

**Christ's Living Church
Today—One, Holy,
Catholic & Apostolic**

PASTORS' SCHOOL 1997

Morning Sessions

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Copies of the Evening Studies are available in a separate volume

STUDY ONE

The Church in the Old Testament

(by John D. Calvert)



The faith of the church is the outworking in salvation history of the faith that God first gave his people, Israel (Rom. 9:4f.; Deut. 7:6). Through the centuries, Israel was being prepared for its mission, with the entire course of the nation's history pointing to Jesus, Messiah. God's disclosure of himself to Israel distinguished their religion from all other beliefs. While other peoples fashioned gods according to their own designs, M. E. Osterhaven¹ comments that 'the highest heaven' could not contain the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (II Chron. 6:18). With the establishment of the Christian church, the foundation was declared to be 'the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together' (Eph. 2:20). All who believe in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, are children of Abraham (Gal. 3:28f.). One Old Testament theologian stated, 'Historically and spiritually Christianity stands upon the shoulders of Judaism'.²

As Western Christians we continue to confront the obstacle of individualism. We think and speak in terms of 'me' and 'my' rather than 'us'. The period since the Second World War has seen Western politics and economics increasingly move in this personal direction, and our religious perceptions have tended to follow suit. Where the New Testament speaks in corporate terms, we instinctively see it as addressing the individual believer. Yet the New Testament, no less than the Old, focuses on the people of God in its corporate identity. The Old Testament is the story of a people and the variety of God's dealings with them as a Father with his family. There are significant individuals who stand out and personal relationship with God is fundamental, but the context is essentially corporate. 'The believing community is the soil in which personal faith sprouts and is nourished'.³

¹ M. E. Osterhaven, *The Faith of the Church* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1982), pp. 22f.

² Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1958), p. 2.

³ B. Milne, *Know the Truth* (IVP, Leicester, 1984), p. 204.

HE IS GOD

Osterhaven has written, 'To compare God with idols was improper to the pious Hebrew in view of God's sovereign majesty' (cf. Isa. 40:22–26).⁴

It was through the prophets that God's message of judgment and mercy came, and these men often stood as solitary spokesmen in the life of the nation. They were often regarded as personifications of their own message as they sought to speak into their own time zone and lead their people away from sin and into submission to the only true God. The prophets at times appeared as tragic or strange figures, but they were compelled by the Spirit of God and were the instruments in the purpose of the One who was accomplishing his purpose through their ministry. The essence of covenant love by Israel's God is shown in the activity of the prophets, for this God calls for the salvation of his people. 'Thus the prophets as the servants of God are the image of Jesus Christ, the Son who gave himself completely to restore the communion between God and man'.⁵

The revelation of the one true God who loved his people and called them to himself was the foundation of the faith of the church. The revelation of such a God was clear, with the advent and ministry of the Word who tabernacled among his people. The hope of Israel had come to redeem his people. This was the Old Testament theme as declared in Exodus 6:6–8 (cf. Luke 24:21).

THE NOMADIC CLAN

The story of the people of God is recorded in Matthew's genealogy as commencing with Abraham, although we could refer back to Seth (Gen. 4: 25, 26). We know this people as 'Israel' and, although it is the seed of one man, the picture is of a family, a household, a people living together in a kinship relationship. The significance of our focus is revealed in the story of a man named Abram who is undistinguished from other emigrants of his day except for one outstanding factor. He is called by God to depart from the city of Ur of the Chaldeans in the first exodus. He is called out of the world, but such calling is for the sake of the world, for 'all peoples on earth will be blessed through you' (Gen. 12:3). So is this the start of the church? Or can we focus on Abel because he is the first person of faith mentioned in the Hebrews 11 list?

We acknowledge the emphasis of Torrance when he reminds us that, 'The church had its earthly beginning in Adam for then it began to subsist in the human society formed by God for immediate communion with himself'.⁶ We know that the entire church fell into sin, also, in Adam. It was not the divine institution that fell, continues Torrance, it fell 'in its constituent members, and therefore the Church upheld by the eternal will of God took on at once a new form under his saving acts in history'.

The word 'sin', *pesa*, is one we have become used to. But theologically, such sin is against Yahweh and is not only rebellion against him, but as Martens states:

breaks off from him, takes from him what was uniquely his. Such breach with Yahweh, rather than obstinacy or pride, is at the core of what the Old Testament calls sin . . . base relational failure . . . a fractured relationship between God and man.⁷

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵ Th. C. Vriezen, *ibid.*, p. 261.

⁶ T. F. Torrance, 'The Foundation of the Church' in *Theological Foundations for Ministry*, ed. by R. Anderson (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 201.

⁷ E. A. Martens, *God's Design* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1981), p. 49.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

In the Septuagint, the Greek word *ekklesia* translates the Hebrew expression *qahal*, which with the related term *edah*, designates Israel as the covenant people of Yahweh. Theological importance is given to *qahal* by the prominent use in the account of Israel gathered to receive the law at the foot of Mount Sinai (Deut. 9:10; 10:4; 18:16; 31:30). This designation of Israel is the counterpart of the New Testament expression for ‘the church of God’ (I Cor. 1:2; etc.). In opposition to this there are scholars who insist that both *ecclesia* and *qahal* mean no more than ‘assembly’. We note this argument, but will not enter the debate.⁸

PREPARATION FOR COVENANT

Ogden Nash is credited with the expression, ‘How odd of God to choose the Jews’. That ‘oddness’ is a symbol of God’s providential activity that is beyond our understanding and calls for faith in him who is sovereign. This ‘odd’ people have been brought out of Egyptian bondage in an incredible series of events and have come to the mountain where there comes a ‘theophany’, in which God appears to Moses (Exod. 19:1–25). We will note verses 1–8. The desert or wilderness of Sinai was grazing country, and Moses was so eager to bring Israel to Sinai that he ‘went up to God . . . on the very day’ they arrived at Sinai. The impression in the narrative is that Yahweh is as eager for Moses and the people to arrive as they are to pitch their tents in front of the mountain. The initial call to Moses is contained in Exodus 3:12, and now Yahweh calls to Moses in the words of covenant (19:3, 4). Alan Cole writes, ‘All that Israel needed initially for salvation from Egypt was acceptance of God’s deliverance’.⁹

Then the words of covenant (vv. 5, 6). ‘My own [or treasured] possession’, means belonging privately to a king (cf. I Chron. 29:3). Not only special relationship, but also special value. Yahweh’s choice or selection, according to his purposes. There is no place for arrogance or pride, it is all of grace. Note that God does not say he is Israel’s possession to be used for the people’s benefit. The people are Yahweh’s own possession and will be used according to his will. As a treasured possession the people would express this in two ways:

- (a) **As a kingdom of priests.** The phrase ‘a kingdom of priests’ in Exodus 19:6, does not occur anywhere else in the Old Testament, although Isaiah 61:6 is close. A people who live to serve God as priests with free access to his presence. They would also be God’s representative to other nations, so the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 has a ‘universalist’ outworking.¹⁰
- (b) **As a holy nation.** Set apart from other nations. ‘Holy’ initially meant dedicated to God, and the holiness was meant to be contagious and might be dangerous or fatal (v. 12). Leviticus 20:7 shows the serious moral implications of being in the people of the Holy One. This emphasis is taken into the New Testament

⁸ For comprehensive insights see L. Loenen, ‘Church, Synagogue’ in *The New Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, ed. by C. Brown (The Paternoster Pr., Exeter, 1975), pp. 291–307.

⁹ Alan Cole, *Exodus* (The Tyndale Pr., London, 1973), p. 144.

¹⁰ H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel* (SCM, London, 1956), p. 135.

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(I Pet. 2:9). Obedience is the response of faith (cf. Deut. 13:4, 18). The people respond as recorded in verses 7 and 8. The agreement of the people is a necessary ratification of the covenant. Cole adds, 'It is not unfair to see man's typical naivety in Israel's eager assertion'.¹¹

I read about an author who conducts writing classes at University. At the start of a semester he always assigns a paper asking students to answer the question; 'What would you do if you had only five days to live?' Some of the answers are: 'I'd say I'm sorry . . . I'd say I love you . . . I'd say thank you to my parents'. The papers are not marked in grades, but across the top the teacher writes, 'Why don't you do it now? What are you waiting for?'

THE DIVINE ELECTION

One of the major themes of the Hebrew Bible is Yahweh's election of Israel. Almost thirty years ago the Old Testament scholar G. E. Wright penned the words, 'The all-pervading sense of election and covenant, therefore, is the chief clue for the understanding of Israel's sense of destiny and of the meaning of existence'.¹²

The most frequently used terms for Yahweh initiating relationship with Israel are: 'to choose', 'to take', 'to be My people', 'to know', 'to separate', 'to make a distinction'. Images used are, father-son, master-servant, shepherd-sheep, potter-clay, farmer-vineyard. Biblical writers also employ marriage terms, with Yahweh viewed as the husband and Israel as his wife.¹³

(a) **Election portrayed as marriage** (Exod. 6:7). Yahweh is going to take the Israelites for his people and become their God, so he will deliver them and settle them in Canaan. The verse uses marriage terms (cf. Isa. 54:5; Jer. 31:31, 32). At the time when the covenant was made, Yahweh as the bridegroom took Israel to himself as his bride. Jeremiah's description shows that he understood the covenant on Sinai as a wedding ceremony, and one which established and sealed the relationship. This meant the establishment of moral principles and ethical responsibilities. The command was that Yahweh's bride was to have no other gods (Exodus 20:1, 2, 23) nor allowed to worship or serve other gods (Exod. 20:5; Deut. 6:14).

As the husband, Yahweh promised and provided land, food, prosperity, security and protection. The bride was to respond with loyalty and faithfulness. Israel was not faithful and became the adulterous wife, hence the prophetic message of her harlotry (Exod. 23:32, 33).

(b) **Election portrayed as an army**. Israel's wars are associated with Yahweh as 'Commander-in-Chief'. The entire nation was to be an army at the exodus and during the conquest (Exod. 15:3, 14:25, 12:12). When David faced Goliath he said, 'You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom

¹¹ *ibid*, p. 146.

¹² G. E. Wright, 'The Old Testament Against Its Environment', in *Studies in Biblical Theology*, vol. 2 (SCM, London, 1968), pp. 62-63.

¹³ E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Harper & Row, London, 1958) p. 202.

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you have defied' (I Sam. 17:45, cf. 17:26, 36; cf. Isa. 13:3, 4). God's election is the key to understanding his people. It is his special act with Israel as the people of promise, as Goldingay states, 'brought into existence by God's word'.¹⁴ In their development and behaviour, Israel is bound to Yahweh and to one another. While they have human leaders, there are no overlords; it is always Yahweh's act, his will and the people's submission to him as Covenant Lord, that makes them his people.

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¹⁴ J. Goldingay, *Theological Diversity & the Authority of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1987), p. 62.

STUDY TWO

The Old Testament *Qahal* Becomes the New Testament *Ecclesia*

(by Grant Thorpe)



The previous study has shown that God has had a people from the beginning and that this people has a very particular nature. Having come to know the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is inconceivable that God would ever have been without a people. We have come to know that we share with Israel one Father and that we are one family with them—having a common heritage and life, purpose and future. With them, we are the people who ‘cling to the Lord’ (Jer. 13:11) and have him as our Shepherd.

Israel was an assembly under God (*qahal*, when used of Israel may indicate the people or the event of their gathering). The church (*ecclesia*) is the people of Christ. Each have their distinctive time in salvation history. However, as regards the nature of their existence (or relationships) and their purpose in history, they are of one piece.

If we do not see this continuity, much of our heritage is lost. The ‘whole counsel of God’ must include the whole story of God’s people.

The connection is through Jesus Christ. Any Old Testament faith which was not looking forward to the fulfilment of the promise in Christ was invalid. The Old Testament people had their integrity and permanence in that the Christ would come to make good all that they had in sign and anticipation. Israel was not ‘perfect’ without the church (Heb. 11:40); that is, they had not truly entered into worship. The New Testament people now have their integrity and permanence in that they are joined to him who fulfilled the promises to Israel.

Israel’s ‘becoming’ the church was not a natural evolution or foreseeable event. Nor did the experience of Israel indicate to Christ’s followers what to expect as the church.

WHAT DID THE DISCIPLES EXPECT?

The disciples were poised for great things after the resurrection, but were unclear as to what this might be. They knew what it meant to be Israel and so asked an ‘Israel question’ (Acts 1:6). But their future identity and kingdom would lie in being the people of Christ—witnesses to him, in the power of the Spirit and to the ends of the earth.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

The Baptist had said that Messiah would winnow Israel and gather the true crop of God’s people (Luke 3:17). He would baptise his people with the Holy Spirit and with fire—the fulfilment of all prophetic longing—and would, as Lamb, take away the sins of the people—the fulfilment of all priestly work. What manner of people would this yield?

JESUS

The disciples heard Jesus claim priority to Abraham, superiority to Moses and lordship over David. There could be no fasting while the bridegroom was present. They heard that he was lord of the Sabbath and that he would raise up the temple in three days. They heard of a new exodus during the transfiguration of Christ, and saw him ride into Jerusalem to the cry of King and then distribute his own blood of the new covenant. What effect would these things have on the way they lived and the mission they fulfilled?

Jesus had resisted attempts to confine the new life he was bringing to the old wine skins of Jewish practice. He had begun to reveal the ethos of his people in saying that the greatest among them would be the servant of all, that they were all brothers, that they were to love one another and that those who heard and obeyed him were his family. He had given brief teaching on discipline in the ‘church’ and some about the proclamation they would undertake. Other than these things, it would have been difficult for him to describe the shape of a people whose life depended on events that had not yet occurred.

John tells us that Jesus would die to ‘gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad’ (John 11:52). What then happened?

THE BECOMING

After the resurrection, the disciples were ‘all joined together constantly in prayer’ (Acts 1:14). After the coming of the Spirit:

day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2:46–47).

They had borne witness to Jesus in the power of the Spirit. God had revived his ancient people. (See next study for more on this.)

Something had happened to Israel so that it was now the church. Israel had not become the church of itself, or evolved into the church. Rather, it was the purpose of God that this be so, the person and work of Christ that made it so, and the Spirit that enlivened the old bones of Israel to make a new people that is neither Jew nor Gentile, essentially. The vineyard of Israel was now let out to other tenants (Matt. 21:41).

For most of church history, the people of God in the Old and New Testaments have been seen as having essential unity. The dispensational school of interpreting Scripture has popularised the view that there are Old Testament prophecies not fulfilled in the coming of Christ and the birth of the church, and which are still to be fulfilled by Israel as a nation. This study assumes the earlier view, and some reasons for this will appear.

The wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile has been broken down—there is nothing to divide Jew and Gentile as we come together to the Father. The distinction between Jew and Gentile is not significant in regard to being the people of God (Rom. 10:12; cf. Col. 3:11; Gal. 3:28).

Three References May Seem to Refer to an On-going Identity for Israel

- (a) The disciples will judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). R. T. France calls this ‘a transfer of imagery’ as ‘the followers of Jesus . . . take the place of the unbelieving nation, a theme which runs through much of the teaching of Jesus in this Gospel (cf. 8:11–12; 21:43)’.¹
- (b) Jerusalem will be trodden down by Gentiles (Luke 21:24); that is, from A.D. 70 to the end of history. It is difficult to see how ‘the times of the Gentiles’ would have been concluded when Israel became a state in 1948, or when Israel regained access to the Jerusalem temple area in 1968.
- (c) The disciples enquired about the kingdom being restored to Israel (Acts 1:6). Christ said they were not to know the ‘times and seasons’. What he meant by Israel in that context is not addressed.

THE ‘BECOMING’ IS WHAT ISRAEL WAS ABOUT

This change for Israel is not something alien to Israel so that we should regret the loss of the former in the coming of the latter. Rather, what happens to Israel is integral to its existence.

Israel was a nation and an ethnic people, but this was wholly dependent on the fact that God called and sustained them. Israel was always spiritual in constitution (Gen. 32:24–30; Deut. 30:11–14). It was a mixed multitude (Exod. 12:38) but an assembly (*qahal*)—a religious community whose unity was in the word and law of Yahweh, and so, in Yahweh himself (see Deut. 4:4; Jer. 13:10–11). The Psalmists regarded their essential identity as being not civic but their being present before a holy God (e.g. 16:5—does he say this merely of real estate?). It was not material benefit but God’s presence with his people which constituted their life (Hag. 1:13).

¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (ed. L. Morris), The Tyndale N.T. Commentaries (IVP, Leicester, 1985), p. 288.

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Especially, Israel, from its inception, was Christological. Its very life and purpose were invalid apart from the Christ who was with them from the beginning (I Cor. 10:4), and whom all their history and practice anticipated. Their life as a nation increasingly bore witness to the fact that its life was in him who was still to come.

Christ came and gathered all Israel to himself (cf. Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:15). He was its remnant (cf. Isa. 49:3–6). From him was born and launched what Israel was always about, its true self.

Israel's hopes could only be stated in terms of land and temple and king, but these were so stated as to be properly fulfilled in Christ—not re-interpreted by the apostles.

THE CHURCH LOOKING BACK AT HER HISTORY

Being born in such a manner and with such a history, the church cannot understand her identity or dynamic or hope or purpose apart from their origins in Israel.

New Testament faith that forgets its unity with Israel will misunderstand that it lives under a new covenant, which is the covenant we have when the old covenant has been broken.

All who are in Christ are this Israel of God—inheriting the gifts given to Israel in their true and intended content. The gifts which defined and empowered Israel are fulfilled in Christ and given to the New Testament *ecclesia*—as their definition and dynamic (Rom. 9:4f.).

They receive the adoption as children of one Father, the glory of God in the face of Christ, the new covenant which encapsulated all that the other covenants had prepared for, the law written on their hearts; the worship with Christ as Leader and High Priest; the promises—all things are ours; the patriarchs—with Abraham as the father of all who have faith; and, of course, the Christ as defined by the revelations given to Israel. The blessing we have is that of being grafted into the stock of Israel.

The calling of Israel has now been given to the church. They are:

a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy'
(I Pet. 2:9–10).

WHAT OF PRESENT ISRAEL?

The continuity of Israel as a nation, and God's dealing with them, must be seen as a revelation of the mercy of God. Israel has no grounds to derive nationalistic content from ancient promises made to them—now that the true has come. The promises are still for them as they ever were, but to press a national and ethnic continuity outside of what God is doing in the church is to go against the essential nature of those promises and against history. It is to obligate God to keep promises he has already fulfilled—so testing the grace of God, which, of course, is still being extended to them.

Romans 9 – 11 shows how Paul loved national Israel, saw no claim to blessing on the grounds of biological continuity with Israel, saw no grounds for Gentile superiority if they turned to Messiah, and anticipated the riches that would come through Jewish

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conversion to Messiah. His final remark that all Israel will be saved can most readily be seen as inclusive of the whole people of God.

The present calling to Israel is one with God's call to the whole world—the call to repent and believe in her Messiah. Of course, the calling has particular poignancy and closeness with regard to Israel. Also, the church can never forget that it is through Israel that riches have come to the world.

STUDY THREE

Christ Both Head of the Church & Lord of the Kingdom

(by Martin Bleby)



FIVE SMOOTH STONES

The story of David and Goliath (I Sam. 17)—not unlike our situation today. The armies of the living God are being defied (see Gen. 12:3). Where does our confidence lie? It cannot be in the heavy armour of worldliness and political dealings. The armies of the living God have no weapon but the word that comes from His mouth (see Rev. 19:11–21). This is the same word by which the heavens and the earth were made (Ps. 33:6), which upholds the universe (Heb. 1:3). David chose five smooth stones, but he only needed to use one. We can be formed by the word (as in James 1:18) and filled with the Spirit, and then trust the meagre resources of our native wit. What else have we got? What more do we need?

HEAD OVER ALL THINGS FOR THE CHURCH

Ephesians 1:15–23. We are used to thinking of Christ as the head of the church. This is because we are particularly church-minded. If we get this far we are doing well. But the emphasis is more on Christ as the head of all things and Lord of all: see Ephesians 1:9–10 (*anakephalaaiosasthai*); 2:21–22; 4:15–16; Colossians 1:15–20; 2:10; also Acts 2:36; 10:36; Romans 10:9; Philippians 2:9–11; etc. The stunning thing is that this Lordship of all things is *for* the church. What does that tell us of God's love for the church, and of the church's pivotal place in God's plan for all things?

HOW THIS WORKS IN PRACTICE

Mark 16:19–20. Note that it was the Lord Himself doing the signs: see Acts 2:43; 3:12–16; 4:10, 29–30; 4:12 (*dia*, 'through'). Instances of Christ himself giving specific

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direction to the church as Head with a view to God's mission among the nations, in the light of his Lordship over all things: Acts 9:1–22 (see also 22:17–21; 26:13–20); 10:9–16; 18:9–11; II Timothy 4:16–18; Revelation 1 – 3. Add to these the directions that came by way of angels, and by the Holy Spirit: Acts 5:19; 8:26, 29; 10:1–8; 11:27–30; 12:1–11; 13:1–4; 15:28–29; 16:6–10; 19:21; 20:22–23; 21:8–14; 27:22–26. There are plenty of other things that happen where no such agency is mentioned: for example, Acts 1:26; 6:1–6; 8:4–5; 11:19–21; 15:36; 23:16. These are all in the context of the ever-present Lordship of Jesus Christ over all things.

This is summarised in I Corinthians 15:20–28.

SOME IMPLICATIONS

We let the word speak for itself, and do its own work: II Corinthians 4:1–4.

We do not lose heart: II Corinthians 4:5–18; 6:3–10.

We do not opt for human factions, for 'all things are yours': I Corinthians 3:18–23.

We eschew worldly weapons: II Corinthians 10:1–6.

We are content with weaknesses: II Corinthians 11:23 – 12:10.

STUDY FOUR

The Growth & Life of the Church in the Acts & Epistles

(by Colin Jones)



Anyone wanting to get the clearest picture of the nature of the church could do no better than go to the record of the early Christian community. There, at the fountainhead—as the title of this study suggests—we see a body of people which grew and spread numerically in a most remarkable way, and which expressed an amazingly unique quality of life together. This doesn't mean that we are to idealise the early church—and so develop some kind of ideology from it—for that would be both dangerous and unproductive. What we are wanting to do in this study is to observe the action of the church in its beginnings and to recognise some of the dynamics which were operating at that time. Here we will not find a pattern—as such—to follow, but principles which we would expect to be part of the action of the church in our own day.

The Epistles—written during the time span of the Acts—spell out for us the substance of the great doctrines which underlie the events of Luke's narrative. And so, although the primary focus of this study will be upon the Acts, the Epistles will obviously provide much added insight along the way.

We will see from the Acts and Epistles, four things which account for the growth and life of the early church—dynamic principles which may certainly be expected to operate among us today.

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL TO CREATE THE COMMUNITY OF CHRIST

When the Holy Spirit came upon the one hundred and twenty assembled on the day of Pentecost, the most marvellous community the world will ever know was brought into being. The Spirit imparted to them a revelation of the grace of God from which they

would never recover—and which made them, at once, participants together in the life and action of Christ.

Unbounded Joy in God

The revelation of the gospel so affected those initial receivers of the Spirit, that some onlookers supposed they must have been ‘full of new wine’ as they proclaimed the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:11–13). Such was their joy! The three thousand souls who joined them that day knew the same grace and came into that same joy, eating their food together ‘with gladness and simplicity of heart’, and ‘praising God’ (Acts 2:46–47).

The primary characteristic of the church is that it is a community which knows great joy. This has always been the heritage of God’s people (Deut. 6:5; Ps. 16:11; Isa. 61:10), it was promised by our Lord (John 16:22; 17:13) and was part of the continuing life of the church as it went on knowing the grace of the gospel (I Pet. 1:8).

This whole matter of joy was so central to the nature of the church from Pentecost onwards, that the apostles—without qualification—commanded the saints to know it at all times (Phil. 4:4; I Thess. 5:16–18; Eph. 5:18–20).

Ephesians—the high-water mark of teaching on the nature of the church in the NT—commences with an outburst of exalted joy as Paul recounts the great realities of grace. Peter does the same in his first letter, which is kind of like his ‘Ephesians’.

Both Paul and Peter—the two key players in the Acts—were especially keen to declare the absolute centrality of God in salvation. The enormous doctrines of election, calling and the preservation of the saints to glory, were basic to their joyous proclamations (Eph. 1:3 – 2:10; I Pet. 1:3–13). These themes—together with the wonder of forgiveness, justification and sanctification by grace—would have formed a major part of the apostolic doctrine to which the early believers were devoted (Acts 2:42). To continue in the assurance of the grace of God was essential to remaining in the great joy of salvation (Acts 13:43).

This unbounded joy was a participation in the joy of Christ’s own Sonship by the agency of the Spirit—a joy which has no more ultimate expression than in the cry, ‘Abba, Father’ (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15–17).

On the day of Pentecost it was a whole community which discovered the grace of the gospel. The joy they knew was wonderfully personal but in no way a merely individual experience. When the Spirit brought the joy of salvation, what was personal was also immediately corporate. They knew it together! All authentic joy in Christ is that way.

Paul and Peter later declared the church to be to the corporate temple of the Lord, the house of prayer for all nations (I Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:21; I Pet. 2:4–5; Mark 11:17; cf. Isa. 56:7). What an amazing thing to be part of such a joyous, worshipping community!

The great wonder of this work of the Spirit is that it overrides—today, as it did then—every racial and cultural barrier (Acts 10:34, 44–45; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:18).

Unfeigned Affection for One Another

Hand in hand with the gift of an unbounded joy together in life and worship, was the presence of an affection for one another which was entirely spontaneous and without pretence. The first—if it is genuine—always produces the second (I John 3:14).

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In Acts 4:32 we are told that:

the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul.

There is more than a hint here of the relationship between David and Jonathan in I Samuel 18:1:

The soul of Jonathon was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

Paul says to his brethren in Philippi:

God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:8).

This statement is no mere apostolic curiosity. What was being expressed is the very nature of relationships within the community of Christ. Just as Paul participated in the Son's affection for His brethren, so do all who know fullness of joy in Him. It is this to which the apostle appeals in chapter 2 of the same letter, when he says:

Therefore, if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind (Phil. 2:1–2).

In Romans 12:10 he urges:

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.

Peter writes in a similar way to the scattered believers of Asia Minor:

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart (I Pet. 1:22).

And then in 3:8:

Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be [humble].

Knowing the purification of our souls together, produces a sincere, unpretending, brotherly affection. To participate in the Son's love for the Father is to participate in His affection for the brethren. The two cannot be separated (I John 5:1).

In the early chapters of Acts this unfeigned affection expressed itself in a wonderfully wholehearted and practical way. They did, indeed, love one another 'ferently from the heart'. We are told that:

All who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need (Acts 2:44–45).

And again:

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common . . . Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need (Acts 4:32, 34–35).

The housing and property sold were of deep significance to the owners, representing the family inheritance. In the thinking of Israel, these were their part in the Kingdom.

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Now they no longer looked to Palestine, as such, but to ‘the city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God’ (Heb. 11:10). Having this hope together, they were free to express their mutual affection in the ways they did.

