Without any knowledge of Neolithic religion we can only guess." But there is no doubt there was some kind of awareness of existence apart from this material world, a life apart from this physical life.

Contemporary African beliefs in spirits and witchcraft are common-place as has been explained to us by our nephew, Rev William Davidson, a Christian missionaryminister with a world-wide ministry. The finding in September, 2001, of the torso of a small West African boy, probably aged between 4 and 6 years, headless and limbless, and wearing only small orange coloured shorts, floating in the River Thames at London, has been attributed to a witchcraft ritual murder. Contents in his stomach and gut point to his having been fed an unusual diet including minerals which African experts conclude were associated with a purification ritual. And the orange coloured shorts may be significant because what evidence there is points to the child having been sacrificed to a Yoruba god, perhaps to Oshun, a rivergoddess that is associated with the colour orange. One theory proposed is that the child was bought in West Africa as a slave, brought to England with a professional witch-doctor, and sacrificed to gain power for a wealthy West African living in the United Kingdom, an offshoot of the necromancy practice of attempting by bribery to obtain power from a spirit being.

And in case we imagine contemporary western society is more scientific and therefore superior to the simple superstitious societies of contemporary African

religions or Neolithic men, here are advertisements plucked at random from a newspaper published in the Scottish city of Aberdeen, a city of commerce and two universities and the centre of the hi-tech oil and gas industry in the North Sea:

Osiris Psychic Network - 24 Hours Live

and another:

Tarot Psychic Live - The Premier Service

Belief in the spirit dimension is alive and well in our modern scientific, western society.

One of the features of many Chinese shops in Hong Kong that I found intriguing when I lived there was on the interior back wall a mirror facing to the front. I had to ask why the need for those mirrors. And the answer was that the mirrors were intended to reflect out of the shop “the evil eye”. And then studying Chinese Personality at the English University (now the Central University) of Hong Kong, I learned about Fung Shui - “wind and water” - the Chinese practice of seeking the best possible protection from the spirit world for the location of a new building, or even of laying out the furniture in one's living room. Now in the western society people are becoming involved in Fung Shui, and books on Fung Shui are readily available – in recent years a popular Book Club included a book on Fung Shui in its catalogue. Yes, we may think we are very modern and scientific, but scratch the intellectual surface of secular man and woman in today's world and you will find an underlying belief in spirit things. Necromancy is being practised by people who may have never heard of the word. Why else do so many people have horseshoes – even plastic ones – on the walls of their property? The lucky horseshoe – a widespread charm to ward off the evil eye or a representation of the vulva of an ancient goddess, shaped opening upwards to catch good luck or downwards to allow bad luck run off and away. And they are obtainable on the internet, clad in white satin to present to the bride as she leaves the church, or bought as “genuine horseshoes in black or silver or with enameled finish or rust-less aluminum price £5.50 or two for £10”. Or throw salt over their shoulder if they spill it, right into the eye of an evil spirit. Or scatter rice, or its substitute, confetti, at a wedding, an offering to the god of fertility. In any western community on a Saturday afternoon where people gather to gamble on sports' results, or to celebrate a wedding, the spirit dimension is being invoked again and again as a matter of course.

I was on my way to a local government meeting in Scotland some seventy or so

miles from my home, when my car wheel had a blow-out while I was travelling slowly through a village, just across the road from a petrol-station and car-repair shop. What would have been dangerous travelling at 60 or 70 mph on the open road amongst traffic, was just a few bumps in a 30 mph limit, and I had the advantage of a petrol-station facilities plus a wash-place with soap and hot water and towels just across the road for me to wash up after I had changed the wheel.

Before the meeting, over a coffee in the ante-room, I shared with my colleagues the details of the wheel mishap and how I was fortunate with where it happened, and a well known Scottish politician and businessman said: “Jim, buy a lottery ticket. Your luck is in today.” I didn't take his advice, I'm not into believing in either luck or in gambling, but it shows that a very real part of modern-man's thinking is the belief in luck and unseen forces that influence our every-day lives.

There is a body of serious-minded academics who study these forces, and other paranormal happenings – The Society for Psychical Research. It was founded in London in 1882 by Sir William Barrett and Edmund Dawson Rogers because of their interest in Spiritualism. They wanted to scientifically study ghosts, telepathy, levitation, and so on. Among early members of SPR were author and physicist Sir Oliver Lodge, the author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle creator of Sherlock Holmes, philosopher William James, and psychologists Sigmund Freud and Carl G Jung. The SPR continues today and publishes its findings in the SPR's Journal and Proceedings, while informal articles on research into spiritual phenomena and such-like subjects appear in its Newsletter and Newsletter Supplement.

While spiritualism still happens, the next story about medium-ship and contacting the dead is more than sixty years old. It is the story of Helen Duncan whose séance activities brought her to the attention of many influential people, including the British Prime Minister of the day. Mrs Duncan was an ordinary Scottish housewife. And she believed in ghosts and spirits. She was born in the town of Callander, Scotland, in 1897. She and her husband who had been wounded in the 1914-18 War had six children, and she worked in a bleach factory during the day. But it was her evening activities that brought her notoriety, because Helen Duncan held séances in the evenings and charged a small fee from those attending.

She was not a very outstanding lady but during the Second World War, she

gained a fame of sorts, so much in fact, that she was recognized as a threat to national security. What was threatening about Helen Duncan was that she appeared to be aware of things which had either not yet happened, or things that had happened but were being kept secret by the Government. It came to a climax at a séance in Portsmouth, an important naval-base in the south of England, when she told a woman in the audience that her dead husband wanted to give her a message. The woman was offended and insisted her husband was not dead.

As far as she knew, her husband was safe and well on the battleship HMS Barham. Mrs Duncan said she could see him and he was wearing his sailor cap with the words “HMS Barham” on it, but he was dead. The surprising thing, and disquieting for the Government, was that “HMS Barham” had already been sunk by a German U-boat but the Government was keeping the sinking of the warship a secret for the sake of public morale. So because Helen Duncan claimed to know things from her spirit contacts that the Government was determined to keep secret, she was targeted as a possible threat to national security.

An intriguing aspect of this story is that during the wartime days, the Royal Navy personnel no longer had the name of their ship on their caps – just the initials “HMS” - because having the name of the ship would let enemy spies know which ships were in port. So it would be strange if Mrs Duncan saw the words “HMS Barham” on the front of the cap of the ghostly sailor. But it was even stranger to get a message from a ghost whose widow thought her husband was still alive.

On the other hand, there is no reason to believe that the spirit world has to comply with government security regulations...

Prior to D-Day and the Allied invasion at Normandy, the intelligence authorities decided Mrs Duncan would be better in jail. Her supporters claim this was to keep her away from the public in case her spirits told her about details of the invasion, the Top Secret information of the whereabouts and the when of the landings and such-like. But there was never any question as to the loyalty of the Scottish housewife. However, the intelligence authorities took seriously Mrs Duncan's apparent ability to get Top Secret information – apparently from her spiritual contacts – so to ensure that she didn't let slip secret information about the forthcoming DDay, Helen Duncan was charged and tried at the Old Bailey under a 1735 Witchcraft Act that said that witchcraft and spiritualism did not exist but anyone professing to have such powers would be prosecuted as a fraud.

The Law Societies of Scotland and England both condemned the case as a travesty of justice, and the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, and many other leading figures of the day spoke up on her behalf. But she was found guilty and jailed for nine months in Holloway Prison. And so she was kept away from her fellow-citizens and anyone else who might be keen to learn military secrets, most importantly, away from any possible Nazi spies who may have heard of her prowess.

All the time she was in prison, her cell door was never locked because the prison authorities believed she was innocent and did not deserve to be there. It's said that prison officers and fellow prisoners regularly consulted her on matters of the spirit world. She served her sentence and by the time of her release the landings at Normandy had taken place and she was no longer regarded as a threat to the Allied war plans. So the spirit world was taken seriously by those responsible for national security, seriously enough to lock up a medium who claimed to communicate with the dead, from which we may assume that belief in the spirit dimension was significant to leading people in the intelligence community.

The following is another personal anecdote which may have relevance to this subject. It happened to Jean and me while we were on "furlough" (the Salvation Army term for 'vacation') and, accompanied by our children, were visiting relatives. Late on the evening of our arrival, the lady of the house and her daughter were talking with us – the rest of the family had already gone to bed.

Then the daughter turned to her mother, and with a significant side-ways look at us, she asked her mother: "Should we tell them?"

Our interest was caught. "Tell us?" we asked. "Tell us what?"

So we heard the story. This was our first visit to this house and we would be sleeping in a front room. So far, nothing remarkable in that. Until the daughter of the house told us of her experience.

It had happened some months earlier: she had been sleeping in the room we would occupy that night, and during the night she was woken by a feeling someone was in the room with her. A dark figure was standing at the foot of her bed. Then it pulled at the bedclothes. She resisted, thinking it was a brother playing a prank on her. But the figure persisted, so she jumped from the bed to give whoever it was a piece of her mind. The figure left the room through the

doorway and she chased it.

But it had vanished. The girl visited each of the other rooms, but everyone was asleep. Now she was very frightened, because it had not been a dream, her experience was real, and there was no physical explanation. She slept the rest of the night in the living room on a couch, and had not spent a night in that room since. Then other members of the family revealed they also had experienced the feeling in the house that someone was standing close behind them but on turning to see who was there, found no-one. What did the family think was involved? A ghost? But a ghost does not pull bed-clothes, though a poltergeist is claimed to be able to do these kinds of things!

So we prepared to sleep in that room with its disquieting history. We went to bed and as was our custom, we read the Bible and prayed together, asking for God's protection on us and all the household that night, before getting down to sleep. We had an undisturbed night's sleep, and at break of day I rose to the bathroom. When I returned to bed, still befuddled with sleepiness, I saw the Bible lying open on top of Jean. We had left it on the bed-side locker the night before, but without thinking I lifted the Bible off Jean and replaced it on the locker. It apparently had been lying open on us all night.

Later we realized how peculiar this was because if we had left the Bible on top of us it would have fallen off during the night. I wish I could say which part the Bible was open at when I found it next morning, but without thinking I had closed it and laid it back on the locker. As a post-script to the story, after we left, the young girl went back to sleeping in her room, and there never was another sighting of the black figure. Whatever the dark presence was, it never bothered the family again.

Having raised the subject of the Bible, it is now time to ask what the Bible says about contacting the dead, spiritualism or necromancy, whatever we call it. Briefly, attempting to communicate with the dead is detestable to God. The Bible expressly forbids contacting the spirits of the dead. Among the rules given by God to the Children of Israel as they approached the Promised Land after their forty years journeying in the Wilderness was the clear prohibition against any form of spiritualism:

“When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you

who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practises divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD.” (1)

The prophet Isaiah (2) explained why spiritualism is forbidden when he said:

“When men tell you to consult mediums and spirits, who whisper and mutter, should not a people enquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?”

There is clear prohibition against spiritualism and consulting mediums - “Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God.” (3) And again - “I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by following them, and I will cut him off from his people.” (4)

A well-known incident in the Bible and one quoted in spiritist literature is the one when King Saul, cut off from contact with God and not having his spiritual adviser Samuel to guide him – Samuel had previously died – the king goes to a witch at Endor on the northern boundary of his kingdom to seek guidance on the eve of what he knew would be a decisive battle against the Philistines. The witch says she can see an old man in a robe coming up out of the ground. Although King Saul cannot see it, he believes it is the ghost of Samuel. And the figure tells Saul he would be defeated and the next day both he and his sons would be with the spirit dead. (5)

It is problematic that the spirit of a faithful servant of the LORD – Samuel – would have responded to the necromancy of a non-Israelite, the witch of Endor, to give a message from beyond the grave to King Saul, foretelling the future no less, in response to King Saul's clear disobedience to the stated will of God. Yet the Bible clearly says it was Samuel, and what the spirit foretold did come true. Various explanations are suggested of what happened ranging from it being an evil spirit that appeared to the witch, or else she pretended to have encountered the spirit and used some form of telepathy to read the mind of the king, or it really was the spirit of Samuel permitted by God to reveal that King Saul was to die on the morrow, that he would never found a dynasty, and that the Israelite army would be defeated. However we interpret this incident, while it cannot be quoted as giving Scriptural approval to medium-ship, it does lend support to the

belief that contacting spirits of the dead is possible.

Before leaving this chapter, we should consider the questions: “what is the spiritualist medium contacting? Is it the spirit of a dead person, perhaps a loved one? What does the Bible teach?”

It is helpful to state some foundation facts:

First, we know that when a Christian dies, he goes to be with Jesus Christ, and is seated with Christ in heavenly realms. (6) The Bible gives no grounds for believing that the spirits of the dead come back to this world with messages or advice. That is part of the meaning of the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. (7)

Secondly, if it is God's will, He can on occasion, and for a very special part of His eternal plan, allow a dead servant of His to be manifested back to the living in this world. But the only undisputed example in the Bible of this happening is when Moses and Elijah were revealed to Jesus with Peter and James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, in Matthew chapter 17. We exclude the story of the spirit who spoke through the Witch or Medium of Endor telling King Saul of his doom on the morrow (1 Samuel chapter 28) because there are differing interpretations of what happened then.

Thirdly, there are spirit beings that are not obedient to God and it would be easy for them to deceive a medium or whoever was seeking contact with the dead.

And finally, the Bible expressly forbids the practice of mediumship and seeking to contact the dead. “When men tell you to consult mediums and spirits, who whisper and mutter, should not a people enquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?” (2) But note what is implied in that verse: the Bible does not say it is impossible to contact spirits. What it does is to forbid doing so. The world-wide practice of necromancy and spiritism does support the belief that there is a spirit dimension although the Bible condemns these practices as its darker side.

References

- 1) Deuteronomy 18: 9-12
- 2) Isaiah 8: 19
- 3) Leviticus 19: 31
- 4) Leviticus 20: 6

- 5) 1 Samuel chapter 28
- 6) Ephesians 2: 6 and Luke 23: 42,43
- 7) Luke 16: 19-31

Chapter Six - Ghosts

“Many cultures have recognized some incorporeal principle of human life or existence corresponding to the soul... there is evidence even among prehistoric peoples of a belief in an aspect distinct from the body and residing in it...”

Encyclopaedia Britannica

“ – the belief common in all religions and at all periods that our spirits survive the death of the body, and pass into another world - ” from “Guide to Human Thought” (1)

Belief in ghosts is world-wide. Many people say they have seen a ghost, or know someone who has. There's an ages-old belief in ghosts. Experts who've studied the subject say that one in eight people in the USA and some European countries claim to have seen a ghost, and in the UK that figure is one in ten. Even more surprising are the results of an investigation by the National Opinion Research Council of Chicago in the 1980s (2) that more than two fifths of the population of the USA have had a ghostly experience, and two thirds of all the country's widows have seen one.

From the early days of the Second World War comes a ghost story, almost certainly an urban legend or myth, as ephemeral as its supposed sightings by soldiers manning the anti-aircraft guns on Inchcolm Island in the Firth of Forth, Scotland, who claimed to have seen a ghostly figure in the ruins on the island during their hours of night-time guard duty. It was a soldier who was there at the time who told me about it. The ghost was described as “the Green Lady”. The island of Inchcolm is still there; its ruins can be seen from the seaward side of the Forth Railway Bridge.

But does the Green Lady still haunt that small island, or was she merely the invention of bored soldiers? Whatever the explanation, it does suggest that these soldiers, while fighting a war, believed ghosts were real... although it has to be added that while Inchcolm is one of the tourist attractions of Edinburgh – or Fife, depending on whether your viewpoint is on the north side or the south side of the Firth of Forth – there is no mention of a ghost in the tourism material. And while

the “ghost” may have been born of boredom, there was little to be bored about since the first Luftwaffe bombs on the UK in World War II fell nearby during an unsuccessful attempt to destroy the Firth of Forth railway bridge.

It’s difficult to say if this next ghost story is an urban legend or not because not all that many people have claimed to see this “ghost” - and a required condition for being described as an urban legend is that it's well known and people come to expect to see “something.” But it’s worth mentioning because I heard it personally from a senior executive of a Scottish coach company who appeared to believe in it. He told me of the ghost that haunts his firm’s offices in Aberdeen. The building was a barracks for soldiers in the 19th century, before being sold to the Tramways department, and then taken back into military service in the First World War.

In 1915, a Captain Beaton had received a head wound in the trenches in France and been sent back to Britain for medical treatment and convalescence. He was transferred to the Aberdeen barracks and in March, 1918, received orders to report for duty back in France. He could not face going back to “the Front”, and on the morning after he received his posting orders, he was found in full dress uniform hanging in the Officers’ Mess housed in the south-east turret of the building. Since his suicide, he has been seen on a number of occasions in that part of the building, the last recorded sighting I know of being in October, 1988. (3)

If it is an urban legend, the appearances seem to be growing less with the passage of time.

It’s not uncommon to hear of ghostly monks haunting old religious buildings or ruins, and one such was the ghost of the Old Priory of Trethevy, North Cornwall, England, that a former leader of the British Liberal Party, Jeremy Thorpe, claimed to have seen in his student days. He was visiting the Priory and one evening he met a monk in a brown habit going into the bathroom he had just left. When he mentioned the incident to his host, he was told it was the ghost of a prior of centuries past who had been murdered and laid out on a slab of stone that was now part of the bathroom.

While the monk is claimed to have been seen by various witnesses over the years, he was always well-behaved and never a nuisance. (4)

Another well-behaved ghost is the Good Ghost Sister of Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney, Australia, who is reputed to be the spirit of a nurse who fell to her death from a high balcony at the hospital and has since returned to complete her work in the hospital. This ghost is not a scary ghost; in fact she is believed to be helpful in that on occasion she has drawn attention to a patient needing help. Nurses who have seen her have always thought she was a real nurse – it has only been her sudden disappearance that revealed her ghostly nature. One member of staff, a Sister Bull, thought she saw a night nurse bending over a patient in a ward and when she went to find out if the nurse needed assistance, what she had seen as the night nurse disappeared before her eyes and Sister Bull found instead a patient needing urgent attention. A wellbehaved helpful ghost..? Or just another urban legend? (5)

Some ghost stories lend themselves to being described as urban legends, stories shared around with little solid truth to them. Reports of seeing the ghosts of President Lincoln and his wife, Mary, are an example of the urban legend, captured by Vachel Lindsay in the poem: “Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight.”

The first verse says:

“It is portentous, and a thing of state
That here at midnight, in our little town A mourning figure walks, and will not
rest, Near the old court-house pacing up and down...”

That poem focuses on President Lincoln's younger days when he was a lawyer in Springfield, Illinois, but most of the ghostly encounters with the former President are around the White House. To quote from a web-page: “The list of those who've actually seen old Abe's ghost includes a former president, visiting royalty and of course, numerous members of the White House's housekeeping staff.” (6) Some of the stories about the ghost of Abe Lincoln will have been encouraged by his reputed dabbling in the occult and the account of the dream he had a few nights before he was assassinated, a dream in which he walked through the White House which was obviously in mourning, and going into the East Room he discovered the reason for the widespread mourning and weeping – a corpse lay there on a catafalque. In response to his questioning a soldier about who the mourning was for, received the reply: “The President is dead.” It would not be surprising for an urban legend of a ghost to have been born of such a traumatic happening as the murder of the President.

And another urban legend, also from the United States is the reported ghostly sightings of “Resurrection Mary” the young girl in the white dress who is said to haunt Archer Avenue and streets near the Resurrection Cemetery in Chicago. The story is that Mary – who has never been positively identified although various names have been suggested for her - was killed while hitch-hiking along Archer Avenue in the early 1930s. Many witnesses have claimed to see her and she usually disappears nears the entrance to the Resurrection Cemetery where it’s said she was buried. The legend of “Resurrection Mary”, has a following and to quote from a web page devoted to her, evidence for the reality of the ghost of this young girl are: “credible eyewitness accounts, places, times and dates. Many of these reports are not just stories that have been passed from person to person and rely on a "friend of a friend" for authenticity. In fact, some of the encounters with Mary have been chillingly up close and personal and remain unexplained to this day.” (7)

That ghost story fulfils necessary criteria for the urban legend because it requires that ghostly sightings are widely known and people half expect to see something, and readily identify what they see as being the ghost. Contrast that with the case of Jeremy Thorpe who had never heard the story of the ghostly monk before his experience so what he saw was not influenced by what he may have expected to see.

