

does not make sense, is no less in place in regard to the books of the Bible. It remains on this subject only to add that there is no inconsistency with the foregoing in the further statement of Genesis about trees growing before the creation of man. Trees with their deep roots will flourish where plants with shallow roots cannot and precisely such a locality is figured in the story of the Garden of Eden. The source of water in verse 6 seeped through the under-soil of itself but required the work of man to spread it on the surface of the ground.

EDMUND F. SUTCLIFFE, S.J.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

In view of certain passages in the New Testament which suggest that Christ would return soon, could the prediction be conditional? Could we hold that as the prophet Jonas was sent by God to announce the destruction of Ninive within forty days and yet it did not really happen, because the Ninivites repented, so God sent the Apostles to announce the speedy return of Christ to judge the world; that the early Christians rightly believed it and yet it did not really happen because something intervened of which we know nothing?

No, the cases are not parallel. The destruction of Ninive was evidently conditional on repentance. The Ninivites understood it so. If it was unconditional, the mission of Jonas lacks its obvious purpose. Jonas erred and was rebuked for wishing it to be unconditional. If the Apostles announced Christ's speedy return as a truth revealed to them by Christ, as part indeed of their divine message, and this return was in reality conditional on something of which we know nothing, their message would necessarily be deceptive and inconsistent with divine veracity. As a matter of fact there is no evidence that the Apostles preached the speediness of Christ's return as part of divine revelation commissioned to them. They surely did not contradict their Master, who as recorded by St. Matthew and St. Mark, stated that no one knew of the day, not even the angels in heaven, but the Father alone, their Master who on the day of his Ascension had said to them: "It is not yours to know the times or moments which the Father hath put in His own power." As to what their private opinions and expectations were is of no importance, as long as they did not express them in their written or spoken word as part of divine revelation whether directly or by implication. St. Paul warned his converts "not to be terrified neither by supposed spirit messages, nor word, nor by epistle supposed to be sent by him as if the day of the Lord were at hand." A teacher is not always to be blamed for the errors of his disciples. From the above quotation (II Thess. ii, 2) it is clear that St. Paul was convinced that none of his teaching demanded the inference that Christ would return within his lifetime

or that of his converts. We have therefore the authority of St. Paul himself in interpreting such expressions as "we the living," "we who remain" as general indications of those living at the time of Christ's return.

J. P. ARENDZEN.

What exactly was the nature of the pillars of cloud and fire in which the Lord went before the Israelites to guide them in the exodus from Egypt? (Exod. xiii, 21; Numb. xiv, 14; etc.).

It is a general principle of Catholic exegesis (and indeed, one might say of common sense in literary matters) that words should be taken to mean just what they say, and in their literal meaning, unless there be some good reason for preferring some applied meaning. Thus, if someone points to the horizon and remarks how clearly it stands out, we know that he means the horizon in the strictly literal sense; but if he says that the political horizon has become clouded, he is evidently speaking metaphorically. The English language appears to be unusually free in its use of metaphors, and it is one of the advantages of a Latin education that it helps us, by means of translation and composition, to say what we mean and mean what we say. Holy Scripture has likewise many metaphors and parables and other such free use of words, and we need to be careful in our terminology when dealing with it; the literal meaning of a parable, for example, appears to be found rather in the application than in the setting.

When God (Jehovah, Yahweh) is said to go before the Israelites in a pillar of cloud (Exod. xiii, 21), we know that he cannot have been present in the cloud in some special manner peculiar to the cloud. Holy Scripture is very free in its "anthropomorphisms" (a word from the Greek, meaning "man-figurings," i.e., figurings of God as man); it attributes to God, without always asserting any qualifications, the actions, emotions, etc. of man. But it also provides the necessary qualifications or limitations of such expressions; at the very beginning of Genesis, for example, God is said to be the creator of all things, and (not to dilate upon the matter) one may cite Psalm 138 (139: *Domine, probasti*). The cloud and the pillar were symbols of his especial protection, and he is said to be in them because he is acting through them. We ourselves sometimes say of a person that "he is in this matter" when he has had some part in the arrangements, and God was in the cloud and the fire in a far more effective sense than that.

On the other hand there does not seem to be any reason to doubt that there was real cloud and real fire; they were just what was wanted for the purpose, and could be made by God's almighty power to alternate. There does not seem to be any definite warrant for supposing that the cloud was luminous; on the contrary, the Hebrew of Exod. xix, 9, seems to imply a dark or thick cloud. In II Paral. (Chron.) v. 13, we should perhaps read, with strong support from good manuscripts of