



**New Creation Teaching Ministry**

**PASTOR'S MONDAY STUDY GROUP NOTES**

**1994**

**February:** Christ the Prophet

**March:** The Marvellous High Priesthood of Christ, the Son of God—I

**April:** The Marvellous High Priesthood of Christ, the Son of God—II

**May:** Christ the King & His Royal Community

**June:** Borrowed Holiness (Dr John Kleinig)

**July:** Jesus the Man of Law

**August:** Christ the Living Image

**September:** Christ: Liberator of the Conscience

**October:** Christ: The Mediator of the Better Covenant—I

**November:** Christ: The Mediator of the Better Covenant—II

**December:** God's Covenant: Its Commencement & Culmination

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## **Study One: Christ the Prophet**

### **Introduction: The Practical and Pastoral Significance of Christology**

In his work *The Oracles of God*<sup>1</sup> Calvin said, 'Whoever does not know the office of Jesus Christ, can never trust in God, nor make prayers and supplications: he will always be in anxiety and doubt and dissimulation. Unless faith comes and shows the way, it is certain (I say) that we shall never have access to God'. This is a sobering statement especially if our people do not really know the office of Christ.

There can be no question but that the Christian world, the constituency of Christian churches, has as its primacy the idea of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Various churches and sects may often be in heresy as regards the orthodox interpretation of Christ, but these hold to him as they see him. There would no group calling itself 'Christian' which not hold that Christ is unique amongst human beings. Other great religious leaders would not be put in the same class. There can be no escaping the fact that the life, vitality, power and praxis of any group is dependent upon the view it takes of Christ. There is no theology worth the name which does not evidence itself in the life of the believer. Hence if belief is wrong or asymmetrical so will the worship be deficient and so will the ethical, moral and vocational life of the group be awry. Church history has shown us that churches have died out because they have had the wrong view of Christ.

### **The Problem of Belief and Practice**

Few thoughtful Christians would deny that their lives have had risings and fallings according to their perception of Christ. If there are such persons as 'nominal Christians' then the being of Christ will mean little to them. If they are orthodox in the form of their belief then there will be consequent orthopraxis, rightly speaking even if some of it may be mediocre. Where belief is nominal, this will not result in any great action of life. Thus the rising and falling of our praxis will be to some degree dependent upon our personal and intimate belief in Christ, especially as it is aided by the Holy Spirit. If we can talk of mere cerebral belief, then a rational system will be built up which we would call 'Christian living'. Where existential knowledge of Christ is lacking then the form of the life will differ from those who have existential knowledge, personal conviction and whose understanding of Christ as Saviour, Lord, Prophet, Priest, King and the Mediator of creation, redemption and the final renewal of the creation. Nominal Christianity has always held to some kind of morality, the fruits of a former vital Christian community.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by T.H. L. Parker (Lutterworth, London, 1947, p. 150). Calvin was commenting on Luke 2:9-14.

In immediate, practical terms the life and the vitality of the Christian person will be present in proportion to his or her living, intimate, personal and existential knowledge of, and relation to, the person of Christ. What is not always evident to us is that we can accept all the Scripture teaches of Christ and yet have little or even no dynamic comprehension of Christ himself. Holding the doctrine of Christ may not be holding to Christ, or living in him, even though we may have a theology of the same.

To test out this Christological belief, let us ask ourselves how we really see Christ and relate to him. The test is not simply an emotional one, but it contains the affectional. If it lacks this then the statement of I Peter 1:8 is void, ‘Without having seen him [Jesus Christ] you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy’<sup>2</sup>. If we ask what the offices of Christ mean to us in terms of our relation to the man Christ Jesus, then this will further reveal who and what Christ is to us. For example, if Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world then that disenfranchises any other person from being that. No other human being can claim to be as him. If we deny the necessity for being saved, then we deny his Saviourhood and so deny him. If salvation has not been, and is not being, the experience and reality of our lives then all ideas of Christ are valueless. The same test could be put to his other offices and would bring similar results, namely evidence of a non-belief in Christ.

In any given church or sect the life of the group and the persons within it would be evidenced by their knowledge of, and belief in Christ in his offices. For example, what does the continuing intercession of Christ at the right hand of the Father mean, in practice, to members of our congregation, especially to those who seek out every human aid in order to be pursue their living, especially when problems and crises confront them. Do they rest in his intercessory power? Do they trust his Lordship over all creation and all events of human living? Do they see that only his Lordship over principalities and powers—with whom believers wrestle—assures them of a final good outcome?

For those of us who are Christian pastors and leaders how much does Christ’s person and work figure especially in the practice of life and ministry? We need to be able to give some kind of answer to this question, and we need to ask whether we have in us the dynamics of belief and of the person of Christ. Even more, we need to inquire whether the lack of genuine vitality in our churches does not arise because of a personal lack of faith in Christ and thus in subsequent practice. As pastors we need to inquire whether we have had made the theology of Christ central but not Christ himself. It may be that the many cosmetic (‘make up’) elements that we employ may be because we lack personal, intimate, existential—and hence dynamic—relationship with Christ.

*A Note:* In our Christological studies we recognise that there is not a true Christology which is not at the same time one with Patrology and Pneumatology. All Persons of the Godhead must be viewed as one and in one. To come to know Christ is also to know the Father and the Spirit. Christ can only be comprehended within the Trinitarian perspective. The second point our note concerns is the historical Jesus. Attempts to demythologise, to contextualise Jesus of Nazareth particularly by trying to get the mind of the early community of Jesus so as to find the true historical figure is an attempt bound to fail. Any epistemology must work from the position of revelation, Christ as God’s revelation, Christ revealed by God, and God revealed by Christ. Christ’s claims

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<sup>2</sup> We will remember that this key verse was foundational to Jonathan Edwards’ *A Treatise on the Religious Affections*. Edwards virtually claimed that if one lacked the affectional, one lacked true faith.

reveal him to *be* history and whilst he is a person *in* history he is more than one *of* history, for he is *over* history. That our rationalising of him should produce the true Jesus, the historical Jesus is an impossibility. We must therefore see him as a person in history, but not think we can treat his ‘case’ by our investigative methods. ‘The mystery of Christ’ is, like all God’s mysteries, only known by revelation, and whilst rational thinking may exist within the appropriation of Christ through revelation, it cannot, of itself, appropriate Christ.

### **The New Testament, the Old Testament and the Presentation of Christ**

Formal Christologies have sought to begin with the prophecies of the Old Testament in regard to the person and work of Christ, and there is much sense in this method. Even so, the New Testament begins, as in Mark 1:1, ‘The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,’ an assertion of the being of Jesus. Mark 1:2 refers to the Old Testament as its basic terms of reference. The New Testament as a whole presents us with the Jesus of Nazareth who is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and who is Immanuel, ‘God with us’ in the flesh. In fact it is not difficult for us to work out the offices claimed for him. The congregation of Israel in the time of Jesus did not accept, and so did not authenticate these offices. For this reason formal Christologies present the offices predicted in the Old Testament of One to come, and combines them so that they are to be found in the one person, and seeks to show their ordination is of God, and that Israel in the flesh opposed the will of God in not recognising, and not accepting Jesus as His Chosen One.

### **The New Testament and the Old: An Interpretation**

One thing is clear from the Gospels, the Acts and the Epistles and that is that Christ appointed apostles to proclaim what he had accomplished, and that these apostles believed in their apostolate, and were convinced of the apostolic truth committed to them. It could not be apostolic without apostles. By ‘apostolic truth’ we mean the events [or, event] of Christ as interpreted in the light of the Old Testament and the Old Testament as interpreted in the light of the events [event] of Christ, so that a new formulation of truth which was not singly the Old Testament or singly the event’s of Christ, was now proclaimed. The New Testament proceeds in the understanding that the apostles were given full revelation of the person and work of Christ. Apostolic truth, then, should not be understood as a formulation or a body of theology or a credal setting out of elements to be believed for salvation and incorporation into the people of God, but should be seen as Christ himself so revealed by the Father and the Holy Spirit, that he is the revelation of the Godhead and of the work of God as God has planned it for history and for the *telos* which concludes and completes it. Whilst the *kerugma*—the preaching formulation of the gospel—does seem like a body of truth to believe it was Christ who was to be believed for salvation (Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9). The *kerugma* simply revealed the person and work of Christ.

On this basis of the Old Testament and the New Testament comprising a unity<sup>3</sup> the inherent Christology of the Old Testament is important<sup>4</sup>. As each Testament sheds light on the other so an understanding of the person and work of Christ is enlarged. The few words of Luke 24:25–26 and 24:44–48 show us Christ’s mind on the relation of the Old Testament and his incarnation–redemption event.

And he said to them, “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Then he said to them, “These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

Again, we must take into account the matter of the Law and the Gospel. Christ came to be the end of the law (Rom. 10:4; cf. John 1:16–17). The term ‘law’ is specifically used for the law to Israel but generically for the whole of the Old Testament. In this sense he was the ‘end of the law and the prophets’<sup>5</sup>. What ‘the end of the law’ means exegetically is linked with the passages from Luke 24 (above) and has to do with ‘fulfilment’. Thus there is an organic unity in the Old and New Testaments, and without Christ and the Gospel the whole Scriptures do not make sense. ‘The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’ (Rev. 19:10) certainly fits with what we have said, and enhances it.

For the purposes of this Study we will not now and here refer to the predictions of the Old Testament except to state some of the titles which can be the materials for research. Not all scholars agree that such titles should be attributed to Christ but through the internal references of the New Testament, most can be shown to refer to Christ. They are then, Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah/Christ, Davidic King/Son of David, Righteous Branch, Suffering Servant, the Prophet. To these could be added by inference Immanuel, King of Israel, Judge of All, Law–Giver, and so on. Since this is a specialised subject, worthy of much attention, we will leave it to another more confirmatory Study. I propose in this Study to take up only the office of Christ as Prophet. First, however, we need to see the meaning of the term ‘office’ and to recognise that any one of these offices cannot be viewed separately from the other offices attributed to Christ. We shall take a look at Calvin’s understanding of Christ’s offices.

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<sup>3</sup> The New Testament was not written even early in the apostolic ministry, but its elements were all present, active and operative. The enscripturing of the apostolic truth and action added nothing to them but was essential for the continued understand of the community, especially as the apostles ceased to be, and because oral transmission is always open to error.

<sup>4</sup> Here we have to take as accepted that Christ is in all the Scriptures

<sup>5</sup> See Romans 3:21 and parallel texts where ‘the law and prophets’ really constitute the whole of the Old Testament. To say Christ was ‘the end of the law’ does mean the law was ended, but, rather, fulfilled. Thus the prophets and prophecy were also not ended.

## Calvin's Understanding of Christ's Offices

J. F. Jansen in his *Calvin's Doctrine of the Work of Christ* sets out Calvin's understanding of Christ's offices<sup>6</sup>. They are Redeemer, Messiah, King, Priest, and Revelator of God. Jansen points out that whilst Calvin uses the term 'Prophet' for an office of Christ comes to include it under 'Messiah'. Within the office of Redeemer Jansen shows that Calvin speaks of Christ as Victor, Ruler and Judge. We may ask ourselves whether we define these latter elements in or preaching of him as Redeemer. Indeed, we may ask whether we have existentially appropriated the five—perhaps six, if Prophet is valid—offices, and truly proclaim them for the life and practice of our congregations.

Calvin was the Reformer above all who spoke of the triple office of Christ as Prophet Priest and King, but this dogmatic pronouncement is not supported by him exegetically, so that ultimately Calvin sees Messiah as having the two offices of Priest and King and these being indissolubly joined. Whilst in some senses the Messiah has prophetic overtones, yet Prophet is not an office. We will seek to see whether there is not an exegetical link that makes Messiah consist of a triple office or offices.

### The Term 'Office'

This is no exegetical term but a dogmatic one. Because the word is not literally used in Scripture does not mean its principle is absent. If Christ is Prophet, Priest and King, then these must be offices though none of these may be understood apart from the others. 'Office' can have the thought of a ministry into which someone is installed, a position or a place, service, work or function. How can we speak of Christ being Priest and uniquely so unless God—his Father—has so appointed him (Heb. 5:5–6)? How can he be King without a similar appointment (Heb. 5:5–6)<sup>7</sup>? The meaning of 'office' lies in his position, his function and his work. Whilst in some situations a person may be elected and appointed to an office, the difference with Christ was that he was not just fulfilling an office in the way we might understand it in our culture, that is a position which may be given to another or which may cease for certain reasons. The office took its meaning from him. Otto Weber says of Christ, 'The concept "office" seeks to remove the activity of Jesus from the sphere of the private, the arbitrary and the accidental. That is what is justifiable about it'.<sup>8</sup>

## Christ as Prophet

### Traditional Exegesis of Christ as Prophet: Deuteronomy 18:15–22; Acts 3:17–26

The traditional way of showing Christ to be the unique Prophet is to take Deuteronomy 18:15–22 which speaks of God 'raising up' and thus appointing 'a prophet like me',

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<sup>6</sup> *Calvin's Doctrine of the Work of Christ*, James Clarke, London, 1956, especially pages 60–102.

<sup>7</sup> We will later see that Psalm 2: 1, 6, 7, 8 speaks of one being made King ('his anointed', 'my king' 'my son') and Psalm 110:1, 4 tells of one being made Priest after the order of Melchizedek—King—Priest—thus showing that Messiah is King-Priest.

<sup>8</sup> *Foundations of Dogmatic Vol II*, p. 170 (Eerdmans, 1983).

and to prove that in the New Testament Christ is that one, especially by the use of Acts 3:17–26.

And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, 3:20 and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old. Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul that does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’ 3:24 And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came afterwards, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness.

In this passage Peter was saying that this prophet has come, and not to listen to him, that is not to obey him, is to be destroyed. This principle had never been spoken of any of the prophets, not even Moses. To be ‘sons of the prophets’ must mean, among other things, that those of Israel were part of the prophetic community and were liable to hear the prophets and that each member of Israel was not a prophet, just as to be ‘a kingdom of priests’ (Exod. 19:5–6) did not mean that each was an appointed priest, but that they were a community linked with the appointed priesthood, and therefore a people of worship<sup>9</sup>. At this point we might ask whether, pastorally, we teach and confront our congregations with the facts that they are ‘sons of the prophets’ and ‘sons of the covenant’ and should act in conformity with this identity—the prophetic and covenantal categories and their demands.

If we only exegete Deuteronomy 18 from verse 15 we miss the full import of the verses 9–14 and so of the theme of the true prophet. Verses 9–14 forbid ‘abominable practices’ which are then nominated as the occult which is the pagan equivalent of what the prophet is about. As we will see the prophet teaches, and his words have the power to predict what will happen as well as to teach the way of life in the law. Human beings desire to know the future and so seek divination in its occultic forms, but divination is linked with the idols and their laws. The unique prophet who will come will speak the words God desires him to speak and an entirely (that is unique) situation will arise with his coming.

### **Traditional Exegesis: ‘More than More than a Prophet’**

In John 1:19–23 the priests and Levites sent by the Jews from Jerusalem asked John—among other questions ‘Are you the prophet?’ He said, ‘No.’ Jesus said later of John, ‘What went you out to see? A prophet. Yes, and I tell you more than a prophet.’ He went on to show that John was—to that point in time—the greatest born of women. This would seem to be a testimony to John’s being ‘the prophet’ but it was not. In Matthew 16:13 in answer to Jesus asking them ‘Who do men say that the Son of man is’,

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<sup>9</sup> Exodus 19:5–6 can be exegeted to show that Israel as a people, a corporate entity was the priest-nation *for* and *among* all nations. The use of this passage in I Peter 2:9–10 can show that the church ‘a royal priesthood’ as such for being a people of worship, but also for proclamation. Our Study on ‘Christ as Priest’ will seek to show that the church is incorporated into Christ’s Priesthood and so does not have one of its own. It is not ‘the priesthood of all each believer’, but ‘the priesthood of all believers’, that is a corporate entity..

they replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or on of the prophets’. Jesus asked Peter directly what the apostles thought, and Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’, thus raising Jesus above John the Baptist, Elijah and ‘one of the prophets’. He was unique.

Jesus certainly referred to himself obliquely as a prophet when he said. ‘A prophet has no honour in his own country,’ though it could be argued that he was arguing generally for the fact that Israel had always rejected the one who came with the word of God. His apostrophe to Jerusalem in Matthew 23:37–39 could be interpreted in either of these two ways or especially as meaning he was the unique prophet about to be killed, especially as he says in the Lukan parallel, ‘I must go my way today and tomorrow and the third day for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem’. This surely includes him in the prophets. In Luke 7:11–17 the raising of the son of the widow of Nain is reported, and Luke reports, ‘Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen among us!” and “God has visited his people!”’ ‘What was meant by ‘a great prophet? The woman at the well (John 4:19) said, ‘Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet,’ for he had told her all that she had ever done. Even more to the point was the conclusion people came to in John 6:1–14, following the feeding of the 5,000, ‘When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, “This is indeed the prophet that was to come into the world!”’<sup>10</sup> This was surely a reference to Deuteronomy 18:15–22. In Matthew 21:11 (cf. John 7:52), ‘the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”’<sup>11</sup> Otto Weber suggests these are more suggestive of the office of Messiah than of a separate office of the Prophet (op. cit. p.171).

Having said all this can we maintain that no less than being Priest and King, Jesus was—and is—Prophet? Calvin certainly spoke of him as Prophet but a close reading of his writings may lead us to believe that whilst he had spoken of the triple office/s he was eventually only confident in speaking of the double office/s—Priest and King, both of these being one in Christ as Messiah.<sup>10</sup> In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* he said II, xv, i<sup>11</sup>), ‘the office enjoined upon Christ by the Father was in three parts. He was given to be prophet and priest and king’. This seems clear enough as do many of his similar statements to show Calvin believed in this office<sup>12</sup>. Calvin then goes on to describe the office of prophet. Referring to Isaiah 61:1–2<sup>13</sup> (cf. Luke 4:18) he says, ‘We see that he was anointed by the Spirit to be herald and witness of the

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<sup>10</sup> Calvin certainly made claim that Christ was Prophet but Jansen points out that Calvin seemed to subsume the prophetic office under the term ‘Messiah’. Calvin sees the work of the prophet as a revelatory and so a teaching one. Jansen (p.58) says, The real question, however, is whether this revelatory aspect of Christ’s mission is for Calvin best understood in terms of a formula of offices which would place it alongside the kingly and priestly offices. This is precisely what later theology does, but apparently Calvin does not do this. If we read carefully, we find that the revelatory character of Christ’s work does not receive a separate or ‘typical’ treatment—rather it belongs to his *de persona*, it permeates his kingly and priestly work’. Jansen says the offices are concerned with redemptive work, ‘Nowhere does he [Calvin] relate the prophetic office to the Cross’ (p.58). I think Jansen is unconsciously using special pleading as our Study will attempt to prove.

<sup>11</sup> The version we are using is the one edited by John T. McNeill and translated and indexed by Ford Lewis Battles, Westminster Press, 1960.

<sup>12</sup> Jansen (op. cit.) quotes the following ancient and medieval fathers as speaking of Christ’s threefold office, Eusebius (d. 339), Chrysostom (d. 407), Petrus Chrysologus (d. 450), Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274). He also refers to the pre-Reformation Osiander but does not think Calvin would have drawn from this source which he disliked

<sup>13</sup> It is often argued that in the Old Testament kings and priests were not necessarily actually anointed in a ritual of applied oil. In Kings 19:16 Elijah was told to anoint Elisha in his place, but we hear of no anointing other than Elijah cast his mantle on Elisha. In Psalm 105:15 ‘Touch not my anointed ones, do my prophets no harm!’ seems to be a parallelism. That Jesus was anointed is shown by his reference to Isaiah 61:1–2 and Peter’s statement in Acts 10:38

Father's grace. And that not in the common way—for he is distinguished from other teachers with a similar office. On the other hand we must note this: he received anointing, not only for himself that he might carry out the office of teaching, but for his whole body that the power of the Spirit might be present in the continuing preaching of the gospel. This, however, remains certain; the perfect doctrine he has brought had made an end to all prophecies.' (op. cit. p. 496).