Another ghost story involving an individual who did not expect to see anything supernatural concerned a Mr and Mrs Troward who had arrived in 1871 at Hoshiarpur in the Punjab district of India, where the husband was to take up a government appointment. They reached their official bungalow late in the day, where their servants announced they would not stay the night in the building and tried to persuade the Trowards to find accommodation elsewhere. The behaviour of the servants may have disturbed the young couple, but not enough to put them off staying in the house and so they settled down for the night.

The husband was wakened during the night by his wife screaming. She said that she had been disturbed by a man in a grey suit standing over her, and that the man had said: “I shall not hurt you.” Then he fired a gun over her. Next day, they learned that the previous occupant of the bungalow had committed suicide by shooting himself during the night, before first saying to his wife: “I shall not hurt you.” It is important that the couple did not learn the details of the suicide until they had spent the night in the house, so what they experienced could not have been an urban legend – that is, they had not been expecting to see a ghost.(4)

Ghost stories come from all over the world. I'm bemused by the one from Beijing, capital of the People's Republic of China, concerning the Buma Inn in that city. To quote directly from a web-page on the subject: "...there is a ghost that haunts Buma Inn in China because the chef poisoned his food and then the chef stabbed himself. The ghost still roams around at night looking for the chef who poisoned him." Which raises questions such as: Why did the chef poison him? And why did the chef then stab himself? And doesn't the victim know his murderer killed himself? It's difficult to take it seriously.

But the Chinese live in a world of ghosts. Part of my responsibilities when my wife and I first went to Hong Kong as missionary Salvation Army officers was to supervise a residential home for elderly street-sleeping ladies, most of whom had fled the mainland when the Nationalists were defeated by the Communists and were thus homeless and without families to support them in their self-imposed exile. So we had some twenty permanent residents who were getting older and frailer and occasionally we had new residents coming in to fill vacancies of those who had died.

On one occasion, there was a degree of concern among the residents because one of the residents who had been a sharp-tongued trouble-maker had died. The Chinese believed that three nights after someone died, the ghost of the deceased would return to the former place of residence to visit and take a final look around. So the residents were apprehensive as the third night approached – how would their former troublesome neighbor behave on her final visit?

About half of the residents were Christians so I went to a Bible shop in nearby Central District and bought a supply of small post-cards depicting Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane and gave them to the Christian residents and to anyone else who desired to have one. On the fateful third day many of the ladies had a postcard of Jesus at prayer stuck up over their beds. And next day, they were all delighted with a good night's undisturbed sleep. I had "fought fire with fire" and I share that story simply to illustrate how important ghosts are to Chinese people.

But here is a more up-to-date "ghost story" from Hong Kong. In the closing years of our stay in Hong Kong, a new highway was opened: the Tuen Mun Highway. It is basically a high speed two-lane road (with three lanes in places) that goes out from Kowloon to the New Territories skirting the indented coastline, and "the steep terrain encountered required the construction of

numerous viaducts, culverts and cuttings.”

The road requires good driving skills because in places there are tight bends and the occasional steep descent. And not surprisingly, with a population of some six million in the Hong Kong, Kowloon and New Territories areas, there are road accidents. In fact there are many accidents. So much so that the Tuen Mun Road is now labelled a haunted road and ghosts are sometimes blamed for causing accidents because of their habit of appearing suddenly in front of speeding vehicles and causing their drivers to brake and swerve, sometimes with fatal consequences. Whether or not ghosts are the cause of many of the accidents is debatable, but the fact that they are widely blamed is further proof if that were required that China, despite decades of Communist rule, is still a land where the spirit dimension has a strong hold on the thinking of the ordinary people. (8)

The internet provides a rich source for stories of ghosts. Here is one from the United Arab Emirates, of a girl named Miish, who returned home to India with her mother and brother to be with her father and members of family to attend the funeral of her grandfather. Miish was deeply grieving and after the funeral she was with her grandmother and other members of the family when she had a sudden urge to turn round. She did so and saw her grandfather standing in his favourite clothes in a corner of the room.

She was shocked, but when he smiled and said: “I’m alright sweetheart” her relief was overwhelming. And then he was gone. A ghost, or is there another explanation? Later we will consider a possible explanation that does not depend on the spirit dimension.

Singapore is reputed to be the most ghostly city in Asia, with its Hougang School and the unseen presence haunting the Changi Beach houses, and the ghosts of beggars who beg for food in the coastal region of Lor Halus.(8)

And finally, two stories of ghosts, one from a small village in Andalusia, Spain, and the other from Lilongwe, the Capital City of Malawi. Controversy surrounds both these stories, but for better or worse, here they are.

Belmez de la Moraleda is a small mountain village in Andalusia, Spain. In August, 1971, in the kitchen floor of the small house of Maria Gomez Pereira, the outline of a face appeared. It was frightening and it was dug out and the hole filled with concrete. But it reappeared, and although various measures were

taken to prevent the faces coming back, they kept reappearing on the floor. The phenomenon repeated itself over the years, and even after Mrs Pereira died in February, 2004, the faces kept on appearing. Much was made of the fact that digging to a depth of some eight feet down into the soil beneath the house revealed skeletons, but skeletons were also found under neighbouring houses – it had been once the site of a cemetery, and no faces appeared on the floors of the other houses. It was later claimed that the faces in the floor had been unmasked as a hoax, the faces made by readily available cleaning fluids, and even the brush marks had been identified. But while some of the faces look rather crudely drawn, others look more realistic, and since strenuous efforts had been made over the years to prevent the faces appearing, there still remains an element of doubt over the phenomena. The house went on sale in July 2004 and there is no further information available on the kitchen with faces in the floor. (4) and (8)

And the final account of ghosts comes this time from Lilongwe, Capital City of Malawi, courtesy of BBC News. In March, 2005, a report out of Lilongwe said that Malawi's President Bingu wa Mutharika had moved out of the Presidential Palace because he was afraid of ghostly rodents infesting the palace, a residence that had taken 20 years to build at a cost of \$100 million. However, President Mutharika responded angrily to the ghost story saying: "I have never feared ghosts in my life."

But the BBC correspondent, Raphael Tenthani, stands by his story, saying he got the story from a Christian priest adviser to the President. "Sometimes the president feels rodents crawling all over his body but when lights are turned on he sees nothing."

Since the palace has 300 rooms, it should not be too difficult to find at least one room free of real or imaginary ghostly rodents. But once again, it seems that belief in ghosts encircles the globe and is with us at least for the foreseeable future. (9)

So why is it easy for people to believe in ghosts? It could be that people believe in ghosts because we instinctively feel there is more to self than the physical body, something that will survive death. The first dead person I saw was in August, 1941.

He was an elderly gentleman, the father of a neighbour, killed by a Luftwaffe bomb. All we children who lived nearby were invited to see the old man lying in

his coffin, to see what “the bad Jerries” had done. But my lasting impression was that the grey figure lying in the coffin was not the real man who had been alive a few days earlier, that something important was missing, it had gone away. Perhaps I was too young to have heard of ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’, but I had an instinctive knowledge that there was something more to this gentleman than what was in the coffin. And it wasn’t just the breath that had left him. Perhaps, even as a small child, I was already receptive to the idea of a spirit side to man.

Various attempts are made to explain what ghosts are. One of them is that the sighting of a ghost is caused by the light of a candle or lamp burned onto the retina and remaining as a ghostly light when you look at a dark background...a transparent something you can actually see through. And in some ghost sightings, that may be a valid explanation where what is seen is a blur of light. But it would be hard to confuse a blur of light, with – for example – the figure of a military officer in full dress uniform hanging by his neck.

Another suggested explanation is that a ghost is an “energy memory” imprinted on a location, an atmospheric “video recording” of a traumatic event in the past that is triggered by a receptive personality who acts unwittingly as a human ‘video player’.

That may be offered as an explanation for the ghost seen by the man (see chapter one) who came to me with his problem. But it does not tell us what a ghost is. It simply creates an otherwise unexplained physical energy and uses it to fill a gap in our scientific knowledge. And it depends on a traumatic event in the past, an event culminating in the death of the individual whose “spirit” is recorded for future manifestations. Perhaps it could explain the “Green Lady” of Inchcolm Island if she died in traumatic circumstances, or the ghost of the murdered prior seen by Jeremy Thorpe. But it leaves questions to which there are no answers – such as: “What is an ‘energy memory?’” And what is a ‘receptive personality?’”

Another explanation is that a ghost may be caused by unwillingness to accept the death of a loved one, a hysteria reaction triggering the image of the departed – a selfgenerated defence mechanism in order to come to terms with bereavement. We create the image for our comfort, a contrick we play on ourselves. That is how the ghost of a recently dead woman was explained in the book “Deliverance”, (10) in which the widowed husband actually saw his wife’s “ghost” get into bed beside him.

From my own experience, for some weeks after the death of my Mother I occasionally thought I saw her walking in the street, but after the first sudden sighting, when I knew rationally that it was not Mother, the distant figure quickly resolved into being someone who slightly resembled her, or perhaps walked like her. It was a fleeting moment of selfdeception, quickly abandoned as reality took charge. But many who see what they believe is a ghost are not emotionally involved with the person who died whose ghost they claim to have seen. Many ghost sightings happen in the absence of an emotional connection. And many sightings of what people believe to have been ghosts cannot be rationally explained.

The cynic would say that ghosts are the creation of man's unwillingness to accept the idea of death, the result of man's hunger to believe in a spiritual dimension, a self generated "comfort-blanket"? If that is so, it's world-wide, and all peoples of all cultures and ages have believed in ghosts. Belief that man has more than just the physical nature is world-wide and as old as history itself. Call it soul or spirit if you will, but this belief is universal. Apart from Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which have belief in the spiritual side of man as a foundational principle, we also find it in Chinese religions – Taoism, for example – which says the individual has two souls, the "hun" of heaven, and the "po", of the earth. And older Chinese religions speak of the "shen", the spiritual aspect of man that is destined for the spirit world. The earth religions of the Mongolians teach man has a body and a soul, or even many souls.

And in Indian beliefs, there is the "purusha", the Sanskrit for "soul". Among the ancient Egyptians man had his "akh" and his "ka", and although some Egyptologists disagree about aspects of these, there is general agreement these concepts represented sides to the soul of man that lived on after death in some form or dimension.

Mankind's belief that he has a spirit or soul has been around even from pre-history if archaeologists are correct. Not far from where I lived in Scotland some years ago, a grave was uncovered during the construction of a new road, a bronze-age grave, possibly from around 2000BC. Along with human bones of the grave occupant were relics of food utensils and a beaker apparently for the use of the dead in a future existence. The beaker, which could have held liquid, was obviously for the dead person's onward life. Archaeologists used the beaker to designate that grave and similar ones – as Beaker Graves. In addition to grave goods, Beaker Graves often contained pottery jars, bronze and gold artifacts,

cups and necklaces and so on, indicating the status of the grave occupant and belief in some form of afterlife, and that belief was held long before history as we know it began. A curious aspect of those Beaker grave burials is that men were usually buried facing east, and women were buried facing west. That probably had to do with sunrise and sunset and may have had a religious significance ... a significance from 2000 BC.

So far, the attempts to explain what a ghost is have not involved the spirit dimension. But the Christian may consider the spirit dimension in looking for an answer to the question: "What is a ghost?" As a Christian, I ask: "Is belief in ghosts compatible with my faith?" Scriptures tell me that Christians who die are with Christ.

That is one of the foundation truths in the previous chapter: we know that when a Christian dies, he goes to be with Jesus in glory. (11) And Jesus promised the thief on the cross: "Today you shall be with me in paradise." The Bible gives no grounds for believing that the spirits of the dead come back to this world to occasionally visit a significant scene of their previous lifetime, or to give messages or advice to those who remain alive. That is part of the meaning of the story of Lazarus and the rich man. (12)

So as a Christian, I cannot believe a ghost is the spirit of a dead person come back to this earth. But later we shall look at possible explanations for the ghost phenomenon.

That is, if the ghost is obviously not an imagined event raised to the status of urban legend, or the after-image of a candle flame, or an energy memory imprint of a traumatic event, or a hysteria self-deception by which the mind employs a defence mechanism to come to terms with bereavement

In Luke's Gospel, chapter 24 verses 37 to 39, the disciples on the evening of the Sunday on which Jesus Christ rose from the dead "were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost." But it was Jesus Christ they saw, and He said to them: "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

The disciples thought they saw a ghost and Jesus did not dismiss their fears by saying that ghosts do not exist. Instead, He said: "A ghost does not have flesh

and bones, as you see I have.”

The Christian believes in the spirit dimension, because he knows that the Spirit of God lives in him: “You, however, are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.” (13)

What appears to be a genuine ghostly sighting may be of a spirit being, but there are no Scriptural grounds for believing that it is the spirit of a dead person who has come back to haunt a former setting. If there are ghosts, then we have no reason or Scriptural grounds for believing they are from God. The alternative has to be that they are from the darker side of the spirit dimension. The Bible clearly teaches that we who are Christians need to be aware of that darker side and be on our guard against it. But we have this assurance: “You dear children are from God and – the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” (14)

The Spirit of Jesus Christ Who is in all Christians is infinitely greater than the god of this world, Satan.

The conclusion is, that while many so-called sightings of ghosts may be explained away rationally, there remain those that cannot be dismissed rationally, and for which a spirit explanation is the only remaining alternative. But there are no grounds in the Bible for believing that such a ghost is the spirit of a person now dead that has come back to a site of its former life, or that the ghost is from God. We are left with the alternative explanation that such a ghost is from the darker side of the spirit dimension, it is not from God. However, if ghosts exist, and the evidence such as it is seems to point in that direction, then ghosts are further evidence of the reality of the spirit dimension.

References:

- 1) “Guide to Human Thought” ed. Kenneth McLeish
- 2) “Paranormal World” (1997) Paul McKenna
- 3) A pamphlet produced by Grampian First Bus Group and various web pages
- 4) “Encyclopedia of Ghosts and Spirits” (1992) John and Anne Spencer
- 5) Peter Underwood's “Guide to Ghosts” (1966) and various web pages
- 6) webpage suite 101.com and other web pages
- 7) Various web pages and see (4)
- 8) Various web pages
- 9) BBC News web pages
- 10) “Deliverance” (1966) ed. Michael Perry
- 11) John's Gospel 14: 3 and Luke's Gospel 23: 42,43

12) Luke's Gospel 16: 19-31

13) Romans 8: 9

14) 1 John 4: 4

Chapter Seven - Exorcism

Exorcism is an unpleasant subject, because it implies that a thinking rational human being may be indwelt by an alien spirit entity. Of course, exorcism and spirit possession is not confined to human beings. People may be exorcised, yes, but so also may houses, shops, buildings of all kinds, fields and harvests, small objects, whatever may be thought to be adversely affected or used or influenced by a spirit entity. A personal definition of exorcism I propose to use for the time being – and there are many to choose from in literature and the internet, from dictionaries pro-spirit dimension and dictionaries that don't believe in the paranormal - is as follows:

“Exorcism is when authority is asserted over a spirit entity living in and controlling or influencing to some degree a living person or an object, so that the spirit entity is expelled and its control or influence removed entirely from what has been exorcised.”

That is not a truly accurate definition and a better one will be given later, but it will suffice for the present.

Exorcism is a fascinating subject for the general public. Why else would the film “The Exorcist” have been so popular. Of course, if exorcisms are genuine, if they do happen, then it follows that there is a spirit dimension actively inhabited by spirit entities. The plight of the young girl in the film “The Exorcist” with her glassy stare and head rotating horrified most people, and despite a natural and commendable distaste for the subject, if the exorcism of evil or unclean spirits from people really happens, then it must be included in a book on the spirit dimension.

So what do we know on the subject of exorcism? It is not unusual for Christians to think exorcisms were confined to the Bible or mainly in Christian circles. But not so!

Most of the world religions have included the exorcism of spirits in their ritual. Obvious exceptions are the Indian religions of Jainism and Sikhism that don't believe in or practise exorcism.

In Tibet, Buddhists use mantras (usually one sacred word) and dharanis (short sacred sentences) in rituals designed to protect against illness and evil influences.

Public chanting of these “holy phrases” is a feature of the Theravada Buddhist tradition to ward off danger. That isn’t casting evil spirits out of people, but protecting against the power of evil influences to harm people...a preventive rather than healing exorcism! So in Buddhism there is the concept of evil forces that can harm humans and there are religious rites for warding off or dealing with them.

The belief in jinns or spirit beings, said to be descended from Iblis, a spirit creature fallen from heaven, exists among Muslims. Followers of Islam in Somalia believe that certain illnesses including TB and pneumonia can be caused by an evil spirit living in the sick person and exorcism involves having portions of the Quran read over him. In Islamic Somali tradition, “Zar” and “Gelid” are other forms of spirit possession and each spirit-possessed individual receives an exorcism ritual that includes readings from the Quran.

Taoism is basically a Chinese philosophy dating from about 500BC. It has developed into a religious way of life. And it, too, has its belief in exorcism, performed by orthodox Taoist priests who have developed a power over demons.

These ‘fashih’ priests perform rituals to purify haunted houses or make physically or mentally sick people well again. The ‘fashih’ also use mediums believed to be possessed by a spirit to communicate with the spirit world and through this spirit they can get information denied to more earth-bound mortals, information useful in business dealings or other interactions with this world.

In Japan, before Christianity was introduced to the country, illness was thought to be caused by evil spirits, and medical treatment consisted largely of prayers, incantations and exorcisms. In the late 7th - early 8th centuries AD, one form of exorcism was to recite specially written poems to flatter spirits of the recent dead by promising not to forget them in the world of the living.

The North American Indians along the Pacific coastline believed in the spirit world and often asked friendly spirits to help them with their fishing and hunting. But they also practised exorcism dances in case a spirit over-stayed its welcome. The Navajo Indians used holy chants to exorcise people of sicknesses

caused by witches or evil spirits. They believed these illnesses were the result of the sick person having offended the Holy People or supernatural beings.

In Judaism, in Bible times, the Jews believed in evil spirits and practised exorcising or expelling them from sick people. In Matthew's Gospel, chapter 12 at verse 24, the fundamentalist Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out evil spirits by the power of Beelzebub. So it is obvious they were familiar with exorcism. And Jesus answered them – (verse 27) “If I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out?” So exorcisms were being practised by other Jews in the days of Jesus. And Acts chapter 19 verse 13 refers to Jews exorcising evil spirits. Some of these exorcists are actually identified as the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest.

In medieval times, Judaism continued to acknowledge the existence of evil spirits – called Dybbukim – disembodied human spirits who were being punished for sins in their life in the world by having to wander around until they found refuge in a living being. Perhaps an oblique reference to this belief in homeless spirits is the request by the spirits, named Legion, to be allowed to go into the herd of pigs after they were cast out from the madman who lived in the region of the Gadarenes. (1). Often, mental illnesses were blamed on these Dybbukim, and miracle-working Rabbis would attempt religious exorcism. A Jewish mystic, Isaac Luria (1534-72) gave impetus to belief in Dybbukim through his doctrine of the transmigration of souls.

There is a traditional story in Jewish literature – in both the Talmud and the Midrashim - from about the second century AD, of a Rabbi Simon ben Yochai.

There are different variations of the story, but basically it is about an emperor - possibly a Roman emperor - issuing harsh decrees against the Jews including forbidding them from observing the Sabbath and from circumcising their sons.