This does not imply an obligation for all to sell their possessions and give to the poor. The apostles *were* commanded to do this (Luke 12:33) and the principle of providing the basic necessities of life for all was part of the apostolic teaching (II Cor. 8:14–15). However, the issue here is primarily one of liberty not obligation. Just as Zacchaeus was secured by the love of Christ to renounce his wealth (Luke 19), so now a whole community had been liberated to respond in the same way! Some have tried to start communities like this today, saying, ‘Everything we have we share’, but this kind of thing can unfortunately become very legalistic. Trying to make structures out of what happened in the early church, hoping to reproduce the life they knew, doesn’t work. It is not, ‘Get the NT pattern and you’ll have the NT power’. It is actually the other way round.

The early Christian community enjoyed a unity of worship and love. They had all drunk of ‘the oneness Spirit’ (I Cor. 12:13). But this, by no means, went uncontested. In Acts chapter 5, the Spirit of God needed to bring fearful judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira for deception in the selling of a possession. Then in chapter 6:

when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution (Acts 6:1).

This serious threat to the unity of the church was also dealt with in a most decisive manner, this time by the appointment of seven men ‘of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom’, who presided over the matter (Acts 6:3).

Division and disunity was, and is, always an ever-present danger in the church, and the apostles passionately exhorted the saints in this regard, again and again (e.g. I Cor. 1:10–13). Paul’s appeal in Ephesians 4:1–6 is certainly a passionate one:

I, therefore, the prisoner for the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all.

This passage is then followed by the apostle’s great statement of unity in diversity, through the operation of the gifts of Christ to the church (4:7–16; cf. I Cor. 12; Rom. 12:3–8; I Pet. 4:10–11).

One thing indispensable to the ongoing life, unity and action of Christ’s community was a continued spirit of corporate and personal prayer (Acts 2:42; 6:4; Rom. 12:9f.; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2; I Pet. 4:7).

The loss, at any time, of unbounded joy in God and unfeigned affection for the brethren, is both dangerous for the church and tragic for those who have quenched the Spirit in that way.

THE PASSION OF CHRIST’S COMMUNITY TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL

As the early church knew the power of the gospel in its inner life, there was an outgoing of proclamation from its midst. The Lord’s people were ablaze with the good

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news—so that by the end of the Acts, the word of grace had gone out ‘to the ends of the world’ (Rom. 10:18; cf. I Pet. 1:1; Rom. 15:19).

With the persecution which arose after Stephen’s martyrdom we are told that:

those who were scattered went everywhere preaching [gossiping] the word (Acts 8:4).

These folk just couldn’t keep quiet about what had come to them! (Acts 4:20). Joel’s prophecy was being wonderfully fulfilled:

*And on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;
And they shall prophecy (Acts 2:18).*

What gripped the early believers personally and was enjoyed in the church was passionately proclaimed in the world.

A Deep Compassion for the Lost

Knowing together great joy in salvation and warm affection for one another, it is understandable that the believers also had a genuine and deep compassion for those who, as yet, did not know the grace of God.

Just as when Jesus saw the multitudes, He was ‘moved [in His bowels] with compassion for them, because they were [harassed] and scattered, like sheep having no Shepherd’ (Matt. 9:36), so those in Christ bear that same burden within themselves by the Spirit.

We saw in the previous section that Paul’s affection for his brethren was a participation in the affection of Christ known by all joy-filled believers. The same was true of his desire for the lost (Acts 17:16–17; 26:28–29; Rom. 10:1; Col. 1:27–29; II Tim. 2:10). The cry of his heart was, indeed, a deep one:

I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh (Rom. 9:1–3).

Life in the Gentile world was rife with immorality and perversity. But, like Jesus in the Gospels, the church’s attitude to its pagan society was not one of condemnation (Luke 5:30–32; 19:10). Their approach was to boldly and sincerely call it into repentance and the forgiveness of sins. The list of the former vices of church members in I Corinthians 6:9–10 is instructive. It indicates that the emphasis was not one of pharisaic moralism, but of urgent and compassionate proclamation of Christ to morally and spiritually bankrupt people.

Earnest Desire for the Kingdom

Acts 1:3 tells us that during the forty days leading up to His ascension, Jesus was speaking to the disciples of ‘the things pertaining to the kingdom of God’. The early believers were gripped by the whole matter of the Kingdom and eager to participate in its action. They had heard the ‘great commissions’ (Matt. 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–16; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; 13:47) which would have come to them not as heavy obligations, but as great statements of assurance in regard to the Kingdom of God. ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’. What a fantastic thing that must have been to hear! Christ had been promised the nations as His inheritance and the ends of the earth as His possession (Ps. 2:8). He had purchased them at the Cross (Rev. 5:9),

and now, as Lord, was in the process of possessing what was His—and they were given a part in the action!

The apostles' doctrine, to which the Christian community was devoted (Acts 2:42), would no doubt have contained these great themes. In the Acts they proclaimed the Kingdom—'Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Saviour!' (Acts 17:30–31; cf. Rom. 10:9). This would also be the essence of authentic proclamation in our time.

All believers know that they ought to be about the work of the Kingdom. But so many of the Lord's people today live with a kind of dull guilt because they are all the time fighting the urge to get on with it. There's nothing like being charged with an earnest desire for the Kingdom—and being engaged in its labours!

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE PROCLAMATION OF HIS PEOPLE

In Matthew 28:19–20 Jesus said:

[Going,] make disciples of all nations . . . and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

The gospel is all about the nations coming to Christ—and towards this end He has promised to be with His people in their action of proclamation (Acts 18:9–10; 23:11; II Tim. 4:17).

Often Visibly Confirming the Word

As the gospel was proclaimed, our Lord consistently confirmed the spoken word with miraculous signs and wonders (Mark 16:20; Acts 4:7–10; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6; 15:12; 19:11–12; Rom. 15:19; II Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3–4).

Acts 14:3 is one of the classic statements of this work of Christ among His heralds:

They [Paul and Barnabas] stayed there [in Iconium] a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

Whenever Christ's people speak the word of His grace, He is present to authenticate that word to the conscience of the hearers—one way or another.

Always Taking the Initiative

At every point of the church's proclamation, the risen and reigning Jesus was directing and enabling. One clear example of this is found in Acts 16:6–10:

They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bythynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

Christ is not just letting things work themselves out. He is personally involved in every aspect of the proclamation of His people—as He comes into the possession of His inheritance.

THE POWERLESSNESS OF THE WORLD TO HINDER THE WORK OF CHRIST

Because the work of the gospel is the action of the Kingdom, it is fiercely contested at every point by the powers of darkness. Such resistance will, however, never ultimately frustrate the Father's eternal purpose.

The Sovereign Power of God

Gamaliel showed great insight when he cautioned his fellow members of the Sanhedrin, saying:

keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God (Acts 5:38–39).

In this age, Christ is about putting down every principality and every enemy, so that the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Rev. 11:15). All His foes were—in principle—defeated at the Cross (Col. 2:15). The final chapter of history has already been written, and will be worked out in due time (I Cor. 15:24–28). And how is Christ putting down all rule, authority and power? It is through the church! (Eph. 3:20–21). Angelic powers—both elect and fallen—are intently watching every move made by the people of God (Eph. 3:10).

Nothing is able stem the floodtide of the church under Christ. Throughout the narrative of the Acts we see the relentless progress of the gospel, in spite of all opposition (Acts 2:47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31; 11:21; 12:21–24; 13:48–49; 16:5; 19:20).

Luke must have had great delight in recording *this* juicy morsel in Acts 17:6:

they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, 'These who have turned the world upside down have come here too'.

The Acts closes with a most exhilarating statement. For emphasis, Luke makes the last word of the last verse to be one which sums up this whole matter of the sovereign action of God in the spread of the gospel:

Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, UNHINDERED (Acts 28:30–31).

Isaiah's strong words say it all:

This is the purpose that is purposed against the whole earth,
And this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations.
For the LORD of hosts has purposed,
And who will annul it?
His hand is stretched out,
And who will turn it back? (Isa. 14:26–27).

The Grace Given to the Saints

As Christ worked with His people in the accomplishment of His Father's plan, He went on providing them with all that was needful to press on in the battle—and to do so together, with full assurance.

They were given understanding of the nature of the conflict in which they were engaged (Eph. 6:12) and were supplied with weapons perfectly suited for such warfare

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(II Cor. 10:3–5; Rev. 8:3–5). Their own weakness was the required qualification for receiving strength and power (II Cor. 12:9).

They were promised much suffering (Acts 9:16; 14:21–22; II Tim. 3:12) and experienced precisely that. But in it all they were given grace to continue on with much joy and boldness in the work of the gospel (Acts 4:18–31; 5:19–20, 41; 16:23–25; 20:22–24).

In all their labours and struggles they were sustained by the hope of that which is to come (Rom. 8:18; II Cor. 4:7–18; I Thess. 1:3). This grand expectation was, and will always be, the key to the endurance of the saints.

CONCLUSION

The early church was no super-community, but it was nevertheless a miraculous one—created and sustained by the power of the gospel. The things which accounted for the growth and life of that first-century community of Christ continue to be the things which will produce the same in our own time. We need only rise up to the knowledge of them in the liberty of the great grace of God—which is ever upon His church.

STUDY FIVE

The Church & the Kingdom

(by Deane Meatheringham)



What I will seek to emphasise is that the church is the proclaimer and agent of the kingdom of God (Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). The church does not proclaim itself, but Christ as the King of the kingdom. The mission of the church is governed by the kingdom as it is taken into the active, flaming life of the King's reign. The kingdom of God puts the church on the fireline as it engages the world and is taught by the fire. The mission of the Church is not found in the application of a mission manual, but is understood and taught by the advent of the Kingdom.

To be in the church is to be in the Kingdom. The church and the kingdom are interrelated, but they are not to be confused as the same. The church is the community of the kingdom but never the kingdom itself, because the kingdom of God is not identified as its subjects who enter it. The church is governed and empowered by the King of the kingdom.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS HIS SOVEREIGN, ACTIVE, ESCHATOLOGICAL RULE

The synoptic Gospels begin with the dramatic announcement of the immanence of the kingdom. *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.* The hearers of the summons to repent had an understanding of the kingdom which aroused sensational expectation. The roots of this expectation were in the Scriptures of Israel. These have several aspects which I will touch on as they relate to the theme, showing their fulfilment in Christ:

- God's kingdom is eternal and embraces the past as well as the future (Ps. 145:11–13).
- As Creator, God's kingship, or his reign, is over the entirety of the creation and history (Job 38:4–7; Ps. 47:2).

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- In his covenant grace, God elected Israel to be the people of his purpose who were saved into his rule. The theocracy is the kingdom of Israel (Exod. 19:5–6; Deut. 7:6).
- There was to be a coming manifestation of the reign of God when God himself would come in saving judgment to establish his reign forever through the promised Messiah. Under Messiah's rule, the nations would flow up to Zion, death would be destroyed, there would be universal forgiveness of sins and a universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Justice would be established for ever. The whole creation would be regenerated (Isa. 40:9–11; 52:7; 11:1–10; Dan. 7:13–14, 27).
- Jesus is the Messiah, the Lord of the kingdom who brings the age-old conflict between the rebels who oppose God's rule to a crisis of grace. Christ defeats the kingdom of darkness at the Cross. Now, by the reign of the Lord Jesus, men and women are being transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's Son (Matt. 12:28; John 12:31; Acts 2:36; Col. 1:13; I Cor. 15:25).

The kingdom of God cannot be thought of apart from God's divine power, which cannot be separated from redemption and judgment. It sets off alarms in Satan's empire, transmitting and permeating itself into everything it touches. With the coming of the kingdom, the goal for creation has broken into the present, taking its subjects to the future fulfilment of God's ultimate intention.

THE CHURCH IS THE CREATION OF THE KINGDOM

It is impossible to consider the Messiah without a people who belong to him. The central theme of both the OT and the NT is 'I will be your God and you shall be my people'. Jesus quite self-consciously professes to be the Son of Man prophesied in Daniel 7, whose kingdom is given to the saints of the Most High. The remnant or the remainder of Israel spoken of in Isaiah 10:22, etc., can be linked with the flock or little flock spoken of by Jesus. The remnant saved by grace receive Christ as the king, and become the germ cell of the *ekklesia*.

Matthew 16:16–20 shows that the *ekklesia* is built by the Messiah. It is born out of the revelation of the Father. (They enter the mystery of the kingdom, cf. Matt. 13:11.) The parables in Matthew 13 are parables of the kingdom of heaven, and not of the church, for they tell what happens in the world. The *basileia* is eschatological, and present now in the Messiah, Jesus, but this is never the same as the *ekklesia*. The *ekklesia* is the community of Messiah which is born out of the gospel of the kingdom. The *basileia* has to do with the purpose, the fulfilling and the completion of the plan of God for the whole creation. It is *my* church which Jesus says he builds, for he is the Son of Man who comes to gather his people. The community which Jesus forms inherits the kingdom.

When the apostles proclaim the Messiah as the crucified and glorified Jesus, then the church shows itself as such, for the outpouring of the Spirit is the sign of the coming of the kingdom. The *ekklesia* is closely connected with the *basileia* and proceeds from it. The *ekklesia* is the true Israel, the true people of God.

The *basileia* is the great divine work of salvation in its fulfillment and consummation in Christ; the *ekklesia* is the people elected and called by God and sharing in the bliss of the *basileia*.¹

¹ H. Ridderbos, *The Coming Kingdom* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1962), p. 354.

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The church has received the treasures of the eschatological kingdom now, in the present, as she waits with eager hope for the future consummation of the kingdom. This future occurred in the resurrection of Jesus, the prolepsis of the new creation.

THE CHURCH RECEIVES THE KINGDOM OF FREEDOM

It is God the Father Almighty who created all things. Psalm 115 shows that this places God in the place of supremacy and power, as it also emphasises the nothingness of all other beings which pass for divine (I Cor. 8:6). Because God has this authority, he does as he pleases. The freedom of God is the freedom of his love and righteousness, first known in the intra-participating relationships of the Triune Godhead. The freedom of God is not totalitarian, is not the freedom of the great solitary Lord of the universe, but the freedom of the God whose nature and name is love (John 3:16; Phil. 2:1–11).

The Kingdom Frees Us from Those Forces Which Infringe Our Freedom in God

With the coming of the kingdom in Christ, men and women were liberated from all that debased them through their separation from God. This is the sin of rebellion and fixation, the evil powers, and the idols we set up to produce for us what only God can provide (Luke 10:1–12; Acts 8:4, 5, 12, 15; Col. 1:13–14).

But freedom must be more than this. If we view God's freedom as that of an absolute monotheist power, then narcissistic man will see his freedom as overcoming all competitors to his autonomy and will continue to struggle for yet more freedom in order to win and rule.

The Freedom of the Kingdom Is the Freedom of Community

It is entering the community of the free in communion with the Triune God. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, conferred on the people liberated by the Son, we enter the fellowship with the Father which is enjoyed by the Son. We enter this with all of God's sons, together to discover that other persons don't limit our freedom but expand it (Acts 2:44; Gal. 3:28–29). But the freedom of the kingdom must be more than community in itself.

The Freedom of the Kingdom Is the Freedom of the Future

The creation of the world has its inner basis in the future kingdom of glory. The Father creates for this ultimate goal. With the coming of the Son, this future kingdom is present in all that he is and accomplishes. In the power of the Spirit, the life and the energies of the new future community are experienced. The Holy Spirit brings the future to the community of God as a deposit on the account, as the first instalment of the final gift. We have the first fruits of the expected full harvest (II Cor. 1:22; 5:5).

The beginning of creation occurs from the power of its end. The church is recreated from this same power. The power of the future creates new things (Rom. 4:17). We only know our identity from what we will be in the future, for the essence of a thing is not in its past nor in its present. The freedom of living in the kingdom of the future frees the church from its bondage to the idea that the past has to provide precedents for what the Creator Spirit intends to do in the present. The kingdom breaks

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the domination of the past for the church. It means that the church does not have to back-pedal. It means we can look back on the rich history of the people of God, remember what God has done in the past, take courage from it, and move on to the future.

THE CHURCH ON THE FIRELINE

The heading for this section comes from Ray Anderson's book *Ministry on the Fireline*. What he means is that the ministry of the church is not discovered by a specialist theological manual which determines ministry and gives it to the church to apply.

The best theory for fighting fires comes from actually engaging in the battle against the flames. Fire-fighting science, I am told, is most effective when done by those whose teacher is the fire . . . ' What do you say? Which is the source of truth, the fire that burns or the manuals that firefighters read?'²

We cannot go about the ministry of the church pre-Christ, or pre-Pentecost. The church is the community which has received the kingdom of God and is the agent, or the organ, of the kingdom. The early church preached the kingdom of God and, as it did so, its ministry was determined by the fire of the kingdom. Thus Philip went to *the Samaritans* preaching the Word of God which was the Messiah, which was the kingdom of God. Marvellous acts of liberation occurred, leading to the Samaritans being baptised. This action of the kingdom brought in the apostles from Jerusalem, culminating in the Samaritans receiving the Holy Spirit through the laying on of their hands. Had this run beyond the Scriptures? Not at all! Now, by the action of the kingdom of God, the early church understood the Scriptures. See also Acts 10:34ff.

The hope brought to the church through being in the righteousness, peace and joy of the kingdom of God, means that it expects change, is not content with the status quo, and enables it to transcend the present situation. The hope of the kingdom puts the church on the fireline, confident in Christ that its history is not determined by worldly history.

The kingdom of God delivers us from reducing the gospel to an institutional form of church growth. It frees the church from wanting to use the signs and wonders of the kingdom for the advancement or extension of its own life. The gospel of the kingdom, which the church is to proclaim, has to do with the whole world, and all of society:

The church is constituted as a mission of hope to the nations. The church does not exist *from* itself and *for* itself. Ecclesiolentricity is the primal sin of the new people of God . . . The concern for the world is not an extracurricular activity. Rather, the kingdom of God toward which the church is striving embraces the future of the whole world . . . The church is the place where the world has become conscious of its future destiny in the kingdom of God's freedom and love. The church should cease thinking of itself as nonworld, as antithetical to the world. For what the church already enjoys is a sign of what the world still has in store for it.³

² R. S. Anderson, *Ministry on the Fireline* (InterVarsity Pr., 1993), pp. 14–15.

³ *The Future of God: The Revolutionary Dynamics of Hope*, by Carl E. Braaten (Harper & Row, New York, 1969), p. 110.

STUDY SIX

A People Formed by the Gospel

(by Grant Thorpe)



THE FORMING OF THE CHURCH

On Pentecost day, Peter identified the coming of the Spirit as God's renewal of his people, and proclaimed the crucified and risen Christ as the one who had received the promised Spirit and had poured out what they were seeing.

Everything of Israel's history and faith had now found its fulfilment in Christ. So now, from this fulfilment, everything of the church's life burst with a working that was from God.

As in the Gospels, the powerful action of Christ bringing liberty to people was accompanied by the announcement of the good news. The gospel is not teaching about the gospel, but the announcement of God, whose power is already apparent in what he has done.

Clearly, the life of the people of God is to hear the word being addressed to them by Christ from his place at the right hand of God; it is to recognise the works of the Spirit which Christ is pouring out; and it is to call on God to act according to the word he has spoken.

Humanism wants a life of its own to build on and project, but this has been judged by the coming of Christ. He is the end of autonomous humanity and the fountainhead of the new humanity—the church.

If we read Acts 2 through the understanding which came to the church later, the apostles and all who believed were joined to Christ; they knew they had been judged at the Cross and had no righteousness of their own; they now lived by Christ's life and so were members of one another; they had access by the Spirit to the Father, adoption as his children, participation in the gifts of the Father to his people; they had hope of times of refreshing and the return of Christ.

From one point of view, no-one needed to tell these new converts that they were the church. Christ baptised them in the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of the Father and the

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Son. Within them, personally and corporately, was the Spirit whereby the Father and Son had communion. As the communal life of God had poured out in redeeming love to humanity, so this same Spirit created ‘the fellowship’—a people characterised by divine, perichoretic life.

The question of whether this formation happened then, or always happens now, in a flush of revival or by gradual awakening, makes no difference to the fact of it being a work of God and makes no different requirements on the proclaimer. Either way, the bringer of the word must believe that the forming of the church is the work of God and must rely on his word to effect what he has promised.

It could be argued that many of these things came to the church over subsequent years of teaching. This is to diminish the work of the Spirit who takes the things of Christ and shows them to his people. The church was an act of creation and each Christian was a new creature whose being alive depended on the vital powers of the Spirit to be—not just to know. Teaching and exhortation were still needed to explain the new life they had received, to warn about drifting away from it and to renew the church in the grace of it.

CONFIDENCE IN THE GOSPEL THAT FORMED THE CHURCH

Confidence in the gospel is a critical question for every pastor and Christian worker. It is the same as confidence in God or in Christ, and should not be confused with self-confidence.

Much recent advice and exhortation to church leaders, not to mention their own anxieties, focuses attention on the church community or the world. While focus is directed here, the temptation to utilise powers of this present age will be difficult to resist.

The church is a community and is in the world, but it is such as an entity formed by the gospel. This is another way of saying that it is formed by God. Its capacity to be a community and to be powerful in the world lies wholly in its radical dependence on the gospel—for both its life and mission.

The gospel or word of the Cross is powerful because it is the act and word of God judging our false allegiance to idols, defeating evil powers and leading us to know God. The weakness and foolishness of other messages lies in that they cannot do this (I Cor. 1:17 – 2:5).

We may take it as self-evident that Christ’s death on a cross is a powerful demonstration of love. But the symbol evidently lacks power. In fact, to the thinking of this world, it remains foolishness. By presenting his power to us under the sign of a cross, God has called us to have faith only in his works and not to rely on our own experience or understanding.

Human progress, be it scientific or religious, can mask our true poverty. If we glory in human initiative rather than Christ, court human knowledge rather than tremble at God’s word of the Cross, we have a theology of glory—where human experience is indulged rather than judged, where human need is heeded rather than God’s calling and judgment which creates our need, and where human goodness is presumed rather than the mercy of God believed.

Nothing separated Christianity from other religions of the first century as much as the message of the Cross, and this is still the case. We have an incipient tendency to a theology of glory. Many are recalling us to a theology of the Cross.

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T. F. Torrance, in *Theology in Reconstruction*, chapter 9, says that the doctrine of justification has radical consequences in regard to pastoral ministry. Everything for the church depends on Christ's humanity and substitutionary work. If this is not clear, the church will become dependent on the pastor's humanity, his personality and action. He refers to a Protestant psychological sacerdotalism which displaces the humanity of Christ as leader in worship and sole substitute for our life. It works by the pastor providing human alternatives to the one saving work of Christ's humanity.

SERVANTS OF THE GOSPEL AMONG THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Our task is to reflect on what happened in our birth as a church—and to settle it in our mind that, whatever changes there may be in form, it will be our intention to build no other church than that which it takes a gospel to form. Only a church formed by the gospel will be cruciform in its being and action.

We do not have a gospel which makes a church which then works in the world. We have a gospel which makes a church whose gospel (or God) works in the world.

There is one Priest in the sanctuary—Jesus Christ. False fire (as in Korah's rebellion) is not welcome! Plenty of 'wild fire' may be offered in ignorant enthusiasm, but false fire is asserted in rebellion. P. T. Forsyth observed that the church can afford for its membership to be ignorant but not its leadership.

Consider what it means to be a servant of the gospel:

(a) **Prayer** does not need to begin with problems, but with the power of God (see Acts 4). The former may occasion prayers, but are not the determiner of them. P. T. Forsyth writes:

It is strength that is the root of action, not need . . . Need may shape action, but it does not create action . . . We were created by God not out of his poverty and his need of company, but out of his overflowing wealth of love and his passion to multiply joy (*This Life and the Next*, p. 12f.).

(b) **Preaching and teaching** are not primarily visceral or cerebral, but the announcement of God concerning his creation—his many-faceted, gracious purpose addressed to the wills of his people. This avoids preaching becoming the psychology of the preacher working on the psychology of the people. Paul's preaching was often rejected, but it never registered in his mind that the word of God had failed (Rom. 9:6).

(c) **Pastoral conversation** (counselling, visiting, etc.) is different in mode to preaching, but not supplementary in content. It may utilise various skills, but remains the action of the gospel.

Eduard Thurneysen has written a *Pastoral Theology* whose thesis is that pastoral work is a conversation in which both pastor and person sit together under the word of God, and the word of God to be heard is the word of forgiveness.

(d) **Planning and administration** are not means to ends, but preparation for a future (Dean Carter). The gospel will surely bring about the purpose of God and so we are free to participate in the things of the end time.

(e) **Decision making** is not an activity separate from the grateful worship of the people of God, but the natural outgrowth of learning and worshipping together.

EXPECTING TO SEE THE EMERGING CHURCH

If we are the people formed by the gospel, we will readily expect to see the church built by the gospel. Some have said that they have tried the preaching of grace and that it does not work. Our calling is to believe that the gospel is the power of God to salvation to all that believe. It is to believe that we ourselves come to God's people in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. It is to know that nothing but Christ himself can announce the grace of God, but to be given up to the announcing of this—'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' (Rev. 19:10). It is to believe this when it appears that no-one else does and when we do not feel that it is true. Much of the Scripture is written to encourage the saints to persevere.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

Lesslie Newbigin	<i>The Gospel in a Pluralist Society</i>	Chapter 11
Os Guinness & John Seel (eds)	<i>No God but God</i>	Chapters 1 and 7
C. D. Kettler & T. H. Speidell	<i>Incarnational Ministry</i>	Chapters 4, 5 & 7
Gustaf Wingren	<i>Gospel and Church</i>	Part 2
Richard Lovelace	<i>Dynamics of Spiritual Life</i>	Chapters 2 – 6
Geoffrey Bingham	<i>Christ's Living Church Today</i>	
Deane Meatheringham	<i>Gospel Incandescent</i>	
Roland Allen	The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church	

STUDY SEVEN

The Church & the Power of God – I

(by Ian Pennicook)



When Paul declared that he was ‘not ashamed of the gospel’, he explained that it was because the gospel was ‘the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek’ (Rom. 1:16). He further explained that in the gospel ‘the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith’, and made a direct link between this present reality and the words of Habbakuk 2:4, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith’ (1:17).

The question to which I want to turn concerns the nature of the power which Paul sees in the gospel, and so the power which the church knows. What was it that took place when the gospel was preached which led Paul to make this declaration? In the light of the New Testament evidence, can we draw some conclusion as to the real nature of the power which we may claim to be active in the church today? This matter is not without its significance, especially in view of the claims of many groups, large and small, which claim to have become the locus for the power of God over against what is regarded, by comparison, as a powerless church. But the claims may not necessarily indicate the true state of affairs. In other words, the purpose of this study is to discover both the nature and the range of evidence of the power of God.

It is important from the start that we understand the meaning of the word ‘power’ itself. The Greek word *δύναμις* (*dunamis*) is part of a group of words with the basic meaning of ‘ability’.¹ The verb *δύναμαι* (*dunamai*) is translated throughout the New Testament as ‘able’, ‘can’, ‘could’ and so on. As such it has no particular theological significance (see, for example, John 1:46, ‘*Can* anything good come out of Nazareth?’; 3:2, ‘No one *can* do these signs that you do’, etc.).

¹ W. Grundmann, *δύναμις* κτλ. in Kittel, G. & Friedrich, G., (eds), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, (trans. G. Bromily), Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1964, pp. 284–317; O. Betz, ‘*Might, Authority, Throne*’, in Brown, C. (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1976, pp. 601–606.