Other Reformed writers<sup>14</sup> speak of the prophet as one who 'ousted ignorance', was 'bound to instruct by giving teaching anent salvation', by 'teaching the will of the Father and sealing his teaching by miracles', for 'It is by his *prophetia* that Christ has fully and plainly revealed God's will for our salvation shown directly to himself', 'It includes (i) "the outwards promulgation of divine truth" and (2) "the internal illumination of the mind"'. These writers say that Christ as Prophet came to 'instruct his people in the truth of doctrine legal and evangelical' and he has that 'prophetic office by which by which he deigns to reveal to his own the will of God fully, and perfectly known to himself', and emphasise that unless Christ taught the nature of law and true righteousness, prophetically, then the hearers would not be prepared for the nature of his redemption. Prophetic preaching was thus a *prophetia evangelica* and in such preaching Christ was from eternity as essentially Prophet as he also was Priest and King. If it a *prophetia evangelica* then it is difficult to see how it is not related to redemption.

We now seek to see that if John was 'more than a prophet' and Jesus 'more than more than a prophet' was John nevertheless not a prophet, and was Jesus other than a prophet through with merely some prophetic elements in his Messiahship? Is the 'from eternity' of Christ's being as Prophet not indeed valid? We recognise that often dogma is formed not purely from exegesis whose statements are irrefutable, but from a wide view of Scripture. For example there is no pure exegesis of the Trinity, but the dogma is irrefutable.

### **Christ the Prophet: His People the Prophetic Community**

For a moment let us refer to the fact that Christ was clearly appointed Priest and King (Heb. 5:5–6; Psalms 2 and 110; Matt. 3:17; 17:5). If we take the term 'Christ' to contain these two appointments and offices, then we can scarcely escape applying the same principle to Jesus as being appointed to the office of Prophet. Matthew 3:17 is the time of his anointing to be Messiah, and Acts 10:38 confirms and explicates this. 'The Prophet' cannot be said to cease being Prophet because his prophetic ministry is said by some to have been fulfilled up to the time of the crucifixion. This would be to say that Christ's community would now be priestly and royal but not prophetic. What we will proceed to discuss below will show that argument is fallacious. All prophetic activity in the community would have to spring from itself and not its Head, which is unthinkable. Paul's statement 'prophecies shall cease' must mean they have not yet ceased. If prophetic ministry was intrinsic to Christ's earthly ministry it is intrinsic to his present ministry as it is exercised through his Body, the church.

It is clear from the day of Pentecost that outpouring of the Spirit had to do with making the community a prophetic one.

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<sup>14</sup> From this I am giving the essence of Reformed writing, using Heinrich Heppes's *Reformed Dogmatics* (Allen and Unwin, 1950, pp. 452f).

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams;  
yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days  
I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

And I will show wonders in the heaven above  
and signs on the earth beneath,  
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;  
the sun shall be turned into darkness  
and the moon into blood,  
before the day of the Lord comes,  
the great and manifest day.

And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

The ‘last days’ are from Pentecost to the Parousia so that Peter’s statement does not confine his explanation to Pentecost itself. An exegete like Jansen would have to say that the prophetic element of Jesus’ ministry was completed, and that the matter of prophecy was thus not extended to the church. Ephesians 4:11 includes ‘prophets’ in its description of the various ministries, and in I Corinthians 12:28 apostles and prophets are again mentioned together. Ephesians 2:20 speaks of the ‘household of God’—the church, the ‘holy temple’ as being ‘built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets’ and whilst the meaning of this is debated what must be conceded is that there was no doctrine or teaching which was not living in that it was one with the teacher, through the Holy Spirit, under Christ. If we say the foundation of the house of God was the doctrine of the apostles and prophets then it was not just a block of doctrine as we would know it, nor was it apart from Christ, who alone is the foundation (I Cor. 3:11). In Ephesians 3:4–6 the ‘mystery of Christ’ ‘has now been revealed to the apostles and prophets by the Spirit’.

In this sense then, the church is the community of the Prophet: His prophecy—so to speak—emanates through the church. The objection that all necessary teaching had been given by the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist and Christ as the Prophet until his ascension does not hold water. The difference between Christ as prophet and others as prophets is well shown by James who rightly points out that the prophets came with a message, with a revelation from God, but he says that this was not so of Christ. He did not so much as *bring* the word as he *was* the word: he did not so much *reveal* as he was, himself, *the revelation*. But surely this does not invalidate a continuing prophetic ministry, emanating through the church, from Christ. Acts 1:1–8 should be understood in the light of prophetic ministry. ‘You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses’. Witnessing and prophesying are intimately linked. In Revelation 19:10 ‘The testimony of Jesus is the spirit [Spirit ?] of prophecy’. To witness is to testify and this is the essence of prophecy from the proto–evangel of Genesis 3:6 to the end of the *prophecy* of the Book of the Revelation. Throughout this book the believers are in prophetic—that is, witnessing—mode. In 1:2 John is said to have borne ‘witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ’, and he is on the island of Patmos ‘on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’. In 6:9f. are saints ‘who had been slain

for the witness they had borne'. In 12:17 the dragon is angry and goes to make war with 'those who keep the commandments of God and bear witness to Jesus' In other words the teaching, exhorting and inspiring ministry of prophecy is never ended. I think Jansen's utter separation of the prophetic teaching ministry of Jesus from the work of redemption is not valid since Jesus' entire word was redemptive and the seven words of the Cross are certainly involved in redemption. Prophetic utterance does not cease prior to the Cross

An interesting window on to the prophetic community is found in Paul's discussion regarding worship in I Corinthians 14. In verses 23–25 he shows the power of prophetic ministry.

If, therefore, the whole church assembles and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

'If all prophesy' may be a hypothetical statement, but its must not be confined there. Paul is firm in this context about the ministry of prophets and prophecy. There is no suggestion in the New Testament that the New Testament prophets—and there are these—add to Old Testament canonical prophecy, but they certainly speak in the light of it and the prophecy of the Book of the Revelation is certainly 'The revelation of Jesus Christ', showing that his ministry as Prophet comes upon John the Seer and within the canon of the New Testament there is plenty of prophetic teaching which is probably the extension of Jesus' prophetic teaching given before his ascension.

### **What is a Prophet and What is Prophecy?**

It may seem rather late in our Study to raise this question and attempt definition, but the materials above have themselves helped to delineate the matter of prophet and prophecy. One of the best descriptions of a prophet is found in Exodus 6:28–7:2.

On the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, the LORD said to Moses, "I am the LORD; tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you." But Moses said to the LORD, "Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips; how then shall Pharaoh listen to me?" And the LORD said to Moses, "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh; and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you; and Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land.

Moses will be as God to Pharaoh and Aaron will be Moses' prophet. A prophet is one whose word comes from God, and who is God's mouthpiece. He does not make the word, for it is not his, but he does deliver it. Numbers 12:6–7 gives us further light.

And he [God] said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in dark speech; and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"

Here we see that ordinarily prophets received their messages from God through dreams and visions (cf. Jer. 23:23–32; Acts 2:17–18). Moses is unique in that (i) he was

entrusted with the whole of the house of Israel, and (ii) God spoke to him ‘mouth to mouth’. Whilst, in this context, Aaron and Miriam had had prophetic ministries they were not in the same quality or vein as that of Moses.

The prophets always cried, ‘Thus saith the Lord!’ and it was mandatory for Israel to hear. Whilst it is true that Jesus never said anything but what the Father told him he was in a vastly different position to the prophets and even John the Baptist. He and the Father were one. He was the word of God incarnate. He spoke *from* the Father because he was *with* the Father and they were *in* one another. The statement of Hebrews 1:1, ‘In many and various ways God spoke of old by the prophets; but in these last days has spoken to us by a Son,’ does not mean that the ministry of prophecy has been abrogated but, as we observed above the Son spoke from the Father. Just as there was need for prophecy prior to his coming so there was after his ascension, ‘you shall bear witness to me’, hence the need for prophets as well as apostles, evangelists and pastors and teachers. As in the former covenant Israel was to be a witnessing people and so prophetic (Isa. 43:9–12) so in the new covenant of Christ his people are to be witnesses. As not all in the former covenant had the office of a prophet, so in the latter covenant not all had or have this office, for whilst there were prophecies given in the congregation by men and women (I Cor. 11:4–5) these were *charisms* (gifts) rather than proceeding from an office and such an office needed to exist and did. I Corinthians 14:26–32 gives a picture of worship; only two or three prophets should speak, and then one by one and what they said should help all to ‘learn and be encouraged’. In this ministry the spirits of the prophets were subject to the prophets which I take to mean that the message of a prophet is judged as valid by other prophets and that such a sanction is needed. Some think it means that prophecy is under the control of the prophet, as against an undisciplined use of the ministry.

### **The Pastoral Use and Power of Prophecy and the Prophetic Community of Christ**

This is an important part of our Study. One of the defects of our inquiry has been that we have scarcely linked the ministry of Christ as Prophet with the other two offices of King and Priest. None of the three offices can be understood fully apart from the other two. Even so, I think we have established the fact that Christ did have the office of Prophet, along with the other two offices. In all his ministry he was prophetic. At his baptism the Father said, ‘This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,’ and this surely is the event to which Peter referred in Acts 10:38, ‘how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power: how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him’. This was undoubtedly prophetic ministry. At the Transfiguration the Father said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased: listen to him.’<sup>15</sup> The word ‘listen’ is perhaps not as strong as ‘hear’, especially as to truly hear is to truly obey (cf. Luke 8:4–21) but in any case it surely refers back to the unique prophet prophesied in Deuteronomy 18:15f. and spoken of in 3:22–23.

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<sup>15</sup> Incidentally the words of II Peter 16–21 are interesting, for the writer speaks of the event of the Transfiguration and says, ‘And we have the prophetic word made more sure’ which seems to mean that what happened was in accordance with the prophetic word, and so underlines the event of Transfiguration as authentic, not that he ever thought it was not. His discourse on prophecy in verses 20–21 is superb telling us that the source of all prophecy is not human but God Himself moving prophets by the Holy Spirit.

We have seen something of the prophetic ministry of the community following Christ's ascension when 'he gave gifts to men', one of them being the office of prophet. The gift then, is Christ's gift and in Christ, but as with Christ's use of the office on earth it was to be by the power of the Spirit. Just as the community is a priestly one and a royal one and is these only because it is the expression and operation of his Priesthood and Kingship, so prophetic ministry will come from, and be ordered by Christ the Prophet. In I Corinthians 14:4–6 Paul speaks of desiring prophecy above other gifts, not that he demeans the others. Prophecy edifies the whole church whereas tongues edifies only the person exercising glossolalia.

In a previous Study we have claimed that 'apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers' are really a functional love–hierarchy, all members being in tandem and each necessary to the others. This principle certainly fits with the former covenant where king, priest and prophet were all necessary within the covenant system and in a sense a hierarchy for the community's sake. That former covenant was a prophetic, priestly and royal community whose source was God. Many claim that it was Christ who exercised his three offices in that covenant, but we do not have time to consider this concept. We will see how the new community functions under the offices of Christ's Priesthood and Kingship, but some elements are essential for us to understand in our pastoral situations and they are these,

- (i) Christ is still Prophet and his ministry pervades, directs and enables our prophetic ministry.
- (ii) We are, by grace, obligated, all of us, to exercise prophetic ministry. This will be in and to the community as well as to the world in the sense of our witnessing to Christ.
- (iii) Such ministry is to teach, edify, exhort and encourage, as well as to keep alive in the minds and hearts of the community the eschatological and teleological movement of 'the last days'. We must recognise that as the Prophet all eschatology and teleology is Christ himself. and not just a procession of events which have been predicted. The Book of the Revelation makes no sense apart from such an understanding as this.
- (iv) The word of God is of immense power, and so the community must be the mouthpiece of the word of God, and not just a manufacturer of sermons, worship services, formal credal statements and cultural mores and demands. Each must voice the word of God by lip and by life. This is the true community at its proper work.
- (v) All must be witnesses for this is the prophetic action of the community. This is linked with the other 4 points just above.

What we have to keep in mind that just as Christ is perpetually active in his offices of Priest and King, so he is in his office of Prophet. This is at once an encouraging and confronting act. It encourages because it indicates that our churches do not have to be limp, pathetic and lethargic. Nor do they have to be frenetically active in self–justifying and self extending works. The power of Christ through his Spirit is actively working. 'The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy'. We can all be—and must be—alive to the prophetic vocation given to the churches. The cultic and cultural elements we have developed must give way to dynamic ministry of the witness and the word. Human efforts and techniques, borrowed from a world which does not know the Prophetic, Priestly and Kingly leadership and presence of Christ must be abandoned and we must be renewed in the spirit of our minds and joined to the present action of Christ as our True Head.

# **The Marvellous High Priesthood of Christ, The Son of God**

## **Introduction: Christ's Marvellous Offices**

**Special Note:** *We must keep reminding ourselves that Christ had one office, that of Messiah. For this he was anointed, yet anointing surely covered his being the Prophet, the Priest and the King. Whilst we may call these separate offices they are one in the office of Messiah. As we have said, we have difficulty treating them separately when we examine these modes of his being. If we keep that in mind then we can proceed usefully. It is helpful for us in considering the three offices to see a sort of perichoresis operating between the three so that they constitute an entity.*

In this study we look at Christ's office as High Priest, but we are not permitted to do this without also looking at his offices of Prophet and King. The prophet speaks from God to mankind, for God and with God, and for mankind who needs the word of God, whether it desires to hear it or not. As King with the Father in the Kingdom of God the Son uses his royal powers and prerogatives, so that just as Melchizedec was a Priest-King so the Son is such. Granted that the three Offices reside in the one Person, yet we need to look at each particularly. In I Corinthians 15:24–28 the Kingdom is of the Father and the Son and, likewise in Ephesians 5:5, it is 'the kingdom of Christ and of God' and this royal office is to do with Christ's Sonship. In Hebrews 1:23 and 5:5–6 the Sonship and High-Priesthood are coupled, and these both with the idea of Christ being seated at the right hand of God which itself is an intimation of his Kingship.

In order to understand Christ's High-Priesthood we need to go back to the origins of sacrifice and priesthood, especially as it is shown to us in the biblical tradition.

## **The Offering of Sacrifice and the Priesthood**

Biblically we have the first offerings to God in the acts of Cain and Abel. Cain's offering of 'the fruit of the ground'; is not accepted and Abel's offering of 'the firstlings of his flock and their fat portions' is accepted. This non-acceptance of the first offering is because Cain has 'done not well' (Gen. 4:7), but the nature of the unbloody offering is not indicated as the 'not doing well' so much—it would seem—as the attitude of the offerer. In any case no priest is involved in this worship. It has been said that the head of the family is the priest and this would seem to be the case with Noah and Job. Noah's offerings is certainly received for 'the Lord smelled the pleasing odour' and made a universal covenant with mankind. Job offered sacrifices on behalf of his children so that they would not curse God if and when they sinned.

The matter of Melchizedec is discussed in Genesis 14:17–20, and enlarged upon in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In Genesis he was ‘king of Salem [peace]’ and ‘priest of the Most High’. As priest he brought out bread and wine for the patriarch and blessed him and Abraham paid homage to him, giving him tithes, a tenth of everything, a matter which the writer of Hebrews takes up to show the uniqueness of the priesthood of this person. Abraham obviously offered sacrifices to God, building altars in various places (cf. Gen. 12:7; 13:4, 18; 22:9f.); In Genesis 22 he is commanded to built an altar and offer up Isaac.

The familial priesthood of the head of the family changes with the inception of the Mosaic covenant. A special tribe is set aside, the tribe of Aaron, so that priestly activity issue from them and this is God’s prescription. The forms of sacrifices now become prescribed so that departures from these prescriptions is forbidden and innovations will bring forth punishments. This did not have mean that the heads of families did not have some priestly ministry for the Passover meal was led by them, and they were to teach their children to love the Lord (Deut. 6), and teaching was a part of the ministry of the priest: father would have been priestly towards their families. We note that in Israel the sacrifices were only offered up by the priests for the covenant people. The other nations had their priests and their sacrifices but these are outside ‘the commonwealth of Israel’ (cf. Eph. 2:11ff.). Israel was made a ‘priestly nation’ or ‘a nation of priests (Exod. 19:5–6).

### Some Elements of Sacrifice

We must be careful not to read too much in to or out of the offerings of Cain and Abel. At first sight these seem to be in the form of thankofferings for the first fruits of the field and the flock. All offerings constitute the worship of the offerer, whether good or otherwise. There are good reasons for concluding that the worshipper was having fellowship with God, and in some cases the fellowship of a meal. Certainly the offerings were often to do with the giving of satisfaction to God against whom one had sinned, that is, the satisfaction required where sin had been done. Yet God was the provider of the prescription, altar and victim for such sacrifices for (Lev. 17:11) relates that ‘the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement, by reason of the life.’

### The Priest and the Sacrifices

There can be no question that the priest in the Aaronic order was mediatorial in his ministry, especially as high–priest. The robes he wore were all significant—the mitre, robe and embroidered coat, ephod and the girdle of it, with the breastplate of judgement on his heart the names of the tribes being brought before God in intercession<sup>1</sup>. He had to do with the burning coals and incense when offering the blood of slain beasts. The high–priest was appointed by God primarily though the priesthood was inherited and in that sense can be said to be ‘chosen among men’<sup>2</sup>. Whilst the sacrifices were for varied

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<sup>1</sup> In Exodus 28:2 Moses is commanded, ‘And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty . . . a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a coast of checker work, a turban and a girdle; they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons to serve me as priests’.

<sup>2</sup> The choice of succeeding high-priests does not seem to be by a special direct act of God, but the *purpose* of the appointing is only from God. Hebrews 5:1–4 shows that it is to ‘offer gifts and sacrifices for sins’, sins that were his own and sins that were the people’s. Hebrews 5:5 shows that no one could legitimately exalt himself to the office of high-priest.

purposes, the primary one was ‘to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins’ (Heb. 5:1). Whilst the high-priest was appointed by God yet it was he who represented to God the people of covenant who were as yet sinners. ‘If sacrifice was at the heart of Hebrew religion, oblation was at the heart of sacrifice. No man could stand before God with empty hands. He must offer a gift as an acknowledgment of adoration, gratitude and homage<sup>3</sup>; and, in as much as man is a sinner, sacrifice must also be offered as an expiation for sins. The priesthood was instituted so that priests might represent men before God in sacrifice’<sup>4</sup>. Surely the human experience of conscience and human inability to pacify the conscience is one of the great keys to understanding the need for sacrifice, and the nature of mediatorial priesthood.

### Christ’s Wonderful Priesthood

Given that man—sinful Man in particular—cannot ‘go it alone’ we are faced with the indispensability of Christ’s High Priesthood. Whilst the high-priesthood of Israel was sufficient for Israel-in-covenant, yet even in the face of God’s provision of the sacrificial cultus, and His demand that the people worship none but he, Israel had turned to other gods, other priests and other worship and, as a result went into exile as judgement and punishment. The writer of Hebrews sees Israel us under a covenant which was to be terminated or flow into the ‘everlasting covenant’ which we know as ‘the new covenant’. This new covenant would in many senses be a different covenant, but at the same time is possible to link it with the covenant God made with Abraham, a covenant which had universal connotation (cf. Gen. 12:1–3; cf. Luke 1:68–78). It is in particular that the writer of Hebrews speaks of the High-Priesthood of Jesus, but not all references are confined to that book.

#### Did Christ Come as the High-Priest?

The Book of Hebrews does not ask this question. His incarnation certainly relates to his High Priesthood. 9:11 says, ‘But when Christ appeared (*paragemenos*: ‘having appeared’) as a high priest,’ And whilst this ‘appeared’ may not necessarily mean the incarnation it certainly involves it. 9:26(b) states ‘But as it is, he has appeared (*pephanerotai*: has been manifested’) once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself’. So also 10:5, ‘Consequently, when Christ came into the

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<sup>3</sup> We agree that sacrifice is ‘for sins’ and all that phrase means in its various biblical contexts but we must also see that worship on the basis of sacrifice being initiated by God has as its goal the union of the worshipper and the Worshipped. There is a divine perichoresis in the Godhead, and this flows out to the creation and to Man in particular. The one who receives cannot contain the gift given, but must return it in the giving of sacrifice. This is called ‘the fruit of the lips’ which is praise, adoration and thanksgiving—thanks for the giving of God. If we look only at the grace which redeems we may miss the fact that grace—the personal action of God—flows continuously. Hence the second element of priesthood—intercession—is indispensable. This continuing grace begets continuous praise and thanksgiving.