So Rabbi Simon ben Yochai was sent to the Emperor to seek to persuade him to rescind his decrees. He learned that the Emperor's daughter was possessed by an evil spirit, and he identified the spirit – one version has it called Ben Tamalyon – and he was able to cast this demon out of the girl. The Emperor in his gratitude said he would grant whatever the Rabbi asked for – and ben Yochai asked for the decree to be rescinded. So an exorcism saved the Jewish people from grief and suffering.

Exorcism is not an invention of recent horror stories. For example, scholars tell us that Ancient Egyptians believed that certain illnesses were caused by demons, and they used incantations to expel the demons – while Babylonians also used incantations to seek help from their gods to cure illnesses caused by evil spirits.

Exorcism has been around a long time.

What follows stretches the definition of exorcism to exorcising harvests of any influence that would blight them. But a curious practice existed in the 16th century in north-east Italy and in neighbouring countries, the practice of the benandanti, or ‘good walkers’(2). These benandanti were men or women who had been born with the amniotic membrane covering part of them, usually their heads.

They were marked by this caul, as warriors for God destined to assist Jesus Christ in combating witches and followers of Satan who were hostile to men and sought to ruin harvests and generally cause mayhem. The benandanti claimed to have out-of-body experiences on four nights each year, usually on a Thursday, to fight with the Satan worshippers, to exorcise in effect the evil influence of the witches that would otherwise have caused poor harvests. These fights were more like play fights since the weapons they used were hardly dangerous – the witches using sorghum stalks and the benandanti using bunches of fennel.

The Church’s Inquisition examined a number of these ‘good walkers’, attempting to get them to confess to worshipping Satan, but generally there was little enthusiasm on the part of the Church to persecute these simple peasants who were probably enacting ancient fertility rites, a carry-over from pre-Christian days. It is recorded that at least one of the benandanti was found guilty by the Inquisition and sentenced to six months imprisonment, but since this would have meant hardship for his wife and children, the sentence was commuted to six months restricted from leaving his home district.

But the belief in these ‘good walkers’ who were doing a form of cultural exorcism on behalf of good harvests, was fairly widespread and surfaced in other countries in different forms. For example, the ‘good walkers’ appeared in some Baltic countries as ‘good were-wolves’ who practised socially approved exorcism to ensure good harvests.

While researching for this chapter, the author was visited by his nephew, Rev.

William Davidson. William is the founder and pastor of churches both in England and parts of West Africa, and also founder and patron of a Bible School in Togo.

Over lunch, the subject of exorcism was raised, and William related some of his experiences of exorcism or deliverance, although he refuses to be considered an exorcist

– that is not his ministry, but he has seen exorcisms at firsthand, and has actually carried out the rite of exorcism during his ministry.

His wife, Sue, who shares the ministry with him, has also encountered people suffering from spirit possession. She tells of an experience in 2004 in Africa:

“A child of about 9 years was brought to me for prayer. Her parents had died and a Christian relative was fulfilling their cultural duty in taking the dead brother’s child to be his own.” The child began to behave oddly “and they suspected this child had been promised to the devil before birth.” Sue went on to describe how she took the young girl in her arms – “and as I began to pray God’s blessing on her the devil started to fight for her. For over 2 hours the child writhed on the floor, foaming at the mouth. She had super-human strength. After a while she would stop manifesting the devil – but as soon as we started to pray God’s blessing on her it happened again and again...when the devil finally left she cuddled into me. We had no language in common but she knew she was safe.”

Sue had other experiences of exorcism, including one when a woman she was attempting to exorcise began speaking to her in English – a language she did not know - in a rough masculine voice. When she commanded the spirit to leave, the voice asked: “Why?” and Sue replied: “Remember Calvary!” At this, the spirit left.

Part of the hold of spiritism and ju-ju witch-doctors on Africans living in isolated rural villages is because of the high mortality rate of babies and their mothers at birth.

To compensate for being far from ante-natal help and hospitals, expectant mothers will go to the ju-ju witch-doctor and dedicate their pregnancy to the devil so that they and their baby will survive.

When asked if he had ever witnessed an exorcism, William replied: “Many times,” then he told of an exorcism he had seen while ministering with a group

of African Christians in a rural village. Then he added he has since witnessed similar phenomena on other occasions, including once in Scotland.

“We stood at one side of the village opening, a kind of square, and villagers stood round the four sides of it to listen, with a large empty space in the middle. A man on the other side of the clearing sank to his knees, then he lay on his belly.”

What happened next astounded William. The man began to glide sinuously over the ground like a snake, without using arms or hands or legs and feet. He seemed to have no obvious source of motion, yet there he was slithering over the ground.

“I was amazed and turned to my companions but they appeared to be taking it very much for granted. Then when the man stopped moving, three of my companions went and stood over him. One placed his foot on him, then they began to pray for the spirit to go out of the man. He gave a shake, then stood to his feet, as right as rain, and claimed not to remember his strange experience.”

William also explained the practice among West Africans of dedicating unborn children to be ju-ju priests or priestesses. Some of the ceremonies defy reason, including immersing pre-pubescent girls naked under water from sunrise to sunset.

When the girls emerge, alive and unscathed, they are believed to be possessed by spirits. That practice finds an echo in parts of rural Israel, where even today it is believed that some springs and water-holes have their female water spirits.

William stressed that although he had been involved in “deliverances” – his ministry was one of evangelism and teaching, not healing, whether physical or spiritual.

But he did share one experience of when he was asked by the leaders of a church to pray for deliverance for a young man who was oppressed by “a spirit of fear”.

“We’ve been praying for him for fifteen hours and are no farther forward. Please come and pray with him.”

William shocked them with a flat refusal. “I have no intention of arguing with Satan for fifteen hours. I’ll fast and pray and come see you tomorrow.” Which he did. And when the young man, the centre of all this spiritual activity entered the

church, William faced him across its length, and the young man fell to the floor. There was prayer, then the man climbed to his feet, and displayed a sense of release and peace. He had no further problems. On the other hand, there was an occasion when William was asked to pray for a teenager who had been disrupting services for six weeks in a church he was visiting who was said to be under the influence of an “unclean spirit”. As soon as William met the young man, he knew it was all fake, a device to get attention. The culprit readily confessed when he was accused of faking.

There was no spirit possession. And on William’s part he displayed not the gift of exorcism, but the gift of discernment
– of identifying spiritual truths.

Exorcisms do happen in the West, though with our culture of scientific materialism we play this down or laugh it off with an explanation involving psychology terms such as “psycho-somatic illness” or “dissociation hysteric phenomena”. Although at this point it is worth considering the view expressed by John Richards, Secretary of the Bishop of Exeter’s Study group on exorcism who while acknowledging that many of the NT “possession” cases were indeed a first century way of looking at conditions such as epilepsy, hysteria, schizophrenia, went on to say that science has not disproved evil spirits. He said: “There is much that nowadays certainly does not merit solemn exorcism but equally there is much that Christ can deliver us from which would not be called an evil spirit.” There is, he says, a vast range of evil afflictions. His final paragraph is a concise summary: “Exorcism is not a religious form of psychiatry; it is not using religious actions and terminology to heal the mind; it is spiritual healing of spiritual illness at a spiritual level. It exists, therefore, in its own right complementing where necessary healing at these other levels”.

That care must be taken when attempting to exorcise someone believed to be influenced by a spirit entity is underlined by what happened the night of October 5/6, 1974, when Michael Taylor, a Yorkshireman, who had recently had a charismatic experience, underwent an all-night exorcism at a local church. After his 'exorcism', he went home from church and murdered his wife.. It's said he also strangled the family poodle, and was found later in the street by a policeman, naked and covered in blood. Those who had been attempting to exorcise him later explained that although they had driven out 40 spirits, there were still some spirits left in him.

The African expectant mother who held a conversation in English, a language she did not know, brings to mind the account of an exorcism that Michael Perry relates in his book “Deliverance”. The subject was a middle-aged woman who had lived all her life in an English country village.(3) She had been a member of a witch coven, and her behaviour gave loved ones much concern, so much so they enlisted the help of a priest to attempt an exorcism. As soon as the priest entered the room to meet the woman, she began to call out details from his past life, including his wild youth, details she could not possibly have known, details he himself had forgotten. Then a second priest who was present and who was an Arabic scholar asked her questions in Arabic dialects and she replied in the same dialects. After she was exorcised she lost her supernatural powers of knowledge and language, and renounced the witchcraft she was involved in.

The book, “Deliverance”, gives this definition of exorcism – “Exorcism is a specific act of binding and releasing, performed on a person who is believed to be possessed by a non-human malevolent spirit.” Exorcism can also include the “spiritual cleansing of a place which is believed to be infested by the demonic.” “Deliverance” adds that the Church of England, has in “nearly every diocese - its adviser (or team of advisers) in this ministry.”

And from the Roman Catholic Church, comes this definition of spirit possession from a web-site on the subject:

“What is possession? Possession is when Satan enters and takes over the physical and mental capabilities of a victim, however, the soul and will remain free.”

And that Page includes this advice on exorcism:

“Exorcists in this day and age are on the verge of extinction. No one, religious or lay, would like to acknowledge the fact that Satan is alive and well, tormenting and destroying souls. Many religious do not believe in possession and many are afraid to believe that it can occur.”

“It seems that most religious fear Satan and what he can do to them, more than (sic) they believe in God who can do ALL things. Fear is Satan’s dear friend. When someone fears Satan, Satan has power over them. The religious clergy fail to realize that Satan’s biggest fear, more than exorcism, is confession. A priest who preaches, and hears confessions, should not be afraid to be an exorcist. To

not use the powers of exorcism that Christ has given, is a direct betrayal of His command.”

Internet web-sites give guidance for priests on the rites of exorcism, some of which are for the protection of the exorcist, and his companions, and some for taking authority against the evil spirits, binding and casting them out of the afflicted.

In the early seventies a book– “Satan is alive and well on planet earth” by Hal Lindsey (4) became a best-seller. And it spoke of the reality of Satan and evil spirits in the world.

More recently, a few weeks before this chapter was written, the author saw a documentary experiment on TV that claimed to be about exorcism. A Christian “healer” was attempting to exorcise a member of his church. Apparently this “patient” had frequently been exorcised of various influences and conditions in the past, so the programme makers obviously thought they would not be disappointed with him as a subject.

He was wired up to an electro-encephalograph machine that would measure changes in his brain-waves when he was being exorcised. However, using an E.C.G. machine to determine whether or not a subject was really being exorcised would not provide compelling evidence of the reality of the exorcism. An exercise we undertook as undergraduate psychology students was to do ECG work on fellowstudents, and just opening one’s eyes or reading something could cause changes in the electrical pulses in the brain and the changes would show up on an ECG machine. Sure enough, during the so-called exorcism, there were changes in the patient’s brain-wave patterns. However, since some brain activity was involved, there would have been cause for concern if there had been no changes in his brain-wave patterns. Although the programme was not impressive, it did reinforce the decision to write this chapter, because it is obvious that the public are interested in exorcism, what it is and what it does. So here is another definition of exorcism:

“Exorcism is the act of driving out, or warding off, demons, or evil spirits, from persons, places, or things, which are believed to be possessed or infested by them, or are liable to become victims or instruments of their malice. Technically, exorcism is not driving out a Devil or demon, but it is placing the Devil or demon on oath. And, in some incidences there may be more than one demon

possessing a person.

“Exorcism” is derived from the Greek preposition “ek” with the verb “horkizo” which means “I cause (someone) to swear” and refers to “putting the spirit or demon on oath,” or invoking a higher authority to bind the entity in order to control it and command it to act contrary to its own will.”

Exorcism is dismissed by critics, usually by those who don’t believe there is a spirit dimension to life. To them, only the physical and material exists. So it is not possible to exorcise what does not exist. One critic of William Peter Blatty’s “The Exorcist”, a critic referred to in an earlier chapter, explained away the apparently supernatural manifestations that happened to a young boy upon whose real-life experiences the book was based. The strange sounds heard by adults, said the critic, were just the squeaking of the boy’s bed-springs as he lay on it, and the rapping of his toes against the bed’s footboard.(5)

It takes some believing to accept that parents and Catholic priests called in to deal with “spiritual manifestations” would not have recognised the squeaking of bed springs caused by the boy moving about or the noise of his feet against the foot-board.

Squeaky bedsprings were fairly common before springinterior mattresses, and the rapping of feet against a bed’s footboard is hardly a unique occurrence. It’s hard to believe that adults who witnessed it did not identify the source of the sounds, while someone who was not present was able to recognise it and explain it away. Or is this simply an example of the arrogance of the skeptic.

And another from the same web site condemns exorcism as being “extremely destructive” when practised on patients with undiagnosed multiple personality disorders. If someone is mentally ill, practising exorcism on him could have a serious negative effect, which is why serious exorcists like Rome’s Father Gabriele Amorth always asks for someone’s medical history and consults a psychiatrist if necessary.

Among symptoms linked with spirit possession are knowledge the patient could not reasonably be expected to possess, unusual physical strength, aversion to sacred objects and ability to speak a foreign language that the subject has not learned. Critics dismiss these symptoms as revealing multiple personality disorder, although how someone who has not learned or been exposed to a

foreign language could suddenly be able to speak it is beyond the realm of psycholinguistics.

Such a phenomenon would completely contradict the how and why of language development. Although it does bring to mind the story of the house servant who suddenly began to speak New Testament Greek without ever studying it. Then it was remembered that as a young girl she had worked in the house of an expert in NT Greek and she would often have overheard him speaking it in his study while she polished floors, and it had without her co-operation lodged itself in her subconscious. But in that case, while she never learned it, she had been exposed to it, and that only serves to prove that the brain is a complex and wonderful organism science has barely begun to understand.

In medieval times, many mental illnesses were blamed on evil spirits. But the practice today of giving a name to a psychopathic condition does not necessarily explain how it happens, and even less, how to cure it. Psychology is still toiling to be accepted as a scientific discipline, and there are many gaps in its knowledge.

Some mental conditions are caused by bio-chemical imbalances, others are caused by the inter-action of in-born personality features with experiences, especially in childhood, but it is unwise to be dogmatic about conditions for which there is no observable cause. Guess-work motivated by prejudice, even from the perspective of scientific objectivity, places the exponent in the same category as the medieval practitioners who blamed all illnesses on spiritual causes without having evidence for their beliefs.

Before the physical or emotional causes of all mental illnesses are identified and understood, it would probably be wise to keep an open mind about those that are not understood.

From the internet comes the story of a retired Church of Ireland minister, Canon William Lendrum, from a report in The Belfast Telegraph of 17 February, 2003, and recorded on the web-page www.religionnewsblog.com/00002391-.html.

“He may look like everyone’s favourite grandfather but Canon William Lendrum regularly confronts the Devil.” The report goes on about the 78-year-old minister travelling around Northern Ireland banishing evil spirits from people in scenes like those from the film “The Exorcist”.

He tells of a secret sect called the “Ulster Assassination Cult” which he claims uses a Satanic oath that begins – “My lord and master Satan, I acknowledge you as my god and prince...” And he warns about use of the Ouija Board when he tells of a woman who had two sessions on the Board and ended up fearing for her life. “A few minutes fun,” he says – “fourteen years of hell...”

Reverend Lendrum started out sceptical of evil spirits and even about the existence of Satan, but he goes on: “Seeing is believing. Experience teaches a fool.” After he became aware of what he felt was a perverse plan working against him in his Christian work, he began to question what could be behind it all. He was loaned a book on Spiritual Warfare, then he met a woman he calls “Alice” (not her real name) in a hospital for alcoholics.

“Alice started being argumentative and truculent. She talked about herself in the third person. Then it dawned on me that someone else was using Alice’s lips to speak to me about Alice. It was an evil spirit talking, it was in control of her life.” And so began his ministry of exorcism. Reverend Lendrum described how he learned Alice had been involved in the Satanic Ulster Assassination Cult in a blood-letting ritual.

And although he performed a number of exorcisms in the hospital and a number of demons were cast out of her, she remained unwilling to co-operate. As she stood in a corner of the room, she muttered: “they’re trying to take me away from you but they will not succeed.”

Rev Lendrum adds – “You will not be successful with exorcism if the person you are trying to help fights against you. Alice passed out of our influence and died in her early 40s in a red light area of Belfast.”

His exorcism ministry, however, was more successful on other occasions, both with people and places. He tells about the exorcism of a jeweller’s shop in which things kept being moved around and strange noises were heard. After the exorcism of the shop, “all strange activity ceased immediately.” He adds: “A hundred years ago the house had been a doctor’s surgery where operations were carried out, which may have been significant.”

He is not afraid of exorcisms. “It’s like a fire in your house,” he says, “that you have to put out.” And when asked if anything scares him, he replies, with a grin: “I’m frightened of my wife.”

Finally, it's worth noting that the Catholic Church has guide-lines for an exorcism, including the need for the priest to have a blameless life, any superstition to be avoided, cooperation with qualified physicians, and the exorcism to take place in a church or other holy place if possible. There are more, but that is enough to realise that significant bodies of the Christian Church, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, take exorcism seriously.

The historical widespread practice of exorcism and its continuation in mainstream churches today, proves it is not an empty practice we can easily ignore. On the contrary, it is real to many contemporary intelligent and thinking people, and is one more pointer to the reality of the spirit dimension, and how it may influence everyday life.

References:

- 1) Matthew 8: 31
- 2) "The Night Battles" (1983) Carlo Ginzburg
- 3) "Deliverance" (1987) Ed. Michael Perry
- 4) "Satan is alive and well on Planet Earth" (1973) Hal Lindsey
- 5) http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2843/is_1_25/ai_689665 16

Various web-pages on the Internet.

Chapter Eight - The Bible and the Spirit Dimension

The Holy Bible, in all its 66 books, witnesses to the reality of the spirit dimension.

The spirit dimension is there in the pages of Scripture, from its opening words: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." (1) to the last chapter of the Book of Revelation where it says: "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches." (2) And some nineteen hundred years before the Origin of the Universe Theories of the Big Bang and the Steady State, the Book of Hebrews declares: "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what is visible." (3)

Throughout the Old Testament we have the record of the ongoing communication, the developing communication, of God with man, whether by means of angels, by His Spirit, the gentle whispering voice to Elijah or the thundering from Mount Sinai, or through His chosen spokespersons, the prophets. It is in the Old Testament we meet the Accuser of mankind, Satan, who first appears as the deceiver in the guise of the serpent in the Garden of Eden,

and it is in the Old Testament we learn of the original status of Satan among the servants of God.

But Satan is not the only adversary of mankind. The Book of Daniel chapter 10 tells of Daniel, the servant of God and his encounter with an angel sent from God in response to his having set out “to gain understanding and to humble (himself) before - God.” This angel was opposed by a hostile spirit being - described as “the prince of the Persian kingdom” who resisted the angel of God for twenty-one days.

The archangel Michael intervened and the resistance was overcome. So angels battle in the spirit dimension. And the arena of conflict between these spirit beings is not confined to the spirit dimension; later in that chapter we read of more spiritual conflict between the angel from God and the angel known as the prince of Greece. It would appear from these references to spirit beings known as the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece, that powerful spirit beings are identified with individual nations, perhaps in some kind of influencing or authority role, and that they are opposed to the will of God.

It is in the O.T. we read that God warns us to be on our guard against those spirit beings who are enemies of God, and whose purpose is to make man unfit to serve God. Special warnings are given to those who would seek to communicate with such spirit beings. Deuteronomy chapter 18 verses 9 to 12 gives a warning:

“When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no-one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practises divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD...”

And Isaiah chapter 8 verse 19 explains why these works are repugnant to God:

“When men tell you to consult mediums and spirits, who whisper and mutter, should not a people enquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?”

So the Old Testament (also designated as O.T.) recognises there are spirits for mediums to contact. But the Bible is specific and clear: “Don’t do it!”

