

OBJECTIONS TO CHRISTIAN BELIEF

I have just been reading a book in which some monk try to convince an atheist of the existence of God by logic and as a result lose their faith. This reminded me of a book recording four lectures I heard at University more than thirty years ago. These lectures examined objections to mainstream Christian belief which the four Professors of Theology found themselves unable to answer. As a young dissident Anglican who felt alone and out of step I found them gripping. Reading them again as a Quaker I still find them relevant, though some of the more specialist issues have become less important, both the Church of England and to me. However, two problems remain which are as relevant and immediate now as they were then; the doctrine of the Atonement and the historical accuracy of the Gospels.

Jesus preached a God of love. I cannot reconcile this with the idea (not from Jesus) that all generations before his needed his intervention before they could experience that love and that even those coming after him needed to hear his message as a precondition of salvation. I cannot imagine a loving God requiring a cruel sacrifice, nor condemning generations because of the 'Sin of Adam'. The historical accounts of Jesus' life give a reasonable likelihood that he lived, but they cannot support the key spiritual events of his life - events which seem crucial to a belief in Christianity, since any claim to be a Christian must surely involve a belief in the historical accuracy of the birth, death and resurrection at the very least.

So why, you may wonder, am I talking to you as a believer. I am not a believer in 'conjuring tricks with bones' as the former Bishop of Durham put it, but I am speaking as one who aspires to be a disciple of Jesus. He showed us a Light that I believe to be in everyone, even though they may not always be conscious of it. This is the Light which shows us each our way. I feel it behind me as I walk down the shadow cast by my body, but the Light illuminates a better way and every now and then I take a step or two on the path I should truly follow.