The noun *δύναμις* is found (about) 120 times in the New Testament² and some 250 times³ in the LXX. In the LXX it is commonly used of military forces, as in Genesis 21:22, ‘At that time Abimelech, with Phicol the commander of his *army*, said to Abraham . . .’, or of ‘companies’ of people as in Exodus 12:17, ‘You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your *companies* out of the land of Egypt’ (NRSV; AV has ‘armies’). It also means ‘resources’ as in Ezra 2:69, ‘According to their *resources* they gave to the building fund’ (AV, ‘abilities’). In Psalm 18:32 (LXX, 17:33), David wrote that ‘God [has] girded me with *strength*’, and he then proceeded to explain that this meant an ability in battle (v. 39).

Of course, any ability or strength which men and women may possess comes from God. Thus Psalm 21:1, ‘In your *strength* the king rejoices, O LORD, and in your help how greatly he exults!’ At this point the practice of simply using one Greek word to develop a doctrine must be seen as inadequate, for two reasons. First, we see that in the LXX *δύναμις* actually is used to translate a number of Hebrew words. That in itself should warn us against limiting the meaning we give to the word. Second, there is the use of another Greek word, *ἰσχὺς* (*ischus*) to convey the idea of ‘strength’.⁴ Then, again, we should also beware of assuming that what *we* mean by a word is what the Scriptures are saying. In this case some have noted that the English word ‘dynamite’ is derived from the Greek *δύναμις*. Of course it is, but the meanings are quite distinct. Without going into the distinction in detail,⁵ we must say that the way to discover the meaning of *δύναμις* is to examine what Paul says about ‘the power of God unto salvation’ as he proceeds to expound it in Romans and elsewhere.

THE NEW TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

What, we may ask, would Paul’s readers understand by ‘the power of God to salvation’? This may not be an easy question to answer from the New Testament, not because the idea is not present so much as because we cannot simply assume that Paul’s Roman readers could take out a copy of the New Testament and read it. To begin with, we have to assume that the letters of Paul probably pre-dated some of the Gospels. Then, we may also assume that the Gospel writers themselves may have used words with a careful theological purpose. In other words, the Gospel writers may have had a clear purpose in choosing the words they did. Nevertheless, when we look at the Synoptic Gospels and Acts, we see that the word ‘power’ (in both singular and plural) is used in a number of ways.

Firstly, *δύναμις* refers to the ‘power of God’. In Matthew 22:29 Jesus accused the Sadducees of knowing ‘neither the scriptures nor the power of God’. Here the issue was the resurrection of the dead; the ‘ability’ of God to raise the dead was not known. Jesus’ explanation involved a brief discussion of God as the ‘God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’. Of interest is the fact that the Old Testament has almost no reference to resurrection as the New Testament knows it. That will need to come after the

² On-Line Bible/Strongs Concordance.

³ A rough estimate.

⁴ See, for example, II Peter 2:11 where the two words are used together. There are other words which also appear to have overlapping meaning. Thus *ἐξουσία* (*exousia*) was translated as ‘power’ in the AV of John 1:12. As the various ranges of meanings are examined, so the number of synonyms grows.

⁵ The equivalence of *δύναμις* with ‘dynamite’ is called by Don Carson a ‘semantic anachronism’; see D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1984, p. 32f.

resurrection of Jesus (cf. Rom. 4:17, where resurrection, apart from that of Jesus, does not exist—yet); in the meantime, there is the *implication* of the repeated statement of the Old Testament, and the corresponding knowledge which derives from intimacy with God: ‘If you knew God, you would know his power to do this’. Corresponding to this is the statement of the angel Gabriel to Mary, when, concerning the promised pregnancy, she asked ‘How is this to be?’ The answer was ‘the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you’. In contrast to the Sadducees, the angel Gabriel had come from God (Luke 1:26) and so spoke out of the immediacy which he had in the presence of God. The same principle is seen in Jesus’ own ministry, when he returned to Galilee after his time of testing in the wilderness; Jesus was ‘filled with the power of the Spirit’ (Luke 4:14). We should note that ‘the power’ was also occasionally used as a periphrasis for God himself (Matt. 26:64//).

Secondly, as a result of this, Jesus was a man with power himself (perhaps we ought to say ‘*the* man of power’). When he had cast out the demon from the man in Capernaum, the crowd in the synagogue were amazed and observed that ‘with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and out they come’ (Luke 4:36). The reason he had this power was that the power of the Lord was with him (Luke 5:17). When the woman with the haemorrhage touched him, however, he was aware that ‘power had gone forth from him’ (Mark 5:30), and in Luke 6:19 we read that the crowds wanted to touch him, ‘for power came out from him and healed all of them’.

Thirdly, and consequently, *δύναμις* was the word used for Jesus’ miracles. Thus Matthew 11:20, ‘Then he began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent’ (also 21, 23; 13:54, 58; etc.). In Mark 6:2 the crowds were astounded that one from such humble origins could do such ‘deeds of power’, but Mark proceeds to indicate that the ability was not that of a magician with powers simply at his command; in the context of their unbelief, he was quite hindered:

And he could do no (οὐκ ἔδύνατο) deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching (Mark 6:5–6).

Matthew simply puts it that he *did not do* many deeds of power *because* of their unbelief (13:58).

Fourthly, Jesus gave the twelve power to do what he himself was doing:

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases (Luke 9:1).

And they did do those things, although they were conspicuously unaware of what was the true nature of the ministry he had. In Luke 9:40 the father of the demon-possessed boy complains that the disciples ‘could not’ cast out the demon. Mark’s longer version of this event records the disciples’ bewilderment at their inability, and Jesus’ response that ‘This kind can come out only through prayer’ (Mark 9:29). He did not mean that this particular *genus* (τὸ γένος) of demon needed special attention, since he did not do anything different in his own action towards it than he had in any other situation. But he was saying that the disciples had not understood the nature of the power they had, because they had not understood the nature of his power. What he did, he did out of the intimacy which he had with the Father (cf. Mark 9:7; etc.). In consequence, they must function out of the same intimacy. That they did not understand this at all is seen in Luke 10:17–20 where, on this occasion:

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The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!' He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'

Perhaps the most telling explanation of this is to be found in Luke 24:49 where, even after they had witnessed the fact of Jesus' resurrection, the disciples were warned not to go out but to 'stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high'. Acts 1 links this directly with the gift of the Spirit. Without that intimacy, the source of Jesus' own power, as we have seen (Luke 3:21–22; 4:1, 14, 18–19) they could not be *his* witnesses.⁶

Technical questions apart, the ministry of Jesus and the disciples was certainly 'powerful'. Great crowds followed him, principally because of the miracles which they had either heard of (Luke 4:37), or seen directly (John 2:23⁷). At times he could not enter towns because of the numbers of people who were thronging to him (Mark 1:45; cf. 2:1–2) and at others he was forced to sit in a boat in order to teach (Luke 5:1ff.). Familiarity with the stories of the Gospels should not hinder us from seeing the amazing impact of the ministry of Jesus and his disciples. In his reply on the day of Pentecost, Peter said that the audience all knew of Jesus' signs and wonders, yet the audience included Jews visiting Jerusalem from all over the world (Acts 2:22). Later (although how much later is not clear⁸), Peter could address Cornelius in Caesarea as one who knew at least the basic outline of the ministry of Jesus, in particular:

how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him (Acts 10:38).

However, there was far more than the events of Jesus' ministry prior to his death; there was the phenomenal continuation of that ministry in and by the early church after Pentecost. The promise of Acts 1:8, 'you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth', meant that by their receiving power (as promised in Luke 24:49), not only would they give witness to Christ, but also Christ himself would give his witness through them (cf. Acts 2:17–18; Rev. 19:10). So when the man in the temple was healed, Peter denied that he or John had any power of their own (Acts 3:12). The power for the healing lay in the name of Jesus (v. 16). This was the issue when Peter and John were arrested; they were asked 'by what power or by what name did you do this?' (Acts 4:7). Of course, 'the name' was no formula. Knowledge of 'the name' indicated knowledge of the person and so the privilege of acting on behalf of the person.

It is perhaps this which is significant in the observation of Acts 4:13:

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus.

⁶ We must stress that pre-Pentecost descriptions of the disciples' actions cannot, therefore, be in any way paradigms for their post-Pentecost ministries—or ours! Whatever our 'charismatic' expectations may be, that would hermeneutically wrong.

⁷ John does not use the word power (δύναμις), preferring to use the word 'sign' to describe Jesus' miracles.

⁸ Assuming that the details in Acts represent roughly the chronological order in which the events took place, the conversion of Cornelius still need only have been prior to A.D. 44, the year of the death of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:20–23).

It is conventional to refer to the ‘companionship’ as a thing of the past, that is, they had been companions and were now doing what he had done. But is it also possible that behind the action lay, also, a far more recent ‘communion’? This seems likely when Peter is described as ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 4:8). Whether that was a special filling for the moment or the continuation of the state brought into being at Pentecost,⁹ or both, the point is that the outpouring of the Spirit was specifically the result of the action of the risen and ascended Jesus (see Acts 2:33). So when Peter and John returned to the other believers, they prayed that the ‘Sovereign Lord’, the Creator, would give them the ministry of preaching the word boldly, and that the Lord would stretch out his hand to heal, that signs and wonders should continue to be done in the name of Jesus. Then the place in which they were meeting was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God. We must understand that this outpouring of the Spirit was of the same quality as that at Pentecost, namely, the powerful action of Jesus.

All this means that there are repeated implications in the Acts that it was Jesus who continued to work in and through the church in great power. It is probable that this is what Luke meant when he began the Book of Acts by saying that in the Gospel he recounted all that Jesus began to do and to teach prior to his ascension, implying that what he was about to chronicle was what Jesus was *continuing* to do and to teach.¹⁰

When Acts 4:33 records that ‘with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus’, we see that there were a number of elements. There was a significant response to the proclamation.¹¹ The conversion of great numbers is quite specific—about 3,000 at Pentecost (Acts 2:41) rising to about 5,000 *men*.¹² Later more general information is given, as in Acts 11:21, ‘a great number became believers’ (also v. 24). The indication is of phenomenal growth, and the later accounts of Tacitus and Suetonius concerning the persecution of Christians in Rome by Nero, show that by the mid-60s the growth of the church had made a significant impact on the capital city of the empire.

There were ‘powers’ in evidence which were of the same sort as those seen in Jesus’ ministry. Miracles of healing and exorcism (Acts 3:6–10; 4:30; 8:6–8; 14:8–10; 16:16–18; 19:11–12; 28:1–6, 8–9) took place, while some things happened for which there was no precedent in the Gospels. The release of Peter from prison (twice!—Acts 5:17–26; 12:1–11) is outstanding here. Events such as the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11) and the blinding of Elymas (Acts 13:9–12) do, however, have a precedent in the Old Testament, a fact which the phrase ‘signs and wonders’ perhaps indicates.

In the Old Testament, the phrase is used principally to describe the exodus from Egypt, with the associated judgments, the plagues, and the great deliverance at the Red Sea (cf. Exod. 7:3; Deut. 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 26:8; 29:3; 34:11; Neh. 9:10; Ps. 78:43; 135:9; Jer. 32:20, 21). If this is the source of the phrase, then we may understand the

⁹ Is this the implication of Ephesians 5:18, where the present tense carries a continuous meaning? ‘Go on being filled with the Spirit’ implies a commencement.

¹⁰ See, for example, I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1980, p. 56.

¹¹ cf. Robert H. Mounce: ‘How did people react to this kind of preaching? One thing is certain — they could not remain neutral. Wherever the apostolic *kerygma* was proclaimed there was either a “revival or a riot”’ (*The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1960, p. 58).

¹² The Greek is specific that it was *men* (Gk. ἀνδρῶν) as distinct from women and children, and not *men* in the sense of ‘human beings’. A similar detail is given in Mark 6:44, where ἀνδρες is used, and Matthew 14:21 confirms that the 5,000 were men ‘besides women and children’. See F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, London, 1954, p. 96, n.6.

use of the same phrase in Matthew 24:24 (Mark 13:22//) to mean that Jesus was warning against those who would claim to be deliverers and who would attempt to validate their claim by means of ‘signs and wonders’.¹³ In contrast, Peter claimed that it was Jesus who actually did so:

You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know (Acts 2:22).

Furthermore, the disciples, particularly the apostles, continued to do ‘signs and wonders’ (Acts 2:43; 5:12; 6:8. Stephen is the exception—14:3; 15:12). In Romans 15:18–19, Paul pointed to ‘signs and wonders’ as a part of the action of Christ through him (cf. I Cor. 12:10; Gal. 3:5), while in II Corinthians 12:12 he insists that these were ‘the signs of a true apostle’.

A further element, related to the response of faith, was the evidence occasionally described as associated with it. We may observe that the first outpouring of the Spirit in Acts resulted in ‘the gift of tongues’ and prophecy (Acts 2:4, 17–18); Peter later identified the similar falling of the Spirit upon Cornelius and his group as being the same as that which the church received ‘when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ’ (Acts 10:47; 11:17). While these expressions are not mentioned as taking place among the crowd who responded at Pentecost, although ‘praising God’ (Acts 2:47) may well point to the *substance* of the gift of tongues, Peter did indicate that they (too) would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Certainly there is a community formed, the internal dynamics of which are consistent with the promises of such passages as Isaiah 35:

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the LORD,
the majesty of our God.
Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
‘Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.
He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.
He will come and save you.’
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;

¹³ For evidence of those who later did precisely that, see Josephus, *The Jewish War*, passim. The question may be raised concerning the date of the authorship of the Gospels and Acts; were they written, among other reasons, to indicate that among the many claimants to messianic status, all of whom are described by Josephus as failing to substantiate their claims, there was one who did do ‘signs and wonders’, Jesus. The use of the word ‘signs’ in John’s Gospel may have a similar purpose.

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the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.
A highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not travel on it,
but it shall be for God's people;
no traveller, not even fools, shall go astray.
No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.
And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

and Isaiah 43:14–21:

Thus says the LORD,
your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
For your sake I will send to Babylon
and break down all the bars,
and the shouting of the Chaldeans will be turned to lamentation.
I am the LORD, your Holy One,
the Creator of Israel, your King.
Thus says the LORD,
who makes a way in the sea,
a path in the mighty waters,
who brings out chariot and horse,
army and warrior;
they lie down, they cannot rise,
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.
The wild animals will honor me,
the jackals and the ostriches;
for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,
the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.

Both these passages envisage a second great exodus (cf. Matt. 1:21; Luke 9:31) so that the church which was formed by Christ (Matt. 16:18) was nothing less than the fulfilment of Israel's identity and purpose.

The three outpourings of the Spirit—Pentecost, Samaria and Caesarea—coincide with the dimensions of the witness of the apostles described in Acts 1:8 and are the three occasions when Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles come into the people of God. 'Salvation is of the Jews' (John 4:22), but is not restricted to them. The nations, then, will come to Zion for true instruction, true *Torah* (Isa. 2:1–4), and this is what takes place; true teaching takes place (John 6:45; I Thess. 4:9). Doubtless this is the reason why the church 'devoted [itself] to the apostles' teaching' (Acts 2:42).

The coming of the Spirit upon the church, and upon its individual members, brought the gifts of *Christ* to the church (see Eph. 4:7ff.). The various gifts which come are not incidental; they are an essential feature of the church as ‘the body of Christ’. They are intended to be the way the church, as the body of Christ, functions. While not every gift in the church is of equal importance (see I Cor. 14:1; etc.), the New Testament describes a church in which gifts of *necessity* are in evidence. Paul’s response to the misuse of the gifts, especially an over-emphasis on tongues in Corinth, is never to suggest the *disuse*. Indeed, quite the opposite; he actually forbids a prohibition on tongues while urging the Corinthians to correct their priorities.

To construct a list of the gifts of Christ in the church is probably pointless. The way they are described leaves no doubt that there was an element of ‘*ad hoc*-ery’ about some of them. They were gifts to meet the need. All we have are the lists of Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and I Peter 4. However, we may assume that these lists were *descriptive* and not *prescriptive* (there is no command to have all these gifts in the church), and that they indicate that all that the church needed to function fully as the body of Christ was supplied by him. The responsibility of the church was not to seek the gifts *per se* but to function in love (I Cor. 13:1 – 14:1; Eph. 4:15–16), which is the action of Christ in the church and, as a result, in the congregation to strive for those gifts which most promote the growth of the gathered community. Where that is done, Paul argued, outsiders or unbelievers would be confronted by none other than the presence of God in the congregation (I Cor. 14:25). This is not much different from Jesus’ conclusion in John 13:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:34–35).

THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER

While we may quite easily see that there was ‘power’ in Jesus and the church, we must also understand that the power in evidence was not naked, purposeless, goal-less power. All the actions of Jesus were to be understood as relating to the purpose of God. Hence he told those who criticised him that if it was by the Spirit of God that he cast out demons, then the kingdom of God had come to them (Matt. 12:28).

Within the framework of the Gospel accounts that was a most significant statement, for the beginning of the action of Jesus began with the role of John the Baptist and his cry, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near’¹⁴ (Matt. 3:2¹⁵). On the phrase ‘the kingdom of heaven’ Leon Morris says:

It is also accepted that we should understand *kingdom* as meaning ‘rule’ rather than ‘realm’; that is to say, the expression is dynamic: it points us to God as doing something, as actively ruling, rather than to an area or a group of people over whom he is sovereign. The kingdom is something that happens rather than something that exists.¹⁶

¹⁴ The meaning of ‘has come near’ or ‘is at hand’ (Gk. ἐγγύς) can probably not be determined by lexical means. Rather we will need to see how the announcement prefigures the rest of the Gospel contents to discover what was intended.

¹⁵ The phrase ‘the kingdom of heaven’, found only in Matthew’s Gospel, is demonstrably equivalent to ‘the kingdom of God’ used by the other evangelists and five times by Matthew himself. What is not obvious is why Matthew should have chosen to use ‘the kingdom of God’ when he did.

¹⁶ *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1992, p. 53. Writing from the standpoint of biblical theology, Graeme Goldsworthy says:

The reign of God was never in doubt. God is ‘the King of the ages’ (I Tim. 1:17), but now his reign was being revealed in a climactic way. With the birth of Jesus presented as a dramatic consummation of all the desires of the godly in Israel (Luke 1:33, 54; 2:25, 28–32, 38), the ministry of Jesus began with the declaration that it was now ‘happening’. Jesus took up John’s theme and made the same announcement (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14–15). From that time onwards, Jesus was occupied with the matter of the kingdom. His preaching and teaching concerned the kingdom, and Matthew says that:

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan (Matt. 4:23–25).

Matthew follows this summary by given examples. First there is ‘the Sermon on the Mount’ (Matt. 5 – 7) where the theme of the kingdom dominates:

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . .’

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven . . .’

‘Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven’ (5:1–3, 10, 19–20).

This sermon is followed by a description of the way the kingdom of God is in action. The miracles of Matthew 8 – 9 are concluded with the words of 9:35–37:

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’

The phrase ‘as sheep without a shepherd’ was taken from Numbers 27:17 and referred to Israel as lacking a king or leader. The instruction by Jesus to ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers is followed by his giving authority to the twelve to do precisely as he was doing, casting out unclean spirits, curing diseases and sickness, raising the dead and cleansing lepers, and proclaiming that the kingdom of heaven ‘has drawn near’ (Matt. 10:1, 7, 8). Later, Jesus’ parables are presented as being concerned with the kingdom of heaven/God (Matt. 13//). The reason some did not receive the word of the kingdom is explained in 13:1–9. Understanding that, is understanding the secrets of the kingdom (v. 11), which involves the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy which said that the word would harden the unbelief of Israel. This was followed by the parables which took the form, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like . . .’

we may best understand this concept in terms of the relation of ruler to subjects. That is, there is a king who *rules*, a people who are *ruled*, and a sphere where this rule is *recognized* as taking place. Put another way, the Kingdom of God involves: (a) God’s people, (b) in God’s place, (c) under God’s rule’ (*Gospel and Kingdom*, Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1981), p. 47.

In other words, the notion of the action of the kingdom is derived directly from the text and not merely imposed upon it. *This is the way Matthew expects us to understand the power of Jesus and the disciples. God is in action and is fulfilling his purposes.*

What was the focus of the power which was seen in this action and teaching? In Matthew 16 there is the great revelation that Jesus is ‘the Christ, the Son of the living God’ (v. 16),¹⁷ with the explanation (rejected by Peter) that both Jesus, as Messiah, and his followers must lose their lives (vv. 21–26). He then concluded that:

‘the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom’ (16:27–28).

But what was the meaning of verse 28? What does it mean to see the Son of Man come in his kingdom? The statement is cryptic, and no doubt deliberately so, for Matthew proceeds to tell the story of Jesus being transfigured (17:1–8). ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!’ (v. 5) is a strong statement, intended to draw the three disciples, and the reader, back to the fact that the one who was baptised with this divine affirmation is now seen in his true being and must be heard. Whatever his ‘true being’ may be, either ‘Son of God’ or ‘Son of Man’, the conclusion was that the three disciples must not disclose what they had seen until after ‘the Son of Man has been raised from the dead’ (Matt. 17:9). Before that, their information and their understanding would have been deficient.

It does not, therefore, seem hard to conclude that the coming of the Son of Man in his kingdom is the same as the Son of Man raised from the dead. And, of course, that is how the Gospel of Matthew finishes. Jesus, raised from the dead, declares that now ‘all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to [him]’. The eleven are to now go and make disciples of all nations,¹⁸ that is, bring them to submission to Jesus. Of course, the task is not theirs alone. He will be with them always, to the close of the age because, as we stressed above, the task, and so the action, is his (Matt. 28:18–20).

The focal point of the kingdom is the resurrection of Jesus. Even apart from the amazing nature of such an event, the resurrection demonstrated the glory of the Son of Man *and* the glory of the Father (Rom. 6:4). Paul furthermore claimed that the gospel concerned God’s Son who:

was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 1:4).

This declaration of Jesus as the Son of God with power seems to represent a climax of Psalm 2, with its implication for the nations. And so the resurrection appears in the Book of Acts as the most important element of the preaching.¹⁹ Acts chapter 1 provides an interesting conjunction. For forty days before he was taken up to heaven, Jesus ‘presented himself alive to [the apostles whom he had chosen] by many convincing proofs’ (vv. 2–3). On these occasions Jesus spoke with the apostles about ‘the kingdom of God (v. 3), but told them not to leave Jerusalem until they received

¹⁷ When seen in the light of Psalm 2 (cf. Matt. 3:17//), this is itself a ‘kingdom’ statement. In the psalm, the ‘anointed’ (v. 2, Heb. *messiah*; Gk. *Christ*) is ‘my king’ (v. 6) who is declared by God to be ‘my Son’ (v. 7).

¹⁸ cf. Psalm 2:8–9. There is a whole theme of scripture to be understood through these statements, indicating that the nations are always the concern of God and so of Christ (see Gen. 1:28; 11:1–9; 49:10; Exod. 19:5–6; Jonah; and the sections of the major and minor prophets which focus on the nations, either in general or on particular nations).

¹⁹ Allowing for common contexts (that is, the same sermon, etc.) resurrection occurs as a major item 21 times in Acts.

the Holy Spirit. In response to their question concerning whether at this time *Jesus* would restore the kingdom to Israel, a not unreasonable question in view of the discussions of the previous six weeks, Jesus merely replied that when the Spirit came they would be his witnesses, not only to Jerusalem and Judea, but also to Samaria and to the ends of the earth (cf. Ps. 2:8, ‘and the ends of the earth [as] your possession’).

When the group of disciples met to choose a replacement for Judas, they chose someone who would be a witness to the resurrection (v. 22). Matthias then joined the other eleven and the next event described is the outpouring of the Spirit. Peter’s explanation of the event to the crowd at the feast was in terms of the resurrection:

But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. For David says concerning him,

‘I saw the Lord always before me,
for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;
therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
moreover my flesh will live in hope.
For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One experience corruption.
You have made known to me the ways of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying,

‘He was not abandoned to Hades,
nor did his flesh experience corruption.’

This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. (Acts 2:24–32).

It was this message of the resurrection which dominated the preaching in the Acts of the Apostles, not only preaching to Jews, but also to Greeks, as in Athens where some thought that Paul was trying to add two new gods to the pantheon, namely Jesus and *Anastasis*, the Greek word for resurrection.

In order to proclaim that message of resurrection effectively, the apostles themselves needed to be filled with power, which is what Jesus both promised and gave:

Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.²⁰ And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high’ (Luke 24:44–49).

We may conclude that the power in the early church was not merely the ability to work miracles. Rather its primary reference was to the proclamation of the kingdom of God which was revealed in the resurrection of Jesus, leading to the declaration that Jesus is Lord (Acts 2:36; cf. 16:31). The power which was then evident in the conversion of many and the formation and growth of the church, is directly attributed to the activity of ‘the Lord’. Thus:

²⁰ It is clear that it is not just the naked fact of Jesus walking out of the grave which is in mind, but the vast implications.

The Church & the Power of God – I

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. *And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved* (Acts 2:43–47).

The notable change from ‘God’ to ‘Lord’ in verse 47 seems to mean that it was the one whom Peter called Lord who, because of his resurrection, was now active as the saviour, and thus as the one who is now in the process of receiving his inheritance.²¹

²¹ See J. A. Alexander, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1963, p. 96. Not all commentators agree with this conclusion. Calvin, for example, simply says that it was God who did it. However, the point of the ambiguity is surely that, in Luke’s mind, since the resurrection, the distinction between Jesus and God is hard to define. The same title can be used for both. It has taken later theological enquiry to give Trinitarian form to this.

STUDY EIGHT

John Knox – Champion of the Reformation Church

(c.1514 – 1572)

(by Dean Carter)



INTRODUCTION

Some revere John Knox as a great figure in Scotland's Church and political life: some revile him as a radical ranter and rebel against the State, and heretic within the Church. This paper seeks to investigate *his contribution to the reformation of the Church in Scotland*.

§1. The Ecclesia Scoticana

The early history of the Church in Scotland, with pre-reformation influences (Hus, Tyndale's Bible, etc.) and key Scottish characters (St. Ninian, John Dun Scotus, John Major, etc.).

§2. John Knox—From His First to Final Anchor (John 17)

A brief survey of the critical points in Knox's life, especially those relating to his call to the ministry of preacher, and his theology as formed and informed by Calvin and other Continental reformers.

§3. The Reformation of the Kirk

3.1 Documents of the Scottish Reformation:

3.1.1 *The Scots Confession*

3.1.2 *The (First) Book of Discipline*

John Knox – Champion of the Reformation Church (c.1524 – 1572)

- 3.2 Knox's Reformed Theology
- 3.3 Knox's Doctrine of the Church
- 3.4 Knox's Doctrine of the Sacraments

CONCLUSION

John Knox—Champion of the Reformation Kirk.

APPENDICES

I The Scots Confession—1560

II The (First) Book of Discipline

III The Life and Ministry of John Knox

- 1514 Birth of John Knox at Giffordgate at outer Haddington.
- 1536 Ordained Priest by Bishop of Dunblane.
- 1543 Probable conversion: due to influence of Thomas Gwilliam, and reading of John 17.