The O.T. tells of miracles performed by God, from the very act of Creation in the first verses of Genesis to the transformation of a staff into a serpent as a means of convincing Pharaoh of the power of Moses and his brother, Aaron. The message of the O.T. is that God is on the side of man, and the spirits opposed to God are set on man's destruction.

And it is in the O.T. we get the prophecies of the coming Messiah that are fulfilled in the New Testament, with promises of still further fulfilment to come in the Last Days. The most authoritative statement the Christian can accept on the reality or otherwise of the spirit dimension is what Jesus Christ has said about it, or what He did about it. The evidence for that is in the New Testament, and most of that is found in the four Gospels. The first three Gospels are usually taken together as the Synoptic ("seen together") Gospels, and in them we read that angels foretold and were present at the birth of Jesus Christ, and occasionally figured in His life as a man right through to His Ascension (4). Jesus relationship with the spirit dimension was revealed comprehensively in Mark's Gospel, chapter 1 verses 12 and 13: "At once the Spirit (Holy Spirit) sent Him (Jesus) out into the desert, and He was in the desert for forty days being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended Him."

In these two verses we have the Holy Spirit with Jesus Christ furthering the will of God, the temptation of Satan, and finally angels in service to Jesus. Further evidence for the reality of the spirit dimension to Jesus is in His power over evil spirits, revealed in His ability to expel them from people possessed by them.

It is significant that even His enemies the Pharisees who eventually conspired with others (5) to have Him executed acknowledge He had power over the evil spirits, but they chose to misinterpret the source of His power:

"While they were going out, a man who was demonpossessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, 'Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.'

But the Pharisees said: 'It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons.' (6)

The first three Gospels also record the Transfiguration of Jesus when on a top of a mountain in the presence of three of His disciples, Peter, John and James, He

met with Moses and Elijah and they conversed about the forthcoming happenings at Jerusalem culminating with His crucifixion and final departure from this life. (7)

A last point to be made from the Synoptic Gospels is the story of Jesus' appearing to His disciples on the evening of the Resurrection Sunday as found in Luke's Gospel, chapter 24 verses 36-39:

"While they were still talking about this, Jesus Himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch Me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.' "

Jesus does not dismiss the idea of a ghost as being an impossibility, but instead gives proof that He is not a ghost.

In the writings of John, the divinity of Jesus, the Son of God, is emphasised, as in the first chapter of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God..." and continues: "through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made." (8)

There, Jesus as the Word of God, is with God from all eternity, He is God, and by Him all things were created. The spirit dimension in the writings of John focus more on the Spirit of God. References to the evil side of the spirit dimension are mostly from unbelievers who accuse Jesus of being demon possessed.

"You are demon possessed," the crowd answered..." (9) and "The Jews answered Him, 'Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon possessed," and "At this the Jews exclaimed, 'Now we know that you are demonpossessed.." (10)

John's Gospel identifies Satan with the devil. Of the last supper of Jesus with His disciples we read:

"The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus." And again: "As soon as Judas took the

bread, Satan entered into him.” (11)

Although John’s Gospel refers to the evil side of the spirit dimension, it says much more about God’s Spirit. The spirit dimension is accepted as fact, but it is the good positive side of the dimension that is emphasised. At the graveside of His friend Lazarus, Jesus said to Lazarus’ sister, Martha: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.” (12)

That is undying life forever with God, contrasted with an existence forever without God.

When Pontius Pilate, at the trial of Jesus, asked Him: “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus replied: “My kingdom is not of this world ... My kingdom is from another place.” (13) Jesus was speaking of a kingdom involving the spirit dimension, the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus promised His disciples that He would send another Comforter to be with them after He left this life, a Spirit Comforter, the Holy Spirit of God. And that Comforter is with and within the Church today:

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever - the Spirit of Truth ... you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you... the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My Name...” (14)

In his three Epistles, John had mainly one over-riding purpose: to correct a heresy that was creeping into the Church, a heresy centred on the spirit dimension of the work of Jesus Christ. The heresy arose from the belief that only what is spiritual is good, while by contrast, anything of the body or the flesh is evil. If the body is evil, then Jesus could not have had a physical body of flesh. This heresy was known as Docetism (from a word meaning “to seem or appear to be”.) John referred to it in 2nd John verse 7:

“Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world.”

An obvious fault with this heresy is that a spirit being could not be crucified, it would not suffer, and it would have no blood to be shed for the sins of the world. But John asserts in 1 John 1 verse 7: “the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us

from all sin.” And John began that Epistle with: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched...” Hands could not have touched a spirit.

Then John warns his readers in 1 John 4 verses 1,2: “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God...This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.”

In his Gospel, John focused on Jesus as the ‘divine Son of God’. In his Epistles, he emphasised both the Spirit of Jesus Christ and the spirit side of the Christian, and he saw men as battle-grounds over the which the Spirit of God combats with evil for the hearts and allegiance of men, climaxing with the triumphant assertion that the Spirit of Jesus living in the Christian is more powerful than the spirit of evil in the world. (15)

When we turn to the Book of the Acts of the Apostles we come to a book whose title is sometimes rephrased as the Book of the Acts of the Holy Spirit... with good reason. Because it is in Acts that we read of the wish of Moses being fulfilled:

“But Moses replied: “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit on them.” (16)

The fulfilment of Moses’ wish was prophesied in the writings of Ezekiel to happen after the return of the Jews to Israel from their dispersion throughout nations. (17) But what Moses had wished for the Children of Israel was prophesied to be extended to all flesh in Joel chapter 2: verses 28 and 29. And that prophecy of Joel was fulfilled and recorded in the Book of Acts: “this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel - ‘In the last days, God says, ‘I will pour out My Spirit on all people.’” (18)

Jesus promise to His disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came on them (19) was fulfilled and the spirit dimension is demonstrated in the power-filled lives of the followers of Jesus, as for example, of Philip:

“When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed.” (20)

Saul of Tarsus has a spiritual encounter on the road to Damascus - he meets with the risen Jesus Christ, Who asks him:

“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” and Saul asked – “Who are you, Lord?” and the reply came – “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” (21) And from then on, Saul is a committed disciple, and eventually an apostle, of Jesus Christ. This spiritual encounter had a significant effect on both Saul, later to be known as Paul, and on the growth and future development of the Christian Church. The spirit dimension had invaded the physical world, and its effects are still felt wherever the New Testament is read

The Book of Acts tells of a number of meetings various followers of Jesus Christ had with angels. The following encounter is recorded in Acts 27 where we read of the shipwreck of the vessel taking Paul to Rome for trial. Paul encourages the ship’s crew who fear for their lives as their vessel is driven out of control by strong gales towards the rocky coastline of Malta after a night-time visit he had from an angel.

Paul tells the ship’s company:

“Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete – But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul...God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’” (22) And that is what happened. The message from the angel of the Lord came true.

The Acts of the Apostles is full of references to the spirit dimension, mostly to the Spirit of God working in the lives and circumstances of people. It is both a history of the beginnings of the Christian Church and also a promise of the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in the Church today - an open window on the interaction between the physical and the spirit dimensions.

The New Testament epistles or letters were written for instructing or encouraging Christians, and most references to the spirit dimension concerned the Holy Spirit, although there are also some references to angels, both those faithful to God and those opposed to God, and some references are to Satan, the devil, and to demons. The basic assumption is that man has a spirit while acknowledging he is also a physical being. Paul writing to the church at Corinth

says of the unmarried woman:

Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit.” (23) and again we read: “For the word of God – penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit...” (24)

These refer to man being a body, a soul and a spirit. There are more references to man’s spirit and his soul, but the tripartite nature of man is most clearly referred to in Paul’s letter to the church at Thessalonica: “May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (25)

The Christian has been born again, according to John’s Gospel (26), he has become spiritually alive to God, whereas the one who has not been born again, is without the Holy Spirit. He is out of touch with God. In his epistle, Jude describes it as: “men...who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.” (27)

According to the N.T. epistles, the Christian has the Spirit of God living in him, guiding him and helping him in his service of God : “those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (28) And from Paul’s letter to the Galatians – “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” (29)

The Christian lives in the spirit dimension because he has God’s Spirit living in him: “He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts.” (30)

“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” (31)

“We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.” (32)

But the Spirit in the Christian is also the Spirit of Jesus Christ: “Do you not realise that Christ Jesus is in you -?” (33) and “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ he does not belong to Christ..” (34) and “Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts –“ (35)

The twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians and Galatians chapter 5 verses 22, 23 deal respectively with the gifts of empowerments of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which is the transformation into the mind of Christ. Both gifts and fruit are the result of the spirit dimension being manifested in the

Christian's life.

The N.T Epistles have something to say about the angels, most of whom serve God, but there is also reference to: “the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home – these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.” (36)

And of Satan, 2 Corinthians says: “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.” (37)

We encounter Satan again in the final book of the Bible, Revelation. It's been described as a difficult book to understand – a book that either finds the reader mad, or leaves him mad. The Book of Revelation is spirit dimension undiluted, and even in chapters 2 and 3 where the material world, the physical dimension, is given most prominence; the spirit dimension is never far from the attention of the reader.

Revelation is a Christian apocalyptic book heavy on symbolism and coded meanings and looks forward to the day when God in the Person of Jesus Christ, the conquering Lamb of God, comes on to the human stage, puts down evil and vindicates the faithful servants of God. It begins with Jesus Christ sending His angel to show His servant John what must soon take place: “He made it known by sending His angel to His servant John.” (38) So right at the beginning of the book there is the interaction between the spirit dimension and the physical world, with the angel coming to John.

Satan, the devil, and his angels, and his minions appear both in the spirit realm and on earth. In Revelation we find the allies of Satan, the False Prophet, the Beast, the one numbered 666, and the Whore, Babylon.

Chapter 4 begins with the writer, John, being introduced to the Revelation, to witness the cosmic conflict that will take place in the spirit dimension, a conflict in which the outcome is inevitable – God's victory over evil. And in the first chapter of Revelation we read that John was “in the spirit” (39) and then he receives visions. This happens again in chapter 4 (40) and again God speaks to him in visions. It is on these occasions when his physical and spiritual natures are interactive with God's Spirit, that John receives visions. Christians are people who are both physically and spiritually alive, and as such they are potentially capable of interacting with God's Spirit.

Another important truth for Christians from the Book of Revelation is that our prayers, even those prayers we have been saying for years, perhaps for loved ones, even those prayers – all prayers, are never wasted. They find a place in Heaven.

In Revelation chapter 5 verse 8 we read: “the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders ...Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.” Our prayers are preserved in the Throne Room of God.

And our prayers rise up before God, as we read in chapter 8 verses 3 and 4:

“Another angel, who had a golden censer – was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God...”

Another aspect of the spirit dimension is referred to in chapter 12, where we read of the war in heaven between Michael and his angels and the dragon and his angels (41) and then the dragon and his angels are cast out of Heaven, down to earth. And that explains the activity of Satan and his evil spirits on earth and their hatred of mankind.

The Book of Revelation finishes with the declaration: “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.” (42)

From beginning to its end, the Bible is a testimony to the reality of the spirit dimension and its interaction with this life. And nowhere is this interaction more marked and conclusively defined, than in the Book of Revelation.

References: 19) Acts 1: 8
20) Acts 8: 6,7
21) Acts 9: 1-6
22) Acts 27: 21 to 24
23) 1 Corinthians 7: 34
24) Hebrews 4: 12
25) 1 Thessalonians 5: 23
26) John 3: 3f
27) Jude verse 19
28) Romans 8: 14
29) Galatians 5: 25

- 30) 2 Corinthians 1: 22
- 31) 1 Corinthians 3: 16
- 32) 1 Corinthians 2: 12
- 33) 2 Corinthians 13: 5
- 34) Romans 8: 9
- 35) Galatians 4: 6
- 36) Jude verse 6
- 37) 2 Corinthians 11: 14
- 38) Revelation 1: 1
- 39) Revelation 1: 10
- 40) Revelation 4: 2
- 41) Revelation 12: 9
- 42) Revelation 22: 16

- 1) Genesis 1: 1
- 2) Revelation 22: 16
- 3) Hebrews 11: 3
- 4) Acts 1: 10,11
- 5) John 18:3
- 6) Matthew 9: 32-34
- 7) Matthew 17: 1-8; Mark 9: 2-8; Luke 9: 28-36
- 8) John 1: 1 and 3
- 9) John 7: 20
- 10) John 8: 48 and 52
- 11) John 13: 2 and 27
- 12) John 11: 25,26
- 13) John 18: 33 and 36
- 14) John 14: 16,17 and 26
- 15) 1 John 4: 4
- 16) Numbers 11: 28,29
- 17) Ezek 36: 24-27; 37:14; 39:27-29
- 18) Acts 2: 16,17

Addendum to Chapter Eight - “Ephesians”

Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians is treated as an addendum to the chapter on Holy Scripture, not as an afterthought, but because it has something to say in a way different from elsewhere in the Bible. And that is its use of one word, “epouranios”, used five times, and each time in a slightly different context. Not being a Greek scholar, I have to rely on others' translations, and the first authority quoted is Thayer (1) who says “epouranios” is “existing in or above heaven, heavenly.”

But how it is actually interpreted depends also on its context and since that involves a subjective input, the bias of the translator is also significant.

The New International Version translates the five times “epouranios” is used in Ephesians as follows:

Chapter 1 verse 3: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”

Chapter 1 verse 20: “which he (God) exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.”

Chapter 2 verse 6: “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.”

Chapter 3 verse 10: “His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.”

Chapter 6 verse 12: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

Here is a selection of how a few Bibles translated “epouranios” as used in these five verses in Ephesians:

A.V. Amplified Knox R.S.V. Jerusalem Version

Chapter 1 verse 3

“heavenly places”
“heavenly realms”

Chapter 1 verse 20 “heavenly places”

“heavenly” (places)
“higher
than
heaven”
“above the heavens”
“heavenly “of
places” heaven”

“heavenly “in
places” heaven”

Chapter 2 verse 6

“heavenly places”
“heavenly sphere”
“above the heavens”
“heavenly “in
places” heaven”

Chapter 3 verse 10 “heavenly places”

“heavenly sphere”
“of
heaven” “heavenly
places” * * * *

Chapter 6 verse 12 “high

places” “heavenly (super
natural)
sphere”
“an order higher than ours”
“heavenly “the places” heavens”

The problem is that “epouranios” is where Christ is seated now at God the Father's right hand, it is where Christians are now blessed with Christ, it is where Christians are now seated with Christ, where the rulers and authorities now see the witness of the Christian Church as a manifestation of God's manifold wisdom. But it is also where spiritual forces of evil now oppose the Church. Surely, spiritual forces of evil cannot be in heaven! The translators of the Authorised Version recognised this difficulty and rather than use “heavenly” substituted the words “high places” for it. The Amplified New Testament inserted as an alternative translation the word “supernatural”, and the Knox Version used instead the phrase “an order higher than ours”.

A Bible scholar commenting on the apparent paradox of Ephesians 6 verse 12 said: “Do the powers then live in the same heaven as Christ and God? Since the author of Ephesians (AE) uses the same plural phrase here as in 1:20, this suggests he thought they did.” (2)

The 4th/5th century Bible scholar, Jerome, wrote of the word: “heaven (epouranios) is the large antithesis to 'earth', belonging to the region of the unseen, a sphere of action invisible and practically boundless.”(3)

Perhaps if we use it in that way, or as heavenly realm or sphere as used in some of the translations referred to above, we are not far off from seeing the term “spirit dimension” being an acceptable use of it, at least within the pages of this book.

The closing words of this addendum are taken from “The Lion Handbook of the Bible”, a valuable help for those of us Christians, who while we are not Bible scholars, nevertheless want to know more about the Bible and our faith. It is taken from the section dealing with Ephesians, and is a note on the verses referred to above:

“Heavenly places/realm/world ...The spiritual realm of all the unseen forces of good and evil” (4)

References:

- 1) “Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon” (1976) Zondervan
- 2) “Ephesians” (2003) – Ernest Best (page 318)
- 3) St Jerome, referred to in Note on page 153 in the Cambridge Bible edition of Ephesians by HCG Moule, Bishop of Durham
- 4) “The Lion Handbook of the Bible” (Third edition) eds Pat and David Alexander, page 714

Chapter Nine - Angels

If we believe the Bible is a true record of events that happened during a certain period in history, then we must accept that the spirit dimension exists, because the Bible assumes the existence of that dimension. And if it exists, then one would expect there to be manifestations of that dimension in subsequent non-Biblical history. Take for example, the Biblical testimony to the reality of angels and their intervention at times in human affairs.

Generally speaking, Christians who accept the miracles in the Bible and the reality of Jesus Christ being the Son of God, crucified and resurrected, and believe without question the reality of the appearances of angels in the Bible, find it less easy to believe that angels are relevant outside the pages of the Bible.

It is not easy to explain this attitude. Perhaps it's because the Christian faith doesn't require belief in angels. One can be a sincere Christian and never

mention the subject of angels except at Christmas or Easter-time, and then only when singing a Carol or reading a passage from a Gospel. On the other hand, it's possible – according to the Bible – for a Christian to have seen or met an angel, and not been aware of it.

The Bible does speak of those who have had angels as guests and never knew they were angels (1).

Few sermons are about angels. It isn't that there's a conspiracy of silence about angels...but it may be because they don't obviously fit into 21st Century Christian everyday life. Yet there are mature and level-headed Christians who believe in angels, not just because they're in the Bible, but because of personal experiences.

Take for example what happened to a Christian fellowship in Dundee, Scotland, who regularly held open-air meetings in the city centre. The leader of the group – let's call him Bob – claims to have had an encounter with an angel during an open-air meeting. Bob was preaching and being constantly heckled by a man standing among the spectators. It was difficult for Bob not to be distracted and put off his train of thought. Then he noticed a newcomer had suddenly appeared and was speaking to the heckler and was holding up his index finger to him as if in admonishment. To Bob's surprise, the heckler suddenly went quiet and left.

The open-air meeting was not further interrupted, and Bob invited any interested spectators to come to an indoor meeting to be held nearby. The newcomer who had spoken to the heckler joined Bob and his friends in a nearby hall, but when Bob offered him tea or coffee, he refused, and when thanked for his intercession with the heckler, replied that that was what he had been sent for. Then he added: "We're very pleased with what you're doing here. I have to leave now as I've got to be somewhere else." And with that, he left the hall.

Bob was surprised by this, and after a moment's hesitation, hurried after the stranger to ask him what he meant. But although Bob was almost at the stranger's heels when he reached the sidewalk, and although he could see for some distance in every direction, there was no sign of the helpful stranger. He had vanished.

"I wanted to ask him what he said to the heckler," Bob explained, "but he had disappeared." Then he added: "I now believe we had been visited by an angel."

Here's another angel encounter. (2) And it involves a snow-plough and a yellow van. It happened in the early eighties when a Christian lady, Elsie Hedger, was returning to Keswick in northern England with her father who was returning from a trip to hospital in Carlisle. With them in her car were three friends. In snow-blizzard conditions, Elsie took a wrong turning and ended up lost on the moors. They back-tracked to a crossroads but were unsure which way to go and with snow drifting on the roads, Elsie happened to say that what they needed was a snow-plough.

And right then a large snow-plough appeared and the driver said to her: "Follow me." So Elsie did, and behind her came two other cars whose drivers were also lost, and a small yellow van taking up the rear. It looked as if the snow-plough and the van belonged to a local government road's department because yellow is often the colour used for local government vehicles in the U.K.

They eventually reached the main road for Keswick, and when Elsie wanted to thank the drivers of the snow-plough and its accompanying yellow van, both vehicles had disappeared. (2) Said Elsie: "The road was straight for a long way in either direction, but they were no-where to be seen. I asked all my passengers if any of them had seen which way the vehicles had gone, but none of them had seen them leave. They had simply vanished." Elsie is sure angels had come to guide them to safety. Not with wings and harps, but with a snow-plough.