<sup>4</sup> H.W. Montefiore *The Epistle to the Hebrews* Black’s New Testament Commentaries (A & C. Black, 1964). The heart of the matter is surely that Man, because of his sinfulness and inadequacy as a sinner, needs a mediator. When we take up the term ‘oblation’ or ‘offering’ we find there is an element of mystery. What can be offered to God which is satisfactory to Him? Had there been no prescriptions for oblations in the covenant, then we could not begin to understand the idea of oblation except from a human point of view, and this would be corrupted because of human sinfulness. It might seem to be a bribe, a ‘payoff’ and the case of Cain seems to indicate this.

world, he said, “Sacrifice and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me,” and in 10:10, “And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” The ‘body’ in these cases constitutes the oblation the High Priest offers, so that it appears he was incarnate *for* high priesthood. In 2:10–18 the whole matter of his incarnation with the goal in mind, ‘that he might become (NRSV ‘be’) a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people’ makes it clear that without incarnation he could not have become that. 3:1–2 says, ‘Therefore holy brethren, who share in heavenly call, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession. He was faithful to him who appointed him.’

Whilst there is no explicit statement anywhere that he came as a high priest this thought does seem avoidable. 5:5–10 seems to involve his ever being a high priest,

5: So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee”; 6 as he says also in another place, “Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchiz’edek.”

7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. 8 Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; 9 and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, 10 being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchiz’edek.

Melchizedek is described as being ‘without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest for ever’. We note here that Jesus was *not* Melchizedec who ‘resembled the Son of God’ and so could not have been the Son of God unless the language here is intentionally cryptic. However ‘the Son of God’ is here shown as eternal so that in 5:5–6 the quoting of Psalm 2:7 as ‘Thou art my Son, today I have begotten you’ and of Psalm 110:4, ‘Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek’ if linked with the gospels’ use of the Divine utterance at Jesus’ baptism, ‘Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased’ must see the baptism not only as a coronation of the Son of God, but also as the appointing of him as high priest. This may appear to be a mix of Synoptic Gospels and Hebrews but it should stand, nevertheless because of the juxtaposition of the two Psalms quoted. That Jesus was declared to be the Son of God—whatever that may have been understood to be—means that he was virtually declared to be the high priest appointed by God. He was already the Son of God and in that sense could be said to be already the true high priest. We need not go into any eternal, ontological mystical application of the Melchizedekian order, although it may well be the truth of the matter.

### **His Becoming and Being the True High Priest**

We have ventured to say that Christ came into world *to be* a high priest and in the sense of Hebrews 10:5 and related passages came *as* the appointed high priest of God. Speaking on Hebrews 7:15–16—’This becomes even more evident when another priest

arises in the likeness<sup>5</sup> of Melchiz'edek, 16 who has become a priest, not according to a legal requirement concerning bodily descent but by the power of an indestructible life' and especially on 'the power on an indestructible life' H. W. Montefiore says, 'The levitical priesthood had been appointed "an everlasting priesthood" (Exodus xl. 15) but it was everlasting only in virtue of priestly succession. Jesus' priesthood is eternal because of the indestructible life of a single priest and for this reason it supersedes the levitical priesthood.<sup>6</sup>' No priest has an indestructible life but Jesus, this indestructibility being shown by his resurrection.

If we go back to the passages of 2:10–18; 3:1–2 and 5:7–10 we discover he had to be man, he had to go through suffering, and had to 'learn obedience through the things that he suffered'. This does not mean he was ever disobedient, or that he had to learn how *to become* obedient, but that the path and plan of obedience and all it involved had to be learned as he carried out the will of the Father—'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God' ('I delight to do thy will, O God'; Heb. 10:7; Psa. 40:8). In one sense this demand to be both victim and priest went beyond what the law demanded of its covenant members. Thus he was learning to be both victim and priest as he grew. Granted that he was a high priest then he was a high priest-in-training, or a high priest being fitted for the task before him. The climax came as he offered his body as an oblation. So it was fitting at that climax that God, 'in bringing many sons into glory should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering'. This must surely not mean that he was imperfect as a high priest, lacking suffering, but that the Father made him the penal<sup>7</sup> suffering of all sins without which there could be no sons coming into glory, i.e. the glory of salvation. Without such suffering, or prior to it he was yet incomplete. When he bore the sins then he was complete as 'the pioneer of their salvation.

## Being the High Priest as Offerer of the Oblation

### The Necessity of the Son of God Becoming Man in Order to Redeem It

The apostolic writings refer to this strongly. Without the Word becoming flesh there can be no immanent, personal and effective word of God that speaks into history and becomes the gospel in the person of Jesus Christ. In the soteriological statements of the apostles it is his incarnation which enables him to become Saviour and Lord of sinful humanity. He is born of a woman, born under the law that he might redeem those who are under the law. God sends His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin that there should henceforth be no condemnation to those who were bound for death because of the law. So we might multiply these references which speak of the Word becoming flesh to redeem Man.

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<sup>5</sup> William L. Lane (*Word Biblical Commentary 47, Hebrews 1\_8*, 1991, p.183) has a remarkable statement, 'The promise was fulfilled in Christ who *is* actually what Melchizedek *was* symbolically, an eternal priest who exercises his priestly prerogatives in a nonlegal, universal ministration'.

<sup>6</sup> Montefiore, op. cit., p.126.

<sup>7</sup> The word 'penal' needs to be understood and not as a 'the punishment fits the crime' concept. The suffering of guilt is wholly existential and it is this *coram deo*—before God. The mystery of this in the Cross and is beyond our critical scrutiny and even sympathetic understanding. Whilst 'penal' has a harsh note to it, the matter is a harsh one. P.T. Forsyth once remarked that 'Nothing will satisfy the conscience of man who does not first satisfy the conscience of God'. Our verse really means God exacted of him all that was necessary for him to bring many sons into glory'.

At this point however we wish to look at some of the statements which show the relationship between his incarnation and his high priesthood. These are set forth explicitly in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In 2:10–18 the fact that Jesus is of a common stock with man—'have all one origin' (cf. Acts 17:26, 'one blood') is because Jesus 'partakes of one nature' with humanity and this enables him to destroy the power of the devil over humanity, power which that creature held by virtue of Man's fear of death (2:14–15). Jesus 'had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a faithful high priest in the service of God to make expiation [propitiation] for the sins of the people'. Only 'because he has suffered and been tempted' is he able to help those who are tempted (2:16–18). In 5:2 a high priest can only be chosen among men, because such priesthood is for men by a man ordained as a high priest. In 5:7–9 it was 'in the days of his flesh' and not in the days of preincarnational powers<sup>8</sup> that he learned that 'obedience through what he suffered; and being made a perfect [through this suffering] he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated a high priest after the order of Melchizedek'.

At the same time his humanity was without sin, though not without temptation. Temptation is but testing and he stood every test successfully. The writer of Hebrews in 7:26–28 sees his humanity as true, and no less true because he was perfect<sup>9</sup>. Such humanity is essential for proper high priesthood.

For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did this once for all when he offered up himself. Indeed, the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect for ever.

What all this meant to Jesus in his earthly life and ministry is not for us to probe. The Gospels certainly give us a picture of his utter dependency upon the Father, and such dependency is what every human being ought to have by reason of creation and his innate creatureliness. Jesus undoubtedly found his power in knowing the natural weakness of man and so being dependent upon the Father. The Gospels also show his constant life of prayer, his intimacy with the Father and his refusal to do other than His will. What we cannot penetrate—though we can sometimes observe—are the feelings and pressures which came upon him through, and because of his humanity, and because of that humanity being part of 'the one stock' (2:11). We simply note that it all was part of being our appointed high-priest. It fitted him to intercede for us for salvation, and that by the offering of himself as a sacrificial oblation.

### **'It Is Necessary for this Priest to Have Something to Offer'**

There was no point to Jesus being high priest if he had nothing to offer. The writer of Hebrews has shown us conclusively that whilst the blood of bulls and goats was essential for the system of the former covenant, yet in fact such blood cannot wash away the sins of human beings. Such sacrifices were but shadows of the reality to come, the reality being Christ. God had prepared a body for him to offer, his blood was to be efficacious to the 'purifying of the conscience from dead works to serve the

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<sup>8</sup> This does not mean he was not a high-priest 'from eternity' but that he did not suffer 'from eternity'.

<sup>9</sup> When we say 'true humanity' we must keep in mind that sin is no part of true humanity, and in having no sin Jesus did not rise above what is humanity but only above what is fallen humanity.

living God'. This oblation was to effect a perfect single sacrifice, effective for ever, thus abolishing all other attempts, in all cultures and sacrificial cultuses, to effect salvation by human means. Christ certainly had something to offer—himself!

### **Jesus Always Priestly With a View to the Oblation**

Before the offering of himself as an oblation at Calvary's cross, Christ acted in priestly manner throughout his life<sup>10</sup> of earthly ministry beginning at his baptism. It has long been observed in the Synoptic Gospels Jesus on three different, successive occasions predicted his death and on the last night at the Supper said the shedding of his blood was for the remission of sins. In Mark 10:45 he spoke of giving his life a ransom for many. The statements at his birth such as 'he will save his people from their sins' do not explicitly define this as a priestly act, but many were bewildered by his forgiving the sins of those who came to him. Their minds were undoubtedly occupied by the ideas of priest and sacrifice, and since certainly Christ never declared himself explicitly to be a priest, much less the high priest of all, they were puzzled. Thoughts of a priest after the order of Melchizedek were absent: they knew only the levitical and its sacrifices. Even so, the passage of John 6:35–69 has at its heart the statement 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eats of this bread he shall live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh'. This is the oblation, so to speak under a veil, but it is there.

On the one hand there is the constant intercession that Jesus offered up during his ministry for his people, but the passage of John 17 which has generally been called 'Jesus' High Priestly prayer' certainly shows his priestly care for his people. A more powerful and all-embracing prayer is not extant in all history. We do not quite know its linkage with the agony of prayer in the Garden of Gethemene, where he said, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death'. He certainly experienced death-throes in that garden, and surely they were the preparation for offering and being the oblation. Some see—and I believe correctly—that Jesus' offering up 'of prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who able to save him from death' is certainly the action of prayer in Gethemene. When it say such prayers were offered 'to him who was able to save him from death' and adds 'and he was heard for his godly fear' then it surely must mean he was under the immediate threat and pressure of death in Gethemene, and was saved from this that he might die not of agony in that garden, but in true redemptive, blood-shedding, sacrificial action on the cross. I believe that there can be no doubt that all Christ's actions from his baptism to his ascension must be seen as priestly, even as they must also be seen as prophetic and kingly. The constant consciousness of his coming death of the cross, and the statement of that fact in Mark 8:31; 9:31 and 10:32 bear witness to his understanding of the priestly act to come. This is confirmed by the event on the Mount of Transfiguration where Elijah and Moses spoke of his 'coming exodus which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem'. That death and resurrection constitutes the heart, the core substance of the four Gospels. When the Spirit came at Pentecost he led the apostles and the church 'into all the truth'. Whilst the Epistles for the most part do not seem to be taken up with explicating Jesus' High Priesthood, yet the key that the Epistle to the Hebrews supplies shows his redemptive

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<sup>10</sup> His regard for the Temple, his attendance there, his discussion with the priests and Levites, his regard for it as his Father's house, and it being the 'house of prayer for all nations' tells us much. Again, his constant ministry of intercession during his time with the apostles for them, and for the people links with his eternal heavenly intercession which is a powerful mystery. It is seen in his apostrophe to Jerusalem as he enters into it, as also on the Cross.

work to be priestly. This is also emphasised in the Book of the Revelation. Nothing could be more explicit than Ephesians 5:2, 'Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God'<sup>11</sup> and John's reference (I John 2:2) 'but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous *and he is the propitiation for our sins*, and not for our sins only but for the sins of the whole world' surely shows Christ as the continuing effective oblation.

## **The Oblation**

In offering his body Jesus was performing the oblation of the high priest. The writer of Hebrews points out that blood is essential for the forgiveness of sins (9:22) but also points to the fact that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins (10:4). The body then must make that sacrifice of blood which is true atonement for 'when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins' that sacrifice was 'the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all' (10:11). In writing thus we seem to be looking at Christ's offering of his body in a manner almost too objective, and too detached. If the metaphor were not offensive we might say 'too cold-bloodedly'. Certainly nothing in the annals of Man was so necessary, so indispensable, and so magnificent an act of love. No other act has worked so effectively upon the heart of Man to bring him from his sin and waywardness to the loving Father. Indeed, it was the act which revealed not only the love of Jesus as Saviour, but the love of the Father, the Initiator or all redemption. Hebrews 9:14 says that Christ offered himself 'through eternal Spirit' and however much his own spirit can be said to be eternal by virtue of his ontological Sonship, as a man he certainly was assisted in offering himself as an oblation by the Holy Spirit.

### **The Effects of the Oblation**

These are set out explicitly in the Book of Hebrews. In 9:26 is written plainly, 'he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself'; in 9:28, 'so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many'; in 10:10, 'And by that will [pertaining to his sacrificial death] we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all'; in 10:14, 'For by a single sacrifice he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified'. As a conclusion to such effective work the writer exhorts his readers to take advantage of the oblation and of the priesthood that effected it, and which now continues to be at work efficaciously, 'Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water'. These powerful words speak of the new people of God under the new Priest-Mediator of the new covenant, and of the abolishing of the former temple and all its connotations in favour of a new community which has immediate access to the 'holy of holies' which is nothing less than access to the Creator-Redeemer-Father.

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<sup>11</sup> So many statements the Apostolic Epistles refer to his giving himself in sacrifice and they surely demand something like the rationale that the writer of Hebrews gives in showing Christ to be both priest and oblatory sacrifice. Such a rationale is not explicit in the Epistles and this is by nature of the case. The apostolic writers did not have the exact thesis in mind that occupied the author of Hebrews.

## Where Did Christ Present the Blood?

We need to ask this question because of the RSV and NRSV translations of Hebrews 9:11–12 which are as follows,

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

This passage ought to be translated ‘the Holy of Holies’ instead of ‘the Holy Place’; ‘taking . . . his own blood’ should not be ‘taking’ but ‘by virtue of’, and ‘thus securing’ ought to be ‘having secured’<sup>12</sup>. Christ’s sacrifice was in this world, the ‘courtyard of Calvary’ where his blood was shed, and in the form of propitiation as known to Israel, and where his blood fell it remained. If we make a special ‘creature’ of the blood we find ourselves in difficulty.. If we have Christ carrying the blood into heaven we also have an insoluble difficulty. The passage is really saying that Christ, by the shedding of his blood had the right of entry into the holy of holies as the high priest had the right when he had shed the blood of the atonement. That the high priest then sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat does not mean Christ must carry his blood to heaven to sprinkle it on the throne of God. His oblation offered began at Calvary and ended there because it was completed there.

Some see this exegesis as being contradicted by 9:23—suggesting that in the tabernacle or temple of Israel ‘the copies of the heavenly things’ being originally sanctified by sacrificial blood—shedding rites, so ‘the heavenly things themselves’ needed Christ’s blood—shedding to purify them when he entered into heaven. The blood—shedding rites which purified ‘the copies of the heavenly things’ were not the rite of the atonement. It is difficult to see how anything in heaven, as such, needed purification. The earthly counterparts needed such purification because they were not innately heavenly. In any case There is no direct mention that Christ bore blood into the heavenly sanctuary to purify ‘the heavenly things’. If such were needed then the sacrifice on earth would have accomplished that. It seems to me that the whole argument is clinched by the fact that he had to be man to be high—priest and his sacrifice—he being oblation, altar and high—priest—had to be in a mundane situation, not some transcendent place which would tend to portray elements of Platonic presentation

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

10:19–22 (above) indicates that we enter into the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, and that now we have a great priest over the house of God, that is, Jesus. What, then is ‘the house of God’. Is it the heavenly sanctuary? Yes, and no: for the house mentioned in Hebrews 3:1–6 is the people of God and 3:6 says, ‘We are his house if we hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope’. So then, the sanctuary into which enter is the spiritual house signified by the temple, and especially that shrine of it called ‘the holy of holies’.

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<sup>12</sup> This translation is borne out by H.W. Montifiore, F.F. Bruce and P.E. Hughes in their commentaries.

We can, then, assume that in some sense the present temple is the people of God, and that in some sense also it is joined with and is one with the heavenly sanctuary. This is of course a mystery but it is evident from Hebrews 12:22–24 that we have holy communion with ‘innumerable angels in festal gathering’ and ‘the assembly of the first born who are enrolled in heaven’, even ‘the spirits of just men made perfect’. In one sense the line between the celestial and the terrestrial is not a dividing, but a uniting one even though for us at this time it is a veiled. For our purposes we can conclude that the sacrifice of the Cross was such that no blood was collected to be taken into heaven, and that if any sanctuary was purified by his sacrificial blood it is that temple we call the people of God, the new temple, which is Christ.

### **The Primary Effects of Christ’s Mediatorial Priesthood**

The first and obvious one is the ‘putting away of sin’ (9:26). One single—never to be repeated—sacrifice for sins has ‘perfected for all time those who are sanctified’ (10:14). Because forgiveness of sins has been effected there is no further call for any sacrifice. The blood of Christ has purified the conscience from dead works [sins] to serve [worship] the living God’ (9:14). Summed up, this effect means that every believing person has been freed from sin in its pollution, penalty and power even though the latter two elements are not explicated as such in the Hebrews reference.

The second wonderful effect is entrance into the holy of holies, the way that has been opened up for worshippers to enter into the presence of God and live in it. The presence of God is what Man was created for, and it is that he which needs most of all. Until purified by Christ’s oblation he could not enter: Christ has therefore become the new living way into the heart of God.

The third element we now mention is not so much an effect as it is the very character of Christ our high priest and that is his intercessory ministry. We have seen that the whole of his life was the expression of his innate priestly being, and his obedience and suffering were true preparation for it. His act of offering himself as an oblation was of intercessory priesthood and one transcending the Aaronic type of high priest: he was after the order of Melchizedek, priest of the Most High and king of peace. What we may call his saving [soteriological] mediatorial ministry is followed by his present intercessory ministry at the right hand of God. He had such an intercessory ministry before his death, resurrection and ascension, but following those events his ministry is that, not only of a man on earth, but a man in heaven—the Man of heaven! We will now proceed to examine this third effect or element.

### **Christ, Man’s Only Mediator and Intercessor**

Paul said, ‘There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.’ He also said, ‘Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us’. John the apostle said, ‘If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous and he *is* <sup>13</sup>the

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<sup>13</sup> Jesus Christ *was* the propitiation for our sins, but also *is* that propitiation. This is comforting to those who need the sense of the continuing efficacy of the atonement. Christ is *personally* that propitiation which makes the matter intimate, and not just theological. All intercession in heaven is on the basis of his soteriological work and victory on earth.

propitiation for our sin.’ These statements do not explicitly refer to high priesthood, but they are understood better in the light of it: indeed they cannot be understood apart from it.

It is interesting that the writer of Hebrews makes two points, (i) that the Son of God had to become man in order to be high priest, in order to offer himself as the saving oblation, (ii) it is as man that he perpetually offers up his intercession as high priest for us, in the present which we experience as ‘the now–time’.

Whilst his humanity is undoubtedly glorified it is not transmuted into deity, nor absorbed and dissolved into his deity. His deity was ever his, never absent from him as man, and is not absent from him in heaven, but as humans—especially humans of faith—we are comforted, encouraged and reassured that it is the man who knows our weaknesses, the temptations that assail us. We therefore ‘have confidence to draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need’.

### **Christ’s Earthly Intercession**

We have established that Christ was appointed a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek and that his priestly nature was for ever in action throughout his life. We have seen that only did he revere the temple, but called it ‘my Father’s house’, and was found there as a child. His concern for his people was evident in his identification with them in his baptism—‘It becomes us to fulfil all righteousness’, that is, to fulfil the Father’s will in being of ‘one origin with his brethren’. His life of prayer is not revealed to us in all its details and intimacies, but it was certainly concerned with his people at every point. We are tempted to speculate about what happened on those nights of prayer when he withdrew from his disciples, but his statement to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren,’ reveals something of his intercession for his disciples. His lifting of his eyes to heaven on occasions of healing and the prayers accompanying these occasions, his weeping for Jerusalem as he was about to enter it, and his teaching concerning intercession all indicate his high priestly ministry.