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STUDY NINE

The Theology of Ministry

(by Siew Kiong Tham)



It may seem inappropriate for a lay person to be talking about ministry, but if ministry is understood as a calling, then the church as the called-out people of God must fulfil its calling to minister. So often ministry is thought of in terms of the group of special people called the ‘ministers’. What has happened is that our church orders have become the foundation of our ecclesiology. In a letter sent to the participants of this School, Geoffrey Bingham wrote, ‘There is no ecclesiology which is authentic without the Pateriological, Christological and Pneumatological, Soteriological, Eschatological foundations...’¹ While this paper does not deal with these great doctrines of the church in any detail, it will weave together sufficient threads in each of these areas to enable us to see that it is ministry that is the determinant of the church.

R. S. Anderson in his paper on ‘A Theology of Ministry’ argues that ‘ministry precedes and produces theology’.² By ‘ministry’, he refers to that which ‘is determined and set forth by God’s own ministry of revelation and reconciliation in the world’. The task of theology is the reflection of this ministry as set forth by God. Theology does not stand on its own and determine ministry. And so Anderson continues, ‘To say that all ministry is God’s ministry is to suggest that ministry precedes and determines the Church’.³ This paper will explore these assertions and, in turn, examine our concept of ministry.

¹ G. Bingham, personal communications (1 May, 1997) to speakers of the NCTM Pastors’ School.

² ‘A Theology of Ministry’, in *Theological Foundations for Ministry*, ed. R. S. Anderson (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 7.

³ *ibid.*, pp. 7f.

A TALE OF TWO CHURCHES⁴

Church 'A' is a well-established church in the city. Many years ago several Christians came together and decided that there should be a church that would meet the needs of a certain section of the community in that city. The believers were members of various other churches and they decided to move out of those established churches to form a church of their own for this specific ministry. In time, and after several business-like meetings, they finally constituted their group with the government bodies, and operated as a legal entity. They found a suitable church building at which to gather for their worship and meetings. They gave of their worldly possessions to the church and after a period of time were able to hire a minister to serve the increased needs of the group. More people were brought into the church and eventually they acquired a building in the city as a more permanent meeting place. In the process of building, the members were assigned various tasks to raise money to pay for the expenses incurred. Challenges were made to the congregation week after week for an increased commitment to the work of this church, and for this some were willing. The church increased in number. Commitment to the work of the church equated with blessings from God. Miraculous signs did occur in their midst and for this there was much praise.

Church 'B' is also a well-established church in another city. A few Christians began a ministry in a home many years ago to explain various aspects of the Christian faith for those who wanted to know more about Jesus Christ. In the process Christ was proclaimed. They met once a month. A short while later, a second group met to study the Bible. As a result their lives were enriched and understanding deepened. Many of those who came along to those meetings did not go to any church and some of them had stopped meeting altogether in worship. The group then wanted to gather on a Sunday morning in that home for praise and worship. As an identifiable group in the community they were legally constituted under the laws of the land. In time the group outgrew the facilities in the home and they moved to shared premises with another established church. At one stage they decided to raise some money for one of their number working with a mission overseas. Those who wanted to participate came along and each volunteered their wares according to their ability to do so. The amount to be raised was not pre-determined. The money raised was sent to the mission. They did not have a 'minister' in their midst and a few of their number taught the Word, Sunday by Sunday. Their numbers grew but only slowly. They continued in the study of the Word, in prayer and in fellowship.

MINISTRY

The way we see ministry is essential to the understanding of the church. We call the pastor 'the minister', and his ministry expresses the way the church understands its own existence. The nature of ministry is the nature of the church. The minister *par excellence*, the *leitourgos*, is Jesus Christ Himself (Heb. 8:1).

Jesus Christ is the minister in the true sanctuary that the Lord has set up. He ministers to the Father on our behalf. All ministry is the ministry of the Father. God demonstrated His love to us in sending His Son that we might have life through Him (I John 4:9). The Son does not act on His own accord, but carries out the will of the Father (John 5:17, 19, 30; 6:38). The Son's ministry is that of revelation (John 1:18)

⁴ Told with reference to G. Bingham, *Christ's Living Church—Today* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1993), pp. 29–34. Church 'A' went about to determine its ministry according to models it could identify. Church 'B' was more concerned to engage in the proclamation of the Word and allow the form to develop in a spontaneous manner. Both are imaginary entities and have no reference to any particular church here or elsewhere.

and reconciliation (II Cor. 5:17–19) in response to the will of the Father. The Holy Spirit as the other paraclete continues the ministry of the Son (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7, 13–15; Rom. 8:9–15). Thus we see that ministry is that of the Father and carried in a specific manner by the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is on this Trinitarian basis that we reflect on ministry theologically. It is out of this ministry of the Trinitarian Godhead that we have the church—the called-out people of God, the *ekklesia*. Thus the primary control on ecclesiology is the tri-personal community of God.⁵

‘Christ’s primary ministry is to the Father for the sake of the world, not to the world for the sake of the Father’.⁶ Christ ministers out of the Trinitarian relationship within the Godhead. Needs therefore do not determine the nature of Christ’s ministry, but the purpose of the Father (John 6:38).

So the church is given to continue this ministry of Jesus in the Holy Spirit. However, the church cannot continue the ministry of Christ and run its own agenda. As the called-out people of God, the church must act only in accordance with the will of the Father just as Christ did only what the Father told Him. When the church goes on with an agenda of her own then she has removed from herself the very foundation of her constitution, that is, Jesus her Lord.

That which we seek to know must determine the means or methods by which we come to know it. We cannot impose a methodology that is inappropriate upon that which we seek to know. If the church is indeed the *ekklesia*, that is, the called-out people of God, then it is the calling of God that brings the church into being. The nature of this calling, and indeed God’s ministry in gathering together this people, must determine the way we come to know the church. This may seem too obvious to mention, but it is not what most of our congregations conceive of as ‘church’. Without this calling there is no church. This calling of God to constitute His church is achieved through the incarnation of the Son and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Word was made flesh so that through His humanity, Jesus Christ made that perfect response to God on our behalf, even as He continues to intercede for us as our Great High Priest in heaven. And without that awakening by the Spirit within us, there is no recognition on our part of God as the Father. So to know the church we must start with the ministry of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ mediates both revelation and reconciliation. His incarnation made manifest His solidarity with human flesh. It is through His vicarious humanity that He reveals the relations within the Trinitarian Godhead. Through His humanity, He made the response to God on our behalf. His response becomes our response when in our sin and weakness we are incapable of responding.

While we emphasise the substitutionary element in the sacrifice of Christ, we pay little attention to the participation in the merits of Christ. Our understanding of redemption rests almost solely on the application of the merits of Christ to the sinner as a merely external transaction. There is no hint of the union of Christ and believers. Thus an extrinsic conception of the atonement will result in a detachment of Christ from the context of the covenant relationship with His chosen people.⁷ This inevitably results in the conception of the church as an institution.

In Vincent Donovan’s book, *Christianity Rediscovered*, he speaks against the institutional structure of mission and the human determination of the church:

⁵ C. Gunton, ‘The Church on Earth: The Roots of Community’, in *On Being the Church*, ed. Gunton and Hardy, p. 77.

⁶ R. S. Anderson, *ibid.*, p. 8.

⁷ T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1992), p. 47.

The Theology of Ministry

Because a missionary comes from another already existing church, *that* is the image of church he will have in mind, and if his job is to establish a church, *that* is the church he will establish. I think, rather, the missionary's job is to preach, not the church, but Christ. If he preaches Christ and the message of Christianity, the church may well result, may well appear, but it might not be the church he had in mind.⁸

The church that results, then, is the determination of the ministry of the Godhead and not the off-shoot of an institution prescribed by the existing church.

REVELATION AND RECONCILIATION

Much of the treatment of the great doctrines that form the very foundation of the church is necessarily brief in this paper as they are covered in the other papers of this School. We need to see revelation and reconciliation as the ministry of the Trinity:

No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known (John 1:18, *NRSV*).

That which we seek to know must determine the means of the knowing. The knowledge of God must come from God Himself and that is by revelation, firstly through the prophets and finally in the supreme expression, through His Son Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1–4).

Through His vicarious humanity and His crucifixion at Calvary, Jesus Christ as our Great High Priest offered Himself for our reconciliation. 'In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself' (II Cor. 5:17–19).

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, *and has given us the ministry of reconciliation*; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, *and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us* (II Cor. 5:17–19, *NRSV*).

The very act of reconciling the world was what Jesus accomplished through His life and sacrifice. God reconciled us through Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. That is not to mean that the ministry of reconciliation becomes ours, but Paul reiterated verse 18 and clarified it in the next verse, that we are entrusted with the message of reconciliation. Our ministry of reconciliation is the proclamation of the message of reconciliation. The reconciling is the work of God through Jesus by the awakening of the Holy Spirit. Thus our ministry of reconciliation is to participate in what Jesus Christ has accomplished and our task is then the proclamation of that message.

The ministry of reconciliation is the ministry of God achieved through Jesus Christ. The church is called into this ministry by the mercy and grace of God (II Cor. 4:1). The church is entrusted with this ministry and called to participate in this ministry, not to own or possess it. The church is given this ministry of reconciliation by the mercy of God.

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart (II Cor 4:1, *NRSV*).

⁸ V. J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (SCM, London, 1991), p. 81.

The Theology of Ministry

The church's ministry is to continue the ministry of reconciliation achieved through Jesus Christ, that is, the proclamation of the message for the restoration and healing of the fractured relationships in our communities, through the salvific work of Jesus Christ.

It is also a ministry in the Spirit. The 'other paraclete' will declare the things of Christ in fulfilment of the Father's will (John 16:13–15).

While in Christ we have redemption through His blood, it is by the awakening of the Spirit within us that we have this recognition (Rom. 8:9–17).

IN CHRIST

The church continues the ministry of Christ on earth. Thus Christ's ministry determines the nature and content of the church's ministry. As the called-out people of God, redeemed by Christ's precious blood, we are united with Him. The expression 'in Christ' is a recurring theme in the New Testament epistles.

In fact 'in', 'with', and 'through' in relation to Christ and His people are so frequent that not much doctrine of faith and practice of life would be left if they were withdrawn'.⁹

This is nowhere more beautifully expressed than in the opening chapter of the Letter to the Ephesians:

Eph 1:1—faithful in Christ Jesus; 3—blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places; 4—chose us in Christ; 5—adoption as his children through Jesus Christ; 6—glorious grace . . . bestowed on us in the Beloved; 7—In him we have redemption through his blood; 9—according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ; 11—In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance; 13—In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth . . . and had believed in him; 15—I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus; 20—God put this power to work in Christ; 22—the church; 23—which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

This is the charter of the church. God has 'blessed us in Christ' (v. 3), 'chosen us in Christ' (v. 4), 'adopted us through Christ' (v. 5), 'glorious grace . . . bestowed on us in Christ' (v. 6), 'redemption in Christ' (v. 7) and faith in Christ as a result of the hearing of the word of truth in Christ (v. 13). All these are made possible as a result of the power of God working in Christ (v. 20), the fullness of Him who fills all in all (v. 23). There is nothing apart from what God has wrought in Christ Jesus, the church being specifically mentioned here because she is the body of Christ, the continuing earthly expression of the humanity of Christ.

And so Paul could say:

He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption (I Cor. 1:30, *NRSV*).

If God is the source of our life in Christ, then it must mean that there is no source of life (redeemed) outside of Christ.¹⁰ And so:

⁹ G. Bingham, *The Everlasting Presence* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1989), p. 75. The book expounds the faith union in Christ especially in the chapter, 'The Apostolic Abiding'.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 77ff.

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it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal 2:20, *NRSV*).

We need to start with who we are in Christ. The ‘indicative’ precedes the ‘imperative’. What we do must result from what we are, and the way we express ourselves in ministry will tell clearly what the foundation of our ministry is. The ministry of the church continues the ministry of Christ and is the heart’s grateful response to Christ.

SERVICE IN CHRIST

In his article on ‘Service in Jesus Christ’, T. F. Torrance pointed out that service is the response of love and also of obedience.¹¹ If we say that service is the response to the love of God, then the relationship with God that developed out of the experience of that love must be the determinant of the service. In other words, service is relational and not outcome-determined; that is, it is an expression of the relationship with Christ and it cannot be rendered in isolation from Christ.¹² It is an essential part of the relationship and sometimes regarded as a response to a command. Service is not an end in itself as if it has to be rendered in order to gain acceptance or favour with God. Furthermore, the service rendered cannot stand on its own outside of the relationship with God. Service does not have a driving force of its own. Service for service’s sake finally results in boredom and despair.

Yet it is not a servitude, but a freedom, a movement of love. It is not even a service of love for love’s sake.¹³ God commands a service of love and gives the love that empowers for the service.¹⁴ The servant does not assume authority for the service nor is he responsible for the result of that service. He looks for no reward in rendering that service.

I love I love the master
I will not go out free.¹⁵

This is only possible because of the incarnation of Jesus Christ who has taken our humanity on Himself. He dealt with sin from within the depth of human existence. In Him, and in His mercy, lies the creative ground and source of such *diakonia*.

JUSTIFICATION OF OUR MINISTRY (BARRENNESS IN MINISTRY)

So often in ministry we seek justification in terms of what is achieved. We seek the outcome to justify our ministry. Abraham fell into the same trap. All ministry is God’s ministry. We are called to participate in that ministry. When we fail to realise our calling, then we seek justification in terms of what is achieved. Our calling is a participation, not a proprietorship.

¹¹ T. F. Torrance, ‘Service in Jesus Christ’, in *Theological Foundations for Ministry*, ed. R. S. Anderson, pp. 714f.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *ibid.*, pp. 715f.

¹⁴ Augustine: ‘Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt’.

¹⁵ Redemption Hymnal 542 by F. R. Havergal.

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We are all familiar with the story of the birth of Isaac. There is a tendency to think of blessing as related to achievement and success, that is, blessing has been equated with approval of what we are doing, and failure or barrenness means the curse of God and therefore disapproval of what we are doing.

It was related to me that when Christian workers confront difficult problems in their ministry, they almost always ask, ‘What more can I do to make things better?’ So they work even harder and get involved in more areas, and the more they get involved, the more problems they get themselves into. Instead, they should sit back and take a long, hard look at what they are doing and why they are doing it.¹⁶

Many interpreters have taken the stories of Abraham and made a comparison between faith and works. They say that Ishmael represents human works and Isaac represents faith in God. To a degree that is so, but when faith in God is understood as doing nothing on the part of Abraham and Sarah, then that is a wrong interpretation of God’s purpose. I suppose we imagine Abraham and Sarah sleeping in their own tents every night simply gazing at the stars in the sky waiting for a son to appear. No, Abraham and Sarah needed to embrace each other in their mutual love as husband and wife. As they expressed the gift of their sexual relationship to each other, God worked within that relationship. It is not an argument between faith and works, but a participation in the purpose of God.

So in barrenness, we need to sit back and take a hard look at our humanity and ask ourselves these questions:

- What are we created for?
- What is our relationship with God and with one another?
- What is God’s purpose in our midst and how have we envisaged that?

It is only as we understand the purpose of the Divine that we in our humanity can participate in what He has ordained.

God has created us for relationships—with Him and with one another. This relationship is the outworking of His covenants and that is what we refer to as covenantal relationship. God has chosen to work through human relationships as He exists in relationship. He is to be known in His relationship. The problem that Abraham and Sarah faced regarding their posterity was the issue of the husband–wife relationship between them. They allowed the outcome, that is, the son of promise, to determine the way they related. Rather, their relationship with one another was the primary issue. God chose to work through the relationship between Abraham and Sarah, that is, through a family, and then through a community, and later through a nation. Following the coming of Christ, God has chosen to work through the church.

Every church would have gone through many a barren time. Each time, we need to come back and look at God’s purpose for the church. We need also to look at relationships within the church.

What were Abraham and Sarah supposed to do while waiting for Isaac to come along? They should not have been engineering all the other relationships to achieve an imitation of the fulfilment which God had planned for them. They were firstly to live in hope, and secondly, to maintain and deepen the relationship they had with each other. So it is with the church. While we go through periods of barrenness which no doubt any church will in its life cycle, we need firstly to have a vision of what we may

¹⁶ This was related to me by Dr Robert Redman, Director of the Diploma of Ministry program at Fuller Theological Seminary.

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become. That is our hope. Secondly, we need to maintain and deepen our relationship with each other within the church, so that we can meaningfully participate in the activity of God. The last thing we want to do in a time of barrenness is to engineer imitation outcomes and in the process sever our relationships.

This is precisely what we do when we get into a barren patch in our lives. Because of Hagar, the relationship between Abraham and Sarah was put under a strain. If we understand that God has called us into covenantal relationship with Him and with one another, then that relationship is primary because God's purpose is to work through that relationship. Even though the situation may look impossible, as in the case of Abraham and Sarah, we need to live in hope and with the vision that that will be so.

So we need to know what God has called us to, and keep that vision alive in the relationships within the church, so that one day we will see its fulfilment. All these do not mean that there is a restriction in our ministry. Rather, there is a freedom of the church as it bases its ministry on the knowledge of who God is and what He seeks to fulfil. There is a freedom when we recognise our role as participants in God's ministry. We are confident of its fulfilment as God brings about His desired outcome in His time.

Just as ecclesiology is determined by Pateriology, Christology, Pneumatology, Soteriology and Eschatology, so is ministry determined by the same considerations.

IN CONCLUSION

- (a) The community of the church must be grounded in the community of the Trinitarian Godhead.
- (b) The ministry of the church must be grounded in the ministry of the Father which is effected by the Son and continued by the Holy Spirit.
- (c) The ministry of the church, then, is our participation in God's ministry as a result of our union with Christ. This is a faith union achieved through the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ and not a mystical union through some external transaction on the Cross.
- (d) Thus the ministry of the church as the continuation of the ministry of the Father is assured of its outcome and we do not engineer imitations on the grounds of human possibilities.

STUDY TEN

The Church & the Power of God – II

(by Ian Pennicook)



When Paul says that the gospel is the *power* of God to salvation he obviously means something quite specific. Things such as ‘signs and wonders’, while plainly part of the life of the apostolic church and, indeed, a significant feature of the *apostolic* ministry (see Rom. 15:18–19; II Cor. 12:12), were by no means the ‘power’ to which Paul was referring.¹

What, then, is the power? While the answer is ‘the gospel’, we must ask what we mean by that phrase. For example, is it enough to define the gospel as ‘the good news about Jesus’? I would go so far as to respond that that definition of itself may actually hide the nature of the gospel, so that the preachers could even be unaware, to a certain extent, of what it is they are doing.

The Greek word which we translate as ‘gospel’ is *εὐαγγεῖον* (*euaggelion*) and ‘to preach the gospel’ is *εὐαγγελίζομαι* (*euaggelizomai*). Our familiarity with the phrase ‘good news’ should not hinder us from asking whether that is how the words were used in the New Testament. And further, we should ask whether or not the New Testament usage reflects the way the words were used in the ancient world. Donald Robinson² observes concerning *euaggelion* that:

The word has a long history in Greek literature, going back to Homer, but there is something quite fresh and distinctive about its use by Paul and the evangelists. In the Greek of the time, the plural

¹ cf. G. H. Twelftree, ‘Signs, Wonders, Miracles’ in G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin (eds) *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 1993), pp. 875–7.

In light of the strong association between ‘signs and wonders’ and the miracle stories of the Exodus tradition, the ‘signs and wonders’ performed by Paul to win the Gentiles (Rom 15:19) cannot refer only to Paul’s sufferings, nor can they be of merely secondary importance to him (as Käsemann maintains). Rather, as reluctant as Paul was to draw attention to his miracles in the way his opponents did (1 Cor 1:22; 2 Cor 12:12), ‘signs and wonders’ were the miracles he performed empowered by the Spirit and integrally associated with his preaching to form part of the new Exodus to the freedom possible in the age of Christ. Thus the gospel is, in part, the miracles that were performed (cf. Rom 15:18-19; 1 Thess 1:5).

² *Faith’s Framework: The Structure of New Testament Theology* (Albatross, Sutherland, 1985), p. 50ff.

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form *euaggelia* was used to describe the sacrifices and celebrations conducted in response to certain official announcements. It was also used, generally in the plural, for the announcements themselves.

Gerhard Friedrich, in his article in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, indicates two contemporary contexts in which *euaggelion* occurs—indeed the two uses to which the word is practically confined. The first is as a technical term in connection with victory in battle. To cite Friedrich’s description of this first context:

Euaggelion is a technical term for ‘news of victory’. The messenger appears, raises his right hand in greeting and calls out with a loud voice: *chaire . . . nikomen* (‘Rejoice . . . we are victorious’). By his appearance it is known already that he brings good news. His face shines, his spear is decked with laurel, his head is crowned, he swings a branch of palms, joy fills the city, *euaggelia* are offered, the temples are garlanded, an *agon*³ is held, crowns are put on for the sacrifices and the one to whom the message is owed is honoured with a wreath. Political and private reports can also be *euaggelia*. For them, too, sacrificial feasts are held. But *euaggelion* is closely linked with the thought of victory in battle.⁴

The second context in which *euaggelion* appears as a technical term is in connection with the imperial cult. The emperor unites in his own person the concepts of ‘the divine man’, ‘good fortune’ and ‘salvation’:

This is what gives *euaggelion* its significance and power. The ruler is divine by nature. His power extends to men, to animals, to the earth and to the sea. Nature belongs to him; wind and waves are subject to him. He works miracles and heals men.⁵ He is the saviour of the world who also redeems individuals from their difficulties . . . He has appeared on earth as a deity in human form. He is the protective god of the state. His appearance is the cause of good fortune to the whole kingdom. Extraordinary signs accompany the course of his life. They proclaim the birth of the ruler of the world. A comet appears at his accession, and at his death signs in heaven declare his assumption into the ranks of the gods. Because the emperor is more than a common man, his ordinances are glad messages and his commands are sacred writings. What he says is a divine act and implies good and salvation for men. He proclaims *euaggelia* through his appearance, and these *euaggelia* treat of him. The first evangelium is the news of his birth . . . Other *euaggelia* follow, e.g. the news of his coming of age, and especially his accession . . . Joy and rejoicing come with the news. Humanity, sighing under a heavy burden of guilt, wistfully longs for peace . . . Then suddenly there rings out the news that the *soter* is born, that he has mounted the throne, that a new era dawns for the whole world. This *euaggelion* is celebrated with offerings and yearly festivals. All cherished hopes are exceeded. The world has taken on a new appearance.⁶

Here, then, is the way the word was used in the world in which Paul wrote. Had the early Christians looked for the word in a dictionary, this is the way it would have been expressed. Yet they would have observed that there were some differences. The first is that, while the contemporary use was the plural, in the New Testament there is only one gospel and it is ‘always, either directly or by implication . . . the *euaggelion* of God. No secular reference is even alluded to.’⁷ In other words, in the face of many human *euaggelia*, the New Testament proclaims one *euaggelion* and what is more, that *euaggelion* proclaims judgment and demands repentance.⁸ This is illustrated by the use of *euaggelion* in Revelation 14:6–7:

Then I saw another angel flying in midheaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation and tribe and language and people. He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water’.

³ An *agon* was a festival at which contestants contended for a prize. The most lasting example is the Olympic Games, although there were many such festivals.

⁴ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 722.

⁵ cf. the description of Vespasian in Tacitus.

⁶ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 724.

⁷ Robinson, *Faith’s Framework*, p. 52.

⁸ Robinson, *Faith’s Framework*, p. 53.

To those suffering the attacks of the beast from the sea (the Roman governor?) and the beast from the land (the priest of the imperial cult?) with their imperial *euaggelia*, the angel brings an eternal *euaggelion*. *Eternal* may be the chosen adjective to demonstrate that the gospel originates not from earth but from heaven, not from Caesar but from God.⁹ And the content of the eternal gospel is clear: ‘Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water’.

The translation of *euaggelion* as ‘good news’ does have an apparent background in the Old Testament where the LXX uses the noun *euaggelia* (plural, in II Sam. 4:10 below) as the reward for good news and then for the good news itself (II Sam. 18:20, 22, 25; II Kings 7:9), while the verb *euaggelizomai* is used in the sense of bringing good news. Thus I Samuel 31:9:

They cut off [Saul’s] head, stripped off his armor, and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to carry the good news to the houses of their idols and to the people.

In II Samuel 4:10 there is the interesting combination of verb and noun:

‘when the one who told me, “See, Saul is dead”, thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him at Ziklag—this was the reward I gave him for his news’.

The messenger ‘thought he was bringing good news’ (καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν ὡς εὐαγγελιζόμενος/*euaggelizomenos* ἐνώπιόν μου, ‘he was as one bringing good news before me’), but the reward for the good news (εὐαγγέλια/*euaggelia*) was that David killed him.

However, none of these examples explains the use of *euaggelion* in the New Testament. What is evident in the New Testament is the way the *euaggelion* is presented as coming from the secular use but with deeper and more significant connotations. Thus when John the Baptist preached, although our translations suggest that ‘with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news [verb] to the people’ (Luke 3:18), the context makes the idea of ‘good news’ sound quite strange. John is proclaiming coming judgment and the consequent need to repent.

Robinson’s opinion is that:

It is linguistically naive to translate *euaggelion* in the New Testament as simply ‘good news’. There is certainly in the background the expectation that, for those who are ready for it, the *euaggelion* brings hope and rejoicing. But the word itself is much more loaded than that, having connotations of authority and power, as well as of a certain pomp or flourish appropriate to the significance of the announcement.¹⁰

If this is so, then the idea of ‘good news’ becomes quite irrelevant; the point would be that this gospel comes with all the importance, and more, that any Roman imperial decree would carry. Its significance takes it beyond any notion of either ‘good’ or ‘bad’; this is the *euaggelion* of God and, as such, demands our total submission. Hence, the gospel is something which is to be obeyed. Thus we have the following:

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.* I have not been able to verify it, but my suspicion is that the translation, ‘good news’, while having some Old Testament background as I have noted, draws as much from the word ‘gospel’ itself. ‘Gospel’ derives from the Old English ‘godspel’ meaning ‘good news’ and was the earliest English translation of εὐαγγέλιον. As a translation, however, it actually begs the whole question. While etymology proves very little in the long run, we may also note that εὐαγγέλιον commences not with the adjective ‘good’ but with an adverb, εὖ, meaning ‘well’. Possibly εὐαγγέλιον could carry the meaning of ‘the message brought well’, that is, appropriately, considering its origin and content. It is a significant proclamation.

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through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the obedience of faith* among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name (Rom. 1:5).

but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about *the obedience of faith* — (Romans 16:26).

in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do *not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus* (II Thess. 1:8).

For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who do not *obey the gospel of God?* (I Pet. 4:17).

While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he *commands all people everywhere to repent*, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:30–31).

What, then, is the content of such a significant proclamation? Paul's answer to that question is in terms of his own priorities:

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart’.

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God (I Cor. 1:17–24; 2:1–5).

Those who believed Paul's message were able to see that what had gripped them was not the power of human eloquence, so valued by the Corinthians, but the power of God. Evidence for the power at work is given in I Thessalonians 1:4–10:

For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, *but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction*; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

What is there in the proclamation of the cross of Christ which could bring about this response?¹¹ In II Corinthians, when writing of his own ministry, Paul wrote that:

¹¹ I raise the question whether the present practice of ‘discipling’ may, to a certain extent, be an attempt to make up for a deficient gospel. This by no means calls into question the desire to see people mature in Christ and the attendant ministry which will assist them to do so, but at least I must note that the verb, μαθητεύω, ‘to make a disciple’ (used in Matt. 13:52; 27:57; 28:19 and Acts 14:21 only), is never used for the life of Christian believers and,

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we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 4:5–6).