There have been claims by people who are very ill to have seen angels. Seventeen-year-old Jason Stroop of St Clair, Missouri, was dying of leukaemia. His brother, Scott, who was at Bible College, came home to see Jason, and as he entered Jason's bedroom, Jason asked who his four companions were. But Scott was alone, yet Jason insisted there were four men with him, and he said "there is a beautiful, bright light around them." Jason was a devout Christian, and his family were thankful that he had received a visitation of angels. He then slept peacefully and died the following day.

It's not often that a busy airport like John F. Kennedy airport is given as the site for an angel visitation, but such was the case when in 1978, Bruce Humphrey was desperate to get a plane to England to meet up with his son, David, who lived there.

They had been estranged for some time and both he and David had made it a matter of prayer and both felt it was God's will for them to meet that weekend.

Bruce phoned the airport beforehand and was assured he could get a stand-by flight. He arrived at the airport to find it thronged with people because fog at Heathrow had caused a back-log of flights and the earliest he could hope to fly would be the following day. After Bruce spent hours of frustrating waiting in line an official singled him out of the crowds and asked him, "Can I help you?"

Bruce explained he urgently needed to get to London, but that it seemed hopeless.

Then the official said: "I have two seats available at 8.30pm." Bruce bought a ticket, then the official said: "Ignore the crowds. You'll find a porter outside." Bruce was amazed by the service, and it happened just as was promised. A tall man came up to him, handed him a boarding pass and took his luggage from him. Bruce could hardly believe it and later when he landed in London and found his luggage safely arrived, he was convinced that he had been assisted by two angels.

An example of an angel assisting a Christian in need is the story told by Patricia Heaton of Yorkshire, England. It involved her gas boiler breaking down. Patricia, alone with her two children – she was a single parent – was in trouble because not only was she without hot water, she was also afraid of a gas explosion. So she phoned round for a plumber to come and repair it, but the prices they estimated to repair the boiler were far more than she could afford. She gave no one the contract. Yet she was worried about the danger to her children and herself, so she prayed about the situation.

She had given no one her address or phone number, so she was surprised when a plumber arrived at her door to repair the boiler. How could he have known her address? She was so surprised that she allowed him to repair the boiler, although she had no idea how much it would cost or how she could pay for the work.

The boiler was repaired and the plumber was on his way out of the house when Patricia asked him: "How much do I owe you?" His reply was even more surprising than his appearance had been: "That's all right, love. Have it on me." She followed after him to thank him, but he had disappeared, and there was no sight of car or van. Patricia thanked God for sending her an angel-plumber. (2)

The internet has a large selection of stories of personal encounters with what people believe to have been angels. Here are two taken by random from web-

pages the first from on a train journey from Euston station, London, to Rugby, and the second from Memphis, USA.

“A young man of our acquaintance was new to the U.K and was travelling on the train to Rugby from Euston in London. It was busy, during the rush hour, and a seat was hard to find. He trudged through the packed carriages and was just about to give up when a man stood and called him over. He shook our friend's hand and invited him to sit next to him. The man was holding a Bible and told our friend he had been waiting for him and that he was really glad he'd made it to England.

Together they prayed for the whole of the journey and when the train neared Rugby our friend stood to get his bag from the rack. He turned back to thank his travelling companion for the prayer and fellowship they'd shared during the journey but he wasn't there.

He really didn't want to go without saying goodbye but the train had by now stopped at the platform. He asked a lady sitting opposite if she's seen where the man he'd been sitting and chatting with had gone. Her reply stunned him: 'You were sitting and praying quietly on your own for the whole of the journey.' Our friend is convinced he'd been praying with an Angel.”

C & J, Rugby

And the second is from Memphis, Tennessee: “It was in December, somewhere between 1983 Christmas and The New Year [the Solemnity of Mary], and I was driving my wife's car. The ice on the streets was of Olympic game quality. I was well familiar with driving on snow and ice and was always able to pull out of any problem.

I soon found an exception. A motorist pulled out across an intersection in my path which forced me to take evasive action. I avoided hitting that person, (he actually watched me headed for trouble and left) but as a result of my sudden correction, I slid onto a slippery slope at the road's edge.

I struggled and fought the slope but eventually I gently slid into a ditch at the roadside some ten feet below the level of the road. I was not hurt, nor was the car even damaged. I was, however, profoundly stuck. There was no driving out of this one! I sat in the car, some six years before the era of cell phones, pondering my plight.

I had been there for about twenty minutes, still without a solution. I heard a voice coming up above me from the road. There were two men in an old red Ford Fourwheel-drive Pickup truck.

One of them yelled down to me. "Are you alright?"
I answered affirmatively.

He asked, "What are you doing down there?" I responded, "Well, things looked rather interesting down here, so I thought I'd come down for a closer look."

I heard some distant talking and laughter coming from within the truck. He asked, "'Would you like for us to pull you out?"

I replied, "Sure, if you think you can do it. It's really slick around here." With that they lowered a chain and one of them attached it to the frame of the car.

Amazingly, they had it up on the road in minutes!
"I really appreciate you guys" I declared and offered them a Twenty. I heard them decline it.

As I was reaching for the money I looked up from my billfold... and they were gone. The truck with the two "men" could not be seen or found."

John Haas, Memphis, Tennessee

The Bible, has many references to angels, whether it's the Hebrew "malak" of the Old Testament or the Greek "aggelos" (with the first "g" converted to an "n" in English) of the New Testament, the meaning is the same: "messenger". In the Old Testament: Hagar, Lot in Sodom, Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, Moses, the Israelites in the exodus from Egypt, Balaam's donkey and then Balaam, the Israelites at Bokim, Gideon, Samson's mother and her husband, Manoah, David, Elijah, Gad, Araunah, Nebuchadnezzar and the witnesses to the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the fiery furnace, Daniel and Zechariah – the Bible says they all met angels.

Do we discount these stories, or say that they were in the Old Testament and strange and unscientific things happened in those days such as the Israelites crossing the Red Sea and then the Jordan, without getting wet feet, and God speaking from a mountain, and a leper being healed by dipping in the Jordan and many more miracles. But we live in modern times, and may find it difficult to

believe such things nowadays.

Let's consider angels in the New Testament. It's nearer our time, and somehow easier to accept, especially regarding the supernatural since Jesus performed miracles, and the Christian religion has for a central tenet the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and you can't get a bigger miracle than a dead person coming back to life.

Angel encounters in the New Testament were experienced by the following people: Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist; and Mary, the Mother of Jesus (they both saw and were spoken to by the angel Gabriel); Joseph, Mary's husband; the shepherds on the pastures near Bethlehem saw angels; angels tended to Jesus: Mary Magdalene with Joanna and Mary the mother of James and another woman saw angels at the empty tomb on the first Easter Sunday morning.

Then there were the apostles who had been arrested on two separate occasions for preaching and were freed from jail, both times, by an angel. Others who encountered angels include the apostle Philip; Cornelius, the Roman centurion; Peter, when he was in prison; King Herod who was struck down by an angel; and Paul when he was on board a ship that was about to be ship-wrecked on Malta. They all met angels.

Angels are referred to in the Letters to Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians and 1 Timothy, the Epistle to the Hebrews and 1 and 2 Peter and Jude. And in the Book of Revelation, there is a great deal about angels and their relationship with human beings and their service of God.

Before we leave the Bible, it would be as well to look again at an interesting reference to angels in the Book of Daniel chapter 10. It speaks of an angel whose intention to come to Daniel was hindered by the angel who is described as the prince of Persia, and the angel Michael comes to the aid of the speaker. In verse 20 this angel says: Soon I will return to fight against the Prince (patron angel) of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come... No-one supports me against them except Michael."

From these verses it would appear that there are spirit beings, angels, who are especially related to certain countries, perhaps in a guiding or empowering or some other influencing role. And certain of these angels are opposed to the will

of God, and in this instance, dedicated to hindering help being brought to the aid of the servants of God.

But while these activities of angels may be acceptable within the pages of the Bible, it could be argued that they are not believable in the 21st Century. We've moved on! But not that much. At least not from a willingness to believe in angels.

Take for example the two widely circulated (and believed) stories about angels from the First World War.

First is the account of the Angels of Mons, from August, 1914. The Germans were sweeping the Allies before them and looked like wiping out the British troops. A National Day of Prayer was called for in Britain, and then from various eye-witnesses, from both British and German ranks, came stories about angels standing before the advancing the Germans to stop them pursuing the retreating British.

Critics attempt to dismiss the story on three grounds:

- 1) that regimental histories of the time make no mention of divine intervention or angelic appearances on the side of the British Army,
- 2) there are no documented eye-witness accounts of the Angelic appearances,
- 3) and it was based on a fictional story by Arthur Machen that first appeared in the London Evening Post of September 29, 1914.

Against that is the fact that official accounts of any occurrence will always reject supernatural or paranormal events as being inappropriate. I remember reading of an English Police Chief being summoned to Downing Street to explain to the Home Secretary of the day his remarks that he as a Christian, in prayer, often speaks with and listens to God. That kind of behaviour was simply not acceptable to the powers-that-be, despite it being a normal experience for all Christians. So it would have been very surprising if a British victory in battle was credited to anything other than the skill of the army leaders and the discipline of the men under their command.

Regarding the criticism that there are no documented eye-witness accounts of seeing the Angel or Angels of Mons, that is incorrect. Many people claimed to

have seen the event, and their accounts are documented in books such as Harold Begbie's: "On the side of the Angels." (3)

A Captain Cecil Hayward of the Intelligence Corps in British Army HQ said later:

"...the British saw four or five wonderful beings much bigger than men between themselves and the Germans...they seemed rather to float than stand. Their backs were toward the British, and they faced the Germans ... next thing the British knew was that the Germans were retreating in great disorder."

A German officer, when asked why they had not continued their onslaught on the British whom they outnumbered replied: "I cannot tell you. I only know that we were charging full on the British and in a moment we were stopped ... there was nothing at all, only our horses swerved round and fled and we could do nothing." For a Bible parallel, see the story of Balaam's ass in Numbers chapter 22 verses 23f.

An account which comes not from that book but from a web-page hostile to the supernatural aspect of the Angel of Mons story is from a writer named Philip Haythornthwaite who "gives a curious example of the story's lasting power. An employee of his grandfather, a veteran of Mons, became convinced that he had seen the angel. He had recounted that before this he had been a hard drinker. After his experience, he became not only a teetotaler but a pillar of the community." That story is cited as evidence that the story of the Angel of Mons is false, and the writer of the web-page goes on to say: "None of these eyewitnesses, however, who later asserted having viewed the Angel came forward in 1914 and had his name recorded in any log or document."

So here we have a man changed from being a hard drinker to a teetotaler and become a pillar of the community in later years, who attributed this to having seen the Angel of Mons, but he is included along with so-called eye-witnesses who did not come forward to have their names recorded.

As for Arthur Machen's story, it appeared in the Evening Post of September 29, 1914, but reports of the Angel of Mons were circulating the previous month. He was a few weeks too late for his story to have been the source of the Angel of Mons story.

Despite attempts to discredit these stories, there were so many eye-witness

accounts from officers and men alike that the stories persisted for long after the war, and men who saw the “angels” testified to being changed men afterwards.

The Australian War Memorial webpage says this about the legend Angel of Mons:

“Whether or not the Germans were terrified by the apparition the fact remains that the enemy forces abruptly checked their advance and recoiled in some disorder towards the right flank allowing the remnant of the British forces to continue their retreat.”

Another incident happened in July, 1918, when German soldiers who had superior firepower and who could have wiped out a British position in Bethune which would have allowed a mass-scale break-through of German troops with disastrous consequences for the Allied cause, suddenly and for no apparent reason, transferred their fire-power to a deserted hillside.

British troops who had expected to be devastated by the enemy artillery and machine-gun fire were perplexed by this shift of target and what appeared to them a tremendous waste of enemy ammunition. Then, the Germans retreated in confusion, leaving weapons and material behind them. Afterwards, German prisoners said they had seen white uniformed cavalymen advancing toward them on the hillside slopes and transferred their fire-power on them. But when the cavalymen and their horses came unscathed through the bombardment, the Germans fled in panic.

This incident happened at a time of a National Day of Prayer in Britain and was readily taken to be an example of divine intervention on behalf of the Allies. Of course it makes great propaganda, but there were many who witnessed the event, although it is true that the British soldiers merely saw a bare hillside being bombarded by the Germans. They didn’t see anything supernatural. All they saw were the German soldiers wasting a great deal of firepower and then retreating for no apparent reason.

Putting aside the arguments whether or not angels intervened on the side of the Allies against the Germans, what is undeniable is that soldiers and civilians, officers and other ranks alike, were prepared to believe in divine intervention. Under the veneer of modern scientific skepticism runs an undercurrent of willingness to believe in the supernatural, an acceptance of spirit beings that

break into our material world to influence what happens.

Here is an incident from Hope Price's book: "Angels" in which she tells of Donovan Cox and his wife, Doris, who lived in Ealing, London. One night during the blitz of the autumn of 1941, Donovan told his wife: "There's going to be a disturbance here tonight, but we will be kept safe, so there is no need to worry." In answer to Doris' question how he knew this, he replied that he had seen an angel floating above their house. They were wakened about 2am by a loud explosion above the house and "a sensation of tremendous pressure". Next day they learned from independent witnesses that a parachute bomb, which was primed to explode on contact with the ground, had been coming down on their house when it exploded in mid-air. That was Mr Cox's only experience of angels but he never forgot it. (2)

If I may be excused recounting a personal experience that has a suggestion of angels about it, my experience happened in the summer of 2001. Our daughter, Ruth, and her husband, Gordon, with their eleven-year-old son, Craig, were holidaying with us. Craig was to go for a day or two to stay with relatives in a town some distance from our home. I set off by car with Craig on what was normally an uneventful thirty-minute journey. We drove off from our back door and waved to my wife, Jean who was standing at an upstairs window. But let Jean take over the narrative here:

"Suddenly as Jim and Craig were about to turn the corner out of sight, I had a strong premonition that something bad was going to happen to them. I instantly rejected it thinking it was from Satan." Jean continued: "Along with that thought came the conviction that I should ask God's angels to take care of Jim and Craig. So I prayed for angels to protect them on their journey."

Craig and I were about fifteen minutes into our journey, travelling in a long stream of traffic, with heavy traffic coming in the opposite direction. As we approached the most dangerous bends on the narrow road, I slowed to about forty mph, my usual speed for the ninety degree right-hand bend. I let the speed drop even more, and although the road straightened out for a hundred yards or so after the bend, for some inexplicable reason I did not speed up, even although my slowness would probably annoy the queue of traffic behind me. I was approaching a left hand junction when suddenly and to my surprise an oncoming mini-bus containing passengers turned right, out of the line of traffic, squarely into my path.

I slammed on my brakes and swung to my right as far as I could although it was a narrow road and heavy traffic was coming towards me, so I had only a very small margin of safety. There was no dividing reservation. I hit the back of the minibus a severe glancing blow and carried on to stop on the verge another twenty yards down the road. Two drivers came to our aid, one an oil executive who was on his way to Aberdeen, and the other, a local businesswoman who phoned for the police and my wife. I knew my home phone number but was so traumatized I couldn't use my mobile-phone.

The police and my family arrived, and the driver of the minibus (unfamiliar with driving on the left side of the road) came and apologized, accepting he was entirely to blame. He was with a group of friends who worked in London, and they were on a golfing holiday. He saw the sign-post for Cruden Bay and without thinking turned right. He apologized profusely, took all the blame, and phoned that evening to see how we were. We were fine and I encouraged him not to let the accident spoil his golfing holiday. And his insurance covered the cost of the repairs to my car.

I had been travelling much slower than I usually did on that bit of road, and so escaped a head-on collision with the minibus. I suspect Craig and I and the occupants of the minibus would have been injured if I had been driving at my usual speed. Jean's premonition or word from God and the prompting to pray for angels to protect us, plus my driving so slowly could be dismissed as coincidence.

If so, here is another coincidence. I was playing a music tape as I drove and Craig and I were singing along with it as best we could. As we rounded the dangerous bend, the track we were singing along with was Robbie Williams' hit-song: "Angels".

If we accept that angels exist, we have to acknowledge that there are spiritual beings, and that when they come with a message from God, we call them angels, or messengers. There is a way of thinking nowadays and it is found even in church circles, that believes supernatural happenings are superstitions from an earlier pre-scientific naive age, that sophisticated Christians don't believe in that airy-fairy stuff, or as the younger generation would have it, angels and suchlike just aren't cool.

But the Bible records angels as real and that Jesus believed in angels, as did His

disciples. And down through history, people have encountered angels, individually or in groups. And if angels do exist, then that is proof of the spirit dimension, and that dimension is inhabited by spirit beings that on occasion, do interact with us humans.

References:

- 1) Hebrews 13: 2
- 2) A book I found very useful when writing this chapter was "Angels": (1993) Hope Price
- 3) "On the side of angels": (1915) Harold Begbie

The internet worldwide web was useful in collecting a mass of information and material on angel encounters, a selection of which was included in this chapter.

Chapter Ten - Satan

It is time to consider mankind's greatest enemy - Satan. The spirit dimension is the natural element of Satan and his demons. But he and they constantly invade the physical dimension to wage their implacable war against us. So what do we know about Satan and his demons? The concept of an influential spirit being who is opposed to God and goodness has been around for a long time and one early version of it may be in Zoroastrianism where alongside the god (Ahura Mazda) that is good was a twin that was evil (Ahriman). But even followers of Zoroastrianism don't always agree on this.

There is much more straightforward information in the Bible about this spirit being that is opposed to God. It says of Satan that he is an angel who was created by God. And at his beginning, he was acceptable in the presence of God. Job chapter 1 verses 6, 7 says: "One day the angels (sons of God) came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. The LORD said to Satan, 'Where have you come from?' Satan answered the LORD, 'From roaming through the earth and going to and fro in it.'"

From that encounter it is obvious that Satan was accustomed to being in the presence of God and conversing with Him. It is also obvious that he is not omnipresent - he is restricted to being in one place at a time: he roams from place to place. So what else do we know about Satan in those early days? It's in Isaiah chapter 14 verses 12 to 14 that we are told of Satan's downfall.

Verses 13 and 14 say: "You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the

tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’”

Satan’s apparent weakness may be defined as inappropriate ambition, and these verses from Isaiah chapter 14 are often said to contain the 5 “I wills” of Satan, marking his arrogant putting of his own will before the will of God, and his ambition to make himself like God: “I will ascend to heaven - I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned - ; I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.” And what fuelled this arrogant self-pride on Satan’s part? Perhaps it may be traced to Ezekiel 28 where a prophecy against the King of Tyre merges into a condemnation of Satan - verses 12 to 17 – “You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty... You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you... You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you... I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub... So I threw you to the earth;”

Then we go on to Revelation 12 beginning at verse 7 where the account of the war in heaven culminates with: “The great dragon was hurled down - that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.” If we tie this in with verse 4 it suggests that one third of the angels in heaven were expelled with Satan. And so we have the Bible’s explanation of Satan and his evil spirits, renegade angels, formerly servants of God who turned against God. And this may explain why they seek the corruption of man as a way of getting back at God.

But perhaps there is more to it than that. God wants us to be sons of God, to be members of His family. Who can tell what the real motive of Satan is, but it may be that Satan wants to have souls who ought to be sons of God, who instead are to be his servants. And in this way, Satan may believe he can rival God. But such an ambition would be short-sighted, for the ultimate end of Satan is his destruction in the hell created for him and his angels - according to Matthew 25 verse 41: Jesus said - “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” And note, Satan knows the Bible better than we do so he knows what God intends for him. But he still craves to have as many of mankind as possible to be condemned with him. And if he was prepared to try and usurp God in the first place, he probably has the conceit to think that he can ultimately frustrate the will of God.