### **The Intercession of John Chapter Seventeen and its Effects**

Nothing, however, stands out so much as this prayer of John chapter seventeen. It is known as his high priestly prayer. It is patient, persistent, methodical, and formulates both the will of the Father, and the Son, as they are one, but it is uttered out of a full heart, is practical in its petitions, lofty in its passion and goal. The Christian church contemplates the fact that its effects go on from generation to generation, century after century, and its intention will be ultimately fulfilled in the glorification of the church. If this is how he prayed on earth then we know something of what he prays in heaven. In John seventeen he prayed in the light of the coming crucifixion and resurrection. In heaven he prays in the light of these accomplished elements: the work has been completed and the power of an indestructible life assures us that nothing can defeat his intercession, or—as we fully understand it—intervention.

What is notable is that prior to that prayer he taught his disciples to so abide in him that they could ask of the Father what they desired and it would be done. Hitherto they had asked nothing in his name: now they were to ask in his name. Indeed, they are to ask in no other name. Christ is the home and centre and medium of all intercession. This teaching is linked with the coming of the Spirit into them, as also the coming of

the Father and the Son to dwell with them. It is no wonder that from Pentecost onwards the people of God give themselves to 'the prayers' as well as to 'the apostles doctrine, the fellowship and the breaking of bread'. They have become an interceding people. This fact is underscored by the prayers in the Book of the Acts, and in all the Epistles. The people of Christ are no strangers to intercession. We read the various prayers of intercession. Paul, the great apostle, constantly desires their intercessions and no less because he knows that Christ above intercedes, and the Spirit is ever making intercession within his own heart. We can reasonably say that all intercession proceeds from the prayer of John seventeen.

### **High Priestly Intercession at the Cross**

Christ's prayer at the Cross proceeds itself from his prayer in Gethsemane. The prayer in the Garden seems to be primarily for himself, and one in utter loneliness, a loneliness in which he had wished his disciples might have shared. but it was to be for him alone. His first great cry from the Cross—'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do!'—revealed his oneness with Man. He knew, as a man, the deceitful nature of sin. Many of that maddened mob thought they were doing God a service (cf. John 16:2, 'indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God') and in any case he knew sin to have its own unbuilt deceit. So he interceded with depthless love. His terrible cry of dereliction, 'My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?' indicated the dreadful limbo of the lost into which he was sent, into which he had gone for the salvation of the lost. It was not simply an intercessory utterance: it was the heart of intercession itself, the very act of intervening against all evil to liberate sinful humanity. His cry concerning his own unutterable thirst indicated that his fountain of life had run dry for humanity; his cry of triumph that he had won the battle for the new humanity, and his last word of giving up his spirit into the arms of the Father tell us that he was returning to his true home: all his cries were all cries for men from a man, *the Man*..

In terms of the apostolic teaching of the death, passion and resurrection his oblation was powerful beyond description in entering into the heart, mind, life, death and history of every member of the human race, and corporately of the whole human race. 'We are convinced that if one died, then did all die'. 'He died, not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world'. 'He, himself, bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins might live unto God.' 'For our sake he [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God'. 'God . . . sending his Son the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.' 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law having become a curse for us'. 'He died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God'.

These and more references tell us of his personal, intimate, loving and effective identification with us in those terrible hours of the Cross. To take that death as some kind of a transaction separated from his humanity, or to see it as played out in some sphere with God as a forensic act of judgement and punishment worked out in an arena alien to Man, and simply to satisfy and impersonal moral law, and so 'satisfy' the legal anger of God is to miss all the humanity in it of the Son and all the Deity in it of the Father, and all the Triune participation by the God who is love. It is to miss the essential nature of soteriological intercession and makes the rich passages of the

Hebrews Epistle into something of a liturgical ritual which perforce must happen for Man's redemption, but which can be contained in, and as, some kind of theological rationalisation. When the heart of the Godhead remains unperceived then theology becomes purely rational, and continues in cerebral expression and understanding. No: the Cross is the event of all history when intercession is total, and is in essence dynamic intervention.

### **The Pastoral Value of Christ's High-Priesthood**

In the next Section of our Study we will see (i) the value of Christ's continual intercessory ministry which is of immense encouragement and comfort to the believer as a person and to the community of Christ over which he is High-Priest, and (ii) the way in which the worshipping community worships in Christ, sharing that high-priestly ministry in intercession and proclamation of the gospel.

It is these things we must teach time and again, and let our folk know their identity in the trifold ministry of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King. This means that not only are persons enriched and strengthened, but their turning outwards to the world which needs the salvific work of Christ will help to transform them as persons and as the community of Christ. It will help to fill out what they really think of Christ.

# The Marvellous High Priesthood of Christ, The Son of God—II

## Introduction: Christ, High-Priest Intercessor

### The Heavenly Intercession

In the Romans, Hebrews and Johannine passages<sup>1</sup> regarding intercession we gather the necessity for the continuing intercession of Christ and the Holy Spirit. As we examine these passages two elements emerge, the first being Christ's intercession which issues in salvation, and the second being Christ's intercession for the redeemed that they may continue in the experience of salvation especially as confronted by the world, the flesh and the Devil.. At times it is difficult to distinguish these two threads—so bound they are together—but we need to detect them both. What we must keep in mind is Christ's vicarious humanity is that which constitutes his present high-priesthood. What Christ does at the right hand of God is linked with what the Spirit does in our hearts in that intercession which is accorded to him in Romans 8:26–27. He is the Comforter whom the Father and the Son have sent so that our prayer will be according to the will of God and it is he who gives us vocative access to the Father, existential knowledge of the truth and communion with the Father and the Son.

### Intercession which Issues in Salvation

Hebrews 2:14–18 speaks of Christ identification with us in our sinful humanity 'that he might become a merciful and high priest to make expiation [propitiation] for the sins of the people'. In 4:14–16 the event of the propitiation has been completed<sup>2</sup> and so one may draw near to the throne of grace with confidence for help in time of need. This 'for help in time of need' seems to belong to the second thread of our presentation, but it may also involve the first. In 5:7–10 Christ's prayers and supplications, which were part of his earthly priesthood's intercession, were essential so that, 'being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him'. This is to do with his salvific act of the Cross. The long passage of 7:11–28 deals with Jesus becoming and being a priest after the order of Melchizedeck and is linked with redemption. Verses 23–25 are important in this regard,

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever. Consequently

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 4:14–16; 7:25; 9:12; 9:24; Romans 8:34; I John 2:2; cf. Romans 8:26–27.

<sup>2</sup> We mean the readers of the Epistle know the event of the Cross has happened in history, and is a past event. In any case Christ's intercession in heaven follows his translation to the right hand of God.

he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

It would seem that human beings may personally decide to draw near to God, but, in fact, that is not the case. Paul, quoting the Psalms said there is no one who understands or seeks after God, and Jesus said that no one could come to him except the Father draw him, and that he, Jesus alone as the Son, knows the Father and can reveal Him<sup>3</sup>. It is clear, then, that Jesus' intercession draws men and women to God as God draws them to Christ. This drawing is through the efficacious shedding of blood, and the way being opened up to God by the pioneer of their faith (2:10). If we do not understand Christ's identification with men in their sinfulness, and if we are unaware of the high holiness of God and the impossibility of a human being entering into the holy of holies, then we will not understand the intercessory ministry of the Cross, and the intercession which draws sinners to God. A pure, direct revelation of God's holiness would cause sinful humans to shrink away from God, indeed, even to flee into the most terrible darkness, since that would be more tolerable than to face the High and Holy One.

It is comforting, then, for sinners to know that they have 'such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heaven' to be their Mediator before God. At the same time we come to know that Christ does not have to plead our case desperately in the face of our sinfulness, for he has concluded that case on the Cross, and as our Advocate may press the claim of our salvation. It is better, still, to know that he does not have to press a claim for our salvation has already proceeded from the Father as Initiator of it. Some of our theology and hymnology depicts the Father as having to be pleaded to, and that Christ's intercession eventually has its effect and the Father accedes. Romans 8: 31–33 shows this not to be the case, for God is the Justifier.

What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us?

God Himself will allow no one to bring an effectual charge against His elect for he has already justified them. We see in I John 2:2 that Jesus ever remains our propitiation, even when, as believers, we have sinned. All of this, then, brings us to the second thread of Christ's intercessory ministry in heaven where 'he ever lives to make intercession for us'.

### **Intercession which is Linked with our Continuing Salvation**

If Christ as high priest ever lives to make intercession for us, and always intercedes for us, then to whom does he intercede and for what purpose or purposes? Hebrews 4:14–16 is obviously speaking to those who are the people of God, and not those in need of, or seeking salvation.

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathise

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<sup>3</sup> Rom. 3:11-12, 1:28; John 6:44, 65; Matt. 11:27.

with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

This is surely speaking of believers who recognise their weaknesses in the battle of Christian living, who are hard-pressed by many things and who have a deep sense of need and who are helpfully being directed to the place of effective intercession, that is to Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father. If we link this with the Romans 8:31–33 passage quoted above, we see that the believer is always beset about by forces that accuse and threaten him or her. We need to read Romans 8:28–39 to get the complete context.

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

“For thy sake we are being killed all the day long;

we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In this passage the conflict the believer knows is indeed a fierce one. There is accusation, and there is persecution. Both are powerful factors in any life and here they are used relentlessly. Whilst we are not told who are the accusers or the persecutors, yet we gather they are both human and supernatural. Ruthlessly they press the people of God, but Christ stands in the breach. Is he interceding to God for the people whom God Himself justifies, seeing that God himself is intervening? It appears we need to understand the helplessness of the believer against the odds confronting him or her. In 8:18–25 Paul speaks of the present convulsions of the creation which affect not only the unredeemed but also the redeemed. He says in verses 26–27 that the believer is too weak to know what to pray for but that the Spirit intercedes and God, hearing the groanings of the Spirit takes them as the petitions of the person. There is, therefore, a kind of prayer-traffic between the believer and the Persons of the Triune Godhead, the Father ultimately effecting the matters which keep the believer free from harm. We have seen that Paul seeks helpful intercession from his fellow-believers<sup>4</sup> and that he is always interceding on their behalf. Intercession is therefore important. In the Book of the Revelation (5:8) we see that the twenty four elders have golden bowls ‘full of incense which are the prayers of the saints’. In 8:3–5 an angel is given much incense to mingle with these prayers of the saints—and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of the saints’—and the results of these prayers are powerful, deeply affecting the earth. Intercession, then, is no small matter.

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<sup>4</sup> See Ephesians 6:18–20; Colossians 4:2–4; Romans 15:30–31.

We are led to think that intercession is not only a requesting of God for certain matters but is the very action of God and Man together, and by this we mean when redeemed Man shares in the ministry with God: fallen man refuses such a ministry and certainly does not think he needs an interceder or intervener .

### **The Idea of Intercession/Intervention (*paga*) in the Old Testament**

Whilst Christ is our High Priest Intercessor, the idea of intercession does not originate with him in his incarnation. It was not a new thing that eventuated with his coming. Intercession was not limited to Israel, nor even the patriarchs. There has always been intercession. In Genesis 20:1–18 is the story of Abimelech’s taking of Sarah and God’s warning of the monarch. Speaking of Abraham God told Abimelech, ‘The man is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live,’ and this was what Abraham did. ‘Then Abraham healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children’.

In the Old Testament the practical examples of intercession are innumerable. Kings who intercede for their people are David, Solomon, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah. Prophets are Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and priests who pray for the king and nation are Hilkiah and Ezra (cf. Joel; 2:17; Malachi 9:1). Daniel’s prayer of chapter 9 shows that intercession is of great power and is so effective that the angel Gabriel comes to give him the answer to it. We think of Moses’ intercession for his people who had committed idolatry, and how he saved the nation from destruction. Moses’ intercession during the battle with Amelek is another rich example from which we can draw intercessory principles.

In Isaiah 53:10–12 we have a picture of strong soteriological intercession, equivalent to the principle of intercession we find in Hebrews.

Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

If ‘made intercession for the transgressors’ is the saving act of the Suffering Servant in this passage then it gives us understanding of his utter identification with us in our transgressions. In 53:6 the verb *paga* (to intercede) means ‘laid on him’ is ‘made to meet upon him’ and in 53:12 ‘made entreaty for’, ‘interceded for the rebels’, is the idea. This ‘mediatorial interposition’ is the very act of ‘personal sin-bearing’ by which the sinners are exonerated and restored<sup>5</sup>. A.J. Motyer (op. cit) says of *paga* here, ‘The base meaning is “to cause to reach” and hence to “cause someone’s plea to reach someone’s ears” (“to intercede”) or “to introduce someone into someone’s presence” (“to mediate”)<sup>6</sup>. What we cannot miss in Isaiah 53:12 and context is the amazing fact that this interceder mediates by means of allowing ‘to meet upon him’ i.e. ‘come upon him’(*paga*) the sins of the transgressors. Bearing sins is here ‘intercession’. This,

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<sup>5</sup> See A.J. Motyer *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (IVP, 1993, pp, 438–443).

<sup>6</sup> The point surely, is that the intercessor is not getting God to change His mind by some quality he possesses, or some merit on which he can call, but that his relationship with the person/s interceded for, and his relationship with God call on elements within him to work in some mediatorial ministry. Mere petition is not intercession. In Christ’s case it was the giving of the oblation which was at once both the gift from God and the gift to God. The idea of a striving is present in intercession: see Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 2:1–3.

surely, is the key to Christ's intercession for his people. His intercession is not limited to petitions but its nature is vicarious and redemptive suffering and in all true intercession there must be something of this.

The word 'intercession' (Heb. *paga*: N.T. Greek: *enteuxis*; verbs *entynchano*, *hyperentynchano*) is translated in Isaiah 59:16 RSV; NRSV; NEB: 'as no one to intervene', whilst the AV has 'no intercessor' And the NIV 'no one to intercede'. Other translations have 'no one to make entreaty', 'none to interpose', 'no one intervened', that is 'no one assailed with petitions'. There can be no doubt that 'intercession' and 'intervention' are synonymous. In the context of Isaiah 59 the sin and degradation of Israel is such that Israel is left in its immoral, yet pitiable situation. No one from outside will come and intervene: so God Himself comes to intervene for Israel, and He does this with great zeal. In Ezekiel 22:30 we have a similar thought, even if the term *paga* is not found. Its idea is certainly present.

And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them: I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath; their way have I requited upon their heads, says the Lord God.

'Build up the wall' and 'stand in the breach' conveys the idea of someone intervening by attacking the evil of the land by revealing its dreadful nature and so stopping the rot. God has sent Ezekiel to warn, but no intervener arises from the nation, and so God brings His judgement. Had there been *paga* of a true nature Israel would have been saved that judgement.

### **The Equivalent Idea of Intercessor in the New Testament**

If we take this view of intercession in the New Testament, then certain passages begin to make sense. Intercession is not only a matter of powerfully making requests but also of action. The results of the prayers of the saints in Revelation 8 shows us this. In Romans 8:31ff. the intervention prevents anyone or any creature from separating the believer from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, and in this case there are very powerful opponents.

It is interesting to note that in modern medicine and psychotherapy the term 'intervention' is used when the doctor or therapist has to enter into the client's situation because the client is helpless, not knowing what to do, and often lacking the power by which to proceed. Then knowledge and ability of the intervener here is used to accomplish a change in the client. Its biblical use must involve the actions of the three Persons of the Triune Godhead, and since believers must also intercede it is really a way of action in the battle which always confronts the church. The gates of hell seek to prevail against the church but ultimately are defeated, being unable to accomplish their intent. What we must understand is that prayer, whilst always personal, should never be individualistic. Intercession is an intervention on the part of others. Christ's prayer as intercession *is* intervention. John 17 makes that clear: Christ is praying for all the generations ahead until they see his glory in heaven. This means he is praying for all the movements which we call 'history', the movements which happen *in* history.. Such are the prayers of the saints in the Book of the Revelation. God has so planned it that

intercession–intervention is one of the great powers He uses in working His plan to its *telos*, its goal.

### **Jesus, a Priest after the Order of Melchizedek**

The above explication of intercession as intervention makes sense within the threefold being and offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King. The prophet speaks from God to his people, the Priest mediates and intercedes to God for them, and the King is ‘King of kings and Lord of Lords’. None is more powerful than him. Melchizedek was ‘Prince of peace (*Salem*)’. Christ is ‘the prince of peace’ but he brings ultimate peace by ‘the sword which goes forth from his mouth’, that is by intervention in the things of the creation and mankind. He is King–Priest. His royal intervention is that action by which he preserves the truth and integrity of his people. As Hebrews 5 links Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 together and shows him as the inheritor of the nations and seated at the right hand of God, his enemies being placed under his feet, then we gain a rich insight into what is truly intercession.

The intercessory passages, then, are of the greatest comfort and assurance to the church, and in particular personally to each believer. That ‘he ever makes intercession for us’, and that his priesthood is ‘by the power of an indestructible life’ because he is ‘a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek’ grants the certainty that we shall never lack his intercession even when we are not always applying for it. He does not intercede because we ask him to intercede, but he intercedes because he is by nature and appointment our true High Priest.

It is this teaching we need to take to ourselves and share with others because it dissolves uncertainty, does not allow us to think we work on our own, and is the active proof of His loving care who said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’

### **The Priestly Community: the Community of Intercession**

In our presentation above we have referred to the true sanctuary as the new temple the church. There can be no doubt about the fact that the ritual, cultus and being of the former temple of Israel has been outmoded, rescinded and replaced by the new. The old temple had ‘copies of the heavenly things’ but it is now with ‘the heavenly things’ that we have to do. We may think of these as ‘above’ and as ‘in heaven’ and in truth the realities are transcendent, but the author of Hebrews speaks of us entering that very sanctuary *now* (10:19–22) in which Christ is minister (8:2).

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

We have seen that ‘the house of God’ is the people of God (3:6), and this is borne out by Paul in his statements ‘Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?’ ‘So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the

cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.' '. . . the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth'. Likewise Peter's passage of his First Letter (2:4–5, 9–10), 'Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. . . But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy'<sup>7</sup>. The fact that the writer of Hebrews says we offer up sacrifices to God (13:13–16) and Peter says the same (I Pet. 2:5) and that the writer of Hebrews says we 'have come to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel', not only gives us a high view of our worship, but makes great sense of the writer's injunction, 'Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and with awe; for our God is a consuming fire'<sup>8</sup>. Whilst the celestial side of all this is hidden from us now it does not prevent us—who are in this terrestrial realm—from participating in the sanctuary. Paul tells us that we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places, and so it becomes comprehensible that we are the worshipping community under the High Priesthood of Christ. As the writer of the Book of the Revelation states it, God 'has made us a kingdom, priests to our God', and we shall 'reign on the earth'<sup>9</sup>.

### **The Community of Intercession**

So much is the High-Priestly ministry of Jesus that of intercession that we must see how this obtains in the church, the priestly community, for his intercession through the community is the only intercession they know and can offer. We have noted that the intercessor must have 'somewhat to give', that there needs to be a power of or gift that makes the intercession effectual. Certainly there must be intimate identification with the objects of prayer: that is priestly ministry. Jesus warned against 'vain repetition' and he was always ready to hear those who interceded for healing and help. He commanded intercession in passages such as Matthew 5:48 and 9:38, and expected his followers to intercede. On the night of his betrayal he spoke of prayer in and through his own name John 14:13; 15:16; 16:23–26). Prior to this they had not asked in his name and now the source and authority for prayer has come through his oblation, soon to be offered, and then to be there for all time. In John 15:7 he showed that to abide in him—which is the same as 'in my name'—meant that asking would receive its fruits. Prayer outside abiding cannot be truly intercessory. In Matthew 18:18–20 there is corporate asking. In Luke 11:5–13 asking for another (others) is a true principle of intercession.

We see also the prayers of the early Christian community as they pray for healing, pray for power for the disciples, pray for Peter to be released from prison and

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<sup>7</sup> I Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:19–22; I Timothy 3:1; I Peter 2:4–5; 9–10.

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 12:22–24, 28–29.

<sup>9</sup> Revelation 1:6; 5:10; cf. 2:26–27; 3:21.

so on. In the Epistles there are the prayers of the writers for their readers, and they request that intercessions be made for them. Paul's intercessions are many (Rom. 1:9; II Cor. 13:7; Eph. 1:16–23; 3:14, 21; Phil. 1:3, 9; I Thess 1:2; 5:23) and he is sure such prayers will yield effects. Just as God appointed Jesus as the Intercessor for mankind, so within Jesus He appoints intercessors whose prayers will affect the course of history. This we can see in Revelation 5:8 and 8:3–5. The very intercessions are also appointed by God Who has determined that the community of the faithful should play their part in the processes of history. Any talk of God's predestination must now see it as wooden, or God's immutability as dispensing with prayer: rather it is the opposite. Therefore neglect of intercession is a reprehensible matter. At the same time it shows the importance of abiding in our High Priest as it shows we are helpless to pray authentically without the Holy Spirit who is always making intercession within our hearts, since we, of ourselves, do not know what we ought to pray.