He is saying that he preaches the lordship of Christ, and that the result of this proclamation is to be understood in the same way that we understand creation. Then God said, 'Let there be light', now he shines the light of the knowledge of the glory of God into the human heart. The parallel with II Corinthians 5:17 is clear:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

When the gospel is preached a new creation is brought into being. In particular, it is because when the gospel is proclaimed God himself speaks. If nothing else, an awareness of this fact ought to cause those who carry the word of the Cross to 'tremble at the word'. Plainly they would have 'renounced the shameful things that one hides [and] refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word' (cf. II Cor. 4:2).

Romans 1:16–17 explains, or at least introduces, the way the gospel carries such power:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith'.

In the gospel there is a revelation of the righteousness of God. To be decided is what is meant by 'the righteousness of God'. Often a distinction is made between the righteousness of God as an inherent attribute of his being and the righteousness of man as a derived state of being.¹² That is, there is a righteousness *of* God and a righteousness *from* God. However, if we acknowledge the ontological unity of the creation with the Creator, then we may say that the righteousness of God is ontologically the righteousness of Man. Not that human beings have a righteousness of their own making or merit; rather, by virtue of being created in the image of God they participate in God's righteousness. N. T. Wright says that the word 'righteousness', 'denotes not so much the abstract idea of justice or virtue, as right standing and consequent right behaviour, within a community'.¹³ But how does this apply to God? My answer would be to define the righteousness of God as '*God's total consistency with his own character which he both expresses and expects, and which he works for us in Christ*'. God's righteousness is therefore seen in the way God acts and in the way he expects his creation to act. The Law of Moses is seen, then, not as the capricious demands of God but as a revelation of his own being and the consequent obligation upon his people. Of course, the law of God was a feature of creation before the Law of Moses was given. It was written on the hearts of men and women by virtue of their being in God's image (see Rom. 2:15) and it must indeed be written there again (Jer. 31:31–34).

when used for the activity of the Christians, is only used in the aorist tense, implying a single action completed in the past. This would mean that the activity of 'disciplining' is completed when the gospel is proclaimed and people respond.

¹² See the dictionary articles for details; D. W. Diehl, 'Righteousness' in W. A. Elwell (ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker, Grand Rapids, 1984), pp. 952–3; N. T. Wright, 'Righteousness' in S. B. Ferguson and D. F. Wright (eds), *New Dictionary of Theology* (Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1988), pp. 590–2, etc.

¹³ 'Righteousness', p. 591.

The Fall only means that men and women have become *unrighteous*, living in denial and contradiction of their created being. In fact, it is this which Paul in Romans goes on to argue. Having said that the gospel is a revelation of the righteousness of God, he proceeds to show that that revelation comes in the face of another revelation, namely the wrath of God (1:18ff.). This wrath comes upon those who, by wicked works, suppress the truth of God (and so of themselves) which has been made plain in creation. In Romans 5:12–21, Paul shows that this situation arises from humanity participating in and reproducing the sin of Adam, but, nonetheless, this is not a merely academic problem. On the contrary, human guilt brings men and women into personal conflict with God (see Rom. 1:30, ‘God-haters’; Col. 1:21, ‘hostile in mind’). Whatever they may acknowledge (and the heart remains deceitful above all things and desperately wicked), they are now living under the present, and in anticipation of the coming, wrath of God. They live under the curse of the Fall now and will one day face the consummation of wrath. Their unrighteousness results in the corruption of their conscience and the consequent pollutions of life. Their only hope lies in being restored to their created being, being a new, in the sense of *renewed*, creation.

As Romans continues, we see that the focus of the work of Christ on the Cross was nothing less than the bearing of God’s wrath:

But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:21–26).

Two points of clarification are perhaps needed. First, the word ‘justify’ is the translation of the verb ‘to make or declare righteous’. I would strongly argue that ‘to declare righteous’ means ‘to make righteous’, not, of course, in the sense of sinless perfection now, but certainly in the sense that our righteousness is not simply that God ‘treats us as righteous’, or even that it is ‘just-as-if-I’d-never-sinned’. Of course, we have sinned and that cannot be erased from history, but the point is God does not call us one thing while we remain another. That would be the ‘legal fiction’ which many have complained about. The point is that to be justified is to be washed clean from all sin (I Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:5;¹⁴ Acts 22:16; etc.). What is more, the present work of Christ is to keep us clean: ‘The blood of Jesus Christ . . . goes on keeping us clean from all sin’ (I John 1:7, again, with the stress that this does *not* imply sinless perfection). All of this is ‘by faith’, that is, a reliance on what God says and not on what is seen. Faith always rests on the evidence of the word of God. It is, therefore, definitely not an ‘abstract’ matter.

The second is that the phrase used in the *NRSV*, ‘a sacrifice of atonement’ (Rom. 3:25), ἱλαστήριον (*hilasterion*), refers to the removal of wrath.¹⁵ God put forward Christ Jesus as ‘a *hilasterion* by his blood’, that is, his death on the cross. The passage of Romans 5:1–11 is a significant summary:

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope

¹⁴ See *NRSV* footnote: ‘Gk *washing*’.

¹⁵ See Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Tyndale Press, London, 1965), pp. 144–213, esp. pp. 184–202, for what is, I believe, still the definitive study on the topic.

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of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we *be saved through him from the wrath of God*. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Christ has, as the *hilasterion*, borne the wrath. But Paul's point is not that we are saved by information about what Christ has done, nor even by believing that information. Just as in II Corinthians 4:6, the gospel comes to men and women as the re-creative word, so in Romans the love of God which sent Christ to the cross 'has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us' (Rom. 5:5, 8). This is what is meant by saying that in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed. This revelation is not the communication of information but the bringing to new birth of a human being. The righteousness of God, the nature of unfallen humanity, is now revealed in the believer. He is a new creation.

It may bear some insistence by Paul, but 'you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you' (Rom. 8:9). This is because there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1), and it is the obliteration of all guilt which came to the hearers through the proclamation of the gospel. So Paul wrote to the Galatians:

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? (3:1–2).

The public exhibition of Jesus as crucified was the proclamation of the gospel (cf. Gal. 1:6–9, where the issue is the gospel which is preached). Christ is preached as crucified for our sins and, when that proclamation comes, men and women see themselves as crucified with him (Gal. 2:19–21). When that is seen, and believed, men and women know the reality of the righteousness of God *within them*.

A similar point is made in II Timothy 1:8–11:

Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death *and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*. For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.

What is happening when the gospel is preached? From II Corinthians 4 we saw that it is God himself, the Creator, who brings the re-creative word to men and women. According to Romans 10:17 it is Christ who speaks:

So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

Christ speaks and faith is born in the hearer. Yet the gospel is the word of the Cross (and, of course, the Resurrection, see I Cor. 15:3–12). If the Cross is the triumph of God over guilt, then we may conclude that the power of the gospel lies in the utterance of the crucified and risen Jesus who testifies to his own triumph by liberating men and

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women from their guilt. In other words, the proclamation of the gospel actually *effects* forgiveness and rebirth. This is surely what Jesus meant when he instructed the disciples in John 20:23:

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.

It is not that human beings can forgive those whose offence is against God and him alone (Ps. 51:4), but it does mean that their word cannot be reduced to the mere impartation of information to be digested. Their word comes with such great power that either men and women will believe and know total forgiveness, or will refuse to believe and so be locked into their guilt. But the power lies in the speaker, the crucified and risen Lord Jesus, who speaks out of his triumph. That is why we noted above that faith is not 'blind' but rather rests on the word of God. It is not just that 'it is written' but that the word has come personally, and spoken creatively, bringing the hearer back to the truth of creation. This is the great power, the *revelation* of the righteousness of God.

Power in the church is found not in those things which are common to fallen humanity, false prophets and demons. It is found in that which is unique to God, the power of the creative and re-creative word, 'the word of God which is at work in you believers' (I Thess. 2:13).

STUDY TWELVE

The Church & Its Sacramental Life

(by Dean Carter)



INTRODUCTION

The thesis of the paper is:

that the life of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)—of union and communion of holy love—is shared by the Church, as mediated by the incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended Word—Son, Jesus Christ; and that this life is expressed in its outward form in the Sacraments (of Baptism and the Lord's Supper), while its inward form is the Communion of the Spirit.

Our prime focus is on the *life* of the Church (as that of the Trinity), and not on the Sacraments as such. Rather, the person and work to which the Sacraments bear witness—Jesus Christ and His life—remains the focus through the whole study.

PART I GOD AND THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY

§1. The Life of God as Trinity

The perichoretic life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as persons in union and communion, holy love, giving and receiving, honouring and self-giving.

§2. The Living People of God

The call of Abraham from idolatry to true knowledge of God (see Acts 7 for Stephen's sermon), the nature of repentance and implications for epistemology, personal relations, worship, etc. (see John 17:3; Rom. 12:1ff.). God is the God of the living, and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the nature of Covenant relations.

The Church & Its Sacramental Life

The nature and life of the Church as *kenotic* and *ek-static* community, contingent upon the vicarious humanity of the incarnate Word–Son, Jesus Christ.

PART II THE CHURCH'S SACRAMENTAL LIFE

§3. The Sacramental Life of the Church

- 3.1 Jesus Christ as Sacrament
- 3.2 Baptism and the gift of Life
- 3.3 The Lord's Supper and the sustaining of Life

§4. The Communion of the Spirit

- 4.1 Union with Christ—*the Living One*
- 4.2 Communion of the Spirit—*the Lord, the Giver of Life*

§5. The Life of God as the Life of the Church

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STUDY THIRTEEN

The Church, Christ & the World

(by Martin Bleby)



WYATT EARP AND ABRAHAM

Wyatt Earp, the famous gunslinging lawman of America's wild west (died 1929), just wanted to settle down with his family. But he lived in an evil, lawless world, and he had a heart to take it in hand, 'injudicious' as his full-frontal approach may have been. His settled family existence was denied him.

If Abraham ever thought that he could just move away and build up his own little family unit, he would have been mistaken. From the beginning the destiny of his family was tied up with that of all the nations (Gen. 12:3). A sharp reminder of that occurred in Genesis 14, when Abraham had to do a bit of international 'law-making' himself. For his allegiance was to 'YHWH God Most High', 'maker of heaven and earth', the God of the likes of Melchizedek, Lord of all the nations. And Abraham never knew what it was like to settle down (see Heb. 11:8–16).

IN THE WORLD, NOT OF IT—BUT IN IT, NONETHELESS

And can we settle down into our little church families? For we, too, are of the family of Abraham. 'In the world, but not of it', was how Jesus described us (John 17:14–19, followed significantly by 20–26: our mission in the world). But in it, nonetheless. Where else could we be? Where else would we want to be, if that is where He is too? Matthew 28:16–20: 'I am with you always', means in all of heaven and earth, in this age (Latin, *saeculum*). Not to comfort us and keep us safe from this big, bad world (is that how we usually take it?) but to *take us out into it*. How else will God's salvation 'reach to the end of the earth' (Isa. 49:6)? So we are with Him as 'a light to the nations' (see Matt. 5:14–16).

AMONG WHOM YOU SHINE AS LIGHTS IN THE WORLD

What do we carry into the world, and how do we conduct ourselves in it? Philippians 2:14–16: ‘holding fast the word of life’. Note that Paul is writing these words in an out-in-the-world context—not necessarily in a churchy context. This is, in fact, where we find all the churches in the New Testament. I Corinthians 5:9–13: unthinkable that believers should ‘go out of the world’. Yet at the same time ‘to keep oneself unstained from the world’ (James 1:27). Is this an unbearable tension? Not if we are sure enough of the atoning sacrifice that alone brings the forgiveness of sins. Otherwise we are bound either to opt out completely, or to condone and endorse whatever the world serves up, because we haven’t the heart to say it is wrong. We carry in our bodies ‘the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God’ (II Cor. 4:4). This means we do not always have an easy time (see John 15:20; I Cor. 4:9–13; II Tim. 3:12–15). But every crack and fracture we sustain simply enables the light to shine out more clearly (see II Cor. 4:7–11). So we are given good advice about living in the world: for example, I Peter 2:9–17, 4:1–5, and I Thessalonians 4:1–8. We are to be ‘wise as serpents and innocent as doves’ (Matt. 10:16): we are to be under no illusions as to what is out there (II Pet. 2:9–22; Jude 8–23).

SO OUR CHURCHES ARE NOT TO BECOME CULTURAL GHETTOS

An extreme example: ‘What if all Nepalis become Christian?’, an article by Dr R. B. Rokaya of the Sagarmatha Fellowship. But to what extent are our churches cultural enclaves that actually protect and insulate us from the world? Like the woman who left St Andrew’s Church ‘to go and find a tin shed somewhere’. Or the bishop in Queensland who left his job to go and work with people up and down the railway line. The love of our Father knows no walls or boundaries: Matthew 5:43–48. So Galatians 6:10: we have a special responsibility for the household of God; but it is Abraham’s family—there for the world.

STUDY FOURTEEN

The Church: The Gifts of Ministry & Eldership

by Deane Meatheringham



INTRODUCTION

Now there are varieties [distributions] of gifts [*charismata*], but the same Spirit; there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities [operations or workings], but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone (I Cor. 12:4-6).

In this seemingly unconscious trinitarian statement we are told that the church has been given a diversity of ministries as gifts which find their source and expression in communion with the Godhead. No ministry is independent of the whole. As the Son never does anything apart from the Father and the communion of the Spirit, so it is within the multifaceted ministry of the church.

The gifts of ministry and eldership are an integrated whole. It is not that the Pastor has a Parish Council which complies with his directives or has a diaconate which dictates to the Pastor. We shall see that within the distribution of gifts given to the church, there is an order which co-ordinates the worship and mission of the church. This order of ministry is not based on the management pragmatism of the current culture but upon the nature of the church which has its ordering of life in the new humanity of Christ Jesus. A deficient view of the nature of the church will lead to a malfunction in the ordering of the church's ministry. For example, where the church is not understood as the body of Christ which participates in his humanity, then the church is likely to substitute its humanity for the humanity of Christ. A separated order of clergy may then arise to perform sacerdotal duties and administer the grace of God. In this environment the new priesthood of pastors may view themselves as the extensions of Christ's incarnation and assume a role of offering sacrifice. Or the congregation may see itself as a divine form of democratic government which hires pastors to fulfil its requirements.

THE GIFT OF MINISTRY FOR ISRAEL

Israel was redeemed by Yahweh to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod. 19:5–6; Lev. 20:26; Deut. 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19; 28:9). The priesthood of Israel functioned only within the covenant of God and in response to the Word which God had imparted to them. The whole gift of the worship and service was initiated by God and given to his people in order that they could live in relation with him. God provided sacrifice (Lev. 17:11), and the whole liturgical practice is given to be the divinely appointed ordering of response to God's grace (Exod. 25:22; Num. 7:89). Within the tabernacle there was the deposit of the Word given to Israel so that the sacrifice and worship were in accord with the ordinance of God.

Within the priestly nation of Israel there was the divinely appointed order of priests. Their ministry was God's gift to his people (Num. 18:7). Priests were to teach the Word of God as they lived in the land with God's people and as they served in the Tabernacle. The teaching of the priests had to do with instructions for the offering of worship.

As there were attempts to fashion Israel's worship to conform with the nature gods and feminine deities, the prophets withstood the attempt to make the worship and the priesthood independent of the Word of God.

Israel was God's firstborn son (Exod. 4:22f.). This means that Israel occupied the place as head of the house amongst the nations of the world. The firstborn amongst the people of God were redeemed back and their place taken by the tribe of Levi (Num. 3:12f.; etc.). One tribe was set apart within the priestly nation for priestly functions, instead of the firstborn.

The consecration of priests is important for our study as it leads into our understanding of order within the royal priesthood of the church. The whole congregation gathered at the Tabernacle as Aaron and his sons stood before those who were to be ordained. The ordinands were solemnly washed and dressed in priestly clothes. They were sprinkled with anointing oil. Peace offerings were made and the congregation took part in the sacred meal.

The Levites were cleansed by the sprinkling of the water of purification, a sin offering was made, and the people of Israel laid their hands on them. Then Aaron offered the Levites as an oblation before the Lord and on behalf of the people, in order that they would serve God (Lev. 8).

Besides these things, the consecrated priests received the filling of the hands. (Exod. 28:41; 29:29; Lev 8:33). This rite seems to mean that the priest has the priesthood committed to him and he receives the gift of being priest amongst God's people.

The service of the prophets was to maintain God's worshiping people and the priesthood in the self-revelation of God's Word. They were to point the people beyond the preparatory nature of the ordinances given to Israel, to their fulfilment in the new world (Exod. 4:15f.; 7:1; I Sam. 10:5ff.; 19:18ff.; Amos 3:7; Jer. 31:31ff.). The prophets were called by God and their anointing or empowering was by the Holy Spirit (Ps. 105:15; Isa. 61:1ff.).

The King, in Israel, was also anointed as a man among the people. He was to be subject to Yahweh and dependent upon him (Ps. 2; 89:20; I Sam. 9:27 – 10:1; 16:12f.; I Kings 1:32–40). The king represented the people. He was to write for himself a copy of the law of God in order to know it, to keep it, and to govern God's people accordingly. The king was to be shepherd to the people of God.

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Summary: Israel was consecrated by God to be a priest people within whom were those who were appointed to fulfil priestly duties. Others were called to the prophetic service of the Word, and others to govern Israel. All service was to be performed as members of the covenant people. They were to serve Yahweh in their flesh, in accord with the Word which he had given to them. But this worship looked forward to the day when the Word of the Lord will be enacted as truth in the hearts and lives of God's people.

GOD'S MINISTRY GIFT IS JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ is the enfleshed gift of God himself. In Christ, the Word and the flesh come together in obedience, which is the truth in action. Christ is the incarnate Son, the true servant, who is priest, prophet and king:

The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

My kingdom is not of this world.

Consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, was faithful to the one who appointed him.

Jesus is anointed for his Messianic ministry at his baptism. As the anointed Son of the Father he gathers into one the threefold consecration for the ministry of prophet, priest and king (Luke 4:18; Acts 4:26; 10:38; Heb. 1:9). Christ recapitulates the whole order of Israel in his flesh as he makes intercession for the sins of the people and offers himself in the place of the people as the Lamb of God. The victim is the priest; the judge is the intercessor. His sacrifice is a once-for-all cleansing of all sin for ever; fulfilling every violation of the law and leading his people into the holy presence of God. Through this man we are made sons, to be a kingdom of priests unto our God.

In Christ we are taken into the new order of the new covenant and, as members of his flesh and blood. As a royal priesthood, we are able to offer our cleansed bodies in service as we simultaneously offer spiritual sacrifices to God. In all this Christ remains the only high priest and head of the church. The singular ministry of priest, only applies to Christ himself while the corporate form belongs to the whole church. As our high priest, Christ continues to intercede for his people, he is the appointed leader of the worship, and all of the ministries given to every member of Christ derive from him. Our ministry comes from our being baptised into Christ's baptism, it comes from the resurrection of our fallen humanity in him and is energised by the Spirit, whom the glorified Son receives from the Father and pours out on the new Israel.

THE GIFTS OF MINISTRY ARE ALL CONTAINED IN THE GIFT OF CHRIST

The *charisma* of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus. Christ is the gift (Rom. 6:23; cf. 3:24). The incarnate Son has joined himself to our sin-ridden flesh and blood, so that through his death and resurrection we might be participants in his new humanity. In this marvellous exchange of grace, all the humanity of Christ is given to us. By baptism we are clothed with Christ. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit we are baptised into the one body of Christ. The *charismata* are all contained in the *charisma* of God. We do not receive different graces as such, but we all receive the one grace of God in Jesus Christ, and from him the Church receives a distribution of gifts which are apportioned by the Spirit to the members of Christ.

Ephesians 4:7 says: '*But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift*'. The gift of ministry is given by the ascended Head to the body, where all the members of the body are joined and ordered. Christ's total gifts are distributed throughout the body. The measuring out of gifts means that Christ distributes them to whom he will. '*The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers . . .*'

It should be seen that, as Christ is the true prophet, priest and king, then all of these ministries are distributed within the body, and through the Spirit are his operations. The ministry of the church is not another ministry different from the ministry of Christ. Rather, the church participates in the ministry of Christ as a corporate, priestly body. The new life, the priesthood, belongs to each as it belongs to all.

THE ORDERING OF CHRIST'S MINISTRY

There are a number of aspects to this ordering of the ministry:

First, the ordering is based upon the new humanity of Christ. The relation between the Head of the body and the members of the body, governs the distribution and the function of the ministries within the body. Thus the ministry of the body is not to be understood as the function of the people or of their delegates. The ministry of the church is not democratically grounded, so that those elected represent them before God. Christ himself is the new order of God for his creation. God himself is the one who administers his own household (Eph. 1:10; 3:9). God does this through the incarnation of his own Son in whom he re-orders his creation (Col. 1:15–20). The ordering of ministry has to do with our service in the obedient humanity of Christ.

Second, the ordering of ministry will be in accord with the substance of Christ's gospel and our obedience to his Headship. When Paul says: '*. . . all things should be done decently and in order* (I Cor. 14:40; cf. 14:26, 32; 12:1–7, 27–31; 15:23), 'decently', or 'becomingly' means 'good pattern', and refers not to manner but to the matter of ministry, and it is this which is to be arranged in good order.

The ordering in I Corinthians 12 – 14 was set out by Paul to deal with a factionalism in the way ministry was carried out at the Lord's Table. The gnostic tendencies of the Corinthian church produced a wrong view of the Resurrection.

The Church: The Gifts of Ministry & Eldership

They removed Christ from the historical flesh and blood of the man, Jesus, making him a spiritual being.¹ Such a view may not only have been a contributing factor in the immorality which was in the church, but also it gave a distortion in the use of the gifts, and expressed itself in the discord at the Lord's Supper.

To cut the link between the Church and the historical particularity of the Incarnation is to transubstantiate the Church into some docetic and timeless *corpus mysticum*, and to sever the Church from any saving act of God in our actual flesh and blood historical existence.²

Paul, then, is showing the ordering of ministry in the worship as it is connected with the proclamation of the gospel at the Lord's Supper.

Third, the purpose of co-ordinating the ministries in eucharistic worship is to witness to Christ as the Saviour and Leader of the Church. This is done by making it plain that, in the fellowship of God's people, the risen, present Jesus Christ is serving his people in their midst, particularly as he serves them with his Word and his body and blood. This gives the ministry of the church an eschatological character (I Cor. 11:26; 16:22). Apart from this perspective the ministry will be ineffectual, for its order will not survive death.

Fourth, in the arrangement of ministries we are given an ascending order. First apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors/teachers and then *in solidum* with these, the multifaceted services for the edifying the church, which is not just a heap of materials, but a building; not just an amorphous mass of believers, but a body (I Cor. 12:27–30; Eph. 4:7–16; Rom. 12:1–8; I Pet. 4:7–11).

Christ is the Apostle sent from God. Out of the disciples he chose twelve apostles whose essential requirement was, to have seen the risen Lord. Christ taught them and breathed on them the Holy Spirit. The apostles represent Christ and bring no new revelation to the world from themselves, but only that which Christ had put in them. They could unfold to the world the mind of the risen, incarnate Christ.

The apostolic ministry is the link between the OT prophets and the church. The prophets authenticate the apostolic message of Christ. To the apostles belong the once-for-all events of the founding of the church as the new covenant through the body and blood of Christ. They are the authoritative witnesses of the new covenant.

Fifth, the Word of the apostles and prophets is the foundation of the church, with Christ Jesus himself being the integrating cornerstone. Evangelists and pastors are servants of this apostolic Word, so that the health and wellbeing of the people of God is guaranteed through those gifts which make known God's Name.

THE CORPORATE ELDERSHIP

Pastors feed and protect the flock of God as the elders and bishops appointed by Christ, the Head of his body. Bishops or overseers are leaders or rulers of the church.

¹ Ernst Kasemann, *Jesus Means Freedom*, trans. Frank Clarke (Fortress Pr., Philadelphia, 1977), pp. 61ff.

² T. F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood* (T. & T. Clark, 1993), p. 69.

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The first mention of elders is at the church in Jerusalem when Paul and Barnabas placed a collection in their hands (Acts 11:30). It seems from this that, as there is no mention of the apostles in this account, the presbyters directed the affairs of the church. This is the case with the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), and later when Paul arrives in Jerusalem for the last time (Acts 21:18), although the apostle Peter calls himself a fellow-elder in I Peter 5:1.

Presbyters are in the churches founded by Paul (Acts 14:23) and notably at Ephesus (Acts 20:17). It is at Ephesus that the presbyters are also called bishops (Acts 20:28), and these are to be pastors or shepherds of the church. The church at Philippi, also founded by Paul, has bishops (Phil. 1:1). The ministry of elders is not seen as successors of the apostles, but their ministry in preaching and teaching is to order the church by the apostolic gospel of Jesus Christ, so that the congregation will be served and directed by no other man than Christ the head.

Elders are ordained or consecrated within the whole membership of Christ's body and within the whole ministry of the body. The church has this through its participation in the vicarious humanity of Christ. The ordination of elders was through the laying on of hands and prayer (Acts 14:23; II Cor. 8:19; I Tim. 4:14, 5:22; II Tim. 1:6). This is the only ceremony which is taken over from the OT for the ordination of its ministers. The consecration is grounded upon the once-for-all consecration of the church and its apostles in Christ, and in this way takes its place within it. If we try to put together the few instances recorded of ordination, we will see some similarity with the consecration of priests within the priestly people of Israel, and the appointment of the seventy elders in Numbers 11:16ff. For Timothy, the act of laying on hands was carried out by Paul and the corporate eldership acting together. Timothy was put in charge of churches and commanded to appoint elders in them. Timothy is told not to do this quickly, that it should only be after careful preparation, and it indicates that he would be the chief minister in the conduct of ordination.

The ordination with prayer would be the recognition of, and calling on, the special *charisma* given through the Spirit, so that the ordinands hands are filled for the service for which he is commissioned.

What needs emphasising is that the ministry of the elders is a corporate ministry which the elders have *in solidum* with the whole church and its diversity of ministries.

While still under this heading, we should consider the ministry of deacons. The ministry of deacons (I Tim. 3:8–13) may be complementary to that of elders. The whole church is in the ministry of serving as sons and brethren of the one who is the servant of all. But there is a distinctional function between that of deacon and elder.

*The charisma of the presbyter is to minister the Word and Sacraments and to shepherd the flock. The charisma of the deacon is to prompt and shape the response of the congregation in life and worship, and so to assist the ministry in the application of the Word and in the dispensation of the mysteries.*³

This should integrate the priesthood of the whole body as it is lead by its great High Priest. (The passage in Acts 6 shows the apostles being assisted by the seven. They may be the forerunners of deacons, but it would not be correct to read an order of deacons into this passage. However, the pattern of serving is emphasised).

³ T. F. Torrance, *ibid*, p. 102.