So there we have a Biblical explanation for the origin and existence of Satan and his demons. But what is his status or power on earth? Satan and his servants/minions are not allpowerful. In fact most of his power is derived from men who are seduced into doing his will, or the promptings of his demons. Satan did not betray Jesus to the chief priests and their allies. It was Judas who betrayed Jesus, but it was Satan who influenced him to do so.

Satan's real power over man is the capacity for evil that lurks within man... within me, and everyone else, that is.

When I first wrote this chapter there was in the press the story of a family in France that kept a small girl in a pigsty and derived enjoyment from poking her with an electric and derived enjoyment from poking her with an electric year-old ex-soldier in England who when he found a disabled 50-year-old woman lying where she fell in a doorway – she struck her head when she fell – this man poured water over her, then he was filmed on a phone by one of his friends, urinating on her, and he finished his handiwork on her with shaving foam. The woman who had curvature of the spine and had been the object of bullying all her life, later died. That man was sentenced to three years in jail.

A few months before completing this chapter, my wife and I visited Auschwitz death camp in Poland. It was hard to believe that the nation which produced Beethoven and Goethe, a nation that is one of the most civilized cultures in the world, could also kill over six million Jewish men, women and children, and thousands of other people, because they considered them to be 'untermenschen' – people of inferior races.

But there is in man the capacity for evil, and Satan knows how to tap into that capacity, if we allow him. God does not tempt anyone to sin, but God permits Satan to tempt people. Satan cannot just do whatever he wants. He is allowed to go his evil way. A good example of this is the way in which he persecuted Job. God said to Satan: "Very well, then, everything he (Job) has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay finger." (1) And again, in Luke chapter 22 verses 31 and 32 we have the words of Jesus: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you Simon, that your faith may not fail."

In both these instances, God allowed Satan to test His servants but in both instances, those servants eventually were spiritually stronger for the testing. So Satan is far from being all-powerful. And he is not omnipresent.

He is restricted to one place at a time. But he has a massive retinue of followers - fallen angels - to do his bidding. And of course, he has no end of humans who are only too pleased to do his will, though for the great majority, they think they are simply following their own inclinations or evil nature.

Perhaps we Christians may be guilty at times of doing his will - on those occasions when we allow our crabby natures - or violent streak - or lust of the eye - or spiteful tongue - or whatever about us that is un-Christ-like - to dominate over the Spirit of Jesus Who lives in each of us Christians. But we Christians are realistic enough to not fool ourselves that we are perfect. And we often have cause to thank God for the truth contained in 1 John 1 verse 9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins, and purify us from all unrighteousness."

But Satan doesn't give up on us. The Bible says of him: "your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5 verse 8)

He sounds fierce and dangerous - but he "prowls" - moving from one place to another - definitely not everywhere at the same time. He is a created being, much more powerful than any human - but limited and restricted in his power. That is Satan.

Perhaps we have spent enough time on Satan. Let's get positive, let's look at Ephesians chapter 6. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." (2) Then put on the full armour of God - with the belt of truth round our waist, and the breastplate of righteousness in place, and our feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. The shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit - and praying in the Spirit on all occasions. Now that is well-equipped - and being alert and always keeping on praying for all the saints. That is both well-equipped and well-prepared.

Satan and his cohorts are dangerous, and powerful. But we Christians have the Spirit of Jesus Christ living in us, and greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world. (3) And that leads on to a practice I have found helps me out well when Satan or one of his allies - human or spirit - is attacking me - or even more often - when the point of attack is a weakness in myself, a susceptibility on my part to sin in a particular way such as making the un-Christ-like retort or the uncharitable thought, or whatever - when if I am going to do or say or think the

Jim Davidson-thing and not the Jesus Christ-thing - then at that time, perhaps in a split second - to say - “May the Spirit of Jesus in me dominate - over-rule - take charge - over the spirit of Jim Davidson!” And it works! The main thing is to activate, give centre-stage to - the Spirit of Jesus Christ in us. And allow Him to do His will in and through us. The actual way we hand over the reins to Him is not so important - you may have your own way of activating so to speak - the Spirit of Jesus in you.

What matter is that you do it! We are in a spiritual war. And there are spirit enemies out there who are dedicated to bringing us down, to corralling as many of the human race into the Satan enclosure as possible (and all the better for them if the said-human race doesn’t even believe in Satan or realize there is a spirit dimension) - so that God is denied as many as possible of His creation to be adopted into His family to be sons of God, because God cannot have fellowship with sin! (4) It is interesting to read that a 2002-AUG poll by Barna Research in North America found that 59% of American adults consider Satan is simply a symbol or concept or principle of evil, and is not an actual personality. Three in four Roman Catholics believe this; and 55% of Protestants agree. A minority of adults – 34% - believe Satan to be a living thing. I suspect that if that research were carried out in the United Kingdom, the amount of adults believing that Satan is a living entity would be much smaller than 34%.

Satan does all he can to get Christians to be disobedient to God, not only in the big things of life such as who we will marry, or what profession we will follow or whether or not we enter the full-time ministry. But Satan wants us to be disobedient in the small every day decisions we make, putting our own way before God’s will, ignoring what God wants us to do, or say, or think. But does God want to influence us in such small decisions of life? And the answer is: “Yes! Sometimes, Yes!”

Some years ago a group of young Chinese Christians in Kowloon, aged from about 16 to 25, asked me – “But how do we hear the voice of God? And how can we be sure it is God speaking to us?” And that got me thinking about how to communicate something I had taken for granted for decades.

Answer to the first question is that if God wants to speak to you, He will find a way to do so. He is the creator, and all the means of communication that exist are His creation. He may speak through a sermon or a hymn or song, or from something read, the words of another person, and the list is endless, and He can

also speak to us via the still small voice in our heart.

And how do we know it is a message from God? The first criterion is that the message must agree with God's word

- God would never ask us to do anything against the teachings of the Bible. So that is one good reason for us to study our Bibles on a regular basis. And to pray about it as we read.

Then we have the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, in our minds.

We get a sense of rightness. A conviction that this is what Jesus would do about this. And a third test of whether the message is from God was passed on to me by an American missionary to Nepal some thirty years ago. She told my wife and me - "Whenever I am not sure if this small voice within me is from God, I ask it - "Do you confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh?" And if it says, "Yes! I confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh!" then I trust it." (5)

In this sophisticated age, that may seem a simplistic way of testing the authenticity of a message, but I have used it regularly in the years and decades since that saint of God told me about it, and for me, it works.

So one way or another, we get to know what God wants us to do. Given half a chance, Satan will attempt to cast doubts about it, or to make us forget it, perhaps by distracting us and filling our minds with other thoughts.

Remember, Satan is a liar and the father of lies. (6) And he will tell us lies not only about God and the world, but he will tell us lies about ourselves. He will make us doubt ourselves; he will make us doubt that we are born again. An old Brethren lady many years ago told a small group of us who met in her home to pray - "Whenever the devil accuses me that I am not saved, I simply say - "Well, I am going to confess my sins to God right now, ask God to forgive me for Jesus' sake, and accept Jesus to be my Lord and Saviour. And you know, Satan soon gets tired of that so he stops telling me lies about myself."

Study the Bible so that you have the yardstick against which to measure the message from God. Test the voice - will it confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh - does the message find a warm response within you, a feeling of rightness about it? - then obey the message, and pray that if in your naivety you have got it wrong, that God will forgive you
- but act in faith that it is God's will for you. And God, Who loves you, Who is

the great communicator - He will honour your desire to serve Him.

To finish this chapter on Satan, it is worth briefly looking at what we often call the Lord's Prayer - which begins: "Our Father, Who is in heaven -" and so on. Part of that prayer says - "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Some manuscripts translate that - "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." (7) There it is, a prayer we can pray in the knowledge that it is a prayer Jesus taught us to pray, and a prayer that asks God to deliver us from the attacks and power of Satan, the evil one. And because it is a prayer that Jesus taught us to pray, we can be sure that God will answer it to His glory.

However, Christians should never become overconfident about their ability to stand firm against the wiles of the devil. (8) Our strength to remain true to God against whatever Satan and his minions throw at us, or however our own weak natures may betray us, our strength comes from the Spirit of Jesus living in us. And our confidence is based on the indwelling Spirit of God within us. And with these words we finish this chapter on Satan - rejoicing in the truth of these words: "the One Who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." (3)

References:

- 1) Job 1: 12
- 2) Ephesians 6: 10ff
- 3) 1 John 4: 4
- 4) Isaiah 59: 2
- 5) 1 John 4: 2
- 6) John 8: 44
- 7) Matthew 6: 13
- 8) 1 Corinthians 10: 12

Chapter Eleven - Personal experiences

Once you've had a personal experience of the spirit dimension, it's easy to believe the dimension is real. I've had such an experience; in fact, more than one. The obvious one to begin with is when I became a Christian.

I became a Christian in a Dr Billy Graham rally meeting which was taking place in the Kelvin Hall, Glasgow in April, 1955, but I was actually in an evangelical meeting in my home town in north-east Scotland which had arranged for the Glasgow service to be relayed by telecommunication to local churches. And from the beginning, my conversion experience was BIG! From the beginning, I was completely changed towards religion and life in general. I knew instantly

the experience that George W. Robinson referred to in his song:

“Heav’n above is softer blue, Earth around is sweeter green! Something lives in every hue Christ-less eyes have never seen”. (1)

I felt differently towards people! God loved them; Jesus had died on the cross for them. So they had become valuable to me! I didn't actually work it out like that – it was just a new attitude I had, something that arose from this experience that the Bible described as being born again.

I loved to pray. At the time I was on sick leave after breaking my ankle following my misguided attempt to jump across a mountain stream in the Cairngorms with a bag of conifer tree plants on my back. So although I'd just returned to work after our honeymoon, we had an extended honeymoon, courtesy of the National Health Service and my employers, the Forestry Commission. In my temporary disabled condition I had plenty time to pray, so I did – so much that I wore out the knees of a pair of tweed trousers I was particularly fond of – then God showed me I could pray sitting down or standing up or walking about or doing almost anything as long as I was talking to Him in my prayers. Years later I found I could pray while driving long journeys. In fact, praying helped keep me alert to traffic conditions. And even encouraged me to be more considerate to other drivers.

Soon after my conversion in that Billy Graham meeting, I found a book in the public library – can't remember the book's name – but it was about the Oxford Group and an American Christian minister called Dr Frank Buchman. The book introduced me to the idea that God wants to guide us in our everyday living so I followed the book's advice and began listening to God in the morning and writing down what I thought He was saying to me.

I made some mistakes in those early years about the guidance, but not when the guidance was to do with the big things of life.

And one consequence of listening for God to tell you what to do is that you may come to believe that He still does miracles, something like Jesus did in the Gospel stories. Healings, for example. I'm going to share stories of some healings my wife and I have witnessed over the years, beginning with one I wrote about in a book some years ago. (2)

Jean and I were Salvation Army officers in Hong Kong at the time of this

healing, where we had responsibility for a Social and Evangelistic Centre in Wanchai, the “red-light” district of the island. This is what happened:

“..the wife of our Buddhist gatekeeper fell ill. Leung Sap was admitted to a private hospital, and terminal cancer was diagnosed. Expenses were heavy, and The Salvation Army generously paid half the costs. Leung Sap was transferred to the Queen Mary Hospital, a Government hospital which gave free treatment to those in a lowincome bracket.

One Thursday evening, during a prayer meeting, Jean and I felt we should visit Leung Sap in hospital, and that Jean should lay hands on her and pray for her healing.

Next morning, we set off to the hospital at the south end of Hong Kong island.

I remember that journey only too well. Leung Sap had been moved to a convalescent hospital down near the coast so that she could be nourished and built-up in preparation for an operation. It meant we had to take two buses, and I was blaming Jean because we had missed the second one. And missing that bus meant we had a hot dusty walk of more than a mile. By the time we arrived at the hospital, I was in a cantankerous mood. But I also knew it was Satan trying to spoil something good, so I prayed through my misery and guilt.

And there were other complications: we had never met Leung Sap before, so we wouldn't recognise her in a ward full of other Chinese ladies; and neither of us was fluent in Chinese, though Jean could converse a bit in the language of the market-place. But that hardly gave her a vocabulary for what she was about to do.

A nurse promised to introduce us to Leung Sap, and as we walked down the long ward, Jean was praying for guidance about what to say and how to say it in Cantonese. The Lord beautifully answered her.

When we came to Leung Sap's bed, the old lady looked at us, puzzled, but flattered by having two 'Gwai Los' – 'foreign devils' – visit her. It gave her 'face' or status with the other patients.

Jean launched out in faith in her Chinese. 'Good morning, Leung Sap. We are Captain and Mrs Davidson of The Salvation Army.' That was easy enough to start with – even I could say that in Cantonese.

The old lady, emaciated because of her illness and propped up in bed with pillows, nodded and smiled. Chinese are naturally polite with strangers.

‘Do you believe in God?’ Jean continued, obeying God’s guidance. Leung Sap inclined her head in assent. “Hai, hai!” (“Yes, Yes!”) Jean went on: ‘Then Jesus said, “Believe also in Me.” (3) Do you believe Jesus can heal you?’

Leung Sap nodded her head again. “Hai, hai !” So Jean laid hands on her prayed in the Name of Jesus for her to be healed. We left soon afterwards – there wasn’t much in the way of conversation we could have with her – but before leaving the ward, we saw the wardmaid bringing in the trolley with the lunches. A few minutes later, Leung Sap ate her lunch with enjoyment, without the usual vomiting. That was the first time for many weeks she had managed to keep her food down.

On the following Tuesday when she was examined in the Queen Mary Hospital for an operation to insert a tube down her throat to help her feeding, the Catholic surgeon found there wasn’t a trace of cancer in her body. There was great excitement, the nurses were weeping for joy. The doctor phoned our Centre with the good news.

Leung Sap had been discharged from hospital and Jean went to visit her at home to help her receive Jesus as her Saviour as well as her Healer. She was met by Leung Sap who on sighting Jean raised her hands in the air and called out: "Praise the Lord!" She had been sharing with her neighbours about Jesus and had already received him as her Saviour and Lord. A few days later her husband became a Christian too.”

As a couple, we have had other first-hand experiences of the Holy Spirit’s healing works. Here are a few more of them.

Jean and I with our two youngest children were living with relatives during the early months on our return from overseas service with The Salvation Army. Our daughter, Ruth, came home from school one day complaining her eyes were sore. The doctor said it was conjunctivitis, perhaps caught from a class-mate because the condition is very infectious and no one else in the family had it. Ruth’s eyes were very sore.

Then the day before Jean and I and the children went to our home-town for the

summer vacation, I also developed conjunctivitis. Now I was suffering what felt like grit caught beneath the eye-lids.

On the Saturday, my eyes were extremely sore and I remember before I drove into town to do shopping, I asked Jean to lay hands on me for healing.

She was at the kitchen sink at the time, and her hands were warm from the washing-up. She laid hands on my head and prayed for my eyes to be healed. Then I set off. I had to shade my eyes from the glare of the low sun.

I completed my shopping which included a visit to the pharmacy and was considering whether there was anything I could buy to get relief for my eyes. The ointment Ruth had been prescribed by the doctor wasn't making any improvement for her and I had not gone to the doctor myself.

Should I buy something or not? And then, waiting in the queue at the cash-out, I was suddenly struck by a thought – “You’ve been asking God to heal your eyes, now you’re wondering if you should buy something to relieve your eyes? Why not just trust to God for healing?” I know that God uses medical science to heal the sick, doctors and medicine are part of His healing work, but this time I felt I should leave it up to God to heal me without the aid of something off the pharmacy shelf. So I turned away from the stacks of medicines and ointments and continued towards the assistant at the check-out with my other purchases. I paid for them and in the short distance to the exit I realized that the bright sunshine wasn’t hurting my eyes.

I hurried home; thrilled to tell Jean my eyes were healed. And at home, our daughter was also delighted because her eyes had also dramatically improved – no more pain. We had both been healed of conjunctivitis. One may say that the prescribed ointment had done its work in Ruth, suddenly and completely, but I thought that was stretching coincidence a bit much for it to have happened in such a timely way in me. I believe that the Holy Spirit was involved, because the way the healings happened suggested divine intervention. It was not an earth-shattering instance of God healing the sick but to me it was as real an example of spirit input into human affairs as anything I had ever experienced.

The next instance of divine healing was of my wife’s over-all body suffering from inflammation of her muscles, Polymyalgia Rheumatica. She had been in hospital with it for some days before it was diagnosed, and she was now on

steroids. The steroids did not heal her condition; it simply reduced to a degree the painful inflammation. She was now home from hospital with instructions to continue taking the dosage that had been found to control the pain to a manageable extent.

Then a former colleague in The Salvation Army Training College, who was conducting services around the country as an evangelist-healer – Melvin Banks – came to hold a campaign in the local Methodist Church. Jean went to hear him and to seek healing from her Polymyalgia Rheumatica. When those seeking healing were invited to come forward for healing, Jean responded. It wasn't easy for her to walk, for the soles of her feet were very sore from the illness, as were her buttocks – sitting on the hard wooden forms in the churchhall had been painful for her. But she went forward, was prayed for, and as she returned to her seat, an assistant at the front asked her if she would be willing to speak to a journalist at the back of the church.

She readily agreed to do so.

“When I started off back up the aisle to where the journalist was sitting I still felt very sore and I wondered what I was going to tell him, when miraculously as I walked towards him, the pain all left me.”

Jean sat beside him, and she told him what had happened, and that as she walked towards him, she was healed. Later when she told the medical specialist about it, he was delighted for her.

“And did you stop taking the steroids, Mrs Davidson?”

“No,” said Jean, “not without talking to you first. But I don't feel I need them now.”

“You did the right thing, Mrs Davidson. You should just phase them out gradually, then stop.” Which she did.

I was going to restrict our experiences of Holy Spirit healing at that, but I feel I should tell of more healings. The first concerns Jean again. Back in the late 1950s, we were Salvation Army officers in Glasgow. Jean fell on ice one day when we were going visiting from door to door, hitting her head and mouth on the edge of the pavement. Apart from chipping her tooth she also hurt her back. For the next seventeen years or so, she had continual pain in her back. It was eventually diagnosed as Cervical Spondylosis, and at one appointment in south-

west Scotland she was referred to hospital in Dumfries where she received injections into her spine. But nothing seemed to help.

During our second spell of overseas work when we were serving in Kowloon, Hong Kong, Jean attended a prayer meeting in the home of a lovely Christian couple, Phil and Anne Daley. Phil worked for the Government's forestry service.

A back specialist in a government hospital had suggested Jean should have an operation to fuse her spine as a cure for her Cervical Spondylosis. She would lose mobility in her back but it should take away the pain. Jean was rather inclined to have the operation but was holding off. Then one morning when she had gone on her own to the prayer meeting – I had other commitments that day – a visiting evangelist was the main guest. He also prayed for healing of the sick, and Jean asked for prayer for her back.

Jean described what happened. "I sat on a chair and held my legs out before me and he held my feet and prayed for me. It was a strange experience, because I actually saw as did the other ten people present - one of my legs grow a bit longer, maybe just about half an inch, but it happened there before our eyes. I didn't feel any improvement, but I thanked God for healing me. It was more an act of faith than an expression of how I felt. I didn't feel any difference, but I believed healing had taken place. Then on the way home in the coach, my attention was caught by something at the side of the road, and I automatically turned my head to the right to see it. I looked back over my shoulder, and then it struck me – I could turn my head and there was no pain. The other passengers must have thought I had lost my senses because I was pivoting my head from side to side and up and down. No pain. So I had to tell the other passengers what God had done. I got to my feet in the bus – all the other passengers were Chinese - and I told them in Cantonese what had just happened, I had been healed by God. Some of them were expressing amazement in their own tongue. Because God had done a miracle!"