We need to keep together the prophetic, priestly and kingly elements when we think in terms of intercession.

### **Being a Kingdom of Priests**

I Peter 2:9–10 states,

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy,*

and this should be understood in the light of Exodus 19:5–6 and Isaiah 43:20–21. In both cases Israel is 'my own possession', 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation', 'my chosen people' and their purpose is 'that they might declare my praise'. 'A kingdom of priests' could be understood as 'the King's priests' but is probably best thought of as just as Israel was in one sense a nation in which all constituted a priestly community, so also in another sense it was the one priestly nation *among* all nations, *for* all nations. Basically it was a priestly nation because it was the one nation alone which worshipped the true and living God. Certainly it was the only nation which had a formulated worship of Yahweh. Its refusal to have an idol or an image, and the fact that the unseen Presence of the Most High was there in the tabernacle or temple gives it a true priesthood. In the eyes of others it was virtually atheistic because it had no depictions of God such as images and idols. The Presence of God, and the worship of Him marks it out from all other peoples. Romans 9:4 speaks of true worship belonging to Israel—because they had been given—'the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises'.

In the passage quoted above Peter says nothing of his readers being a *new* kingdom of priests, nor does he contrast them with an *old* situation. They are now a kingdom of priests and as such 'offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ'. Likewise Hebrews 13:13 exhorts, 'Through him [Christ] let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of the lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God'. We note that in both Epistles such worship in sacrifices is offered up *through* Christ, and *through* him alone for Hebrews 8:2 says he is the true

minister (*leitourgos*) in the sanctuary<sup>10</sup>. It is impossible that Christ would be High Priest and his people not priestly since they are in him. That is why worship is the natural expression of their personal and corporate being. In this sense they are a priestly kingdom, a worshipping people.

Revelation 1:6 shows that Christ's people are 'a kingdom, priests to his God and Father', whilst 5:10 says Christ has made them 'a kingdom, and priests to our God'. Within these statements it is possible to conclude that all Christ's people are kings and priests, so that they can be royal priests, or priestly royalty and 5:10 says 'they shall reign for ever. As In Acts 2:14–21 the community of Christ is declared a prophetic community—'your sons and daughters shall prophesy', and 'my menservants and my maidservants [in that day] shall prophesy', so the community is prophetic, priestly and kingly, although Christ is the True Prophet, the True Priest and the True King. Because the church is his body—'bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh'—it must be prophetic, priestly and royal.

### **The Priestly Community and Christ the High Priest: the Community of Worship<sup>11</sup>**

We have already seen Christ is the minister in the sanctuary and that sacrifices are offered up through him. Paul also says that 'supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men'. He does this in the context of the saying 'For there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus'<sup>12</sup>. He also says 'that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or quarrelling.' Prayers and worship were part of the life of the church (Acts 2:42; 3:2; 4:23–34; 5:4, 6; 7:59; 8: 22, 24; 9:11; 9:40; 10:2; 10:31; 12:5ff.; 13:2, 3; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36) and the Epistles speak much of prayer and worship. All of this prayer and worship was in and through Christ 'the minister (*leitourgos*), in the sanctuary' (Heb. 8:2) whilst being aided by the Holy Spirit.

In Christ our *Leitourgos* is everything. Firstly we are in him and only *in* him, *by* him and through *him* do we worship. To be baptised into him (Rom. 6:1–10) and to have put him on in baptism (Gal. 3:27) is to have his fullness personally, and to be his fullness corporately, 'the fullness of him who is filling all in all'. This means that all that he is now is ours, is accredited to us which means the fullness of his incarnation, his baptism, his ministry, his death, resurrection and ascension. The obedience which he rendered now becomes our righteousness—that obedience which is theologically called 'passive' and 'active'<sup>13</sup> but which is one piece and is the obedience rendered from birth to death, and in the death, as Romans 5:12–25 so powerfully expounds it. What we state here is by no means a *non sequitur* because worship is service, and service is worship, and both are doing the will of God and amount to true

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<sup>10</sup> Extremely valuable is James Torrance's article 'The Place of Jesus Christ in worship' in *Theological Foundations for Ministry* (T & T Clark/Eerdmans, 1979, pp. 348–369).

<sup>11</sup> Much of the material here treated is included and expanded in my book *The Way and Wonder of Worship* (NCPI, 1990)

<sup>12</sup> I Timothy 1:1–5; cf. I Timothy 1:8

<sup>13</sup> The Reformers spoke of Christ's 'active obedience' as the obedience he rendered to God and His law throughout his life. They called his 'passive obedience' that which he rendered in the Cross-event. Romans 5:12–25 speak of Adam's disobedience being accounted to all human beings and as a parallel Christ's obedience being accounted or accredited to all who are in Christ.

righteousness. God has made Christ to be our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

For the reasons we have just stated the community of Christ is one of king–priests, as he is King–Priest. The empowerment of the community in the context of its living in the sanctuary of God, worshipping and serving Him is that we might ‘declare the wonderful deeds of him who brought us out of darkness into his marvellous light’ for we were ‘once no people but are now God’s people’. Once we had ‘not received mercy but now we have received mercy’. Priesthood, then, has not only to do with worship that is service but also with witness and proclamation which is likewise worship.

Such proclamation demands that action of the community of the Leitourgos and this community is to witness to the world but as the ‘priest–nation’ *among* all, and *for* all the nations. In the words of Isaiah 43:20–21 it is ‘my chosen people’ and ‘the people whom I formed for myself, that they might declare my praise’. In this sense proclamation of the gospel is the high calling and obedience of this ‘kingdom of priests’. This is also being ‘a kingdom and priests unto our God’ or, ‘a kingdom, priests unto his God and Father’.

### **Worship is Gospel Proclamation<sup>14</sup>**

Since Man is made to worship God and has refused such worship in the fall, Man is thus ever deficient, and in a state of dislocation, depravity and personal deprivation of the joy and fullness that would be his in full communion with God. His devising of self–worship and idolatry as a substitute for true worship worsens his situation. Surrogate deity is never ontological Deity. Man in deprivation is in indescribable states of misery and fear of death. He needs worship. Israel knew true worship through covenant for it came to it as a gift, along with the other gifts in which worship has its true context, such as sonship, the law, the glory and the Presence. Jesus told the woman at the well that ‘salvation is of the Jews’ meaning that the temple at Jerusalem was the true sanctuary, and all other cultural worship shrines and forms of worship were not authentic, and certainly not salvific. He also told her of a worship that was coming which was not confined to the temple, but was in wider and deeper aspect, namely the worship of God the Father in the Spirit and in the truth. This prophesied change took place at Pentecost when the community began to worship God in the Holy Spirit and in the truth (cf. Acts 2:4f.; Phil. 3:3; I John 5:7).

The truth that the church, the holy nation, the chosen race, the royal priesthood is the new temple and teleologically to be seen and known as ‘the holy city’ means that no human being can know true worship in this world apart from being in ‘God’s temple’ (I Cor. 3:16; cf. Eph. 2:18–22). This temple is spoken of richly in Isaiah 56:6–8.

And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,  
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,  
and to be his servants,  
every one who keeps the Sabbath, and does not profane it,  
and holds fast my covenant —  
these I will bring to my holy mountain,  
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;  
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices

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<sup>14</sup> For an expansion of this material see my *Way and wonder of Worship*, op. cit. pp. 177–194.

will be accepted on my altar;  
for my house shall be called a house of prayer  
for all peoples.  
Thus says the Lord GOD,  
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,  
I will gather yet others to him  
besides those already gathered

We note here that there is something corresponding to Ephesians 2:11–22. Those outside Israel, who were forbidden to worship in the temple at Jerusalem, and who could not partake in the sacrifices, are now accepted in this temple of God. Jesus quoted this passage in regard to the temple at Jerusalem, ‘for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples’ in Mark 11:17. In Luke 2:49 he called it ‘my Father’s house’. Because worship is Man’s deepest ontological need the offer of worship is really the gospel. It tells Man that he can be purified through the work of the high priest, Jesus, that he can come to the Father the way into the holiest being opened by the death of Christ, and his conscience, being purified from dead works, can now worship—serve—the living God. Thus will his misery be taken away, and his true joy be found. Paul speaks of an unbeliever who, in coming into the assembly of Christ’s people and hearing the congregation prophesy will fall on his face and declare, ‘God is really among you!’<sup>15</sup>

‘God is really among you!’ the truth of Hebrews 8:2 comes vividly alive here: Christ is ‘the minster in the sanctuary’. All his power and glory gives reality to our worship. It is worship of the Father whose Spirit causes us to adore Him as His children. It is by the Spirit that our High–Priest and Father draw us out in worship. To be priests unto our God in the present era and in the temple He has made us to be will undoubtedly proclaim to those who come within the orbit of our adoration ‘the wonderful works of God who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light’.

In the celestial sphere the worship described in the Book of the Revelation is pure, rich, full, and is shared by all living creatures, elders, the angelic hosts and the redeemed, and gives some understanding of worship even transcending what we presently know. Worship is the central fact of true living. The object of worship is the Father and the Lamb, and the seven–fold Spirit is as a seven–fold lamp burning before the throne. Those who worship are out of every tribe and people and tongue and nation, for the Lord Christ, the true Mechizedek is not the Priest–King of some unknown and forgotten people, but is the Priest–King of all nations, and his intercessory sacrifice is for all nations. These are the nations which shall bring their glory into the Holy City and shall worship him day and night for ever.

### **The Pastoral Significance Christ’s High–Priesthood**

From our study it is evident that there is not one moment of the day when we are apart from his presence, when we are not dependent on his propitiatory sacrifice—his altar, his oblation, his priestly ministry which wrought salvation. Nor is there a moment when he is not interceding for us. If the people of faith are not taught these things then they are the poorer for being ignorant of them. Understanding them they can not only face the problems that confront them, and which sometimes seem insuperable, but they can also turn from the problems to look out to a world which is under the regime of

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<sup>15</sup> I Corinthians 14:23–25.

the Priest–King, the world of which he is Mediator and to whom all can come, as they eventually must, whether willingly or otherwise.

As we have indicated above, there is the pastoral significance of us being the Intercessory Community. That is, with Christ as our Intercessor we are drawn into effective intercession for others. We share in his intercession, and so ‘keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints. . . that utterance may be given. . . boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel’, and, ‘that God may open a door to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ’—and so on.

As pastors, elders and congregations let us look to the trifold office of Christ, to Christ himself, the loving High–Priest and at his throne find help in time of need.

NCTM, Monday Pastors' Study Group. 2nd. May, 1994

# **Christ the King and His Royal Community**

## **Introduction: the Aim of Our Study**

'What think you of Christ? Whose Son is he?' was the question Jesus asked his opponents, and he silenced them. He was asking concerning 'great David's greater Son'. His listeners dared not say he was Lord of all history and yet they dared not say he wasn't, which was why they kept silence. The doctrine of Messiah, the Lord and King of all history is one which should keep occupying our minds personally, corporately as the people of the King, and pastorally as we realise that the Son of Man reigns at the right hand of God: all history is in his hands, and his alone. Seeing ourselves as 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, and that we are 'kings and priests unto our God' should so fill out our identity in today's world and tomorrow's new age, that we will presently 'reign in life by one Christ Jesus' in the hope of our royal destiny. These things we must constantly teach.

## **Behold Your King!**

Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. From our vantage point of history we have the privilege of knowing this. 'Jesus is Lord!' was the message of the early church (Acts 2:38; 10:5:31; 10:36; Rom. 10:9; 14:7-9; II Cor. 4:4; Phil. 2:11; Rev. 11:14; 19:15). 'Lord' is the equivalent of 'King' as is shown in Rev. 11:14 and 19:15. The vision that opens the prophecy which is the Book of the Revelation (1: 12-16) is deeply moving and is fitting introduction to him we have known as King throughout the prophecy.

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

In 17:4 it is announced, 'They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will; conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings'. 19:15-16 describes him, 'From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and

Lord of lords'. There is no doubt, either that the term 'Christ' or 'Messiah' is the equivalent to 'Lord' and 'King' (Acts 2:36; 10:36; 3:15; 4:26; Ephes. 5:5; Rev. 11:15)

For us, even in this 20th century his Kingship is a *fait accompli*. We need to live by this reality, for it is no less than the Kingdom of God and in Colossians 1:13 is called 'the kingdom of the Son of his love', and in Ephesians 5:5 it is called 'the kingdom of Christ and of God'. I Corinthians 15:24–28 helps to explicate this and show us that the action of the Kingdom is now proceeding,

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. "For God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "All things are put in subjection under him," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one.

So clear is the fact of his Kingship that we could now proceed to make personal and pastoral applications of this matter, but we need to see how he became King and what its significance is for our age.

## Jesus Becomes Messiah–King

### (i) Prophecies in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament God is King over all the nations. The innumerable references scarcely need to be noted: He is 'King over all the earth' and 'King of the nations'<sup>1</sup>. At the same time another figure comes into view in prophecy. It is that of a Davidic King (II Sam. 7:12–14; Psa. 132:11–18; I King 8:25). In Genesis 49:10 (cf. Rev. 5:5) all the nations shall gather at the feet of the 'lion of Judah'. The temporal, anointed Davidic kings seem to give way to one who is greater even than they, and who has to do with the nations. Because of the limitation in time now we shall take a few of the most significant prophecies—those attested to in the New Testament, and examine them.

Psalm 2 is quoted many times in the New Testament, referring to Christ. It needs to be read in the light of this use of it. Briefly, the nation range themselves in rebellion against God who proclaims His Son now to be King. He commands the Son to request rulership over all the nations for all shall be his. The statement by God at Jesus' baptism is a collation of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, 'Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased' and, 'Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, and he will bring forth justice (*mishpat*) to the nations'. The Father's attestation is virtually repeated at Jesus' transfiguration—'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him (Matt. 17:5)' 'This is my Son, my Chosen one listen to him!' (Luke 9:35) which, again, is attested in II Peter 1:16–21—'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased', where the writer adds, 'We have the prophetic word made more sure'.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Psalm 22:28, 'For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations' (cf. Obadiah 21; I Chron. 29:11; Pss. 10:16; 24:7–10; 44:4; 47:2; Isaiah 6:5; 33:22; 43:15, Jer. 10:7)

Psalm 110 emerges in the New Testament as a King–Priest prophecy referring to Jesus in those two offices, as we have seen in previous Studies. The writer of Hebrews uses it liberally but so do others. Part of it is used 27 times, and at least once by Jesus, ‘The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool”.’ That it refers to God’s Kingdom and Jesus as King can be seen in the I Corinthians 15:24–28 quote above.

There can be no question about the fact that Jesus is King in the New Testament.

## **(ii) Happenings in the New Testament**

We could commence this section by remembering that both John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God to be on the very doorstep<sup>2</sup>. Men and women, by repentance and baptism could now enter it. Of course the terms ‘King’ and Kingdom’ are inseparably related. Jesus is King of the Kingdom. This is the prophetic thrust of Psalms 2 and 110 to say nothing of Psalm 89 (see especially v. 27).

There are innumerable references to Jesus as King in the New Testament. Nathaniel, surprised by Jesus, exclaims, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel’. The wise men ask, ‘Where is he who was born King of the Jews?’ Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem on the final week is accompanied by cries that refer to Zechariah 9:9 of the King riding into the holy city of Jerusalem. They cried, ‘Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!’ At the Last Supper Jesus told his disciples that his Father had appointed to him a Kingdom. The question asked by the high–priest, ‘Are you the Son of God?’ the answer did not deny that fact but extended it to include the Son of Man of Daniel 7:13ff. who is, prophetically speaking, given the nations as his Kingdom.

When Pilate asked, ‘Are you a king?’ Jesus agreed but added, ‘My Kingdom is not from this world’. He had already told his disciples, ‘To you is given to understand the mystery (or, ‘the mysteries’) of the Kingdom’. Now he was presenting this mystery to Pilate. Pilate was so affected that he commanded the inscription traditionally placed above the cross of a criminal, to be written, ‘This is Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews’, much to the anger of the leaders of the Jewish nation.

## **Jesus Secures the Kingdom**

Again, time does not permit examining the Gospels’ portrayal of Jesus as the one crowned King at his baptism. Where he went in his ministry the Kingdom went in his person—‘If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then has the Kingdom of God come upon you’—. Even when he delegated ministry to the disciples it was under his aegis or regime. He was the one ‘Stronger than the Strong Man’, and he spoke of casting out the ruler of this world, relating this action to the Cross and resurrection (John 12:31; 16:11; cf. Luke 11:17–23; Heb. 2:14–15; Col, 2:124–15; I John 3:8). It was in that Cross he defeated the powers of darkness and secured the Kingdom for ever. The word ‘secured’ is inadequate for it was always secure, but we mean ‘the gospel of the Kingdom’—‘thy God reigns’—is now also ‘the gospel of salvation’.

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<sup>2</sup> The whole matter of the Kingdom of God and Jesus’ part in it as the King is a vast subject with which we cannot deal here. I suggest that in addition to the great body of literature available on the subject reference be made to my *Christ the Conquering King* (NCPI, 1985), *Christ’s People in Today’s World* (NCPI ) and LFS 14, *The King: the Kingdom of God: the Kingship* as helpful on this theme. We cannot study the idea of Christ as King apart from the matter of the Kingdom of God.

John 12:31; Colossians 2:14–15<sup>3</sup> and Hebrews 2:14–125—amongst other references—show us Jesus defeated the kingdom of darkness through the Atonement. The apostolic gospel of the Kingdom contains Satan’s defeat, as also the defeat of death (cf. Acts 10:38; I Cor. 15:55–57; Heb 2:14–15; cf. I John 4:18). Jesus, as man, has achieved the Kingship appointed to him. Crowned at his baptism<sup>4</sup>, he is finally declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead through the spirit [Spirit] of holiness (Rom. 1:4–5)<sup>5</sup> and finally is King through the Ascension (Heb. 1:5–13). None of this is to say that he was not always King prior to his incarnation, but the staggering fact is that it was *as a man* that he become King through his human life and ministry. Calvin takes up the matter of the Father being King and the Son’s appointment by Him to be King,

We now perceive the amount of what is stated here [John 5:22: Comm. on John), that the Father has given to the Son a kingdom, that He may govern heaven and earth according to His pleasure. But this might appear to be very absurd, that the Father surrendering His right to govern, should remain unemployed in heaven, like a private person.. The answer is easy,. This is said of both in regard to God and to men; for no change took place in the Father, when He appointed Christ to be supreme king and lord of heaven and earth; for He is the Son, and works in Him. But since, when we wish to rise to God, all our senses immediately fail, Christ is placed before our eyes as a lively image of the invisible God.

### **The Kingly Work is Also a Priestly work**

We are reminded by the Epistle to the Hebrews that Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek, whom we also know to be a King Priest, ‘King of Salem’ (*shalom*). A priest who is not king is a powerless priest: a king who is not a priest is not fully king to his people. Christ’s ministry of the Cross was priestly, and yet in that the dying thief saw him as King, ‘Lord, remember me when you come into [or, in] your Kingdom’ was his plea. At the beginning of the crucifixion the soldiers had mocked Jesus, saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’ It took a forgiven criminal to know the priestly–kingly work of the Saviour.

### **The King and the Kingdom**

It is impossible to think of the Kingship of Christ and the Kingdom as two different entities, We have seen that in his earthly ministry Christ was the Kingdom in person,

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<sup>3</sup> In his commentary on this passage Calvin comments, ‘For as he had previously compared the cross to a signal trophy or show of triumph, in which Christ led about His enemies, so now he also compares it to a triumphal car, in which He showed Himself conspicuously to view . . . For there is no tribunal so distinguished, no chariot so elevated, as is the gibbet on which Christ has subdued death and the devil, the prince of death; nay, more, he has utterly trodden them down under His feet’.