CONCLUSION: THE CHARISMATIC DYNAMIC

The charismatic dynamic is realised as the whole, unified distribution of gifts, services and workings acts in the order which it has in the crucified Christ. The elders cannot serve apart from the gifts of healing, prophecies, tongues, administrations and so on, of the whole body. And the body with its gifts is subordinated to the Word of God and the sacramental enfleshment of that Word. Each gift is dependent upon the other and each can only function properly in dependency upon the diversity of gifts.

The whole ministry can only open up and develop powerfully through the life of the Holy Spirit. Until the people of God realise all that they have through the Spirit, they may talk of orders in the ministry and try to connect themselves with the ministry of Jesus, but it will be seriously deficient. Charismatic ministry can only arise through the *charisma* of the Holy Spirit who is both the giver and the gift of ministry.

The dynamic of charismatic ministry is the service of love. This is the new order that breaks into the schemata of the present age. The orders of ministry in this present age are in fact like a temporary scaffold for the building up of the body. Once it is built, the scaffold is no longer required. Our relationship with the Head of the church is love. A membership which coheres in love operates in love. The orders of this age will pass away. Love is eternal. The communion of the Spirit is our participation in the humanity of Christ who is the love of God poured out for our salvation. Love, then, is the dynamic of ministry. It is love which binds everything together in perfect harmony (I Cor. 13:1–13; Col. 3:14).

STUDY SIXTEEN

The Israel of God & the Holy *Telos*

(by Geoffrey Bingham)



INTRODUCTION: 'THE ISRAEL OF GOD'

Paul's statement 'the Israel of God' needs to be seen in its immediate, effective context, namely Galatians 6:11–17:

See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that would compel you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God. Henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

It is obvious that Paul is drawing his Epistle to that conclusion whereby he is insisting—against the Judaizers—that circumcision is of no consequence, any more than is uncircumcision. The Judaizers are pressing the Galatian church members who had once been Gentiles to perfect their salvation by taking circumcision and Paul is saying that it is useless. His great argument is that all persons who are persons of faith—whether culturally born into either the Jewish or Gentile situation—are true children of Abraham, and so circumcision is quite beside the point. It is a nothing. Only being a new creation is anything. Persons are to be judged by this *kanon* (canon, rule); that is, whether they are new creations, or not.

It would appear at first sight that those who walk by this rule are 'the Israel of God'. This would be especially true if the translations which have 'even on the Israel of God' were to be followed. This last phrase would be epexegetic of 'all who walk by this rule', in which case the matter would be clear, Paul is using 'the Israel of God' for the church. However, the *NRSV* uses 'and upon the Israel of God', thus distinguishing 'those who will follow this rule' and 'the Israel of God'.

It seems there are various choices here. Some see it as referring to nonjudaizing Jewish Christians of Galatia (for example, G. Schrenk and D. W. B. Robinson), whilst others see it as an eschatological reference much as the ‘all Israel’ of Romans 11:26–27 when—according to a certain exegesis—it means the totality of Jews who will be saved ‘when the deliverer shall come from Zion’. However, not all agree that the Romans passage is referring to ‘the totality of Jews who will be saved’, but rather to all Jew and Gentiles who have come by the way of Christ’s atonement for sins.¹ N. T. Wright speaks of ‘ethnic Israel’ meaning ‘Israel after the flesh’, the Israel which has not acceded to Christ, and denies that in Romans 11:26–27 all ‘ethnic Israel’ will be saved.² In fact, it is only when the Gentiles have come in—during the period of ethnic Israel’s hardening—that ‘all Israel will be saved’. That is, when it comes to the time that the *elect* Gentiles have come in by faith in Christ, then will Israel be complete in that all its elect members have been saved.

I think it is fair to say that if we are caught up in Galatians 6:16 and do not see verse 16 simply as the conclusion of the whole argument of Paul which commences at 2:11, then we will miss the point of ‘the Israel of God’. ‘The Israel of God’ is the church, those who truly walk according to the *kanon*, and the *kanon* consists in being free from the Judaizers’ injunction to get circumcised. Behind their injunction is a refusal to glory in the Cross, and an insistence on a theology of glory apart from the Cross. That is, they refuse justification by faith—the thrust of Galatians 2:19–21—so that, according to Paul’s argument, all persons of faith are children of Abraham, and as such, justified and members of Christ’s Body, the Church.

I believe then, even against contrary exegesis, that we should understand the Church as ‘the Israel of God’. Here, too, we should understand the ‘all Israel’ of Romans 11:25–26 to be constituted of both Jews and Gentiles, in which case it is, again, the Church.

The Church Becoming ‘the Israel of God’

We still have to ask what does Paul mean by ‘Israel’ and what does he mean by ‘the Church’? The answer must lie along the lines that at Pentecost ‘all who believed’ (Acts 2:44) and who were ‘all’ Jews, were designated first as ‘the number’ (2:47), later ‘their friends’ (that is, of the apostles, 4:23), ‘the company of those who believed’ (4:32), ‘the whole church’ (5:11), ‘the number of the disciples’ (6:1), ‘the church’ (8:1) after which the company of Christ is called ‘the church’. Up to chapter 8, the Church is composed only of Jews. In Acts 9:31 we read of ‘the church throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria’, which means the assemblies were thought of as one church and Samaritans were in that church—a thing unthinkable for a Jewish synagogue. Whilst chapters 10 and 11 introduce the conversion of the Gentiles at Caesarea, chapter 11 onwards is concerned with the churches in which are Gentiles, and the official acceptance of the Gentiles within the churches is made clear in chapter 15. In fact, James the Elder quotes Amos 9:11–12 as a vindication for the entrance of the Gentiles into the body of the believers. It seems that those at Jerusalem, where the apostles and elders were the leaders of what we might call a council or conference,

¹ See N. T. Wright’s *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Fortress, 1993), pp. 249–250.

² It would seem there are two Israels; one ethnic, the other spiritual in the sense of Romans 2:25 – 3:2. There cannot be two Israels, as I make the point that there has only ever been one Israel. There are, however, in ‘ethnic’ Israel those who refuse Christ, and in this sense they may still be called Israel though they are not, spiritually and covenant-wise, of Israel, ‘the Israel of God’.

The Israel of God & the Holy *Telos*

concluded that the inclusion of the Gentiles was a permissible thing. The Pharisaic ‘party’ wanted to make the converts adhere to rules for admission of proselytes into Judaism, but their proposal was defeated. In other words, the Church was now composed of Jews and Gentiles, all of whom had come into it on the basis of belief in Jesus Christ, repentance, remission of sins and the act of baptism.

The ‘All Israel’ of Romans 11:25–27

We set the text before ourselves so as to look at it clearly:

Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved; as it is written,

‘The Deliverer will come from Zion,
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob’;
‘and this will be my covenant with them
when I take away their sins.’

There is a number of interpretations of this passage. The most common is that Paul is saying God will harden part of ethnic Israel until the full number of the Gentiles come in, so that when that has finished happening *then* all Israel will be saved by some act of Christ, as Deliverer coming from Zion. He will banish ungodliness from Israel and fulfil the new covenant promised by Jeremiah.

He first points to the matter of the hardening of a part of Israel and the Gentiles coming in fully as being a ‘mystery’. We recognise a mystery is something which is not obvious when read, but is an open secret to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. It is obvious that whilst the hardening of part of Israel is proceeding, so too is the gospel spreading across the earth in that period until all Gentiles who will respond have come into the Church. The *RSV*, *NRSV* and *NIV*³ have for *houtos* the translation ‘so’ whilst others have ‘then’, but Wright says:

During this period of time, the Gentiles are to come in to the people of God: and *that is how* God is saving ‘all Israel’. Despite repeated assertions to the contrary, the meaning of [*houtos*] is not ‘then’ but ‘thus’, ‘in this manner’. Paul’s meaning is not a temporal sequence—first the Gentiles, *then* the Jews. Rather, it is the interpretation of a particular process *as* the salvation of ‘all Israel’. And in this context ‘all Israel’ cannot possibly mean ‘all Jews’. It is impermissible to argue that ‘Israel’ cannot change its referent within the space of two verses, so that ‘Israel’ in v.25 must mean the same as ‘Israel’ in v.26: Paul actually began the whole section (9.6) with just such a programmatic distinction of two ‘Israels’, and throughout the letter (e.g. 2.25–9) as well as elsewhere (e.g. Philippians 3.2–11) he has systematically transferred the privileges and attributes of ‘Israel’ to the Messiah and his people.⁴

It is true that Paul constantly emphasises that only those who are true Israelites can properly call themselves Israelites. They are not really of Israel. It would be impossible to say that Gentiles who have become Christians and thus are members of the Church are not within ‘the Israel of God’.

Our paper, then, shall proceed now on the basis that the Church is the Israel of God, the ‘Israel of God’ is the Church.

³ The first *NEB* translation had: ‘when that has happened, the whole of Israel will be saved’, and the *Jerusalem Bible*—first translation—had: ‘then after this the rest of Israel will be saved as well’. Both these translation seem to use *houtos* as ‘then’. Wright, *op. cit.*, pp. 249–250.

⁴ Wright, *op. cit.*, pp. 249–50.

ONLY ONE ISRAEL

We recognise that there is an ethnic Israel, and has been since the time of Jacob, and more obviously so since the Israelites were taken out of Egypt and implanted in Canaan. If our reasoning is authentic, then the Israel of God is the continuum of Israel, especially as it was the holy remnant, that is, faithful Israel. In that sense from Jacob to now there has been the Israel of God, and this will always be so until the end, and even in eternity, in the Holy City, the Paradise of God.

We might well ask whether there was an 'Israel of God' before even the age of Abraham. The answer must be, 'Yes'. Just as now the name Israel (Jacob) does not really denote the Church since Christ's name is linked with that, so, too, we find the Church generally being called 'the Church of God'. This is really a term similar in meaning to 'the people of God', although that term, as such, is not found in the Scriptures as an exact designation. It certainly is implied numerous times. In Hebrews 11:4, Abel is seen to be the first person of faith mentioned in a list of other faithful persons, and in I John 3:10–11, Abel is also seen to be the first nominated person of love, that is, of the whole, historical family of love. Jesus names Abel as the first prophet. Certainly there have always been the people of God. To read backwards from the time of Jacob, the term 'Israel' is obviously not literally possible, but to read backwards from Jacob, a 'people of God' is not anachronistic, any more than to read forwards from Pentecost the people of God as 'Israel', would be invalid. The prophets in Israel had long read 'Israel', 'Mount Sion', 'Jerusalem', 'the city of God', 'the mountain', 'the river' and other such terms into the future, not simply as literal ethnic and geographical features, but as powerful symbols of the people of God and the place of their life and worship. In the prophets the realities become eschatological symbols.

CHRIST, THE CHURCH AND THE PLAN OF GOD

Jesus Christ as the Alpha & the Omega, the Beginning & the End

Christ as 'the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end' (Rev. 22:13), and as the one who is 'the same yesterday and today and for ever' (Heb. 13:8), must mean that in every way he is connected with all things from the beginning of creation to the end of it, that is *to*, and *in*, the new creation. He was and is certainly the Word through whom all things were created. He is the one in whom, and by whom, all things will be united (unified), filled, reconciled and harmonised.⁵ There cannot have been a time when he was not occupied in the work of God's plan and purpose. If Christ is not explicitly mentioned and coupled with the plan in the Old Testament, the New Testament certainly testifies to his creating all things, his continuous upholding of the creation by his word of power, and of holding all things together.⁶ There are references to his work in Israel,⁷ and he told his disciples that the Law, the Psalms and the prophets all testified to him. Revelation 19:10 states that 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy', and Paul says that 'all the promises of

⁵ Ephesians 1:9–10; 1:23 – 4:10; Colossians 1:19–22; 3:14; cf. Rom. 8:18–25; Revelation 21:5; cf. II Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 5:6; 6:14–15.

⁶ Hebrews 1:1–3; John 1:1–4; Colossians 1:15–17; I Corinthians 8:5–6; cf. John 13:35; 5:19–29; 8:56–58; 10:30, 38; 17:1–5, 20–26; Hebrews 7:24–25; 9:28; 10:12; Revelation 1:5, 17–18; 5:12–13; 11:15; 17:14; 21:22–23; 22:1, 13.

⁷ See I Corinthians 10:1ff. and Isaiah 6:10 with John 12:40–41.

God find their Yes in him'. All of this surely means that the one we know as Jesus Christ was God prior to his incarnation, God and Man—as one—during the days of his flesh, and following his ascension is still Man—the Second and Final Adam. In all he has been, and continues to be, God's Mediator in creation, redemption and the process of the ultimate unification, glorification, sanctification and perfection of Man in and with all creation. It is in the New Testament that the man Jesus is designated as Prophet, Priest and King, as Son of God, Son of Man, as Lord, as Messiah, as Davidic King, as the Servant of God, as the Mediator of the New Covenant, and it is in the New Testament that Old Testament Scriptures are quoted in regard to his Person and Work.

Jesus and the Mystery of God's Will

Ephesians 1:9–10 gives us Christ as the key to 'the mystery of God's will':

For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

The 'we' and 'you' in verses 11–14 following, are really the Church with its Jewish and Gentile origins mentioned. This body of previous Jews and Gentiles is to be and to live 'to the praise of his [God's] glory'. There can be no doubt that this will happen because it is God 'who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will', a powerful statement. 'The counsel of his will' is similar to Ephesians 1:5 where God has made us His sons 'according to the purpose of his will'. The conjunction 'for' of verse 9 is linking Christ's unification of all things with the Church being 'to the praise of his [God's] glory'.

If we make the unification the mystery of God's will, and if we read Ephesians 2:11–22 with this in mind, then we see Christ's death as the unification of Jew and Gentile. They are now *one* before the Father,⁸ having access together, to Him. Thus, in Ephesians 3:1–11 we see 'the mystery of Christ' (v. 4) is 'how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel'. The unification of Jews and Gentiles is the 'mystery of his will' as it is 'the mystery of Christ'.

What is most significant is that Paul's mandated ministry is:

to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. This was according to *the eternal purpose* which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:9–11).

This surely means that Paul's apostolic commission was to make men and women to see 'the plan of the mystery'—the mystery of unification. What is most powerful is 'that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places'. In other words, *these great celestial powers cannot know God's will apart from the Church: they can only know it by the Church.*

We are now faced with the fact that 'the mystery of Christ'—the Unifier—is itself 'the mystery of God', and *the Church is one with Christ* in working out 'the plan of the

⁸ It was, I believe, Adolf Harnack who called 'the one new man' of Ephesians 2:15 'the third race', meaning there are Jews and Gentiles and now a third race which is neither Jew nor Gentile.

mystery’ or ‘the mystery of his [God’s] will’.⁹ This is borne out by the fact that Christ has given his fullness to the Church which is his body, so that it is now ‘the fulness of him who fills all in all’ (1:23).

CHRIST & THE FULL RANGE & SCOPE OF THE ‘PLAN OF THE MYSTERY’

Now that we see Christ is not a spiritual ‘Lone Ranger’ in history, and that he has always had that body of people from Abel to the End,¹⁰ who are the people of God, the people of faith and the people of love, then we see that Christ is the New, the Second and the Final Adam. If he is this life-giving Adam, then all his people are in him—‘in Christ’—just as all born human are designated as in the death dealing Adam. Those who are in Christ the last Adam, are no longer in the first Adam: ‘For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive’. Nevertheless we will have to see that Christ became *as* the first Adam and so bore the sins and disobedience of all the Adamic body of humanity. ‘Born of woman, born under the law’, he is in Adam, but he is stronger than Adam. Whereas Adam disobeyed and brought sin into the world and death to all humanity, Christ—as a man—obeyed completely—even unto the death of the Cross—and so brought obedience and life to all humanity. We have to see Christ as one with all humanity from the beginning and in that sense to be the protological Man, as he is one with all humanity through being the Second and Final Adam, and as such is the eschatological Man. Our point is quite complex and we will have to unpack it as we go: Christ must be both protological and eschatological Man. He must be *as* the First Adam and yet *be* the Last Adam.

In this Study we do not have the time and space to fill out our thesis which is all that happened in Eden and beyond. The thesis¹¹ is this, that the seventh day rest of God, the seventh day being sanctified, the rest of God was/is available to all humanity. It was to be the basis of Edenic life, the first Adam and the first Eve to be one flesh, having been given their vocation in life in the creational mandate of Genesis 1:28, *et al.* They were to be fruitful, fill up the earth and have dominion over it. This would mean bringing all the earth into the Edenic blessing in the context of the Sabbath rest. Eden was especially made for the couple, Adam being made outside it and then being placed in it, and naming the animals as part of that mandate of lordship over creation. Eve was then created from him to be his helpmeet and the two became one flesh, especially for the fulfilling of the commission to bring blessing and order to all the earth. This Edenic blessing was lost through acceding to the so-called wisdom of the serpent who opposed the Creator’s word to them, and they were ejected from the garden. Even so, an evangel was pronounced to them in the form of Genesis 3:15.

Adam led a humanity which, though it had good beginnings—as in Abel and Seth—was unable to bring Edenic blessing to the world, but slid downhill in a dreadful depravity which brought judgment in the form of the Flood. The righteous man Noah and his family did not prove to be a true Edenic family.

⁹ In our Study, we hope to develop the thought that as Christ is the true Adam of God, so the Church is the true Eve of God, the helpmeet of her Adam. This is by contrast to the disobedience of the first Adam and Eve.

¹⁰ At the End the nations pour into the Holy City. The picture of Revelation 7:9–14 is of a multitude which cannot be numbered out of all tribes, peoples and nations.

¹¹ Over the years I have gathered helpful materials from the following writers and their books: William Dumbrell, Graeme Goldsworthy, Mark Strom, and N. T. Wright. These authors and writers that they quote have helped to formulate what one might call Eden-theology, or better still, Adam theology. They incorporate the theology of the Kingdom of God, of covenant, and of the profound mystery of marriage—of Christ and his Bride of which Genesis 2:24 is protological. Unless the early chapters are protological of the ultimate Adam and Eve, Eden, and the successful mandate for the new heavens and the new earth, then Scripture does not appear to be a unity and a true whole. If Christ is present in all this theology, then Adam—and Eve—theology is without both point and substance.

The Israel of God & the Holy *Telos*

The reversion to violence and corruption was about to be fulfilled and would have, but for God's revelation of Himself to Abraham and Sarah and His revelation to them of a covenant for the whole world. These two were virtually as Adam and Eve to the nations, and in particular to the dynasty they were forming which we ultimately call 'Israel'. Yet their true dynasty was intended to embrace the whole world. Israel was supposed to be in a new Eden in Canaan, but matters did not resolve themselves this way and the prophets saw the true Edenic state would only come with and through Messiah. Likewise through him would come the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God, and the universal Covenant, both being knit together as the one work of God, and of His Christ. Christ is Israel: Christ is the Second Adam. The people he brings to the *telos* are God's true Israel. Christ *is* them and they *are* his Body, Bride, Vine, Flock—and so on.

Christ was to fulfil 'the plan of the mystery' in heading up all things. This he did at the Cross. He made into one new humanity the Jew and the Gentile. Isaiah 40 – 66 prophesies a Suffering Servant who is at once all Israel, at once the holy remnant, and at once the Single Servant, whose work is redemptive, leading to a renewed Israel, and in fact to a world which is redeemed, even to a new heaven and a new earth. Christ is all of these things in his identity as the true Adam. He comes as the Messiah who was predicted in many aspects by the prophets, and is pronounced to be the King of Psalm 2 and the King–Priest—after the order of Melchizedek—of Psalm 110. He becomes *as* the whole of Adamic humanity on the Cross, suffers in propitiatory mode the wrath of God on all sin.¹² Through his death and resurrection he releases Mankind from its Adamic bondage, liberating all humanity into himself as its Saviour and Lord, and as the Head of his Body which is the Church. He was Israel as the Suffering Servant and still is Israel, but then the Church is Israel. This is 'the Israel of God' which is bound for the climactic Eden of the *telos*, and all the other events contained within that *telos*.

THE NATURE OF THE HOLY *TELOS*

We have pointed out that in the prophets all the eschatological elements and events are cast in the language of Israel, and that this way of referring to the end-time and the end-things is carried on in the New Testament. We do not have time here to cover this claim in detail. Yet, to give an example, Psalm 65:9–13 is speaking of Israel, yet is describing Canaan as an Eden. Indeed in many passages Israel's restoration is likened to an Edenic state.¹³ The *motif* of the river is also powerfully developed.¹⁴ Chapters 21 and 22 of Revelation have numerous references back to the Old Testament such as those to the new heaven and the new earth; to Mount Zion the true Jerusalem covering, as it were, the whole earth; to a situation of universal peace; and to a situation where there will be no more pain, no more tears, no more sickness and no more death. Of course the New Testament accords this ultimate peace, reconciliation and unification of all things to the Person and Work of Christ, as also the work of the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Israel of God is Christ's Bride, the Eve to his Adam, the Helpmeet to his being Prophet, Priest and King.

There are also references in the New Testament towards this holy *telos*—this climax of the plan of God, the unveiling of its mystery. The Book of the Revelation—

¹² In II Corinthians 5:14 Paul says 'We thus judge that if one died for all, then were all dead'. It can be shown that all mankind was taken up into the Cross when he died for all, and bore the sins of all in his body on the tree. The true Adam took into himself the whole body of sin (Rom. 6:6) as the world was crucified. In this sense Christ became as the old Adam.

¹³ See Ezekiel 36:35; Joel 2:3; Isaiah 51:3; Zechariah 14:8.

¹⁴ See Jeremiah 2:13; Psalm 65:9–13; Psalm 46:45; Ezekiel 47:1–12. The New Testament equivalents are John 4:13; 6:35; 7:37–39; Revelation 22:1–5.

contrary to the opinion of many—is a very sane prophecy and builds up to the climax in an ordered way. The end chapters speak of the total judgment of all evil, including the devil, the beast, the false prophets, the ten kings and the armies which battle against the Deliverer on the white horse but are defeated. These evil powers plus the finally impenitent are cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. Babylon is destroyed in one day. When all evil is obliterated, purity and holiness cover all things. Creation is sanctified, freed from the bondage of corruption and brought into ‘the liberty of the glory of the children of God’. All things protological of the ultimate Sabbath rest, the Edenic River, the Edenic Sanctuary of worship, the Lordship of Man, the ‘profound mystery’ of the union of Adam and Eve in the ‘one-flesh’ marriage, the Paradisial *locale*, the Presence of God—all these things come to their eschatological climax and fulfilment in the things of the holy *telos*.

We have the New Heaven and the New Earth, the marriage feast of the Bride and the Lamb, the Holy City which is the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven—where it has been formed—to the new earth. The Holy Presence of God is now forever with redeemed mankind. The Holy City embraces all the nations, their kings and leaders bringing the glory of the nations into it. It is a sanctified City, and indeed one which is glorified and perfected. The sanctuary of Eden had no temple since God was present. Likewise the Holy City has no temple for God and the Lamb are the temple.¹⁵ All that the temple signified in its structure, worship apparatus and cultus is now present in God Himself. The redeemed are now sealed with the names of the Father and the Lamb. They see these Two face-to-face. Down the centre of the Holy City flows the River of God, and the Tree of Life grows profusely on both sides of the River, constantly yielding fruit without restriction of seasons, and the leaves of the Tree are for the healing of the nations.

Israel—the people of God—is now transformed from ‘protological Israel’ into a kingdom of priests unto God and as such shall reign and serve for ever. Their Head and Lord, the Lamb and the Wife of the Lamb—the New Jerusalem who is the Mother of us all—shall be in the intimacy of fellowship with God, being ‘partakers in the Divine nature’.

All of this is ‘the mystery of the plan of God’ now unveiled. It is what God had planned before time, worked through in time, and brought to its conclusion—its Holy *telos*—for all eternity.

¹⁵ The interesting revelation of the Book of Hebrews, of Christ being a High Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek, raises questions about the ultimate High Priesthood in the holy *Telos*. It may be that in Revelation 1, Christ is adorned as a High Priest not of the Levitical order, but perhaps of the order of Melchizedek. It does not much matter, but certainly the eschatological Church is ‘a kingdom of priests’, not after the order of the Israel, whose worship and service was of the Aaronic order, but of the Israel whose worship and order is Melchizedekian.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

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STUDY 10

John Knox — Champion of the Church (c.1512 - 1572)*

(by Dean J Carter)

The theology of Scotland begins with the Reformation, and the first of our great theological writers is John Knox himself. No doubt the reformer was more a preacher and a man of action than a student and a thinker; yet he was the latter as well as the former. His clear, strong mind firmly grasped the Calvinistic system, with which it might be said he had both morally and intellectually natural affinities; and he was sufficiently acquainted with its scriptural grounds, with its accepted methods of doctrinal statement, even with its metaphysics, to be the expounder and defender of it. Very far from being the mere iconoclast, he was also the great teacher of his countrymen. The first Confession of Faith, the First Book of Discipline — in its magnificent comprehensiveness, one of the most remarkable compositions of a great time — both of them chiefly the work of Knox . . . give Knox a high place among theologians; and . . . they have been greatly influential in giving direction to the theological thinking of our country.¹

TO SOME, JOHN KNOX IS TO BE REVERED AS A GREAT FIGURE IN SCOTLAND'S Church and political life: for others, he is to be reviled as a radical ranter and rebel against the State, and heretic within the Church.² Given these clearly divergent, and perhaps irreconcilable differences of opinion, the purpose of our study is quite modest — we will investigate *John Knox's contribution to the reformation of the Church in Scotland.*

§1. THE ECCLESIA SCOTICANA

In his lectures on *Scottish Theology since the Reformation in the light of Scottish Church History*, delivered at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia in April 1939, the noted historian John Macleod observed that

in the centuries that intervened between Bannockburn and the Reformation, Scotland, though it had national freedom, was an ill-governed country. It had a weak central executive, a turbulent aristocracy, a bloated Church, and a down-trodden commonalty. . . . As a nation the Scots served in the old alliance with France as a pawn in the political game of the French kings as they contended with those of England.³

* I have sought to acknowledge all sources cited through the paper. Where any may have been overlooked, I must apologise: circumstances beyond my control have complicated the preparation and production of this contribution to the Pastors' School handbook. I have employed secondary sources more frequently than intended, over against Knox primary sources. The chapter by Thomas F Torrance in *Scottish Theology* on Knox has provided the overall framework for much of this paper.

¹ James Walker, *Theology and Theologians of Scotland 1560-1750* (Knox Press: 1982 — Rev. Ed.), pages 1-2.

² Was Knox the 'arch-destroyer of beauty and joyfulness and the founder of a great intolerance'; or, 'a demagogue whom a grasping nobility employed, in the name of religion, to further their personal and political ends'? See Dickinson, W Croft, in *Fathers of the Kirk*, R. S. Wright, ed. (Oxford: 1960), page 1.

³ John Macleod, *Scottish Theology* (Banner of Truth: 1974), page 3. See too the opinion ventured by Barbour,

Macleod continued his argument by indicating that one key figure led both the Church and nation into and through the Reformation, namely, John Knox. Yet before we focus on the life and contribution of Knox, we ought have some idea of the early history of the Church in Scotland.

The earliest Celtic Christianity had entered Scotland through the ministry of St Columba (c. 521- 597) and his followers (to the Argylls). The first missionary to Scotland had been St Ninian (possibly dated in the 6th century), a British bishop who preached to the Picts and founded a church in Galloway. St Andrews had primacy over other sees when it became metropolitan (1472), even over Glasgow (1492 as second archbishopric). Provincial Councils were held annually (1225+), but then less frequently. Many orders of monks, friars, etc. spread across the country. Celtic monasteries (early period of Irish missions) were then outnumbered by Continental types. By the sixteenth century many were poorly administered.