The next healing and I'm almost finished telling about healings, happened in our home town some years later. Jean and I were guest speakers in a Friday evening service in a local church. At the end of the service, it was expected of us to pray with any present who asked for personal prayers. A young woman whose family we had known for years asked for healing for her infant daughter. The little girl had a hole in her heart and an operation was in the offing. She was going back to hospital the following week when the specialist would decide on whether she

was ready for the operation.

I held the young mother's hands as I prepared to pray for her daughter then I noticed her fingers. They were covered with warts and looked very sore. "They were bleeding before I came out tonight," she explained, obviously embarrassed. "Right, let's pray for your wee girl," I said. And we prayed.

A week or so later she told us what happened following that prayer time. "When I got home," she said, "My husband asked what had happened to my hands. Then I was absolutely amazed – all the warts had completely disappeared, though my hands had been covered with them and bleeding just an hour or so before."

The following week when the heart-specialist examined her small daughter he was pleased to say the child did not need an operation because the hole in her heart had healed itself. What had happened? She believed, and Jean and I believe, that the Holy Spirit had healed both her and her young daughter.

This is my final story about a healing and it only occurred to me to include it after I had finished this chapter. I met a man recently whose teenage bride of more than a decade ago knocked her knee badly at the fair-ground, and later they were horrified when it was diagnosed that it had become cancer in the bone. It resulted in her leg being amputated. And his story reminded me of an experience I had never told anyone of before, apart from my wife. So here it is...

Just about the time when as Salvation Army officers we had offered ourselves for missionary service I knocked my knee painfully against a sharp edge of furniture. It swelled a bit and was sore but I thought nothing of it. Then my wife told me I was whimpering with pain in my sleep. It was the knee. So I visited the doctor and was referred to hospital for exploratory surgery.

A neighbour used to baby-sit for us on occasion. I knew she was a nurse in the local Hospital but didn't know what she actually did there. Anyway, I went into hospital as a day patient, had a piece of bone taken from my knee, and was delivered home to convalesce. My leg was very painful – I couldn't bend it - but I couldn't understand what the fuss with hospital and surgery was all about. As I lay in bed God spoke to me. "Jim, you haven't asked Me to heal your leg." "Well, there's nothing wrong with it Lord."

"Nevertheless, you should have asked Me to heal it."

“Very well, Lord, please heal my leg.” May God forgive me, I almost felt I was humouring Him. “Yes, Lord, please heal my leg.”

Some days later, the doctor made a surprise visit. I was still on the bed, still resting the leg. And he was bursting with pleasure to tell us: “I’m delighted to tell you the lump is benign. It isn’t bone cancer.”

Jean and I were shocked! “Bone cancer? Was there any chance of that?”

“Oh, yes. All the symptoms said it was bone cancer. And when they removed the bone, the surgeon was convinced that it was cancer. But the biopsy is normal.”

And when our neighbour baby-sitter, the nurse called by, she revealed that she was an Operating Theatre Sister, she had attended my operation. All the staff present had been convinced it was cancer, and were amazed when the growth tested as benign.

So was I healed of a bone cancer I never even suspected I had, healed because God prompted me to pray about it? I firmly believe so. And I still have a shiny scar on my knee to remind me of the cancer that never was. And that God still works in ways too wonderful for us to comprehend.

Other examples of Holy Spirit involvement in our lives have been about giving us information we could not have had naturally, and I will give one instance of that here. It was a summer evening in Hong Kong, probably in 1979. Venue was the church hall of St Andrew’s Church in Kowloon, and the occasion was an inter-denominational prayer meeting. Anglicans and Baptists, Catholic nuns, Plymouth Brethren, Methodists, Jean and I the only two Salvationists, Lutherans, and other Christian groups, Western, Chinese and Indian were in the meeting.

We sat round in a large circle. An invitation was made for anyone asking for prayer for themselves or on behalf of others to come and sit in a chair in the centre of the circle. The wife of a Swedish missionary responded. She asked for prayers to be said for her. She and her husband had three daughters, and when they learned she was pregnant with a fourth child, they were delighted, hoping it would be a son. But that afternoon, her doctor had told her after a gynaecological examination that her baby would not survive, it was in a bad position and she would abort. She was just a few months into her pregnancy. And that evening, she was hot and tearful and very distressed. Would we pray for her? So the leader of the meeting asked a few of us to come into the circle to pray for her,

probably about five of us.

So the others laid hands on her head and shoulders and prayed, but I felt I had to hold back. I could only watch. Then I knew God was telling me to say something.

Perhaps it is what is called a word of knowledge. But I was reluctant to obey. Because if you pray for someone and your prayer doesn't get the outcome you asked for, you can cope with that because not all prayers are answered as you would wish. But to say something is going to happen – that is different! If it doesn't happen, you would be embarrassed at getting it wrong.

I didn't want to say what God was telling me to say to this Swedish lady because I didn't want to look foolish if my message to her was wrong, if in the passage of time, my so-called 'word from the Lord' proved to be false. "Oh me, of little faith!" What was happening was a struggle within me between my concern for the good opinions of my fellow Christians and my desire to obey God.

Then like a still, small voice from within came the words - "So you're more concerned about not looking foolish than doing my will?" Immediately I knew I was in the wrong. "Sorry, Lord," I whispered. So I spoke aloud. "God is telling me I should say something to you." And then in the silence that had followed the others' prayers I spoke out: "God is telling me that you're going to have a good pregnancy and that your baby will be born safe and well in the fullness of time."

There, I'd done it. Now it really was in the hands of God! And the effect on the pregnant lady was immediate. She was smiling, tears were gone, no longer hot and bothered, she was radiant. But that night, I knew I had disobeyed God, and next morning, I phoned the missionary lady at her home to tell her what God had really told me: "About what I said last night," I began. "I didn't give the whole message God gave me. I didn't have the courage to say it. What God actually told me to say was: 'She is going to have the best pregnancy yet, and he will be born safe and well in the fullness of time.'" A boy! And now I had really done it, I had committed myself. Months later she told the people at the prayer meeting that she had had a wonderful pregnancy and her baby was born safe and well, a bonny healthy boy.

So being instruments of healing, and receiving words of knowledge, does that

mean Jean and I have special gifts? I don't think so. Just like many other Christians, we are simply channels that God's Spirit will use on occasion, according to his will. For example, Jean was used to bring healing from terminal cancer to an old Buddhist lady, but some years later she was powerless to be a channel of healing to her own mother who died of cancer.

That is obviously true in the example of the word of knowledge or information I received about the pregnant missionary-wife, because you can't go around sharing knowledge you don't have. You have to receive it from God.

And as for healing, you may often pray for people to be healed and they don't get healed. But those occasions when you have an inexplicable conviction to focus healing on an individual – not a very good description but the best I can do – those occasions are few and far between. But that they happen, and achieve wonderful results, is all the proof I need to know that God is in this situation, and that the Holy Spirit has been pleased to work through an ordinary Christian. And I believe these are true examples of the spirit dimension, when the Holy Spirit breaks into the world of man.

I have before me an account of another, very different, instance of the spirit dimension breaking into our lives, but I'll leave it to introduce the next chapter.

References:

- 1) George W Robinson – 1876
- 2) "This Happy Gift of Tongues" Jim Davidson (1985) Vine Publishing
- 3) John's Gospel 14: 1

Chapter Twelve - Timeslips

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy." Shakespeare (1)

and another quote, this time from a Scottish Mathematical Biologist –

"Now, my own suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we can suppose ... I suspect that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of, or can be dreamed of, in any philosophy." JBS Haldane (2)

So here is one of those "queerer" things referred to by Haldane. It involves a young school-master, one Ken Webster, who in 1984, moved into a nineteenth century cottage in the small English village of Doddestone. (3) The story in

question is difficult to categorize. Is it a ghost story, or a poltergeist experience, or what? You would expect computers and the supernatural to have little in common but this story brings them both together.

Soon after Ken settled in his cottage, strange things happened, like footprints seen moving up a wall. Then Ken discovered unusual words appearing on his computer screen, so he decided to ask – via the keyboard - what was happening.

And replies came, on the screen, apparently from someone who said he was a Thomas Harden, who thought the year was 1546. And Mr Harden wanted to know what Ken was doing in his house.

Was it a hoax, something put on the hard disc by a friend of the family, a trick being played on the young man? Or a computer virus? But Thomas Harden used unusual words in his correspondence with Ken, words such as “torablise” and “reethed” and “stincioun” - * 16th century words. If it were a practical joke being played on Ken, then it was a sophisticated joke involving a familiarity with the English language of centuries ago which neither Ken nor his friends had. So we are left with the incredible idea of a ghost – or something supernatural – or a country gentleman of the 16th century using a computer keyboard!

There have been other stories like this, stories which some say have been caused by time-slippage - in which windows are opened on to past times, and the viewer has been allowed to see something happening in a bye-gone age. An example of possible time-slippage is the story told by members of the American and British embassies in Oslo about an incident in the spring of 1950. They were in a group of family and friends on a skiing outing and towards the end of a day of perfect skiing conditions, three of them returned ahead of the group to their cars. The surrounding landscape was flat and they could see for miles around. There was nowhere for anyone to hide, apart from a farmhouse a few hundred yards away.

The light was good, vision perfect. Then suddenly, the three skiers at the cars found themselves getting a telling-off from a tall elderly lady dressed in a tweed skirt suit and clothes fashionable in the early years of the 20th century, speaking English with a strong Scottish accent, complaining of their skiing on her land without permission. Nowadays, in Norway, no permission is needed to ski on others' land in the winter-time. Nevertheless, they apologised, and when the others in the party returned they told them that this lady was unhappy about their trespassing.

"What lady?" They looked around. There was no one there. The elderly lady had disappeared. They went to the farmhouse where the young owners told them that no elderly lady, Scottish or otherwise lived there. But they did recollect that the owner's great-grandfather had married a Scottish lady who lived in the farmhouse decades earlier. And so the intriguing possibility is of a timeslip, in which each saw the other in their own time. Perhaps the Scottish lady had a story to tell her husband in the early 1900s, of American and English trespassers on their land, skiing without permission, who simply disappeared after she gave them a telling-off. (4)

And another example of "time-slippage": I heard of a minister of religion who was walking along a city street in Scotland when he glimpsed in the passing crowd a young lady acquaintance. He turned to call her, but she had disappeared. He looked into nearby shops to see if she were there, but she was nowhere to be seen. She seemed to have vanished. Two years later he met her and she gave him a telling him off for having passed her, ignoring her, on the street of a foreign city. It had happened two years earlier, about the same time he saw her in the street. But she had been abroad at the time, in a distant country. She had replicated his experience by looking for him without success. They had seen each other momentarily in a crowd, in different cities, many miles apart. Time-slippage, or what?

One of the most widely publicised examples of timeslippage happened in the summer of 1901 and involved two senior academics of St Hugh's College, Oxford, Charlotte Anne Moberly and Eleanor Frances Jourdain. They were in the gardens of the Petit Trianon at Versailles where they claim they met a number of people dressed in the clothes fashionable at the end of the 18th century. They believed they had encountered Queen Marie Antoinette with her companions in the time leading up to her execution in 1793. (4) They wrote of their experience in the book "An Adventure" that was published in 1911, but they did so under pseudonyms because they believed that admitting to having encountered the paranormal would harm their academic careers. Their experience was later made the subject of a film, *Miss Morison's Ghosts*, in 1981, starring Hannah Gordon and Wendy Hillier. Their experience of having seen what they believed were participators of a by-gone stressful event was similar to that occasionally reported by tourists visiting the battle-ground of Culloden in Scotland who claimed to have seen a wounded Highlander soldier dressed and armed as for fighting a battle in 1746. (5)

To bring the experience nearer home, a man I know personally has seen on a

number of occasions, usually with peripheral vision, a figure passing his ground-floor window. Sometimes the figure is in white, other times in dark brown, wearing some kind of robe. His house is on the site of a former medieval church, and what he is seeing may be the after-image of priests or monks who once ministered there, perhaps centuries earlier. He has chased after the figure on occasions but has never managed to catch up with it because it always disappears before he reaches it.

Time-slippage is suggested as a possible explanation for the experience of Geoff and Pauline Simpson and their friends Len and Cynthia Gisby during a visit to France in October, 1979. An account of the experience is given on the internet at <http://members.aol.com/timeslip8888/hotel.html>, which is taken from Charles Berlitz's book "World of Strange Phenomena" published 1988 by Wynwood Press.

Briefly, the two couples found a strange old-fashioned hotel in France where they spent the night, a hotel which had no telephones or elevators, where the beds had heavy sheets and no pillows, there were no locks on the doors, only wooden catches, and the windows had only wooden shutters and no glass in them. But perhaps the strangest aspect of the hotel was that the total bill for the two couples for their evening meals and bed and breakfasts came to a total cost of only 19 francs. On their return journey after two weeks in Spain they looked for the hotel but it was no longer to be found and they had to stay overnight at a modern hotel, where the total cost for the two couples was 247 francs.

Questions which have been asked about the experience of the two couples include why did the hotel keeper accept 19 francs in a currency different from that in use at the time, and why did he show no curiosity about the strange vehicle they had arrived in? By the way, the uniforms worn by gendarmes were not as used in the late 20th century but were later identified as those worn prior to 1905.

Many other instances of what have been described as timeslips have been reported and well publicised, including a crop of experiences by various people in or near Bold Street, Liverpool, instances that are difficult to explain away except by dismissing the subjects' experiences as hallucinations or false stories. The web-page Parascience records a number of these experiences.

For example, there was Mr X on the way to meet his wife in Bold Street one

Saturday afternoon. He knew a number of shops had closed down, and was interested to see that one of them, Collinsons, had re-opened, and another, Catchpoles, had relocated to its former site on the opposite side of the street. He also noted that all the cars were some 10-15 years out of date, as were the fashions the passers-by were wearing. He met his wife and they went into a bank where everything seemed normal.

When they left the bank, everything outside was back to normality again – Collinsons was closed with empty windows, Catchpoles was back to the opposite side of the street, and everything else, cars and clothes had a contemporary appearance.

Another timeslip was that of Mr C who had been to a Hi-Fi shop on Bold Street, and on his way to meet a friend, He passed the bombed-out ruin of St Luke's church, still standing as it had been left following an air-raid in World War II. He was surprised to see St Luke's all lit up as if the war damage had been repaired. Not long afterwards he was again passing St Luke's church, but this time he noticed it was back in its derelict condition.

These and other incidents of what have been described as timeslips in this part of Liverpool may indicate that there are places where the phenomena are prevalent.

Information supplied by the subjects of these and other Bold Street timeslip experiences are later found to have been verified by circumstances that existed perhaps decades earlier. And this verification is common with time-slippages occurring in other countries.

So does time-slippage, if it really exists – and there is much evidence to suggest it is a real experience – does it deserve a place in a book on the “Spirit Dimension”? In answer to that, let us consider further...

Here is a quotation from Albert Einstein, perhaps appropriate at this point: “The distinction between past, present and future is only an illusion, however persistent.”- Albert Einstein. (6)

And the poet T.S. Eliot adds a poetic flavour to the concept

“Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.” – T.S. Eliot (7)

While philosophers and poets may comment on the nature of time, the rest of us are accustomed to think of it as linear, going from now to later, measured in seconds, minutes and hours, days, weeks and years and centuries and so on.

World famous academics such as Lucasian Professor of Mathematics, Stephen Hawking, (and Albert Einstein before him) theorise that space-time may be warped. If this is so, then theoretical science's pushing back the boundaries of astrophysical and cosmological mathematics may be questioning the rational view of reality of the universe and its four dimensions.

And if time is different from what our rational senses have always informed us it is, then it makes sense of the experience of Ken Webster conversing with Thomas Harden across a time gap of centuries and the Simpsons and Gisby's and their very inexpensive overnight stay in a French hotel, and the members of the British and US embassies in Norway getting a telling-off from the lady with the Scottish accent during their skiing excursion. Perhaps time-slippage is more common than we realize. David Filkin in his book, "Stephen Hawking's Universe" (8) that accompanied his television series on the work of Stephen Hawking, says, in describing the universe as a partially inflated balloon: "Perhaps we are inside a universe where time and space can be so bent and flexed that the balloon can be folded back on itself. Eventually two parts of the outer skin could somehow get close enough to each other to be linked by 'wormholes' – strange tunnels through space and time through which we might one day be able to move from one end of the universe to the other."

We now live in an age when highly respected academics question whether it is possible that the three dimensions of width, height and depth and the fourth dimension of time are not the only dimensions that exist. In fact, such are the problems facing the theorists who attempt to explain the beginnings of the universe as we know it that it requires perhaps eleven dimensions to reconcile the laws of thermodynamics with the Big Bang theory, the Inflation theory and so on, in the attempt to construct a Theory of Everything about the universe in order to exclude God from it. Professor of Physics of Harvard University, Dr Lisa Randall, is one of the world's leading theoretical physicists on the theory of multi-dimensions - and what she said in an interview with Charlie Rose on his television programme - is worth listening to on the subject of dimensions. That interview is available on a number of web-sites and is readily accessible.

Professor Randall asks: "Is it really true that what we see is all that's there or is

there a case where we're just not physiologically designed to experience or see those dimensions..?" and then later in the same interview, on the subject of warped dimensions adds: "maybe space-time really is warped and if so you could have infinite extra dimensions..." (9)

There is much about this universe we don't understand. It seems strange, however, when scientists can theorize about multi-dimensions and imaginary time and worm-holes which may allow us to go backward and forward in time, and multidimensions, yet may balk at believing in the possibility of a spirit dimension existing in parallel and inter-connecting with our physical world. If people don't want to believe in the idea of God, they will quite happily "swallow a camel, yet choke on a fly." Perhaps one day we may be able to explain in terms of physics and time, some of the strange phenomena which are inexplicable at the moment. And if that is made possible by the expansion of human knowledge and understanding, then that is to be welcomed.

Man, however, will never be able to understand all there is to know about God and the universe He created. But at this stage of knowledge, it is enough for us to be aware that "there are more things in heaven and earth" than we understand. It is always preferable not to close our minds to what we cannot explain. God is infinitely bigger than we are: His thoughts infinitely beyond our ability to understand. And for no one is this principle more true than for those who seek to expand the boundaries of human knowledge by the pursuit of scientific enquiry.

The more we learn about God and the laws by which He runs the universe, the less there is of the supernatural. And more and more of what we call the supernatural becomes accepted aspects of God's creation that we did not previously understand.

References:

- 1) "Hamlet" act 1 sc 5 W. Shakespeare (1601)
- 2) "Possible Worlds and Other Essays" JBS Haldane (1927)
- 3) The Ken Webster story - (4) "World Famous Ghost Stories" (1994) Colin Wilson, et al, and various web-pages.
- 4) "The Encyclopedia of Ghosts and Spirits" John and Anne Spencer (1992)
- 5) "Guide to Ghosts and Haunted Places" Peter Underwood (2001)
- 6) Albert Einstein, in a letter to Michangelo Besso, 21 March, 1955
- 7) Four Quartets "Burnt Norton" – T.S. Eliot (1936)
- 8) "Stephen Hawkings Universe" David Filkin (1997)
- 9) Professor Dr Lisa Randall interviewed on the Charlie Rose Show – 12/12/2006

* Here are three of the unusual words Thomas Harden used in his correspondence with Ken Webster:

“torablise” = “troubled”

“reethed” = “disturbed”

“stincioun” = “immovable”

Chapter Thirteen - “Gary Larson and APOD 112102”

Gary Larson has a Far Side cartoon in which two ants sitting on a toadstool are looking up at the night-time sky, and one says to the other: “Just look at those stars tonight ...makes you feel sort of small and insignificant.” It reminds me of the Internet Astronomy Picture of the Day November 21 2002 which is of Starburst Galaxy M94. Part of the explanation below the picture says: “M94 – spans about 30,000 light years, lies about 15 million light years away, and can be seen with a small telescope toward the constellation of Canes Vanatici.”

