

## Ministers letter.

Dear Friends,

Last month we finished with “Thomas questions”. Why can’t they be ours as well?

To continue....Jacob Bronowski broadcast, what at the time was a groundbreaking television series “The Ascent of Man”, making one thing fundamentally clear in his treatment of the evolution of science. From the point of view of the physical sciences, he argued, “there is no absolute knowledge. And those who claim it open the door to tragedy”.

Bronowski grew up in the 1920s and 30s; when Max Born (a Professor of Physics) was working on a theory of relativity and one of his pupils, Werner Heisenberg evolved what he described as the “Principle of Uncertainty”, something which Bronowski preferred to call a “Principle of Tolerance”. All science is posited upon as near an approximation to clear-sightedness as possible. But they all understand that they will never master the principles of knowledge.

Bronowski was interested that this Principle of Uncertainty was being developed in a Germany where it was certainty (rather than uncertainty) which was asserting itself and tolerance, far from being practised, was being extinguished. This was, after all, the time of the rise of Adolph Hitler. Bronowski is clear that all knowledge is limited and, therefore, doubt is legitimised.

In the same way that scientists claim the right to doubt, so should we as believers. After all, for a believer to claim to have absolute knowledge would be effectively to suggest that he/she is on a par with God himself. I refuse to belittle God by my own littleness. Indeed, there are things being taught within the Christian community about which I have severe doubts, truth claims that pretend to be non-negotiable and beyond discussion but which I feel very uneasy about. Let me spell some of them out. I find it difficult to believe:

- that faith leads inevitably to material success in one’s business or automatic positive outcomes on one’s relationships;
- that infertility is a sign of God’s displeasure and a punishment from God;
- that contraception is always and inevitably wrong;
- that God sent his son deliberately to a gruesome end to appease his wrath.
- that arming Israel to the teeth is the fulfilling of a biblical injunction to prepare the Jewish people for the final battle which will make the world ready for the second coming of Christ.

To all these teachings, heard commonly enough in church, and many others, I want to say: “Show me”. I want to say passionately: “Unless I can prove it then I won’t believe”. And my criterion will always be the litmus test of love. How does what is being argued for make the world a better place? How does it make the world more loving? How can religious claims be true if the person making them is filled with hatred or bitterness?

The application of Thomas’s doubt in our contemporary world would be this: And I’d ask this of myself as much as of anyone else. “You say you follow the risen Christ, that you’re one of his followers; show me his love, show me something of his grace and mercy operating in yourself. Then I’ll believe it’s true”.

His declaration of faith: -“**MY LORD AND MY GOD**”, identifies Jesus for all believers for all time.

Thomas represents **us**, separated in time and space, but not in faith.

Thomas deserves to be respected for his faith; his doubts had a purpose – he wanted to know the truth.

Thomas didn’t idolise his doubts, he gladly believed when given reasons to do so.

He expressed his doubts fully and had them answered completely. Doubting was only his way of responding to the traumatic event, not his way of life.

Let me end with a quotation from Bronowski, who watched his family be taken off to Auschwitz where they all died. He wrote: “I owe it as a human being to the many members of my family who died at Auschwitz to stand here as a survivor and a witness. We have to cure ourselves of the itch for absolute knowledge and power. We have to close the distance between the push-button order and the human act. We have to touch people”.

Thomas touched Jesus. And he believed. All of us believers must behave as if we have been touched by Jesus and that our faith is directly the result of his love operating in us.

Every blessing,

Mark Cheetham