<sup>4</sup> In one sense we should see his coronation as beginning at his birth—‘Where is he that is born king of the Jews?’—but publicly at his baptism, in accordance with Psalm 2. Yet his resurrection, following the victory of the Cross is also part of that continuing coronation (Heb, 1:5–13: cf. Rev. 12:5)

<sup>5</sup> This essay does not allow us to cover Jesus’ teaching of the Kingdom as in the Sermon on the Mount and the many parables of the Kingdom. We simply observe that Jesus was teaching ;’the mystery (or, mysteries) of the Kingdom. Certainly his enemies knew what he was about even if they did not receive his teaching personally to themselves.

wherever he went and in whatever he did. 'If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then has the Kingdom of God come upon you.' His wide teaching regarding the Kingdom of God in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. chs. 5–7) is climaxed by his saying, 'But I say unto you', or 'He who hears my words and does them . . .', thus making himself more than 'a greater than Moses'—the great Lawgiver—for the words were the law of the new King. Likewise his teaching concerning the Kingdom—especially the parables of Matthew 13— show him as the King of the Kingdom, with all that that was to mean.

We really need to understand the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount for they are really the true spirit of Christ, and we will mistake brute metaphysical power for true authority, and we will misunderstand true holiness for legal rectitude. We will likewise turn back on Christ the triumph of the King shown in the eschatological parables of the Kingdom. We will assume he has some innate power which is no less imperialistic than we would exercise were we to have the power we suppose God to have, and to exercise it in the way in which we think Christ does, that is, the way we would. We need to see Zechariah 9:9 in its true nature, 'Lo, your king comes to you, triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass'. He cannot be the Lion of Judah who is not first the Slain Lamb. No wounds in the Vicarious Humanity, means no power in the Glorified Man.

## **The King as King**

### **It is essential that we understand the nature of Christ's Kingship**

We have indicated that he won his victory at the Cross and the Resurrection. In Philippians 2:5–11 we see that he enters this world through the *kenosis*, that is that his incarnation ensures he is truly Man. It is an act which makes him a man forever, albeit in the ultimate, a glorified man. The text tells us he does not humble himself to become Man but he humbles himself to go to the Cross which for all other human beings is humiliating, but for him is the expression both of his Deity and his humanity. He is not 'strong' in that he is 'crucified through weakness'. This is how he wins the triumph of the Cross and Resurrection. It is through this weakness he ascends to his Session at the right hand of God. In the Revelation John the Seer is told to behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah for he has overcome and is able to open the seven-sealed book of history. John, with his knowledge of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and all it meant in Israel's history and in the sayings of Jesus, looks, and he sees not a Lion but a Lamb, a Lamb as it had been slain. It is the 'weakness' of the Lamb, and its humility which wins the triumph of history. When he is further portrayed in the Apocalypse as a mighty King—'the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of the Lord and his Christ'—he does not win by mighty armaments of this world to 'smite the nations' but he does so with the sharp two-edged sword which goes out of his mouth, that is the Word of God. It is this which out countenances the ancient Serpent, the Devil and all his hosts<sup>6</sup>. Were he to fight evil powers with their carnal weapons he would not rise above them: he would be one with them. The Temptation in the wilderness tells us this, as does also his deep pain in crucifixion suffering. That is why 'the word of the Cross'—of 'Christ crucified'—is 'the power of God and the wisdom of God'. Such 'power' seems weakness to evil, and such 'wisdom' seems intellectual foolishness. The Lamb is the

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<sup>6</sup> This I have tried to portray in my allegorical work *Bright Bird and Shining Sails* (NCPI, 1981).

King and the King is the Lamb, else he would never be Ultimate Judge and Ultimate Pacifier.

### **The King as Judge**

As telling, if not more telling is the eschatological view of the King as Judge in climax of history. Matthew 25:31–46 shows that he has power of life and death in the final Judgement (cf. John 5:19–29; cf. Acts 10:42; 17:31; II Cor. 5:10). The prophecy of Genesis 49:10—that all nations would be gathered before him—will be fulfilled. The Son of Man, as in Daniel chapter 7 will judge the nations—‘he will sit on his glorious throne’—and those who have opposed him will be sent into everlasting destruction and the others will ‘inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’. In accordance with the parables of Matthew 13 the tares will be destroyed, the bad fish likewise eliminated and the true harvest be gathered in. The fact of this judgement should cause us, and our people to revere Christ in his awesome task of judging.

### **The King as Pacifier**

The pacific side of the outcome of the Kingdom is reflected in the eschatological passages that speak of the ceasing of wars, the eventual absence of all forms of impurity, evil and the strife they cause. The exaltation of Man into the glorified state, the shaping up of the same Man into the image of the Son, and the great eternities such as the granting of inheritance and rewards, the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, the Holy City, the blessedness of seeing God face to face, being inducted into the mystery of the Godhead, and becoming as Christ in that all share as Kings and Priest unto their God, and reign on the earth forever—this is the triumph of him who is Prophet, Priest and King.

## **The Kingship of Jesus and the Community of the King**

On the basic and viable thesis that the Community of Christ receives its life, character, identity and work from its Head as Prophet, Priest and King, the community is, as we observed from the beginning a ‘Kingdom of priests’. That is a priestly community. Just as in Exodus 19:5–6, so in I Peter 2:9–10,

Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were no people but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

In Israel not every one was a priest, but the nation was priestly (i) in the sense that it was the priest nation to [among] all nations. Ideally it mediated between God and the nations, from God to the nations, for the nations to God. I Peter 2:9–10 throws back new meaning into Exodus 19:5–6 as that passage does into I Peter 2:9–10 and (ii) in that it had a worship which was other than that of the nations and transcended what they knew (cf. Rom. 9:4 for the gifts of God which the basis of priestly worship).

Just as in Israel the priest was to be enquired of, and taught the Law of God and ministered the sacrifices, so in the new priestly community<sup>7</sup> the new people are to declare ‘the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light’ so that proclamation now becomes a priestly act.

## Elements of Priestly Ministry

### Introductory Observation

Certain prophetic schemes emasculate the Kingship of Christ because they present him as an absent King from the last days. The New Testament passages which show Christ as elevated above all principalities and powers and as Head over all things are ignored in favour of an ultimate Lordship. Thus the present dynamic of his Kingship is not recognised<sup>8</sup>. The result of this rendering Christ as almost impotent or ‘a waiting Lord’ has the effect of making the church virtually powerless in ‘the presence of the Absence’. The statement of Romans 5:17 ‘reign in life by one Christ Jesus’ puts that triumph into the ultimate, and not the penultimate age. Whilst it is true that the ultimate will be total Kingship that has no opposition, the Kingship is no less in action for the present opposition it meets.

The biblical action of the royal Community of Christ is presented as follows,

- (i) The Community of Christ was constituted of those who had been delivered from the powers of darkness into the Kingdom of the Son of His love: they were the Kingdom community, although not wholly the Kingdom itself, for the church is never the Kingdom. It is the proclaimer of the Kingdom, and prays, ‘Thy Kingdom come,’ but never, ‘Thy church come.’
- (ii) The proclamation stated immediately above comes in the form of the *kerugma*, the announcement of salvation. In the Book of the Acts the apostles preach the Kingdom of God<sup>9</sup> (1:3–8; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 28:25; 28:23, 31). Their preaching of the Lordship of Christ was also the preaching of his Kingship. Their telling ‘the wonderful deeds of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light’ was the dynamic preaching of the powerful Kingdom and its King. There was the power of the word of God, and often the confirming elements of signs and wonders, elements which had also attested to Christ as King in the four Gospels.
- (iii) They were co-workers with the King and his Father in the ministry of the Kingdom. This is seen powerfully in Acts 14:22; II Corinthians 4:20; II Thessalonians 1:4–6. It is all part of the present action of Christ as shown in

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<sup>7</sup> Note that the Reformation doctrine of ‘the priesthood of *all* believers’ is not ‘the priesthood of *every* believer’, so the church is the priestly community only in Christ the great High Priest.

<sup>8</sup> See my commentary, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (NCPI, 1993) especially the chapter on Revelation chapter 20, ‘The Matter of the Millennium’. A booklet of that title is also available from NCPI.

<sup>9</sup> Note Jesus’ followers became such from hearing the proclamation by John the Baptist of (i) then Kingdom of God at hand, and its gospel, (ii) the promise of the universal forgiveness of sins (John 1:29; etc.), and (iii) the promises of the universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:8). Jesus encouraged his flagging disciples to believe they would receive the Kingdom (Luke 12:32; 22:28–30) and the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13; John chs. 14–16; Acts 1:8).

I Corinthians 15:24–28 and the whole of the prophecy of the Book of the Revelation.

- (iv) They were proleptically and actually partakers of the Kingdom, and as such already ‘reigned in life by one Christ Jesus’. We have seen that whilst this statement of Romans 5:17 (cf. Ephes. 2:5–6) has eschatological connotation it is not limited to the future *telos*.
- (v) They took part in the conflict with powers of darkness thus participating in the action set out in I Corinthians 15:24–28. This was through the royal power they knew in Christ as the King of kings and Lord of Lords. The Book of the Revelation opens up this matter on several fronts.(cf. Ephes. 6:10ff; II Cor 10:3–6).
- (vi) The prophetic, priestly and royal elements of Christ’s Community are inseparable because they are so in the Head, Christ himself. At this time when the Church is on earth, its three elements are exercised in the eschatological way: nothing is yet completed. We need then to see that the way of weakness—the way of the King who is the Lamb—must be the way of the Royal Community. Only in weakness can it be strong, and then only because of grace. It will one day judge angels, but its judgement will be *within* Christ for he is true Judge because He is true Lawgiver, and because he has fulfilled the law, not only in passive and active obedience, but in the sense that he has confirmed and established it by his life and death and is himself its personification.

### **Conclusion: The Pastoral Power of the Doctrine of Christ the King**

This is apparent: Christ being King over all the universe, along with the Father–King makes intelligible the Lord’s Prayer and the prayer for the Kingdom to come. The sanctions spelled out in the Epistles regarding entrance into the Kingdom—the inheriting of it— are powerful factors in present sanctification—‘They that do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God’<sup>10</sup>. We might ask ourselves whether we present Christ as King or as one whose works are contingent upon our gracious acceptance of him! The rejection in much modern theology of an ‘imperialistic tone’—so called—renders the gospel concerning the nations impotent. Our present anthropological theology centres our emphasis upon the new sociological mores currently advocated. Whatever value the prevailing empirico–scientific researching may have—and it may have quite some value—we must see it from the point of view of the Kingdom, and not in reverse of this. The Kingdom is militant, even if this militancy is known as ‘love, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (Rom. 14:17).

#### **The Pastoral Questions we Need to Ask**

- (i) Do our folk understand the King, the Kingdom, and the royal nature of the church of which they are members?
- (ii) Are we so ecclesiastically domesticated and theologically inept that we are spiritually ‘paper tigers’, toothless and impotent?

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<sup>10</sup> See I Corinthians 6:9–10; Galatians 6:19–21; Ephesians 5:5. Inheritance is a powerful motivating force in the New Testament.

- (iii) Have we put the triumph of the Kingdom to the end of the age and meanwhile given Satan and his kingdom predominance in this age, and this in spite of the Scriptures which talk about us being overcomers in Christ and of overcoming the Devil, himself (Rom. 8:31–39; II Cor. 10:3f.; James 4:7; I Pet. 5:8–9; I John 2:13–14)?
- (iv) Does Christ really lead us in triumph or not (II Cor 2:14)? Spiritual imperialism is not jingoistic but is powerful to the pulling down of many worldly strongholds.
- (v) Do we triumph in the spirit of the kenosis, the Slain Lamb, of the religious scandal of the Cross, and its seeming intellectual foolishness? That is, are we crucified with Christ through weakness or do we blaze out with some imperial power that is beyond the seeming powerlessness of the word of God?
- (vi) Do we really believe that it is the King who is Intercessor/Intervener at the right hand of God, and that he is seated on the eternal Throne? We need to ask ourselves the further question, ‘How are we going to be able to be ‘a kingdom of priests unto our God’, ‘to reign upon the earth’ and ‘to reign for ever’ if presently we fail to know our identity and the power of the Kingdom of the King?

### **Self Paranesis**

All of this tells us that we have to answer personally the question, ‘What think you of Christ?’ and we must answer it in great faith. We have seen Christ as Prophet, Priest and King and ourselves as the prophetic, priestly and royal community. We must never cease to teach these things until they become the very lifeblood of our churches, the muscles and sinews that aid us in life and the battle of this penultimate age

## **BORROWED HOLINESS**

Dr. JW Kleinig

### **1. Our Call to Holiness**

- a. See 1 Thess 4:7 (NIV):

God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

(1) We have, a holy calling (2 Tim 1:9).

(2) We are called to be saints (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2)

- b. See 1 Thess 5:23–24 (NIV):

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.  
May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

(1) God not only calls us to be holy but also makes us holy

(2) He promises to make us completely holy for eternal life with him.

- c. See Heb 12:10 (NIV):

Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.

(1) God educates us—for holiness in the school of life

(2) He wants us to share in his own holiness.

(3) He teaches us through our experiences and disciplines us through our troubles, so that we can share more fully in his holiness.

### **2. The Source of Holiness**

See the angels' song in Rev 4:8 (NIV):

Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty, who was, and is, and is to come'.

- a. The living God is the only being who is inherently and permanently holy (cf. 1 Sam 2:2, Rev 15:4).

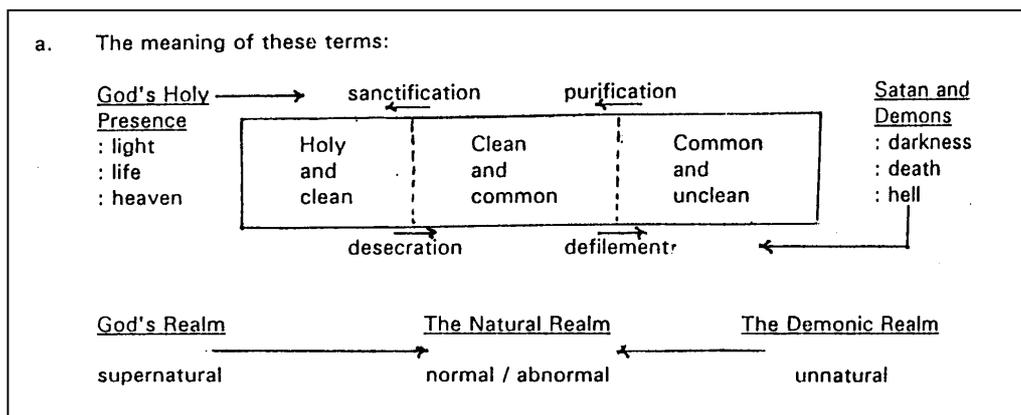
(i) Holy One (Ps 99:3, 5; Is 10:17; Hos 11:9).

- (2) The Holy One of Israel (Ps 71:22; 78:41; 89:191).
  - (3) The Holy God (Ps 99:9; Josh 24:19; 1 Sam 6:20).
- b. In the Old Testament he reveals himself and his nature by saying: I am *holy* (Lev 11 :44, 45; 19:2; 20:7, 26; 21 :8).
- c. All three persons of the Holy Trinity are equally holy
- (1) God the Holy Father (Jn 17:1 1)
  - (2) God the Holy Son (Lk 1:351, the Holy One (Rev 3:7; cf Jn 6:69).
  - (3) God the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:25).
- d. Since God’s holiness has to do with the mystery of his being it cannot be understood and defined abstractly but can only be adequately expressed and proclaimed in praise (Is 6:3; Ps 99; Rev 4:9).
- e. His holiness is inseparable from him and his presence,
- (1) People and things borrow holiness from contact with him,
  - (2) Apart from the Triune God, no one is ever holy.
- f. Since God makes himself accessible in divine worship, his holiness is available to his people in worship.
- (1) Holy people receive their holiness from being in God’s presence and participating with the angels in divine worship in the heavenly sanctuary.
  - (2) Holy things are set apart for use in worship.
    - (a) In the Old Testament the most holy things make people and things holy.
    - (b) The holy things are made and kept holy by the most holy things.

### 3. The Nature of Holiness. Purity and Impurity

See God’s words to the priests in Lev 10:10 (NRSV):

You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean.



- b. People and things exist in one of three states:
  - (1) Holy and clean, eg. baptised believer, bread in Lord's Supper.
  - (2) Clean and common, eg. faithful husband, roast beef.
  - (3) Common and unclean, eg. murderer, food offered to an idol,
- c. Like light, God's holiness is a life-giving power which creates a holy, heavenly state of being.
  - (1) Contact with God makes people holy and revitalizes them spiritually.
  - (2) The closer they are to God, the holier they are.
  - (3) They remain holy as long as they do not desecrate their holiness by doing something unclean.
  - (4) They must be purified before they can be made holy.
- d. Purity is the natural healthy state of being for people in the world.
  - (1) People who live moral lives are clean.
  - (2) Purity results from being in a right relationship with other people and the natural world.
  - (3) It results in a good conscience and a sense of physical well-being.
- e. The state of impurity.

See the words of Jesus in Mk 7:20–23 (NIV):

He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean'. For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean' "

- 1) Like darkness, impurity is a destructive power which. establishes an evil, diabolic state of being (note the reference to unclean spirits in the NT).
- 2) It is the opposite to holiness and belongs to the realm of Satan.
- 3) A person becomes unclean by contact with the realm of darkness through sin against God and human beings.
- 4) People are defiled by their evil thoughts and desires which lead to evil deeds.
- 5) Impurity is as incompatible with holiness as darkness is with light.
- 6) If unclean people come into God's presence, they are destroyed by God's wrath.

## 4. The Danger of Holiness

See Isaiah 6: –7 (NIV)

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: , ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory’.

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty’.

Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, ‘See this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for’.

- a. No one who is in a state of impurity can remain unscathed in God’s heavenly presence.
- b. An unclean person desecrates God’s holiness and so comes under God’s judgment.
- c. God’s holiness is deadly and destructive to an unclean person.
- d. Unclean people must be purified from the stain of sin, before they can stand in the presence of a holy God and serve him by speaking his holy word.
- e. People who are in a state of spiritual purity receive blessing from meeting with him (cf Ps 2 4:3–6).

## 5. The Gift of Holiness

- a. The Mission of Jesus as our High Priest

See the prayer of Jesus for his disciples in Jn 7:17–19 (NIV)

Holy Father... sanctify them by the truth;  
your word is truth.

As you sent me into the world,,  
I have sent them into the world.

For them I sanctify myself,  
that they too may be truly sanctified.

(1) God the Father sent Jesus into the world to call us as his disciples and make us holy (cf Jn 10:36).

(2) He sanctified himself as our high priest by his holy life and sacrificial death for us (cf Heb 2:10–18).

- (a) He took upon himself our impurity and suffered God’s wrath for us
- (b) He gives us his purity and holiness as God’s Son.
- (c) He intercedes for us with his Father to sanctify us through his word, so that we can be with him in the Father’s presence and work with him for his heavenly Father.

b. Our Sanctification in Jesus

See Eph 1:3–7a, 13–14 (NIV):

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.  
For he chose us in him before the creation of the world  
to be holy and blameless in his sight.  
In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ ...  
In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins ...  
And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of salvation.  
Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,  
who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those  
who are God's possession ...

- (1) We don't make ourselves holy, but God makes us holy as a favour to us.
- (2) Before we were created, God the Father planned to make us holy in and through his Son. .
- (3) This plan involved three things:
  - (a) Our redemption and purification through the blood of Jesus.
  - (b) Our union with Jesus through faith in him.
  - (c) Our adoption with Jesus as God's children with the same holy status as Jesus.
- (4) Our justification is therefore the basis for our sanctification (cf Rom 6:19, 22)
  - (a) Through Jesus we have been forgiven and accepted by God the Father.
  - (b) Since we are right with God the rather through Jesus, we are also holy in him.
- (5) We borrow our holiness from Jesus and are not holy apart from him.
  - (a) He is our sanctification (1 Cor 1:30).
  - (b) We are made holy in him (1 Cor 1:2) and his name (1 Cor 6:11).
  - (c) We are made holy by faith in him (Acts 26:18).
  - (d) We are therefore holy in him (Phil 1:2; 4:21).
  - (e) Since we are holy in Christ we may pray for all the spiritual blessings belonging to Jesus as God's Son and heir.
- (6) Through Christ we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
  - (a) He puts his mark on us as God's holy property.
  - (b) He is the first instalment of our full inheritance and guarantee of our full sanctification.

(c) He makes and keeps us holy (cf. Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 6:1 1; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2).

c. God's Means for Making People Holy

(1) See Jn 17:17 (NIV):

Holy Father ... sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth.