A light year is a measure of astronomy, and is equal to: 5.88 miles multiplied by 10 to the power of 12, a distance we cannot imagine. That is one light year, the distance that light travels in a year. M94 is that distance multiplied by 15 million. And as a distance, that is even less imaginable. We can talk about it as if it were measurable, but to be honest, we cannot grasp the concept of such a distance. It’s beyond us in more ways than one. In fact, as the ant said, it makes us feel small!

In terms of material existence, that ant in the cartoon is understating the obvious. In the dimension of space and time, we are “sort of small and insignificant”. In terms of material value, we are as close to zero as can be measured and yet still be here. Even planet earth is an almost infinitely small speck of dust. Against that back-drop, we are so insignificant it hardly bears thinking about.

The truth is, Man has no real meaning or significance in a reality that consists only of a material physical universe. He can only have meaning in a reality that includes a spirit dimension. Because a spirit dimension transcends space.

In the spirit realm, space is meaningless. In the spirit realm, 15 million light years is closer than breathing, because there is no distance. With God, both space and time have no restrictions. Or as the Bible put it non-scientifically a long time ago – “do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.”(1)

Of course the Bible speaks of man having a spiritual side to his being - he is a spirit, a soul and a body. The Apostle Paul in writing 1 Thessalonians in chapter 5 verse 23 said: “May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the

coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul refers in that verse to the whole person, in direct contrast to the view that sees man as animal, although those who take that view usually concede that man is at the top of the ladder of evolution. The Bible claims that man has a spiritual side to his being. And no way is that a development brought about by evolution: man’s spirit nature is because he is made in God’s own image (2); as Jesus said: “God is Spirit.”(3)

In the Bible we find the physical world and the spirit world side by side. They have linked but separate existences; and the Bible takes this duality for granted.

This spirit existence outside of space and time may be deduced from the words of Jesus to the Jews in John’s Gospel: “I tell you the truth,” Jesus said, “before Abraham was born, I am.” (4) It is the present tense: “I am!” The name of God that was given to the Jews – Yahweh (or Jehovah as we are accustomed to translate it) means: “I am that I am” or “I will be that I will be” - a short-hand way of saying – the Self-existent One beyond Time and Space. There are more inferences in the Bible to God being outside of space and time. But I want to focus on man.

The Bible says man consists of a spirit, a soul and a body. And we remember what Ephesians chapter 2 verse 6, said in the part of the Bible we already looked at:

“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.”

We already have a suggested meaning for “heavenly realms” – that is, the sphere or dimension of spirit things. But the important point of that verse is that Paul was writing to Christians alive and going about their everyday business in Ephesus and neighbouring towns in that part of Turkey that used to be known as Asia Minor. And as they did that, Paul said they were at the same time seated with Christ in the spirit realms.

So Paul saw the Christian as having two existences: the physical existence that looks up at the stars, and echoes the words of the Psalmist – “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” (5)

That same physical existence laughs along with the Gary Larson cartoon of the

two ants but is silenced by the immense distance of Starburst Galaxy M94 – 15 million light years away.

And then there is man's spiritual existence that will outlast the physical Universe and is independent of space and time. Science fiction deals with time travel, and time slip, or moving from one dimension into another, so that travelling physical distances of millions of light years is a brief journey. Or travelling backwards in time, or forward in time. Science fiction writers, cosmologists and philosophers deal in such ideas. It's all sounds very modern and scientific.

But the Bible has assumed this kind of thing a long time ago. In fact, the Book of Revelation speaks of the death of Jesus – in time it happened just over 2,000 years ago on a cross outside Jerusalem - but in Revelation chapter 13 verse 8 it says, referring to Jesus as the Lamb: “ – the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world.” (NIV)

In the physical world the crucifixion of Jesus happened about 33AD; in the spirit realm, the sacrifice of the Lamb of God is a timeless event. (6) Another out-of-time event is referred to in Psalm 139 verse 16: “All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

In that Psalm, the Psalmist says that our destinies have been written out in detail before we were conceived, in a condition where time and eternity inter-twine. You can have two ways of looking at that verse. On the one hand, there is the pre-determined plan that leaves no place for free-will and man is simply a puppet at the mercy of pre-ordained fate. On the other, it means that in the spirit world, because there is no time or unfolding of events, God knows everything that is going to happen about us before we are conceived, yet we still have the free-will to make that “everything” happen.

The first option would remove from us the responsibility for anything that happens in our lives. The second option does not remove that responsibility for what we do by exercising our free-will, and it means we have the freedom to make of our lives what we will – to remain in the dust or to reach for the stars. But either option is based on a spiritual dimension to our existence...and a pre-existence in some form, even if that existence is restricted to being in the thought of God.

To return to those wonderful pictures with their commentaries in Astronomy

Picture of the Day on the Internet – and to January 8th, 2003 – the X-rays from the Galactic Core – and a quote from its script: “In fact, the Chandra image shows clouds of multi-million degree gas dozens of light-years across...”

I think 100 degrees centigrade is hot, and 200 degrees very hot. But how can I imagine the temperature referred to in that APOD of 8th January 2003. What can that mean to me? There is no way my mind can come to terms with the heat of multi-million degree gas. That is very hot, regardless of whether it is Centigrade (Celsius) or Fahrenheit. It is a temperature I cannot imagine!

And here is an important clue: “I cannot imagine.” I imagine with my mind! Mind is something to think with. What is mind? Intelligence – personality – self-awareness. Mind is that which makes a person a person. So it raises the question – what else do I know in our world that has a mind like man? As far as we know, only man can attempt to grasp or imagine the vastness of the universe, or on a much smaller scale, our galaxy, the Milky Way, and man’s place in it. Only man among the hundreds of millions of living species in our world would want to, (7) or be able to, both write and read this book. And that is part of the humour in the Gary Larson cartoon of the two ants looking at the stars.

We exist in a vast impersonal material universe that we cannot grasp or imagine. In the material universe I am familiar with, there are two kinds of physical existence – nonthinking or non-imagining existence, and physical existence with life in it. And in that second category is that of physical living beings.

All the evidence suggests that only man thinks about his place in the universe.

And only man, as far as we can tell, believes in ghosts and life after death, and the possibility of a spirit dimension we can interact with. Only man is superstitious, who believes in luck and reads horoscopes. And draws cartoons of two ants gazing up at a starlit sky and making the profoundly wise remark: “Makes you feel sort of small and insignificant...”

This chapter is not only about man who is infinitely small in an infinitely large universe. The existence of this chapter and its conception and the understanding of it by its readers show just how unique man is – as far as we know - in this Universe. If you can read and understand what this chapter is trying to say – whether or not you agree with it – that is proof positive that you are infinitely more significant than a grain of sand. And our significance is derived from the

truth that we are not only physical beings, but that we are also spiritual beings in a reality that includes the spirit dimension alongside the physical.

References:

- 1) 2 Peter 3: 8
- 2) Genesis 1: 26,27
- 3) John 4: 24
- 4) John 8: 58
- 5) Psalm 8: 3 and 4
- 6) An alternative translation of that verse from Revelation 13 verse 8 is given in the Amplified Translation of the New Testament – “every one whose name has not been recorded from the foundation of the world in the Book of Life of the Lamb that was slain.”
- 7) A very readable, informative book on the subject is “A Short History of Nearly Everything” (2004) Bill Bryson

Chapter Fourteen - Concluding thoughts . . . ?

“The fool has said in his heart – ‘there is no God’!” Bible experts tell us that the Hebrew word: ‘nabal’ translated here as ‘fool’, does not mean a person who is foolish: it means someone who is empty or morally deficient. So why the use of “fool” in this Psalm? (1) Because, to say “there is no God!” is to ignore the instinctive yearning in all mankind to be linked in some way with a divine being, it is to deny our spiritual nature. It is to say that all man is, is this physical being, and that we – mankind – are as the beasts of the field – we have come from the dust and are going back to the dust. That’s all we are, according to the “fool” in the Psalm! Man’s morality is simply the conditioned learning of the animal pack. And to say that - is to say we are empty beings. And to believe it, one has to be an empty being - a ‘nabal’, a fool.

But without going into the religious evidence, strictly staying within the limits of everyday experiences and beliefs from the world of men, there are strong grounds for believing that there is a spirit dimension to man. Whether we consider ghosts – and there is much evidence to support the belief in something of the sort - or poltergeists, and again, there is a great deal of evidence for the existence of these non-physical entities - or the attempts of mediums to contact the dead, and they have been around for a long time - there are experiences which can only be explained in a spirit context. That is not to say that what is experienced are what men believe them to be, because Satan is a liar and the father of lies. He is a deceiver and he can present evil as an angel of light. Much of the so-called supernatural may well be of his making; manifestations of his never-ending war against God, and his exploitation of man as a battlefield and

possible prize.

Mystics of all backgrounds and persuasions firmly believe - based on their experiences - in another dimension, and often in a greater spirit being. Christian mystics firmly identify with that being as the God of the Christian religion, the God they know as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the one true God who dwells in light.

Those who have had Near Death Experiences claim to have seen that light and other aspects of the after-life before being returned to their bodies and to this physical life. Both mystics and those who have experienced the NDE claim to have glimpsed another dimension, and for many, that is the spirit dimension.

Even modern theoretical physicists and philosophers have considered the possibility of another dimension, or more than one, apart from the four – length, breadth, height and time of this physical universe. Serious and well-respected academics can speak of eleven dimensions, and of parallel universes. Then there is speculation that time as we know it is an illusion, and those who have witnessed time-slips are ready to agree with that concept. The Christian believes that while he lives in time, he also has eternal life, with a future beyond time. He lives on two levels, within the physical fourdimensional universe, and at the same time within the spirit dimension, and he finds nothing contradictory in accepting as true what Jesus meant when He said: “Before Abraham was, I am.”(2) When Jesus made that claim, He was revealing a truth which is becoming more widely accepted in this 21st century, that linear time as we know it is only one aspect of reality.

The Bible has given a unified and clear witness to the reality of the spirit dimension. What the Bible has displayed has been echoed in the experiences of contemporary men and women as well as people in history, of the spirit dimension breaking into the physical dimension. Ordinary every-day people have met with angels in recent decades, have witnessed and experienced inexplicable healings and other miracles straight from the pages of the Bible. There is an overwhelming weight of evidence for the existence of the spirit dimension in keeping with its manifestation as recorded in the Bible.

For the Christian, this physical life is not all there is; there is another dimension, a spirit dimension, and the Christian is a citizen of it. The purpose behind writing this book has been to consider the evidence which proves the existence of that

dimension, a dimension that is a natural element for the Christian. Christians interact with two realities, through their indwelling Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

And that has been the purpose behind the writing of this book. To remind ourselves that at all times Christians enjoy the privilege of living in two dimensions - the physical dimension and the spirit dimension.

There are implications for man being a spirit, soul and physical body creature with the potential for living in both the spirit and physical dimensions while in this life. If St Augustine was right, that our hearts are restless until they rest in God, (3) what are the consequences if man chooses to reject the idea of God? What if, while the spirit part of our nature is seeking God – what if we don't believe in God - does our spirit part look elsewhere for satisfaction? Is it going to be always seeking and seeking and never finding rest? Like having an itch you can't scratch? Perhaps embracing exotic religions and cults, rejecting the establishment with its formalized religion and the traditions of society, while satisfying the desire to go one better than what went before? Or perhaps, in an act both pathetically selfish and selfdestructive, to become addicted to mind-changing drugs as the ultimate gesture of “stop the world I want to get off!” And in so doing, to experience the illusion of finding the answer to life... in effect, could drug-addiction be one consequence of man's spirit nature seeking fulfilment in the wrong place?

Is rebellion against society, by whatever age-group, a symptom of the vain search for spirit rest?

And the conviction that what went before and has always been done, that is not going to be the way to find rest now? The need to do or be something different has a limited choice of options once you reject God, once you reject the claim that He alone is the means of satisfying the spiritual hunger that is part of being human. Something like the angst that teenagers display when they rebel against their parents or society's standards, not necessarily because those standards are not good, but because they are there - the sitting-up and obvious target to rebel against. Which brings to mind the opinion of a mother about her teenage son's taste in music from a recent novel: “His taste in music was a mystery to her, but she knew from her own youth that that was the whole point. If it didn't alienate your parents, why bother listening to it?” (4)

So if St Augustine has correctly summed up man's dilemma – "Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our heart is not quiet until it rests in Thee." (3) If that is true, and this author believes it is, then many of the problems that afflict today's western society arise because atheism, in both its apathetic and militant expressions, has replaced the complacent religiosity of the nineteenth century. The spirit dimension for man demands a spirit response from man, even if that response is pseudo-spiritual or irrational or even self-destructive. And unfortunately, that is often the response manifested: pseudo-spiritual or irrational or even selfdestructive. Because while many Western men have no interest in the spirit dimension when it refers to God, they are open to any replacement for God. Ranging from revering Higher Intelligence Aliens from beyond Andromeda, to smoking crack-cocaine from street-corner pushers, with the whole spectrum of experiential phenomena in between.

Reject the concept of God and it is easy to reject a higher moral law. Ditch belief in goodness for its own sake, and you are in danger of amoral anarchy. And the whole Ten Commandments of liberated Man are compressed into: "Do whatever you want to do!" And that sad state of affairs may result from Man's need for spirit rest never being satisfied. Because the only true source of satisfaction is God and that requires belief in God.

Put like that, the spirit side of man may be a handicap. That is, when it can never find rest: an itchy spiritual part of human nature and nothing to scratch it with. Or – seek in the wrong place and you won't find. The search for rest goes on. Today, the western world has seen a mushrooming of many and varied forms of beliefs about the spirit dimension. They are all around us. Spiritual enlightenment is big business. The way to spirit fulfilment - though it must exclude Jesus Christ - offers a diversity of pathways such as white-witchery, spiritualism, yoga, tarot cards/ouija boards, astrology and so on - a list longer than your arm of religious and superstitious systems and beliefs.

21st century-man is more spirit-hungry today than his predecessor in centuries past because the "establishment respectability" has been discredited; belief in the natural goodness of man, if it ever really existed, perished in the bloody massacres of World War I and finally buried in the human ashes land-fill at Auschwitz Birkenau of the Holocaust. "Cynicism Rules – OK!!" The hunger for a spiritual dimension to life has had to find what satisfaction it can in other than the conventional sources – in various kinds of spirit phenomena - or by abandoning the search and grabbing what pleasures are available from material

things.

The Christian has found that rest with God, and with it, the means to live out his existence on the two dimensions, the physical existence of time, and the spirit dimension of eternity. These should have been the closing words in this book, until something happened. And that something will be the subject of the next and final chapter.

References:

- 1) Psalm 14: 1; 53: 1
- 2) John 8: 58
- 3) St Augustine, Confessions II
- 4) "Genesis II" by Paul Adam (2001) Little, Brown and Company: London (page 145)

Chapter Fifteen – "Don't let Satan bully you!"

I'd had a broken night's sleep, so I felt not good next morning. Problems weighed heavily on me. There were no obvious solutions, no way forward, prospects were bleak. Then clearly, the voice of God spoke within me, the voice I had become familiar with over the past fifty years and more, and I knew it was Him.

"Don't let Satan bully you!"

What?

The words were repeated: "Don't let Satan bully you!"

Then I understood. I was allowing the problems of everyday life to overwhelm me: the real material problems of this physical life. I'm a Christian. I live at two levels, in two dimensions.

First, the present physical dimension - the dimension of everyday life- and it was on this dimension that my horizons were filled with crushing problems. Or they seemed to me to be "crushing".

But I also live on the other level, the spirit dimension. The dimension where I can be in continual contact with God. The Bible tells me Jesus Christ is with me, in me, all the time. (1) Being a Christian means I have the Spirit of Christ in me. In fact, although I am here in this physical world facing all these problems that are so depressing, I am at the same time - seated with Jesus Christ in the heavenly realms. (2) So I don't have to let the problems and difficulties and

bleak outlook of the physical here and now dimension fill my entire horizon. I have a spirit horizon. And when placed alongside the spirit horizon, the things of this world diminish.

God's voice within rebukes me: "Here you are, just finishing writing this book about the Christian living on two dimensions, and you are behaving as if the material dimension is all there is. Get real!"

Satan wants to bully me with the down-side of my physical existence. But God's telling me I am to dismiss him and fix my eyes on Jesus – "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace." There's a whole lot of Christian common-sense in those old choruses and songs.

And that is what I have to do - turn my eyes upon Jesus - and not let Satan bully me as if the physical dimension is all there is. I have to look to Jesus, not only when things are going badly, but in all circumstances, both good and bad. And some times, my responses are going to be praise and thanksgiving. Other times, I'll be seeking His help and strength to face what lies ahead. But whatever the circumstances, it's a case of looking to Jesus.

That is one brilliant advantage of being a Christian, we live in both the physical and spirit dimensions simultaneously. And the things of this earthly existence need not be allowed to overwhelm us. We can deal with them for what they are, the short-term problems of our earthly lives. We don't ignore them; we don't treat them as if they don't count. They are important for they are of this world and we live in this world. But they are not all there is, they are of passing significance.

Christians are not of passing significance. Christians have a future that will outlast the stars.

Most certainly, we will outlast these temporal problems that get us down.

So I gave my attention full-time to Jesus, centre-stage. "And the things of earth grew strangely dim . . ." I began to rejoice, and I shared my experience with my wife, Jean, and she rejoiced with me. The problems of this physical dimension that had been getting me down were still there, but now they were seen from the perspective of eternity.

A half hour later, a Christian acquaintance phoned me. I knew right away he was

feeling depressed. He had been in for medical tests recently and was told the results would be available within a few days. But he was convinced - and I suspect, with good reason - that the results would be bad. So I shared with him the advice God had given me:

“Don’t let Satan bully you!”

Then my caller began praising God. Then he was quoting: “Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith - ” (3) And so for a while we were both praising Jesus, and enjoying our fellowship with Jesus and each other. The things of our physical dimension had been put in their place from the perspective of eternity. These things of the physical dimension are important, and we have a responsibility to deal with them as best we can, in as Christian a way as possible. And Jesus Christ lives in us and will help us do that, if we open ourselves up to His influence. But they are not the beall and the end-all. They are of time, and so are we, but in addition, we are also of eternity - and these problems aren’t!

The truth is, Satan wants us to be distracted by the evidence of our physical senses and our knowledge of what has happened and our fears about what may happen. Or we may be so enjoying our circumstances of the physical dimension, we forget the spirit dimension. Satan wants us to fixate on this physical dimension, the things of time. And he doesn’t want us to think about the spirit dimension at all, and especially, he wants us to forget Jesus. If he can get us to fixate on, to be obsessed with, the things of this world, that is a victory for him. It satisfies him if our consciousness is overloaded with the things of this present life, the happy things, as well as the not-so happy. He wants us to be distracted from the spirit life. Because, then we can be down, defeated and despondent. Or we can be so buzzing with the enjoyment of things going well that we lose out in our fellowship with God. And in that condition, we can lose out on the spirit dimension.

As far as Satan is concerned, there’s more than one way to undermine a Christian . . .

But when instead of focusing only on things of the physical we look unto Jesus, then “we are more than conquerors” (4) through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

So we’ve come quite a way from my visitor saying: “I’ve seen a ghost!” But

through it all, has been the connecting thread of being aware of another dimension, in addition to the physical dimension of our everyday lives. And that other dimension is the spirit dimension. As a Christian, I live in that dimension, while also living in the physical dimension. So it is that we Christians have the ever-present help of God to live as His servants, to His glory, and our eternal blessing.

References:

- 1) Romans 8: 9
- 2) Ephesians 2: 6
- 3) Hebrews 12: 2
- 4) Romans 8: 37