There had been a number of contributors to theology — outstanding among them were John Dun Scotus and John Major. The influence of early Protestantism can be traced to the English priest James Resby, burned in Perth in 1407 (he followed Wycliffe's theology); a Moravian Hussite missionary Paul Crawar (Kravar) suffered at St Andrews, being burned at the stake on 23 July 1433; and Lollards were hunted down during James' IV reign (1494). Tyndale's New Testament in English reached Scotland in 1526; Wycliffe's New Testament had been translated into Broad Scots in 1520 by Murdock Nisbet (a Scottish Lollard). In 1525 and 1527 the Parliament and Lords of Council had tried to stem the tide of incoming Lutheran works; and in 1528 Patrick Hamilton (1504-1528) was the first martyr of the Scottish Reformation: he was tried and burned at St Andrews. This testimony became the catalyst for others to consider and join the faith.⁴ Among them was to be found — John Knox.

§2. JOHN KNOX — FROM HIS FIRST TO FINAL ANCHOR (JOHN 17).

Knox is known to us mainly in his public actions, and although he was the chief agent in giving a new theology to his country and a new character to its religious life, it is not easy to see his own mind and his own spiritual experience as clearly as we should like. In particular, we are quite without knowledge of the fundamental experience through which the priest of the Church of Rome became an evangelical Christian and a leader of the Reformation. Yet the casual references in the six volumes of his works, and especially certain passages in his familiar correspondence, enable us to understand the kind of Christian he was. We can see how his heart and mind were exercised as he lived the Christian life and fought the fight of faith; we can see also the conceptions of Christianity which bulked largely in his thoughts.⁵

John Knox was enrolled (1522) at Glasgow University under John Major (Principal Regent of the University), who taught him Logic, Canon Law and Divinity. He became

But what call for reformation? A hierarchy, subjects of a foreign power, possessed of half the national wealth and of the highest places in the state, living in acknowledged ignorance of the revelation they safeguarded, and in open violation of the vows they had taken; religious foundations, raised to piety and learning, grown as guiltless of letters as of godliness, mothers of indolence and of evil lives; a priesthood, unable to preach, reciters of an unintelligible service, and celebrators of an incredible sacrifice, selling the blessings and the maledictions of heaven to the rich, and tearing the last garment from the poor; houses of God, devoid of the Divine message, echoing only to ribaldry, to traffic, or to crime; a society, the language and manners of whose leading spirits as well as its common members, had become careless of the ordinary rules of morals — such is the burden of Scotland before the Reformation. Barbour, page 64.

McNeill notes that the English kings tried to subject Scotland to 'vassalage', while Scottish leaders sought full autonomy (yet often by alliances with France). There were no clear links with the Papacy during this period. See McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (Oxford: 1973), page 290ff.

⁴ McNeill, *op. cit.*, page 293.

⁵ James Denney, 'John Knox: His Religious Life and Theological Position' (Den - 10-06), page 1.

a competent linguist — in Latin, Hebrew, Greek, French, and Italian. Although he did not complete his studies for the degree, he had learned the rigours and habits of personal study, especially the discipline of reading.

By 1540 he had been ordained, and made papal notary. It is about this time that he was converted. It appears that the two main influences in this were Thomas Gwilliam (a Dominican/Blackfriar priest), and the reading and hearing of the Gospel — particularly the 17th chapter of John's Gospel (he had studied Augustine on the Fourth Gospel, and complemented this with studies on Ephesians 1-2). It became, as he said, the place where he 'cast his first anchor.' By this time he had also become tutor for the sons of two noblemen. As tutor he led his students through the Gospel of John. Now, after twenty years, came the events which plunged him into his ministry of the Gospel.

The first was the appearance of George Wishart, the preacher and teacher. Knox learned more than Greek from him; he became his confidant and bodyguard (armed with a claymore). Further, he became a 'professor of the true evangel' and 'simple soldier of Jesus Christ.'⁶ When Wishart was threatened, and eventually executed, Knox returned to tutoring. This led to his being called to the St Andrews Castle for protection.

By the time the castle was overtaken, Knox had strengthened his resolve to stand and speak for the Gospel of Christ. He was ready to argue against the corruption and excesses of the Church of Rome.⁷ In taking such a stand, he saw the confirmation of his call to be a preacher (and 'restorer of the Gospel of God in Scotland'). Yet within months he was captured, and became a French naval galley slave. During the nineteen months of imprisonment, Knox found time to revise Henry Balnaves' *Justification by Faith* (Balnaves was a fellow prisoner from St Andrews). This 'French prison, like Bunyan's, became a study; and during the busiest years of his ministry, part of each day was devoted to the desk, although he never wrote a sermon beforehand.'⁸

Following his release (March 1549), Knox became the incumbant of the parish of Berwick (Dio. of Durham). His ministry was marked by a thorough exposition of the Scriptures, and in 1550 he was summoned to Newcastle to defend his views of the Mass (that it was an expression of idolatry, was blasphemous and an abomination; could not be a sacrifice, since Christ's death was once for all act). In 1551 he moved to Newcastle, and was appointed King's Chaplain (to Edward VI). During this period he was offered the Bishopric of Rochester, which he declined (so too, a position in London). He would have had to use the Prayer Book exclusively — he found this an intolerable burden. He had, however, become a confidant of Archbishop Cranmer, and was consulted on Prayer Book revisions.⁹

When King Edward died in 1553, Knox fled to France with his family, eventually arriving in Geneva to consult with Calvin, who referred him on to Pierre Viret (in Lausanne) and Henry Bullinger (Zurich). In July 1554 he published *A Faithful Admonition to the Professors of God's Truth in England* (this denounced Mary and her allies), and by the end of the year accepted a call to Frankfurt. Here the church was divided on the matter of Liturgy: Knox favoured simplicity of form and content (eg. the Lord's Supper: scripture reading, exhortation and exposition, and extended extempore prayer — this bypasses traditional liturgical niceties). MacLeod goes as far as to

⁶ R W Barbour, 'John Knox' in *The Evangelical Succession* Second Series (MacNiven & Wallace: 1883), page 42.

⁷ 'For him the one Priest's intercession availed; he accepted for himself the one Priest's sacrifice. With that there was an end to all belief in other sacrifices, whether of one's own merit or of the mass; in other intercessions, whether of virgin, saint, or angel.' Barbour, *op. cit.*, page 43.

⁸ Barbour, *op. cit.*, page 46. On average, during his first two years at St. Giles, Edinburgh, he preached five times a week: see Barbour, page 50.

⁹ See too, ch. 10 'The Setting of Worship' by James Whyte, for comments about reception of the Lord's Supper, for the Scottish practice of sitting at table, rather than either standing, or kneeling. The background to Knox's view (with the Black Rubric in the BCP: 1552) and the practice at Berwick (1549-1551). He asserted that we sit 'as men placed in quietness and in full possession of our kingdom.' see page 152.

suggest that of Knox's time in Frankfurt may be traced the eventual split between moderate (the Conformists) and more thorough English Reformers — so the seed bed for the Puritans (who would include Knox).¹⁰ Hence, the Swiss Reformation made more impact on Scotland, than either Lutheran or Anglican.¹¹

Knox returned to Scotland in 1555, and his preaching mission through central Scotland marked the turning point of the Reformation, as he called those in favour of reform to reject the idolatry of the Mass. In May 1556 he was called to appear before the Bishops in Edinburgh. He appeared — with such overwhelming support — and his case was dropped: he went on a further preaching mission. Pressed by the nobility, he wrote to the Regent (Queen Mother Mary of Guise) to convince her to reform the Church. She remained un-persuaded, and again Knox left for Geneva with his family. In the meantime, as trouble was brewing, he urged his friends to meet in house churches; he wrote *A Most Wholesome Counsel how to behave ourselves in the midst of this Wicked Generation*.

After a couple of years in Dieppe in France, he arrived in Geneva, as pastor and city burger. At last he was able, with others, to draft his notion of a 'godly revolution': he wrote the *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, published in the summer of 1558. He had come to the position of affirming that rebellion may be lawful before both man and God.¹² He was a participant in the drafting of the English version of the Bible (the Genevan Bible); he also utilised the order he had earlier compiled in Frankfurt, and it provided almost the complete text for the Book of Common Order (Church of Scotland).

On his return to Scotland he found that while both he and the reformers wanted reform for the Church ('true religion'), many nobles were more concerned for national status and personal aggrandizement. As McNeill observed of Knox: 'Others . . . cut the branches of the Papacy, but he strikes at the roots.'¹³ He sought the support of Elizabeth I of England against the alliance of Scotland (Mary) and the French. After considerable diplomatic efforts, Elizabeth supported the reformers, and signed the Treaty of Berwick (Feb. 1560). On 19th July 1560, Knox led a public thanksgiving service as a sequel to the Treaty of Edinburgh (French and English troops to leave Scotland): the nation was now at liberty. While the Treaty did not include church reform, it cleared the way for same. This was urgent, for episcopacy had all but ceased to function. Arch. John Hamilton (1546-71) had held a series of national councils (1549, 1552, 1559), allegedly to reform abuses, but this led more to exposure of problems than resolution. Critical documents for the Church, as well as the nation, were formulated and approved at this time¹⁴ — the *Scots Confession* and the (*First*) *Book of Discipline* (See below at 3:1 and Appendices 1 and 2).

While continuing his practical concerns for the nation, and as 'arch-superintendent', Knox spent himself primarily for his congregation in Edinburgh, in matters of the faith. He affirmed that the *locus* for our learning the certainty of faith is trial and tribulation (like that experienced by Christ himself), as we face the world and the wiles of Satan. The *means* for learning is the promise of the Word of God. This pastoral concern may be especially seen in his letters to his somewhat neurotic mother-in-law, Mrs Bowes

¹⁰ MacLeod, *op. cit.*, page 5.

¹¹ MacLeod, *op. cit.*, page 6.

¹² Croft Dickinson, *op. cit.*, page 8. The three grounds for his argument proposed are: sacraments to be duly ministered, suppression of idolatry, and liberty of native Scots from 'bondage and tyranny of strangers' (ie. French).

¹³ McNeill, *op. cit.*, page 295. W Croft Dickinson also comments that while the *Scots Confession* was accepted, the *Board of Discipline* was bypassed. He notes that 'faith . . . was not followed by works', *op. cit.*, page 11. After all, many of the nobles had joined the 'movement' for reasons other than or mixed with that of 'true religion'.

¹⁴ The Reformation Parliament met in August and approved: (i.) jurisdiction of the pope was abolished; (ii.) the celebration of the Mass was forbidden; (iii.) the *Confession* was approved; and (vi.) all doctrine and practice contrary to the *Confession* was condemned.

(she constantly appealed to Knox to reassure her of her salvation). Knox consistently directed her to flee or repair to Christ since ‘the rest and tranquillitie of our conscience standeth in this, that we do imbrace Jesus to be the onlie Savioure of the world.’ (3:348). To this Knox added that two further elements give reassurance: (i.) the presence of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, and (ii.) the troubled conscience is itself an infallible sign of election. Yet Knox tried to make sure that the evidence for our assurance of election is objective, not founded on subjectivism.

On the personal side, Knox was timid, melancholic, and suffered from dyspepsia.¹⁵ ‘If the typical Christian is the martyr, and that is the New Testament view, few have a better right to the title. He had the Cross on his shoulders daily, prepared at any moment to die in the service of Christ.’¹⁶ So, he wrote on suffering from his own experience, knowing both personal danger and deliverance. This was evident to the last, as is seen in his last illness, his ‘open door’ policy, with constant ministry to family, friends and flock to the end. And on his death-bed he looked to Isaiah 53, the Epistle to the Ephesians, and as expected, to the seventeenth chapter of John’s Gospel. ‘So his last anchor is dropt, and plunges, where his first did, into the depths of grace, free, sovereign, divine.’¹⁷

§3. THE REFORMATION OF THE KIRK

3.1 Documents of the Scottish Reformation

3.1.1 THE SCOTS CONFESSION

The *Scots Confession* was admittedly provisional, and did not presume to give an infallible articulation of the faith. It was open to revision and rejection (being displaced by the Westminster Confession), where shown to conflict with supreme standard, the Scripture. It was fully approved in 1567 with legal status — under the Apostles’ Creed as subordinate doctrinal norm. Its function was to indicate what beliefs were shared with Reformation Church, and those explicitly rejected. It was accepted by Parliament as a *fait accompli*, rather than as approved following serious debate.¹⁸

The first ten chapters are non-controversial, embodying the doctrinal tradition of the early Church. The stress on Ethics is unusual. While the ‘Papistical Kirk’ is denounced, the matter of papacy is not mentioned. It reads like an Articles of Faith, being modest in

¹⁵ Percy A Scholes, *The Puritans and Music* (Oxford Press: 1969); he notes how Knox spoke (with ‘bold candour and conscientious faithfulness’ to Mary Queen of Scots) about the enjoyment of dancing. Scholes cites from the *Dictionary of National Biography*

On a Sunday morning towards the end of the same year (1562) Knox preached another violent sermon against the queen and her court, in which he denounced dancing and other vanities. He was sent for by Mary. Murray, Morton, Lethington, and some of the guard were present. According to Knox’s account, he said that he did not utterly condemn dancing provided those who practised it did not neglect their principal vocation, and did not dance for the pleasure they took in the displeasure of God’s people. Mary dismissed him, saying stronger words had been reported, and Knox grumbled at being called away from his book. He left her with a “reasonably merry countenance”.

Knox’s attitude was matched by that of the Puritans in the following century: the comment about Mary’s dancing indicating that the court frivolity went beyond the ‘limits of rational distraction.’ (Two years later Knox had to preach on the subject again, a great rain and frost in January and meteors in February being clear hints from heaven that the dancing and junketing had gone too far.) See pages 64-65.

¹⁶ Denney, *op. cit.*, page 7.

¹⁷ R W Barbour, ‘John Knox’, in *The Evangelical Succession* Second Series (MacNiven & Wallace: 1883), page 84.

¹⁸ *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, (T. & T. Clark: 1993), page 751-2. We should not overlook the fact that in December 1557, Protestant nobles and gentlemen signed a Covenant ‘to maintain, nourish and defend to the death the whole Congregation of Christ and every member thereof’ (Congregation = Church). See Routley, *op. cit.*, page 114.

length (8,000 words), and the text is free from close or technical theological argumentation. A Latin translation was published in 1572. Alongside this Confession, the General Assembly also sanctioned the Genevan English Confession, the ‘orthodox faith and Catholic doctrines’ of the Second Helvetic (Swiss) Confession (1566) and the Negative (or King’s, or Second: later incorporated into the National Covenant in 1638) Confession of 1581.

Particular features of the Confession which relate to, or provide background to Knox’s personal views include Scripture, Election, the Church, and the Sacraments:

i. Scripture

The Scots Confession followed the Continental formulations in affirming the unity of the Scripture: that is, a continuity of Old and New Testaments (so, the Old Testament is applicable to the present day Church). So, they employed the Old Testament as would Christ and the Apostles (who lacked a New Testament): interpretation of the Scripture was dependent upon the Holy Spirit, who had inspired its writers. Since all of the Scripture applied to the present, the Church is required to submit to the Scripture.

ii. Election

This issue is treated between the Incarnation and Passion, indicating a concern with election and predestination — only in so far as linked with clear Biblical texts (Fourth Gospel). Again, the paragraphs on the Church (V, XVI), with the early paragraph (V) between Revelation and Incarnation, to show how Old Israel as elect is preserved in faith to prepare the way for the new Israel. This notion is prominent in Calvinist thought, but here Knox’s placement is unique.

Finally, the departed elect are the ‘church militant’. The true Kirk is distinguished from the ‘filthy synagogue’ by three notes of the Church (see. esp. ‘discipline’).

iii. The Church

‘There is scarcely any segment of the circle of Christian truth that has had more abundant heed paid to it in the Theology of Scotland than that which takes to do with the Church of God.’¹⁹ The Confession includes a stress on the unity of the Church: cf. visible and invisible, and continuity through Covenant periods.

In relation to Church ‘visible’, it gave a particular importance to Church and State relations:

and yet in Scotland it came to hold such a place of control as that it is largely in connection with the application and working out of this doctrine that the most remarkable struggles and discussions of national Church life have taken place. It regards the Church in its visible form as a Kingdom with a King of its own. The King is not a mere absentee monarch nor is He only a figurehead. He is looked upon as the Head of the Church as it is His acknowledged realm.²⁰

iv. Church and Ministry

There is no specified form of Church government, apart from that which is conformable with Scripture, and the equality of ministers is affirmed (so, form of Presbyterianism).

v. The Sacraments

The view of the sacraments shows more affinity with Calvin than the Anglican 39 Articles. It acknowledged the fact that the matter of sacraments did divide the Reformers, almost from beginning. The Confession rejects any notion of ‘bare and

¹⁹ MacLeod, *op. cit.*, page 31.

²⁰ MacLeod, *op. cit.*, page 33.

naked signs’ (not so much as held by Zwingli, as later Socinians), but is not critical of high sacramental view of Lutherans.

We acknowledge and confess that we now, in the life of the Evangel, have two Sacraments only, instituted by the Lord Jesus, and commanded to be used of all those that will be reputed members of his body, to wit, Baptism and the Supper, or Table of the Lord Jesus, called The Communion of his body and blood. And these sacraments were instituted of God. . . . Thus we utterly damn the vanity of those who affirm Sacraments to be nothing else but naked and bare signs. No, we assuredly believe that by Baptism we are ingrafted in Christ Jesus to be made partakers of his justice, by the which our sins are covered and remitted; and also, that in the Supper, rightly used, Christ Jesus is so joined to us, that he becomes the very nourishment and food of our souls. [*Scots Confession* xxi. ‘Of the Sacraments’]

It affirms the alliance between the sacraments of Old and New Covenants (of Circumcision and Passover, with Baptism and Lord’s Supper): the sacraments effect union between the people of God and their Head, Christ, by His Spirit. Transubstantiation is rejected as a ‘pernicious doctrine’; the doctrine of Ascension is clearly linked with sacraments; worship offered to Christ, not to signs. Women may not baptise; priests from Rome are not ministers of Christ. The Communion Cup is not withheld from the people. Any sacerdotal implications (esp. mediating priesthood) are abhorrent. Finally, sacraments have been instituted for the faithful and their children.

vi. Church and State relations

The State is acknowledged as a secular power, as a gift of God, worthy of respect. Magistrates and civil leaders have been authorised to suppress idolatry and purge religion. This view has been copied from Geneva.²¹

3.1.2 THE (FIRST) BOOK OF DISCIPLINE

Work on a ‘Book of Reformation’ was commissioned on 29 April 1560, and completed on 20 May, 1560: the *Book of Discipline* was a plan for the administration and finance of the new Kirk, and so have the City of God on Earth. The original was revised and expanded later in the year (August to December), and finally included in Knox’s manuscript ‘History of the Reformation’. Latin copies were prepared to be sent to Calvin, Viret, and Beza in Geneva, and Peter Martyr, Bullinger and others in Zurich for their perusal and approval. It was not lodged with the Reformation Parliament, which did authorize the *Scots Confession*. Rather, after further scrutiny by the General Assembly in December 1560, it was presented for approval to a convention of nobles in Edinburgh (January 1561): the Privy Council, plus further nobles consented to the revised edition, and it became the Kirk’s formal programme and priority.

The section on Patrimony (tiends, etc) was not universally accepted by those who already received the benefits of the Kirk’s resources — the Crown, nobles and lairds — as well as some ecclesiastics, who stood to lose if changes were too far ranging or effectively implemented. Such changes were seen as too radical in the unstable political situation. However, the General Assembly did attempt to consistently and impartially implement its proposals throughout the 1560s. Certainly the ideals and aspirations expressed were not abandoned, and were expressed in the *Second Book of Discipline*, authorized in 1578.

²¹ Routley, *op. cit.*, page 117.

3.2 Knox's Reformed Theology

3:2.1 THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

In Knox and his colleagues, a radical shift from medieval thought and praxis (from abstract theology of logically ordered propositions, linked with Greek philosophical framework, to dynamic theology addressed to the nations) is to be observed: the change from the Medieval to Reformation theology (general principle — Covenant of Grace, and particular principle — Christ), especially seen in the contrast between the Reformed and Latin views of God (*Reformed*: Biblical and self-revealed trinitarian affirmation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and there is no separation between doctrine of One God and the Triune God (cf. Roman orthodoxy of Aquinas; *Latin*: God as Supreme Being and Cause).²² Coupled with this is the clear centrality of Jesus Christ, made known to us through the Spirit.

The knowledge of God given through Word written and incarnate. We need God's self-revelation, and the open-ness of faith. God is unique (there is no *genus* called 'god') — so all idolatry is improper.²³

God is Trinity (this clearly reflects Calvin's treatment in the Institutes): i. as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in being and act; ii. the triune God creates, preserves, governs all creation (so all creation is contingent), and through the incarnation of the Son, discloses and donates adoptive sonship to his creatures; iii. as triune God, that God relates to all creation in terms of personal will, in the light of the salvific act purposed and pursued in Christ;²⁴ iv. there is the ever-present danger of abstraction and scholasticism as evidenced in later reformed theology (the fixed divine decrees).

The providential intervention of God is especially seen in the covenanted relations with Israel, the unity of the Scriptures, and God's continued and consistent actions to His people in the nations by His Word. God is the Lord and Judge of History: all creation comes under the order and discipline of God by the Word. Here Knox stressed the significance of Resurrection and Ascension, together with Justification (and the resultant implications for the nations, as well as individual believers). So, all history has soteriological and eschatological meaning — now partially seen in the divine judgements being effected and executed among the nations by the Word. God answers prayer for God is faithful to his creation, and his people. Finally, Knox strongly affirms that the God of grace will prevail.

3:2.2 CHRISTOLOGY

When we turn to Knox's view of the doctrine of Christ — both His person and work, we find the critical questions here are — election, and the form of humanity which the Son assumed. These issues had been raised already in the Confession, especially the personal union of two natures (full Godhead and manhood), rather than scholastic metaphysics. Here is a stress on the vital and intimate linking of person and work of Christ — Incarnation and Atonement — interpreted by means of the threefold offices of the Messiah (king, priest and prophet).

This is further coupled with eschatology, for here is the Last Adam actually present, the promised salvation of God effected in human history.

²² T. F. Torrance, 'John Knox and the Scottish Reformation' in *Scottish Theology* (T. & T. Clark: 1996), page 3; and T. F. Torrance, *The School of Faith*, (James Clarke & Co.: 1959), pages xliii-lxxx.

²³ Torrance, 'John Knox', *op. cit.*, page 5.

²⁴ Torrance, 'John Knox', *op. cit.*, page 7.

i. Incarnation: this is interpreted by reference to salvation, not speculation. It is seen as integral to salvation, yet not as an isolated act. Through the incarnation the original purpose of creation is realised and recapitulated (as per the theology taught by Irenaeus): salvation is with a view to the new creation, with a new humanity in union with God. Such an incarnation is effected by the Spirit with the Virgin Mary: the eternal Son assumes our fallen human nature, to live as one of humanity, and consecrate our humanity to the Father.

ii. Election and the man-hood of Christ: election is interpreted Christologically, with the mystery of personal election only to be observed in the life and ministry of Christ. As such, the doctrine evokes wonder and praise, instead of self-doubt and speculation.

iii. Election and mediation: the union between God and man effected in the incarnate Son takes place in his union with *fallen* humanity (this is a strongly held view in Scottish theology: see various treatments of Romans 8:3, where Paul disavows any inkling or possibility of Docetism). Knox and others sought to avoid the divisive Continental debates on Predestination. Election was therefore subsumed under the section on Christ, and him alone (cf. Calvin in *Institutes*). While he sought to affirm the full freedom of God's grace, later Scottish theology maintained a double predestination concept, which obscured the primacy of grace, and led to personal and pastoral lack of assurance of salvation.

iv. The significance of both the Godhead and manhood in Christ: only God can save man — only what happens within humanity actually 'touches us'. In his humanity Christ suffered our sin and disobedience and acted as victim — in his Godhead he triumphed, victor over all evil.

v. The death of Christ was a voluntary sacrifice to His father for us. Knox also affirms a full satisfaction for sins (contra. 'limited atonement'), with the vicarious humanity of Christ providing the pledge of our new life. This is coupled with a high view of Christ's high-priestly ministry.²⁵

vi. The resurrection was regarded by Knox as the 'chief article of our faith' (so Art. X in Confession). He holds to a thorough-going rejection of any forms of Docetism. The resurrection reassures us of the victory of Christ, and confirms us as new creatures.

vii. The ascension: the body which was born of the Virgin Mary, has been crucified, dead and buried — has now been raised. The ascension completes the Incarnation; the union of God and man in Christ, taken into the most intimate union and communion with the Father; he has taken possession of his Kingdom (both on heaven and earth); he continues to make priestly intercession for us, as our one Advocate and Mediator; and has sent to us His Spirit as Comforter.

3:2:3 JUSTIFICATION

James Denney asserts that in his early theology, Knox shows more affinity with the Lutheran (justification by faith) than Reformed (election) position; yet both aspects complement the other, and both in Christian experience ('he had from the first a thorough appreciation of its truth, and the liberty which it brings.').²⁶ In his concern for 'Justification', his view restored Christ to his rightful place, for 'Christ had become invisible in the medieval Church, or if not invisible, inaccessible.'²⁷ For, as Denney

²⁵ Torrance, 'John Knox', *op. cit.*, page 19.

²⁶ Denney, *op. cit.*, page 1.

²⁷ Denney, *loc. cit.* Denney notes that Knox held to the Reformed view of Predestination, and that without such a view the 'world became a scene of moral anarchy.' page 2. He continues, with what he considers one of Knox's most profound statements: 'The causes are known to God

argues, Christ had been obscured and displaced by a priesthood, sacraments, ceremonies, and a multitude of religious activities.

T. F. Torrance agrees, stating that for Knox, the issue of justification is neither isolated, nor a principle by itself, for it directs us to Christ. Hence, there is no separate paragraph/article in the Scots Confession. Rather, his sole concern is Christ, who must be central, and our union with God in Christ. There is a further stress on the saving humanity of Christ, our participation in his, and Christ's obedient filiality in and as human. He continues,

in that Life of the worshipping and obedient Son we are made to share and are well-pleasing to the Father as through that participation we are clothed with the Name and holy Life of Christ. In his unity with man the Son lived out a perfect Life on earth in obedience, love and worship, and as such died and rose again. Therefore it is in and through our union with him, that all that is his becomes ours. It is only as such, that is in the Name of Christ, that we appear before God, and as such that he regards us — in Christ.²⁸

Justification is intimately and vitally linked with the resurrection: Romans 4:25 was one of Knox's favourite texts. The Resurrection and Ascension receive separate paragraphs in the Confession (X, XI), thereby indicating that both are integral to the one work of Atonement.

So Justification is not the mere putting away of sins, in a technical and forensic remission, but the positive donation of derived righteousness of God in Christ. Humanity is raised to a new, a risen and Messianic life. This is based on the mediation and reconciliation effected in and by Christ. This expresses the Advent of the Coming One, denoting Jesus as the Messiah and eschatological second or Last Adam. So, the goal of the Incarnation is the Ascension: as a corollary, the goal of the Ascension is the Parousia.