(a) God's word is most holy.

(b) Through our trust in it as the truth we become holy (cf 2 Thess 2:13)

(2) See I Tim 4:5 (NIV):

everything God created ... is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

(a) God's word and name are most holy.

(b) The use of God's name in prayer makes something holy (c.f. 1 Cor 1:2;6:11).

(3) See Eph 5:25b–27 (NIV):

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing of water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

(a) Christ cleanses and sanctifies us through baptism.

(b) The word and name of the Triune God make baptism a means of sanctification (1 Cor 6:1 1)

(4) See Heb 10:10 (RSV):

We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

(a) The body of Jesus is most holy (cf Heb 10:14)

(b) We are kept holy by eating his body in the Lord's Supper (cf 1 Cor 11:27–32).

(5) See Heb 13:12 (NIV):

Jesus ... suffered... to make the people holy through his own blood.

(a) The blood of Jesus is most holy (cf Heb 10:29).

(b) We are kept holy by drinking the blood of Jesus in the Lord's Supper (cf the sprinkling of our hearts in Heb 10:22; 12:24; 1 Pet 1:2).

## 6. Agents for Holiness

### a. Introduction

- (1) All people who believe in Jesus as Lord and worship the Triune God are saints.
- (2) Their holiness is borrowed from God through their association with Jesus.
- (3) Question: What's the purpose of being holy?

### b. As Saints We are Priests

See Pet 9 (NIV);

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praise of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

- (1) In the Old Testament the priests acted as mediators between God and his people.
- (2) Through Christ all believers mediate between God the Father and those who don't yet believe in him and worship him.
- (3) As priests they represent others before God the Father by interceding for their forgiveness and by praying for their needs (cf 1 Tim 2:1–6).
- (4) As priests they represent God the Father to others by bringing him and his grace to them through their daily contacts with them (cf Matt 5:14–16; 10:40).
- (5) As priests we are to offer our bodies (Rom 12:1; cf 6:12–13, 19–23), our confession of allegiance in songs of praise (Heb 13:15), and our possessions (Heb 13:16) as acceptable offerings to God.

### c. As Saints We are Involved with the Angels in Heavenly Worship

See Heb 10:19–22 (NIV).

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

- (1) In the Old Testament the high priest alone had restricted access to God's presence in his earthly temple.
- (2) Through Christ our high priest and liturgist in God's heavenly temple, all believers have unrestricted access to God's heavenly presence.

- (3) In worship and prayer we can approach him unafraid together With Jesus, since our bodies have been washed by the waters of baptism and our consciences are cleansed by the blood of Jesus.
- (4) Since we rely on Christ's purity and holiness, we can approach God the Father with the assurance that he will welcome us and treat us exactly as he welcomes and treats his Son.
- (5) In our worship we stand together with Jesus, all angels, all departed saints, and all Christians everywhere in the presence of our holy heavenly Father (cf Heb 12:22–24).
- (6) Through our worship we receive a preview of heaven here on earth.

d. The Goal in our Pursuit of Holiness

- (1) See 2 Tim 2:20–21 (NIV):

In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

- (a) We do not make ourselves holy by living holy lives, but rather live holy lives because we have been made holy in Christ.
- (b) Christ makes us holy, so that we can work with him as our master.
- (c) We are challenged to give up our impure activities, so that we can be more useful to our Lord and be better equipped to serve him.

- (2) See Heb 12:14 (NRSV):

Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

- (a) Our Lord shares his own holiness with us, so that we will be able to see him face to face in heaven.
- (b) Only those who are at peace with God and each other share in Christ's holiness.
- (c) We therefore pursue holiness as a gift from God through his Holy Spirit, so that we will be drawn into deeper intimacy with him until we see him face to face, holy and perfect and lovely to him.

## 7. Conclusion

- See 1 Pet 1:14–16 (NRSV):

Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'.

- a. God is holy and calls us to share in his own holiness (see Lev. 11 :44, 45; 19:2; 20:7)
- b. God's statement: You shall *be holy* can be taken in three ways
  - (1) As a promise about what he will do to us.
  - (2) As a statement about what we will be as his children.
  - (3) As a command about how we are to live.
- c. Since we are holy, we are to preserve our holiness in our way of living.

## Jesus the Man of Law

### Introduction: Jesus the Man of Law

In seeking to supply our answer to the question, 'What think you of Christ? Whose son is he?' we have looked at his ministry as Prophet, Priest and King. To some degree this has covered his earthly ministry in Palestine and the end events of his death, resurrection, ascension and session at the right hand of the Father. Matthew 4:23 (cf. Acts 10:38) gives us a summary of the elements of that ministry,

And he went round about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and infirmity among the people.

Whilst the Gospels do not always give us the *form* of that ministry we know that Jesus' teaching, preaching and healings were not separate one from the other. The most prominent block of teaching was the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5–7. What is clear is that Jesus did not just do acts—such as signs and wonders—but taught his listeners who had been brought up in the matters of 'the law and the prophets'. This term would cover the substance of what we call the Old Testament. In Palestine there were innumerable scholars and teachers of the law and the prophets and various schools of thinking regarding the same. Had Jesus not taught regarding the law and the prophets then they would not only have regarded him as ignoring the truth of God, but the other elements of his ministry would have lacked foundation and substance. What is even more pertinent is the fact that Israel was in the grip of a view of the law [and the prophets] which far from a true understanding of the covenant so that the *practice* of the law would have been deficient<sup>1</sup>. To be a teacher of the law was a primary pursuit and office in Israel. It was 'the law people' who gathered around Christ for it seemed he was saying something else, and that he was departing from the understanding of law which obtained with them.

There can be no doubt that the Son was 'the word made flesh', and yet also was 'the law made flesh'. We mean this in the sense that (i) Jesus lived utterly by the law of His Father, which was essentially the true law of God, (ii) he obeyed the law in his active obedience, and (iii) he interpreted or 'radicalised' the law both by his teaching and his life. If we put together 'the law and the prophets' which constitute the whole of God's law then in order to understand God's law we must come to Christ. Who else would be *the* teacher of the law, and as such *the* prophet and *the* priest?

When Paul later talks about 'the law of Christ' (I Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2; cf. Gal. 5:13, 22, 23; Rom. 13:8–10) what Christ taught regarding law in the Gospels cannot be ignored, and cannot be other than the law of God the Father as *fons divinitatis*.. This

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<sup>1</sup> Paul is the classic example of a teacher of the law whose practice seem impeccable (Phil. 3:6 passim). In Romans 7:9 he speaks of having thought himself 'once alive apart from the law'. Then the law 'came' and 'sin revived' and Paul 'died'. He had not really known the law. How did the law 'come' but by Christ's appearing to him. Then Paul understood the law and was slain by it.

law came to the Son as the one into whose hands all things had been delivered (John 5:19–30; 3:35; Matt.11:27) so that the sum of that teaching must be included in the term ‘the law of Christ’.

### **The Human Problem of Understanding the Law**

If we take the law of God firstly as a subjective genitive, then we understand it is the law obtaining within the Godhead by which the Three Persons subsist. It derives from the Father as *fons divinitatis*, and the Son receives it from the Father in eternal generation, as also the Spirit receives it through the Father and the Son. It is then ‘the law of the Father’, and so ‘the law of the Son’ and so ‘the law of the Spirit—terms which we find in the New Testament—and it is the law of the Triune God, the law of their relationships—and thus it becomes (objective genitive—the law *for* Man. Given in overt form at Sinai it is the Primal Law (‘soft copy’), which then became the law of the covenant (bot ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ copy). Jesus’ teaching ‘radicalised’ the law as Israel had come to view it, so that it now comported with the Primal Law given to Man at creation. Hence such things as the antitheses, ‘It has been said of old, but I say unto you . . .’

The moment Man lost union and communion with God the living reality of law became dead to him. In dying to God Man died to law. Even so Man [ontologically] needs a god and a law. Because of the fall the true God and the true law became images in Man’s mind which he could not eject but which repelled him, Because his conscience could not deny them, Man’s adverted to surrogate gods and surrogate laws to give conscience a place for operation at the level of eikons which were devised by him and which, seemingly, he could control, but what emerged was the resultant tyranny<sup>2</sup> of these gods and laws who used this conscience<sup>3</sup>. Whilst Man can placate his conscience by his god–observing and law–observing actions he believes he is living reasonably. His trouble is that his eikons of God and God’s law are false ones changed to suit himself, but never prove truly satisfying.

Israel had pure revelation of God and pure law but innate idolatry transmogrified the glory of God and His law. By the time of Christ the God–views and law–views were set in wrong eikons. Thus when Christ talked he sounded so one outside the formalised teaching of the law (cf. Matt. 7:28). Let us take a couple of examples

Now when the Pharisees gathered together to him, with some of the scribes, who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands, observing the tradition of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they purify themselves; and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze.) And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with hands defiled?” And he

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<sup>2</sup> I think there can be little doubt that behind the devised gods—which have no ontological reality—the notion of God is still the eikon Man really retains, but the eikon is false. Man does not wish to retain true knowledge of God, hence his ontological confusion, lack of fulfilment, and loss of integrity as a person and as a community.

<sup>3</sup> We have plenty of teaching in the New Testament about ‘an evil conscience’ (consciousness of evil), a ‘seared conscience’ (a conscience made to be numb), and ‘a good conscience’ (one that works truly in God and is conscious of good), and ‘a purified conscience’ (one cleansed of evil; and dead works) to show us that conscience can be used in evil contexts and holy contexts. Paul’s qualifying clause ‘in the Holy Spirit’ (Rom. 9:1) shows conscience can work in all purity.

said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’ You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men.” And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die’; but you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is Corban’ (that is, given to God) — then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your tradition which you hand on. And many such things you do.” (Mark 7:4–13).

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! (Matt. 23:23–24).

It was this wrong view, interpretation and practice of the law that Jesus had to correct. He was not giving a new law, but ‘radicalising’ it to its pristine nature. This is seen supremely in the Sermon on the Mount

### **The Sermon on the Mount the Truth of God’s Law**

It has been pointed out by many commentators that the Sermon on the Mount is a fine exposition of the law of God in its true, essential being. Whilst it may be a true criticism that the Pharisees and others had developed a legalistic view of the law, in fact they were virtually antinomian, at least in the sense that they reduced the law from its true nature to a humanised version, *one which they could pursue and achieve*. It was not that Jesus lifted the law above what it had been, or ridiculed it by saying, ‘It has been said to you of old, but . . .’, for he was revealing the true nature of the law<sup>4</sup>. The introduction—if we may call the beatitudes that—set the understanding of true law, one that demanded a certain spirit of being in approach to obedience to the Father. It set it also in the context of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom which Paul later calls ‘the kingdom of the Son of his love’ (Col. 1:13). The *torah* of Christ has to do with the Kingdom and, in one sense has to do with nothing else. Thus we can rightly speak of ‘the law of the Kingdom’. We also observe that since the Father in mentioned so many times and in connection with so many actions regarding life in the Kingdom, that the Sermon must be of ‘the law of the Father’ as it is ‘the law of Christ’ in the sense that he had taken it to himself. If the Sermon on the Mount is the key to understanding love for God and neighbour as set out in the Decalogue, then the Decalogue is the key to understanding the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus did not see himself as derogating the law of the Mosaic covenant, but rather unveiling its riches and reality. When, then, he said,

Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota or dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever relaxes one of the least of these

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<sup>4</sup> In Romans 7:6 Paul speaks of being ‘discharged from the law’ and he may mean ‘law as a way of self justification’ but at a deeper level he is saying ‘the law as you saw it according to *your* eikon which made it out to be ‘the old written code’. In fact the law of God was *never* that! It was only as *they* saw it. It is the way the sinner sees it, especially when it is ‘working wrath’, and ‘bringing death’ and ‘giving the knowledge of sin’.

commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall 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,

he was saying that far from abrogating the law he had come to confirm and establish the law<sup>5</sup>. The whole of the Sermon on the Mount, as we have observed is a radicalising of the law as Israel had come to know it. If we take the text and give it much thought it would appear to resolve itself as follows,

- (i) Only those who are in the beatitudinal states or modes could really be able to receive what Jesus was teaching. 5:3–12. Life (law) must be lived from and on this basis.
- (ii) True listeners are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, as a city on a hill so that their works will be of God and glorify him, 5:13–16. What Jesus was teaching would be the natural way of life of the community (the Kingdom people).
- (iv) The permanent, immutable nature of the law for true righteousness in God's Kingdom, 5:17–20.
- (v) The five antitheses which compare the way the law has been taken with the way it should be understood and practiced, the true nature of law reasserting itself, 5:21–48<sup>6</sup>.
- (vi) There is a piety which men do before men and not before God whilst mistakenly think of it as being before God These acts of piety being almsgiving, prayer, forgiveness, fasting, and seeking security in this life by human endeavour. Since God is Father these acts must spring from intimate communion with him, and as for treasure, let it *not* be laid up on earth but in heaven. Regarding security, that will come from trust in God as *Father*, 6: 1–34.
- (vii) (a) Judgement is of God and human beings must not take his prerogative, (b) holy things must not be given to unholy people, (c) God must be trusted to supply what is needed and dependent, human trust in him will ask and receive, (d) the way of the law and prophets is to do to others as you would wish them to do to you,<sup>7</sup> (e) the law of righteousness is a 'narrow' way to life but a sure one, demanding total choice of will and the only one that will result in eternal life, rather than the way of life the crowd will take which is 'easy, (f) disciples and children of the Father must be alert to disguised forms of evil. False prophets will be known by their fruits, and those producing evil fruit will be destroyed, 7:1–20.

All of this is, indeed, 'the law of Christ': not only the law that he kept, but the law that he expounded in the name of God. That is the law of love, and especially in the relational sense as we have seen in the antitheses and in 5:43–48. That his words are

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<sup>5</sup> I think the correct exegesis of 'to fulfil' does not mean he would obey the law wholly and thus fulfil it, and so it would not longer be needed. Nor does this relate to Romans 10:4, 'For Christ is the end of the law, that everyone who has faith may be justified', as though Paul is saying Christ ended the law by fulfilling its legal demands.

<sup>6</sup> In radicalising the law he never gave a new block of law or even a renewed law for the nation. In accordance with Jeremiah 31:31–34 and Ezekiel 36:24–28 (cf. Isa. 2:3 *passim*; Luke 24:47) this law could only become the law of the new community when Messiah would come and establish it. Jesus was not simply a reformer in Israel, but a transformer in the Kingdom.

<sup>7</sup> This really both the sum and climax of the law; it is the law of love to neighbour which cannot obtain if there is not love to God. Love *to* God springs from love *from* God (I John 4:19).

true *torah* and *dabar* can be seen by 7:21–27 where Jesus reveals his place of authority as judge on ‘that day’ (vs. 22–23).

Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.’

Verses 24–27 reveal that he has not been making a commentary on the *torah* of God, but that what he has said *is* the *torah* of God, or, in short, the *torah* of Christ. This shows then that he is as the Lawgiver in that no choice is given to his hearers if they wish to survive the ultimate test of judgement

Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.

There can be no doubt that Jesus is claiming his word is as the *dabar* (command) of the *torah*, and in that sense, though Jesus is not here explicitly indicated as the new Moses, he is that and even more than a new Moses<sup>8</sup>. The people had not previously heard such words, nor witnessed such authority. Verses 28–29 indicate this.

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

Verses 24–27 reveal that he has not only been making a commentary on the *torah* of God, but that what he has said *is*, in fact, that very *torah*—the *torah* of God, the *torah* of Christ and the *torah* of the Spirit, even the *torah* of the Triune God.

### **The Sermon and the Father**

In chapter five there are three direct references to ‘your heavenly Father’, and in chapter six there are twelve. This gives us a significant key to the whole Sermon. It is primarily the law of the Father. The true hearers know God as Father. Leaving side for the moment the matter of the Son’s revelation of the Father which could not be received in fullness until the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, we see that almsgiving, authentic prayer, forgiving others their trespasses, fasting and the way of life of the Kingdom which obtains where the person depends on the Father for his or her needs. are the substance of chapters 6 and 7, but also must refer back to the blessings in chapter 5 and to those other matters we have commented upon. Those who are peacemakers are the sons of God—the Father. Those who love their enemies and who pray for them and do them good are the true children of the heavenly Father.

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<sup>8</sup> A number of commentators see Jesus as the new Moses in the Gospel of John and find elements of this in the synoptic Gospels. The writer of Hebrews certainly presses the point that ‘Jesus is greater than Moses’ (3:1-6) and the Mosaic covenant as been superseded by the greater covenant, the covenant of which Christ is the new mediator, and the True Priest, after the order of Melchizedek.

The intimacy of the genuine disciples of the Kingdom is with God as their heavenly Father. This relationship is of such depth and moral power that it carries the subjects through all the injunctions laid out in the Sermon. It takes out of these precepts any coldly legal element and makes them matters of joy. Already the person has fellowship with the Father, and this is because he is a disciple of the Son<sup>9</sup>. Because of this relationship his that person's obedience to the injunctions is a matter of joy. The paranetic elements of chapter 7 then become 'the Law of God' or 'the will of God' and needs no special interpretation. The matters of critical judgements of others, the discernment in sharing heavenly truth, the principle of Fatherly giving, and fraternal sharing are easily understood.

### **The Law and the Prophets**

The Sermon is linked irretrievably with 'the law and the prophets'. Jesus, in the Sermon is speaking as the true Prophet and as the true Priest<sup>10</sup>. In Israel the priest was to be enquired of for the teaching of the law, and the prophet was to draw people from idolatry and lawlessness back to the substance of the law. The conflict often experienced because of those who were false teachers of the law or who were false prophets uttering words that were not of God, meant that a true prophet and a true priest were required, and Jesus in his teaching of the Sermon was fulfilling these roles. From these two angles he was expounding the Law of God. In 7:21–23, Jesus unmasked those who were either deliberate hypocrites or who were self deluded into thinking their works were good. His teaching and exhortation came as a powerful warning.

For hearers who were merely interested in Jesus' *view* of the Law of God, or were appreciative but not inclined to take his teaching to heart as the word of God, Jesus uttered his illustration of two persons building a house, one on the sand, the other on rock. His statement, 'Every one then who *hears* these words of mine, and *does* them will be like a wise man. . . ' whose house does not fall because it is built on the rock'. Those who *hear* but do not *do* will surely see their house crash to destruction. These are solemn words for Jesus here is fulfilling the role of the true Lawgiver. As we have said, he is not giving a new law, but the law which will come afresh to the members of the new covenant: it will be placed in their hearts and their inward parts, and they will 'delight in the Law of God after the inner man'.

That this Lawgiver—Son of the Father—spoke with power which brought conviction is without doubt.

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.

We are forcibly reminded of Deuteronomy 18:15–20,

And the LORD said to me, 'They have rightly said all that they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not give heed to my words

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<sup>9</sup> In the passage of Matthew 11:25–28 sonship and discipleship would seem to be interchangeable terms.

<sup>10</sup> The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of Christ being our High Priest, appointed by God for this task. It is clear that Jesu was being trained all his life for this ministry, and indications are that from his baptism onwards he exercised a priestly ministry. In this sense he fulfilled priestly ministry along with his prophetic and kingly ministry.

which he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.’ And if you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’ — when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously, you need not be afraid of him,

for in this passage it was said there will be a new *prophet* and a new *teacher*, and people shall listen to him and obey his words under pain of death if they do not. Matthew 7:15–27 is almost a parallel of the Deuteronomy passage, and certainly the same principle obtains in both passages. Jesus was greater than Moses, by whom the ‘hard copy’ of the law came to Israel. Jesus was a greater teacher and a greater prophet than Moses and whilst the Law he put before them was not other than the Primal Law and the Law of Moses<sup>11</sup>, it was certainly given by one greater than Moses. This was so by the office and authority God has given him.

It would be a serious thing not to obey this law. Other interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount fail and fall against this fact that the One who is to redeem mankind has said he will confirm or establish the law and never abrogate it. It is the holy Law of God Himself, and thus can never be abrogated. For it to be cancelled is for God himself to be abrogated, since God cannot be separated from his law, or the law from him.