Further, Knox asserts that the Sacraments speak not of our life, but Christ's in and through us, by union. In such a scheme, there is objective justification, as detailed in the Scots Confession: Christ is Brother, Mediator, Pacificator (Art. IX: he dealt with death). In addition, Knox holds to an active and passive obedience, as with other Reformed treatments, yet also by the Incarnation he assumed and consecrated our (fallen) human nature. Jesus sanctified Himself for us (John 17:18); he further consecrated himself as High Priest (as per Hebrews 2), to effect the union of the sanctifier and those sanctified. This is the completed action of Christ. So, justification, regeneration, and sanctification all flow out of *adoption*.²⁹ This view has been obscured by the Westminster formularies. There had been a stress in Knox (following Calvin) on Christ, not our faith, nor evidences as focus for assurance:

it was only later in Scottish theology when the anthropocentric questions emerged, questions of conscience and soul-searching, when the eyes of the believer were turned inward upon his own heart rather than outward upon his Lord and Saviour, that the demand for assurance became clamant.³⁰

alone why he suffereth the soldiers to fall in battle whom nevertheless he commendeth to fight.' (Knox. Works Vol. 4:417). This is indicative, continues Denney, of the faith in God, of those living in troubled times, who dimly perceive the purposes of God, in the works of His hands. It avoids the detachment of deism, yet not offering the crassness of naive immanence. Denney suggests that Knox well understood the need for the Church to affirm and live under the Triune God, as confessed in Paragraph I of the *Scots Confession*.

²⁸ Torrance, 'Justification: Its Radical Nature and Place in Reformed Doctrine and Life' in *Theology and Reconstruction* (SCM: 1965), page 151.

²⁹ Torrance, 'Justification', *op. cit.*, page 158.

³⁰ Torrance, 'Justification', *op. cit.* page 160. This was the issue which led to the dismissal of John McLeod Campbell in 1841. See also T. F. Torrance on 'John McLeod Campbell' in *Scottish Theology*, pages 287-317. 'Investigation shows . . . that Scottish theology did not remain true to the spirit and tenor of Calvin's teaching, and that the first traces of diversion and subsequent distortion can be found in Knox himself.' Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology* (The Handsel Press: 1985), page 8. Bell concentrates on the matter of covenant — and its sequel in contract Federalism— and the gradual shift from Christ to the believer for the ground or focus for assurance of justification

Yet for both Knox and Calvin the priority to grace over law, familial over forensic is to the forefront.

With the coming of the Spirit, at Pentecost, as ‘realised eschatology’ to point to the Second Advent (‘future eschatology’), there is a suspension of the final judgement until that last day. Now the church lives in patience and perseverance, waiting with preaching and prayer; with Jesus Christ as the centre of life and ministry, this fostered good works, with particular concern for the poor and needy of the nation.

While the place of Christ as King and Prophet was prominent in the Reformation (the *Triplex Munus*), this did not eclipse for Knox, and others, that Christ is priest — in worship and their understanding of ministry.

3:2.4 SCRIPTURE

Knox had a Calvinistic view of Scripture, and its use by the Christian. It provided a mirror for his own experiences, and reassured him that he was ‘in the succession of saints.’³¹ He had what Denney termed an ‘indiscriminating rigour’ in applying Scripture, seeing both Old Testament precepts and examples as authoritative for his day. He employed this Puritan view of application (Scholastic more than Historical), especially in his stand against idolatry.³² Hence, Knox could argue that his conflicts with the sovereign and Catholicism matched those of the prophets against the corrupt kings and their forms of idolatry. Idolatry, he defined as anything which is ‘done in Goddes service or honour, without expresse commaundement of his own Word.’ (4: 468)

With such a sweeping definition, Knox was able to sweep away all that was considered offensive by Protestants within Catholicism, especially the Mass. He could also argue that Scotland was a ‘covenant nation’, under the strict obligation to singularly conform to holiness before God.

The nation must be bound by oath to refuse fellowship ‘with ony religioun, except with that whik God hath confirmit be his manifest Word.’ (3:190f.) The covenant with the nation is conditional upon uncompromised obedience to God, for this is the basis for his continued mercy towards the nation. For this to be maintained, civil magistrates are required to eliminate all forms and features of idolatry (whether of commoner or ruler).

Bell claims that due to his ‘peculiar hermeneutic’, whereby he could impose the Old Testament directly or in an unqualified manner on his peers, Knox was led towards Federal theology, as he gave place to notions conflicting with the unconditional grace of God in Christ.³³

3.3 Knox’s Doctrine of the Church

The Church is an ‘article of faith’ and object of faith, not sight: it belongs to salvaton; it has an unbroken succession ranging from creation to the Second Advent; the promise offered to and in Israel being fulfilled and expanded in the life of Christ and the church

and faith. Shift marked in work of Robert Rollock, and in seventeenth century Calvin’s view eclipsed. The issue came to the fore again in the dismissal of John McLeod Campbell (*The Nature of the Atonement*): See Gary M. Tuttle, *So Rich a Soil: John McLeod Campbell on Christian Atonement* (Handsell Press: 1986); Kenneth R. Ross, *Church and Creed in Scotland* RUTHERFORD STUDIES SERIES ONE: HISTORICAL THEOLOGY Vol. II (Rutherford House Books: 1988); and Ian Hamilton, *The Erosion of Calvinist Orthodoxy*, RUTHERFORD STUDIES SERIES ONE: HISTORICAL THEOLOGY Vol. V (Rutherford House Books: 1990).

³¹ Denney, *op. cit.*, page 3.

³² For the Regulative Principle, see Norman Norman Shepherd, ‘The Biblical Basis for the Regulative Principle of Worship’ in *The Biblical Doctrine of Worship* (Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America: 1974), pages 42-56.

³³ Bell, *op. cit.*, page 43.

to the nations. The Church now lives and ministers between the Cross and the Parousia. Under the Old Covenant, Israel was linked to the temple and its cultus: this pointed to the Coming One and His people. The OT temple was replaced by the New Covenant Community: there is freedom from any lineal and local succession.³⁴

The Church lives under the Word, as a mystery throughout times of trouble, herself under judgement and grace, nurtured by the Spirit and Sacraments. Christ relates to His Bride-Wife, bonded in a sacred marriage, yet to be consummated.

There are 3 notes of the Church: Word, sacraments, and discipline. The Reformers held the first two, whereas the Scottish Church affirmed the place of ‘discipline’. As Denney remarked of Knox’s view — ‘orthodoxy is nothing, worship is nothing; if Christian character is wanting.’³⁵ Here is a positive view of discipline, with the Church urged to take and deal seriously with its own failures. Knox was no fanatic in accusation or application: he became an ‘arch superintendant’, rather than bishop.

There are also four ‘marks’ of the Church as One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic;

- i. *one*: see Art. 16: one God, faith, baptism, so one Kirk (see also John 17).
- ii. *holy*: has received remission of sins, the gift of the Spirit of sanctification.

While acknowledging faults and imperfections, the church covered by the imputed righteousness of Christ.

- iii. *catholic*: denoting its universality, of all conditions of men and women, tongues and nations; with three special gifts — remission of sins, resurrection of the flesh, and eternal glory.

A further note needs to be made on ‘apostolicity’. The question of apostolicity is generally linked with ‘succession’, of the ministry. However, the Church in Scotland has held that there have been issues far more important than succession. For Knox, the prime concern was not validity of orders, but effective preaching and pastoring. Not, does this man comply with ecclesiastical order, but is he a man of God and Word? Knox called even bishops into question, arguing that the need of the nation was ministers, not priests — his question was, ‘could old priests in orders be accepted as new ministers’?

Early Scottish standards don’t call the Church ‘apostolic’, since it is not a biblical term, certainly not in the Apostles’ creed. Knox believed the Reformation restored the Church to its primitive and apostolic purity, in continuity with first Christians, and was based on Christ, and thought the term gave little confidence or security to the Church.³⁶

³⁴ Torrance, ‘John Knox’, *op. cit.*, page 28.

³⁵ Denney, *op. cit.*, page 6. For a popular treatment of the issues relating to this ‘discipline’, see John Kennedy, *Presbyterian Authority and Discipline* (St Andrew Press: 1960): see esp. Ch. IV ‘Discipline and Christian Fellowship, pages 59-78. Along with Calvin, Knox exhorts all to self-examination prior to attendance to the Lord’s Table. Yet this examination ought to be complemented by that of the local elders, who undertake to hear confessions from fellow believers. This detracted from the view of the sacraments as ‘converting ordinances’ (the term is not found in either Calvin or Knox, though such a notion is present in their thought), as divinely appointed means of entering union with Christ. (so, Torrance, ‘John Knox’, *op. cit.*, page 45). Yet Knox held to view of sacraments as unambiguously pointing to the person and work of Christ.

³⁶ G D Henderson, *Church and Ministry*, (Hodder & Stoughton: 1951), page 163. See further the views of Gustaf Wingren and P T Forsyth:

- (i.) Wingren on Apostolic Succession: see *The Living Word* (Muhlenberg Press: 1960). See pages 96ff. on ‘the commission of the ministry’; Footnote on page 98ff.

Continuity between the holders of office in different ages is, accordingly, due to the fact that the living Christ works all the time. Christ’s words, spoken and heard today, binding together Christ’s resurrection and Christ’s *Parousia* is the link in the chain of events and contains all the continuity that is necessary. The need for an ecclesiastical succession implies doubt about the living Christ: the theological basis for such a succession is that Christ *was once* alive and established a ministry which later was passed on by means of a visible ecclesiastical causal chain — a belief which is essentially akin to belief in a verbally, inspired book handed down to us. pages 98-99.

- (ii.) P. T. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments* (Independent Press: 1953), ch. VII ‘The Ministry Sacramental’

Forsyth argued that the true apostolic succession is the evangelical:

The strict successor of the Apostle is the New Testament, as containing the precipitate of their standard preaching. It is not the ministry that is the successor of the Apostolate, but the ministry *plus* the true apostolic legacy of the Bible — the ministry *of the Word*. . . . The Apostolic succession is the Evangelical succession. Its continuity lies not in a due devolution but in a common inspiration, a common ministration

Further, it is the Church that is apostolic, not merely its ministry. He affirmed the ministry of superintendent, over bishop: but whether this would be a temporary measure, or permanent feature was unknown.³⁷

3:3:1 CHURCH AND STATE RELATIONS

For Knox, there are two distinct Kingdoms (contrasted, but not to clash); there was no clear or evident division of life into religion and politics. The Church was an earthly kingdom, as the ‘nation in its religious aspect.’³⁸

Holding to a unitary view of Scripture, and the world, Knox saw it as logical to find answers to his questions in the Scriptures.³⁹ What was true for Old Testament Israel, was so for 16th. century Scottish civil magistrate (citing Psalm 2). Hence his calls to the Commonality to reject the idolatry of the Mass, and to apply capital punishment to offenders.

So, Knox sought to effect a Christian Commonwealth for all Scotland, as the Ecclesiastical (Church) and Political (civil) realms cooperate to establish true religion throughout the nation.⁴⁰ His view of Scripture in relation to Church and State may be tabulated:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>i. purification of worship
OT Scripture/literalists
Deut. 12:32 as rubric for worship</p> | <p>ii. resist idolatrous rulers.

became basis for resisting and/or
opposing political authority
overthrow political power, so set
up Reformed Faith.</p> |
|--|---|

Such a view led to differences between the Church and State, and within the Church over relations with the State: as MacLeod comments,

the stand made in Scotland against the encroachments of the Crown and on behalf of the exclusive kingly rights of its Head and Lord to appoint the conduct of the government of the Visible Church as His professed kingdom on earth is what more than anything else has accounted for the stormy conflict which lasted so long and was so often renewed in the Church history of the country.⁴¹

3.4 Knox’s Doctrine of the Sacraments

The Sacraments warrant a specific article in the Scots Confession (Art. 21): there is a trinitarian framework, and christological pattern. Both sacraments are firstly and foremost acts of God through Christ, and in the Holy Spirit; both ‘convey and seal to the believing participant conjunction and union with Christ.’⁴²

of God’s grace as mercy. It is (so to say) not a vertical continuity descending in a line, but a solidary, spreading through a mass; not a chain on which the Church is hung, but a nervous system pervading it and, by the Word, continually creating it.. [P T Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments*, page 137, 139-40]

³⁷ Henderson, *op. cit.*, page 185.

³⁸ Denney, *op. cit.*, page 4.

³⁹ Denney, *loc. cit.*, page 5.

⁴⁰ Apart from one exception, all divisions of the Church in Scotland have been on Church-State relations, rather than on formal theological grounds. Hence, all churches have continued to affirm their place within the ‘Catholic Church’; similarly, all churches issuing from the divisions have maintained the Pres byterian form of church polity.

⁴¹ MacLeod, *op. cit.*, pages 36-37.

⁴² Torrance, ‘John Knox’, *oop. cit.* page 36. So too, see Denney, ‘in the New Testament the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are each in its own way a condensation of the most essential truths of the Christian religion.’ page 6.

Baptism effects our being ingrafted into Christ, and the commencement of our life as a covenant community member; in the Lord's Supper believers partake of the person and work, life and ministry of Christ, and continue in the life of the Church. Both complement each other, since both have common content — *Christ Jesus Himself*.

3:4:1 BAPTISM

For Knox, baptism is the sign of first entrance into people of God; the Father maintains this in his gracious faithfulness, not that of the Church or individual believers. We are commanded within the New Covenant to baptise all those who are children of Christ's members. God is pleased to offer this as the sign of his acceptance, provide tuition and defence for his people, in addition to the promise and gift of the Spirit.⁴³

The basis for Knox's view of baptismal initiation of children is provided in *The Book of Common Order* and *John Knox's Liturgy*: two grounds are presented, the free and faithful grace of God the Father as primary (so that the sign of the New Covenant should be applied to children of believers), and the fact that Christ readily admitted children into his presence, declaring them to be recipients of the Kingdom and its attendant blessings (Mark 10; Matt. 19; Luke 18: this being underscored by the apostolic directive in I Cor. 7:14, that children of believers are designated 'holy').

The sacrament is directly related to Christ's person and work: it signifies our ingrafting into Him, and full participation in all his saving benefits which come on the basis of our union with him. This ingrafting has a duplex action: on the one hand it involves a translation from one state of natural life and inheritance, into a new life and eternal inheritance in Christ, while on the other it indicates that we have been clothed with Christ and his righteousness (justified by His grace).⁴⁴

3:4:2 THE LORD'S SUPPER/EUCHARIST

While evidently having a personal fascination or attraction to 'the glistening beauty of ceremonies', Knox felt the strong appeal of the Roman Mass.⁴⁵ He countered this with the 'regulative principle' as found in Deut. 12:32 ('Not that which appeareth good in thine eyes shalt thou do to the Lord thy God, but what the Lord thy God hath commanded thee, that shalt thou do: add nothing to it, diminish nothing from it.'): there is no place for abridged or amended additions to worship. Hence all worship must be agreeable to the revealed will of God, and the Word of God.

The Roman Mass gave the Church control over its members, as a temporal repetition of Christ's *timeless* sacrifice, and a means of participating in that eternal sacrifice.⁴⁶ Knox countered such notions on three grounds:

- i. the restoration of the sole mediatorship of Jesus Christ, and His unique and once for all atoning sacrifice on the Cross;
- ii. the restoration of the historical perspective of the Lord's Supper, and reformation of the liturgy according to what took place in the Upper Room (cf. Paul's insistence in I Cor. 11: 23); and
- iii. a renewed stress on the whole Christ as the 'substance' of the sacrament: the Christ who was crucified, but also risen, ascended, and will return. Here Knox

⁴³ Torrance, 'John Knox', *op. cit.*, page 37.

⁴⁴ Torrance, 'John Knox', *op. cit.*, page 38.

⁴⁵ Torrance, 'John Knox', *op. cit.*, page 39.

⁴⁶ Torrance, *ibid.* See too Denney's comment, 'if the gospel was buried under all the clerical mummery of masses it was buried alive, so to speak, and could work through them still for the healing of simple souls.' *op. cit.*, page 4. The great need of the hungry soul remained — 'the assurance of a present sinbearing love of God' see page 4.

especially concentrated on the Ascension and Parousia of Christ, which he had stressed as key articles of the faith. In relation to the ascension, Knox conceded a ‘distance’ between the earthly elements and the ascended Christ, and also affirmed the ‘real presence’ of Christ by the Spirit. Hence, the directive of the *Sursum Corda* (‘lift up your hearts’), where the believers are to rise up in faith to their proper place, the heavenly sanctuary (cf. our life is hid with Christ in God; cf. Col. 3:4).

In relation to the Parousia or Advent of Christ, there is an element of judgement, upon the elements employed in the worship, as provisional and temporary, and pointing away from themselves to the Coming Christ and their fulfilment in the new creation. Here is an eschatological note or perspective not seen so readily in other rites.

The ‘real presence’ and eating and drinking of Christ’s Body and Blood, takes place through the Spirit, to be received and known only to faith.⁴⁷ Here is a dynamic relation of Word and Spirit, more than mere signs, with the bread and wine *really conveying* through the Spirit what they promise — the Spirit freely conveying and confirming the life of Christ to and in the Church.

Overall Knox overcame the Roman view of sacerdotal priesthood, with the sole High Priesthood of Jesus Christ, as God and man, as mediator and sacrifice. This emancipated the Kirk to engage in eucharist — thanksgiving, praise and prayer — in the name of Christ. The Supper also provides a testimony to the unity we have with and in Christ: it is outwardly expressed in the visible unity of the Church, and the Church as Communion.⁴⁸ The other feature of Knox’s view was his insistence that the Church enters into the intercessory prayer ministry of Christ our High Priest (cf. John 17).

Such intercession provided further impetus to Knox’s concern for the poor and needy, the care for others clearly enunciated and provided for in the *First Book of Discipline*.⁴⁹ For, as Torrance notes, ‘it was through union with Christ in his vicarious humanity nourished in sacramental communion that the concern of the Reformed Kirk with human and social care in the lives of people was grounded.’⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

Given the evidence from the documents of the Scottish Reformation, namely the *Scot’s Confession* and the *(First) Book of Discipline*, and the theology of Knox, can we come to any conclusion or answer to our question — was John Knox the champion of the Reformation Kirk?

M Charles Bell, while allowing for much that is commendable in Knox’s theology, and his contribution to the reformation documents, concludes his discussion by alledging that Knox’s work is severely compromised by going beyond Calvin in two areas: i. church discipline (as a mark of the Church) is elevated as complement to Word and sacraments (leading on to the distinction between ‘evangelical’ and ‘legal’ repentance); and ii. the covenant as a national league or band between God and man, with the nation as obliged by conditional covenant obedience to holiness (and elimination of all idolatry), thereby obscuring the effective and completed work of Christ.⁵¹ To answer such claims is beyond the scope of our paper: however, whether such issues or shifts may be attributed to Knox does not necessarily mean that they did not take place, with disastrous consequences for the Kirk and nation.

What we can affirm with some certainty is that during the life and ministry of Knox,

⁴⁷ Torrance, ‘John Knox, *op. cit.*, page 41.

⁴⁸ Torrance, ‘John Knox’, *op. cit.*, page 42,3.

⁴⁹ Torrance, ‘John Knox’, *op. cit.*, page 44.

⁵⁰ Torrance, ‘John Knox, *op. cit.*, page 45.

⁵¹ Bell, *op. cit.*, page 48.

the emerging Reformed Church in Scotland found the new centre of gravity in the pulpit. The exposition of the Word of God in the Reformed churches created the new communions of Christian people, inspired them to battle for what they saw as a purified worship and a more Scriptural and 'democratic' government of the Church, and was an instrument in the struggle from state control.⁵²

What was Knox's legacy to the Kirk and nation? It was a new view and value to Kirk and Nation, to Church and State, with people coming into their own, against the nobles, and ecclesiastical nepotism.⁵³ John Knox may well be hailed then, as a true 'champion of the Church.' And we may echo W Croft Dickinson's conclusion: John Knox 'gave to the people of Scotland a living Church that did much to form the national character, he gave them a new moral outlook, with a sense of duty on earth which was duty before God, and in them he planted a deep desire for a knowledge of all things both spiritual and temporal.'⁵⁴

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⁵² David Read, 'The Scottish Tradition of Preaching' in Duncan Forrester & Douglas Murray (eds.), *Studies in the History of Worship in Scotland* (T. & T. Clark: 1984), pages 132-3.

⁵³ It may be claimed that the Reformed Church may also be said to have established the Commons.

⁵⁴ Dickinson, *op. cit.*, page 17.

APPENDICES

A. The Life and Ministry of John Knox.

- 1514? Birth of John Knox at Giffordgate at outer Haddington.
- 1536 Ordained Priest by Bishop of Dunblane.
- 1543 Tutor for sons of Hugh Douglas of Longriddy and John Cockburn of Ormiston. Probable conversion: due to influence of Thomas Gwilliam, & reading of John 17.
- 1546 George Wishart (Protestant preacher): burnt at stake on 1 March (in castle of St Andrews).
- 1547 Knox and students to St Andrews castle for safety. By this time had seen and could argue against, the excesses and corruption of the Church of Rome. Challenged to justify his position, he saw this as confirmation of his call to be a preacher. In July the castle captured by the Regent, and Knox and others sent as slaves in French naval galleys.
- 1549 March — released, and licensed to preach and pastor in Berwick, (Diocese of Durham).
- 1550 Summoned to argue his views on Mass in April in Newcastle. He argued that the Mass was expression of idolatry, was blasphemous and abomination — not a sacrifice, since Christ's death was 'once for all act'.
- 1551 Moved to Newcastle, appointed King's Chaplain (Edward VI).
- 1553 6 July — King Edward died, leaving Mary Tudor as Queen.
- 1554 Mary of Guise-Lorraine, Mary Tudor's mother, became Regent of Scotland.
 To Dieppe in France. In March he moved to Geneva to consult with Calvin, and was referred on to Pierre Viret (Lausanne) and Henry Bullinger (Zurich). He returned to France, as English Protestant bishops were being imprisoned. In July: Published *A Faithful Admonition to the Professors of God's Truth in England* (denounced Mary and her allies). In August: returned to Geneva. Then in November: accepted call to Frankfurt, where the Church was divided on issue of Liturgy. Knox was rejected by Church, and expelled from the city.
- 1555 March, determined to head for Scotland, via Geneva. 1555 or 1556 — Married Marjory Bowes in Edinburgh (daughter of Bowes (from the castle in Berwick). His preaching mission through central Scotland marked the turning point of the Reformation in Scotland, as he called those in favour of Reformation to reject the idolatry of the Mass.
- 1556 15 May — to appear before Bishops in Edinburgh. When he appeared, with such large support, the case was dropped. So he went preaching again, for 10 days of unprecedented opportunities. Wrote to Regent (Queen Mother Mary of Guise) on behalf of nobles, to try to convince her to reform the Church.
 Knox left with wife and mother-in-law, to return to Geneva to pastor English speaking Kirk. He wrote that for the future (hopefully only a short term measure) believers should meet as house churches: *A Most Wholesome Counsel how to behave ourselves in the midst of this Wicked Generation*.
- 1557 Spent in Dieppe. Later in 1558 returned to Geneva, as pastor and city burger. Together worked out a 'godly revolution.' Was participant in drafting the English version of the Bible (Genevan Bible). Utilised the order of worship he had earlier compiled in Frankfurt, and provided almost the total text for the *Book of Common Order* (C of Scot).
- Encouraged to return to Scotland, 'where you shall find all faithful that ye left behind you, not only glad to hear your doctrine, but will be ready to jeopard lives and goods in the forward setting of the glory of God.'

- Knox wrote: *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. published in summer of 1558. Knox came to position of affirming that rebellion may be lawful before both man and God. Female sovereignty as contrary to both divine and natural law.
- 1559 Set out again for Scotland, encouraged by ‘an organized group of influential laymen committed to reform’ by a Common Bond and Covenant.
- 1560 Reformation Parliament met in August:
- i. jurisdiction of pope abolished;
 - ii. celebration of Mass forbidden,
 - iii. *Confession of Faith* approved;
 - iv. all doctrine and practice contrary to *Confession* condemned.
- 1564 Married: to 17 year old Margaret Stewart, daughter of Andrew Stewart of Ochiltree. Marjory Bowes died either late November or early December 1560. Knox married again in March 1564. They had three daughters — Martha, Margaret and Elizabeth.
- 1572 24 November, ‘he rendered his spirit’, as his wife was comforting him with John chapter 17.

B. The Scots Confession (1560)

Chap. I	God
Chap. II	The Creation of Man
Chap. III	Original Sin
Chap. IV	The Revelation of the Promise
Chap. V	The Continuance, Incease and Preservation of the Kirk
Chap. VI	The Incarnation of Christ Jesus
Chap. VII	Why the Mediator had to be True God and True Man
Chap. VIII	Election
Chap. IX	Christ’s Death, Passion, and Burial
Chap. X	The Resurrection
Chap. XI	The Ascension
Chap. XII	Faith in the Holy Ghost
Chap. XIII	The Cause of Good Works
Chap. XIV	The Works which are counted good before God
Chap. XV	The Perfection of the Law and the Imperfection of Man
Chap. XVI	The Kirk
Chap. XVII	The Immortality of Souls
Chap. XVIII	The Notes by which the True Kirk shall be determined from the False and who shall be Judge of Doctrine
Chap. XIX	The Authority of the Scriptures
Chap. XX	General Councils, their power, authority, and the cause of their summoning
Chap. XXI	The Sacraments
Chap. XXII	The Right Administration of the Sacraments
Chap. XXIII	To Whom Sacraments appertain
Chap. XXIV	The Civil Magistrate
Chap. XXV	The Gifts freely given to the Kirk

These acts and articles were read in the face of the Parliament and ratified by the Three Estates, at Edinburgh the 17 day of August the year of God, 1560 years.

A. C. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (SCM Press: 19..), pages 166-184.

C. The (First) Book of Discipline

Sect. I — Doctrine (the need for preaching the Gospel, suppression of false teaching); Sect. II — The Sacraments (Baptism and Lord's Supper administered in native tongue: water only for baptism; communion of both kinds, sitting at the Table as 'most convenient'); Sect. III — Abolition of Idolatry (esp. as seen in the Mass, invocation of saints, adoration of images, etc.; the suppression of religious houses); Sect. IV — The Ministry (the congregation had a voice in the selection and call of the minister; examination of candidates; ordination, temporary assistant readers; Sect. V — Provision for the Ministry (stipends, from the Kirk's patrimony, to be administered by deacons; others who engaged in ministry to be recompensed); Sect. VI — Patrimony (tiends, land rent, etc. to radically change the ancient practice of benefices and nepotism, and redistribute the resources in favour of the parishes); additional section included on Superintendants, schools and universities, indicating the Reformers concern for evangelisation and education; Sect. VII — Discipline (cf. ecclesiastical and civil; preachers and princes; with the Kirk's right to excommunicate enunciated); Sect. VIII — Elders and Deacons (with mutual censure and admonition commended); and Sect. IX — Ecclesiastical Administration (ie. local congregation activities, orderly preaching of the Word, administration of sacraments, public prayer, marriages, burials, religious instruction, upkeep of buildings, etc.).