## **Love of Neighbour is the Principle of the Sermon on the Mount**

I. John Hesselink (*op. cit.* p.126) has this to say of Calvin’s treatment of the Law of God.

His exposition of the commandments is nothing other than the application of the method employed by Christ himself as recorded in the Gospels. Thus complaints to the effect that the reformers ignored the Sermon on the Mount fall to the ground. Calvin’s exposition of the ten commandments is at the same time an exposition of the Sermon on the Mount. The result, as we have seen, is a penetrating, concentrated emphasis on the inner spiritual meaning of the law.

However, by specifically emphasising the fact that the law is divided into two tables which is not accidental but divinely ordained—Calvin wishes to indicate the crucial connection between faith and love, between religion and ethics. In general, God’s purpose in all the commandments was simply ‘to instruct us in love’ (*nos ad caritatem institueret*). But this love has two foci: the love of God and the love of neighbour. These two are not to be confused although they are interdependent and inseparable. This is what we learn from the division of the law into two tables.

What is clear in Moses, Christ and Paul is that the two commandments to love God and the neighbour ‘are interdependent and inseparable’. In Paul it would seem that love for the neighbour sums it all up in Romans 13:8–10 and Galatians 5:13–15,

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence,

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<sup>11</sup> Here we are thinking particularly of the Decalogue, but also of the Deuteronomic exposition of it, accorded by that book to Moses whatever critical views may have to say of the text being later formulated and read back into the time and ministry of Moses.

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another.

The order of loving in the New Testament is seen in I John 4:19 and context, ‘We love because he first loved us’. This order is

- (i) God loves us, as is seen by the sending of His Son to be the propitiation for sin, thus casting fear of judgement out of our hearts,
- (ii) we love when we see His love and respond so that love is shed abroad in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), and
- (iii) we thus love our neighbours.

The Sermon on the Mount, without directly explicating this order of love, certainly emphasises love to God and to the neighbour. The warm fact that God—who is the Father of the Son, Jesus Christ—is our Father means that all obedience to Him lies in our filial relationship with Him and so in our brotherly or neighbourly love to one another. As well as directing us to serve only God who is Father (6:24) the terms ‘neighbour’ and ‘brother’ are both used in the Sermon, thus underlining ontological relationships with God and our fellow-creatures.

What we need to see, then, is that within the Godhead the Father, Who is *fons divinitatas*, is the Source of love and that the Son is ‘the Son of His love’ whilst the Holy Spirit is ‘the Spirit of love’, so that the *perichoresis* is one of love stemming from the Father. Whilst the thought of the Three Persons being ‘neighbours’ is too quaint to be admitted and perhaps stands in danger of tritheism, yet the principle of the relationship of the Three Persons is the ontological drive of all human [neighbourly and brotherly] relationships which derive from that Source. Thus the Sermon on the Mount becomes understandable as the Law of love and so as the law of God.

### **The Sermon With its Rewards and Losses**

One of the characteristics of Psalms 1,19 and 119 is the rewards which come from law-love and law-obedience. Psalm 1 commences with a beatitude for the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord. There are 18 other nominated beatitudes scattered throughout the Psalter and many more statements regarding the rewards which come from law-keeping as also the losses which result in disobeying the law. Two of the nominated beatitudes are in Psalm 119:1–2 and refer to the keeping of the law. In Psalm 19:11 the Psalmist says that in keeping of the precepts, testimonies, ordinances and commands of the Lord ‘there is much reward’.

In the Sermon on the Mount there are nine nominated blessings and these are to do with the eschatological joys and rewards which will come such as , ‘they shall be comforted’, ‘they shall inherit the earth’, ‘they shall be satisfied’, ‘they shall obtain mercy’, ‘they shall see God’, and ‘they shall be called the sons of God’. Twice it is said, ‘theirs is the kingdom of heaven’, and doubtless these statements also have eschatological connotation. In the face of persecution ‘rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven’. One of present rewards is that the blessed are ‘the salt of the earth’ and ‘the light of the world’. The injunctions keep promising rich results when obeyed. As for the term ‘reward’, the Father is spoken of at least four times as rewarding where piety is exercised in a filial way, and not for self-justification.

By contrast there are the losses which accrue to the disobedient, such as never entering the kingdom of heaven, of entering into ‘the hell of fire’, of being hauled before judges, of perpetuating enmity by hatred of the enemy, and—perhaps most terribly of all—the ultimate destruction of one’s house, that is of one’s life. All of these losses and judgements are too awful to contemplate.

For the blessed the great reward of having built on the rock is the joy of life eternal. Doubtless references to ‘the rock’ as being Christ, or ‘the foundation of the [teaching of] the apostles and prophets’ are not out of place. Of course, if we are simply being utilitarian in our approach to blessings and rewards, then this deficient motivation will itself cancel out what can only be true when we are in the states and attitudes of those who are promised such blessings and rewards.

When Jesus said, ‘I am not come to abolish the law but to fulfil [confirm, establish] it, then there would be great joy in the hearts of law-loving, law-obeying hearers. For the law to dissolve, disappear and for it to be *non est*, would not only bewilder the great Psalmists, prophets and teachers and all who delighted in the Law of God after the inward man, but it would present an horrific, anarchical view of the termination of human history. To be denuded of law, to have to wander without direction, and—most of all—not to be allowed to participate in the Godhead for all eternity—this would be the loneliness of a chaos more terrible than hell. What a glorious gift, then is the Law of God, and what a magnificent exposition of it is Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount!

### **The Creational Roots of Law**

That Jesus saw the law as going back to creation cannot be doubted. In Matthew 5:31–32 Jesus brought up the matter of divorce, but he did so on the basis of the previous verses which spoke of the concupiscence of the human heart. This was his lead up to saying divorce was not part of true law, which is why he used the antithesis,

It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

In Matthew 19:1–12 (cf. 5:31; Mark 10:1–12; cf. Luke 16:18) Jesus based his opposition to divorce on the basis of creation, and in particular on Genesis 1:27 and 2:24,

Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.”

From the beginning’ and ‘from the beginning it was not so’, show how Jesus radicalised *marriage* on the basis of *creation*. He saw no place for divorce in the Mosaic law, even though he acknowledged the so-called concession of Moses in Deuteronomy 24:1–4. Divorce would not happen apart from hardness of hearts, and that hardness can scarcely be said to begin *specifically* with *any given* married couple *so much* as it would be with *generic* opposition to what we have called ‘creational’ and ‘covenantal’ law. *In other words that hardening began with the primal couple’s intention of going their own way via the fall (cf. Gen. 3)*. The hardening against one another would derive from their hardness towards God’s law. Thus when Jesus made his statement

regarding divorce within the Sermon on the Mount he was being consistent with torah as Israel knew it, and *torah* as it is, always. Primal Law and the Decalogue are One.

When the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16–22; Mark 10:17–22; Luke 18:18–23) came to him Jesus did not vary from the law. He said, ‘If you would enter life, keep the commandments.’ The commandments were virtually the Decalogue. When in Matthew 22:35 the lawyer asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment in the law he said,

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets<sup>12</sup>.

In every way, then, Jesus supported the law of God, and, we may say, having taken it to himself as his own<sup>13</sup>. This alone can give sense to what we are about to consider, namely the theological terms ‘Christ’s active obedience’ and ‘Christ’s passive obedience’.

### **Christ’s Active Obedience**

By this is meant the obedience Jesus rendered to God throughout all his life. It was obedience ‘from the heart’. It was the keeping of the law, but not ‘the letter of the code’ but in accordance with the magnificent way Jesus knew the law, especially as it was the will of God, and perhaps, also, as ‘the preceptual image of God’ to which he gladly conformed.

Much has been made of the fact that Christ obeyed the law. A docetic view of Christ would find no difficulty in seeing this obedience as natural. There was no docetic Son but a Jesus who was ‘born of a woman, born under the law’, who was ‘made in the likeness of sinful flesh’, who ‘had to be made like his brethren in every respect’, who ‘suffered and has been tempted’ and ‘one who in every respect has been tempted as we are’ and was ‘himself beset with weakness’. This one could call the law his own—the law of Christ—because he kept it. Even so, it was no less than what he ought to have done, and indeed, no less than all human beings should have done, and still should do, for fallenness is no part of true created humanity. Of course, had he not rendered ‘active obedience’ he could never have become the spotless sacrificial Lamb to take away the sin of the world.

### **Christ’s Passive Obedience**

Theological this is the obedience Christ offered in his passion, death and resurrection. This kind of obedience, as such, was not explicitly demanded by the law<sup>14</sup>. He said that

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<sup>12</sup> Richard N. Longnecker in his commentary on Galatians (Word Biblical Commentary 41, Word Books, 1990, p. 243) quotes the Rabbi Hillel as rep[lying to a Gentile who asked regarding ‘the whole Torah’, ‘What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbour; that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof. Go and learn it’. In one sense the Sermon on the Mount is a commentary on the twofold law of love to God and one’s neighbour.

<sup>13</sup> We need to note in the passages above which relate to divorce, to entering into eternal life, and similar situations in which Jesus was questioned that he did not simply return flat quotations of the law but went on to explicate and apply those passages. So he teaches a radical matter of no divorce and sees it in the context of ‘for the kingdom of heaven’s sake’: he demands of the rich young ruler that he fulfil the one thing he lacks by selling all he has and giving it to the poor. He tells the lawyer the story of the good Samaritan and thus defines who ‘the neighbour’ is. Jesus’ understanding and practice of the law was alive and dynamic.

<sup>14</sup> It could be well argued in John 15:12–13 that true love of the brethren did demand the laying down of one’s life for one’s friend, but there is a voluntary aspect to this which takes such an act away from the purely mandatory. Even so, there is room for argument that Christ’s laying down of his life fitted the law. Indeed, it might be argued that it was even the heart of the law.

he had been commanded by the Father to lay down his life (John 10:17–18; 14:30–31; cf. Phil. 2:8; Romans 5:21–21). We have spoken in previous Studies of the *dikaioma* of the law, and this we have in Romans 5:18 (*enos dikaiomotos*) which means that Christ obeyed ‘the just requirement of the law’ in the sense of both active and passive obedience. We need to see—as in Romans 3:24–26 and Colossians 2:14–15—that Christ actually took the judgement for all sins of all persons for all time.

Our conclusion, then, is that as regards the law of God, Christ in obeying it made it ‘the law of Christ’ even as it was essentially ‘the law of God’, that is ‘the law of the Father’..

### **The Commands of Christ**

Whilst we have seen that Christ upheld the essential law of God by obeying it in both the *active* and *passive* senses, and taught that the law would not be abrogated we cannot escape the fact in the Gospels that Jesus gives commands. Not only in regard to the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Luke 6:46), but in regard to the commandment to love (John 13:34; 15:10) and other commandments, Jesus speaks to his disciples. In John 14:21ff. he promises the Triune indwelling; ‘If you love me you will keep my commandments’, ‘He who has my commandments and keeps them . . .’, and the latter accords with John 8:51, ‘If anyone keeps my word he will never see death’. Here the use of ‘my word’ (*emon logon*) really relates to the Hebrew *dabar*, the dynamic *word*, even the word of law. In Acts 1:2 ‘After he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles’, surely catches up the ‘proclamation commission’ passages at the ends of the four Gospels, especially in Matthew 28:20—‘teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you’—and surely links with Acts 10:42, ‘he commanded us to preach to the people’. Paul, likewise is commanded to do the same in Acts chapters nine, twenty two and twenty six.

What is also important is that the proclamation—the *kerugma*—is also a command. Listeners have to ‘obey the gospel’<sup>15</sup>, a term used in Romans 10:16ff. and II Thessalonians 1:7–8, and referred to in Acts 5:32; 17:30; I Peter 1:2, 22; Romans 1:5; 15:18 and 18:26. In Acts 6:7 it is recorded that ‘a great many of the priests were *obedient* to the faith’. In this sense the gospel becomes the new *torah* to be obeyed, and the outcome of such obedience is the gift of eternal life, with forgiveness of sins, justification, sanctification, adoption and ultimately, glorification. By this we do not mean ‘obeying the gospel’ earns these gifts, but it is submitting to the saving Lordship of Christ (cf. Rom. 10:9), so that then the gifts are the fruit of the gospel following the acts of repentance and faith. It is repentance and faith which are the obedience, but it is the gospel of grace which saves. Having saved, the gospel then demands the continuing obedience intrinsic to the New Covenant.. It would seem equally clear in the Book of the Revelation that the servants and saints of God who ‘keep His commandments’, are at the same time keeping the commandments the Lord gave to his church. The Book, itself, contains numerous commandments for the people of God, not least paranetic statements in the seven letters of chapters two and three. In all, then,

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<sup>15</sup> Being obedient to the proclamation of the gospel lies in the idea of *kerugma* which was a term used for the proclamation of the Emperor's edict, delivered by his messenger, and usually in a public place. Obedience to the *kerugma* was under the threat of pain of punishment; hence the strong statement in I I Thessalonians 1:7–8, ‘when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his holy angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ’.

this is ‘the law of Christ’ being obeyed in history for He is Messiah and as such the Lord whose law must be kept.

### ‘The Law of Christ’ in the Epistles

The two explicit mentions of ‘the law of Christ’, are found in (i) I Corinthians 9:21 and (ii) Galatians 6:2. In the first he says, ‘To those outside the law I became as one outside the law—not being without law towards God but under the law of Christ—that I might win the weak’. He says clearly he is not lawless—‘not being without law towards God’—but that is ‘under the law of Christ’: that is he is ‘enlawed’ to Christ. To Paul the idea of being without law was unthinkable. In the context of his utterance his being under the law of Christ, or under the law to Christ, relates to his desire to ‘that I might by all means save some’. He is not under the law only in order to save some, for that would mean his being enlawed to Christ was utilitarian. No: all his life was lived passionately in the law of Christ, a law he would understand to be no less the law of God the Father, or the law of the Holy Spirit.

In the second reference (Gal. 6:2) he says, ‘Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ’. This must equate with the law of love. In Galatians 5:13–14 he has said, ‘. . . through love be servants one of another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”’. This accords with Romans 13:8–10,

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

‘He who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law’ is the principle. Note the use of the verb ‘to fulfil’ (*pleroo*) in both the Galatian and Roman passages. Linked with Romans 8:4 and Galatians 6:2 (*anapleroo*) the statements in all references speak of the law being fulfilled in us rather than us fulfilling the law<sup>16</sup>, and this is an important point. In Romans 8:4 and Galatians 5:16ff. the fulfilling of the law arises from walking in the Spirit for to live in the Spirit is to experience the fulfilling of the law within us. It could not be otherwise. The fruit of the Spirit are really the way of true law–walking.

There is a further reference to ‘the law of Christ’ which, though not explicit, is thinking of law as ‘Dominical’, that is, as the mind of Christ, out of his *torah*.. In I Corinthians 7 Paul is giving advice in regard to marriage<sup>17</sup>, the possible separation of spouses and the states of unmarried persons. For the most part he proceeds as though what he is saying is evidently correct, and that the basis for such advice is that it has already proceeded from Christ, the Lord. In verses 10 and 12 he says he is giving a certain charge, ‘To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord’, ‘To the rest I say, not

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<sup>16</sup> The point made is that in Romans 13:8 and 10 gives no explicit command to fulfil the law. In 13:8 it is said, ‘He who loves his neighbour has fulfilled (pepleroken) the law’; in 13:10 ‘love if the fulfilling (*pleroma*) Likewise Romans 8:4 says, ‘that the righteous demand of the law might be fulfilled (*plerothe*)in us’. Again, Galatians 6:2 (*anaplerosete*) can be translated ‘and so you fulfil the law of Christ’ (*NRSV*). One might conclude that the fulfilment of the law is something which is accomplished in us, rather than the idea that we set out to accomplish it, though this idea may not be wholly absent.

<sup>17</sup> Here, in verse 10, Paul follows his Lord in showing the inviolate nature of marriage. In Ephesians 5:31 he refers marriage back to creation ordinance, but for him ‘the profound mystery’ means Genesis 2:24 was protological and prophetic of the marriage of Christ and the church, as it was also eschatological of that ultimate marriage. This is ‘the profound mystery’.

the Lord', and these statements do not mean that Paul is speaking from his own mind, but really from the mind of the Lord. It is just that Christ had not given explicit pronouncements, but Paul being an apostle could speak *as* the Lord.

### **A Conclusion Regarding 'The Law of Christ'**

There can be no question about the law of Christ being the law of God. What we distil from the Gospels is a review and a conclusion of what we have seen above.

- (i) *Jesus in no way denigrated law*: he insisted that it must be fulfilled. So his statements, 'Think not I have come to abolish the law and the prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.' 'It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one dot of the law to be made void.' 'Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.' He told the rich young ruler that if he kept the commandments he would have eternal life.
- (ii) *Jesus did not bring a higher law*<sup>18</sup>—as such—but an interpretation of the law which raised it higher than that presented by the lawyers, scribes and Pharisees. He said, 'Except your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.' He told listeners, 'The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach but do not practice.' The Sermon on the Mount has (a) 'It was said to you of old', and (b) 'but I say to you' which was the truth of the law. In passing we may note that Jesus taught law and that the 'law-folk' such as the scribes, lawyers and Pharisees were appalled.
- (iii) *All law in Jesus' view had—and has—to do with the Kingdom of God* [of heaven]. Just as in Israel it had to do with covenant, and Israel was a theocracy, so in Jesus' teaching. This is clear in the Sermon on the Mount. In the New Testament the Kingdom and the Covenant are interrelated.
- (iv) *Paul's Epistles speak of 'the law of Christ'* (I Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2). This could refer to (a) the commands which Jesus gave (cf. John 13:34; 14:15; 15:12–13; Matt. 28:19–20; Acts 1:2, (b) the law which Jesus followed and fulfilled in his flesh, and (c) the law of love ( Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:13–14; cf. James 1:22–25; 2:8, 12) which was virtually the Decalogue which Jesus summarised as love to God and love to one's neighbour.

### **The Law of Christ the Law of the Triune God**

Finally we have to go back to the fact that the law of Christ the Son derives from the Fountainhead of the Father. Likewise the law of the Spirit derives from both Father and Son. The law of the Father, the law of the Son and the Law of the Holy Spirit are the one, the law which is their nature, in which they subsist, and which they give to Man made in their image to be the law by which the human community subsists.

We also remind ourselves that the Father has given everything to the Son—all gifts are given to him and with them all authority. This includes the divine law, and so

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<sup>18</sup> See our later treatments of 'The Law of Christ' and 'The Sermon on the Mount and the True Torah'.

the community of Christ lives out the law of God in him. This is why it is called ‘the law of Christ’. He is the true image of the Father and as the law of the God obtains and is lived out in the Son, so all who live and subsist in the Son work out that law in their living. Since fallen Man’s image of God is a wrong eikon, and in fact an idol, so his eikon of the law is also false (idolatrous), so that God and the law are abhorrent to him, and only by fear of destruction will he be forced to try to keep the law he thinks he knows. However, now being redeemed and hence in Christ who ‘reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature’<sup>19</sup>, he now knows God truly and sees his law as wonderful. In fact, he lives in obedience to the law *in Christ*. He delights in sanctification, having been justified. Yet the full picture is not given unless we see two important things, (i) the believer’s obedience is filial: he is in the Father and loves the law of the Godhead, (ii) The Father can only be known through Christ, and only the Spirit can reveal Christ and the Father. This means that to live in Christ is first to live in the Spirit, and so the law of Christ is at the same time the law of the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:1–8; Gal. 5:22–23). Whilst our subject is ‘the law of Christ’ yet we must continually keep in mind that it is also ‘the law of the Spirit’.

### **Conclusion: Christ the Man of Law**

We see that Christ came not only to dwell amongst men and women as the delivering King, but also as Prophet and Priest<sup>20</sup> to teach the truth of God, which was really the whole of ‘the law and the prophets’. The law was not just legislation but instruction. ‘The law and the prophet’ were together the revelation of the *torah* of God, the law of the community of the Triune God. The weightier matters of the law (Matt. 23:23) were ‘justice and mercy and faith’ (cf. Micah 6:8 Exod. 34:6–7) and the matter of redemption was contained within the law, not that law is gospel and gospel is law, but that the two are inseparable. Having dealt with the curse of the law, Christ liberated his community by forgiveness and justification so that they could live the way of sanctification by the law of love and love of the law, thus entering into the way God himself subsists. In this sense the law was fulfilled, and in this continues to be being fulfilled.

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<sup>19</sup> The NRSV has it, ‘the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being’.

<sup>20</sup> Of course, as High Priest he came to offer his body as an oblation to redeem Man, and redemption in Israel was part of the law—its soteriological part. In redeeming man from the curse of the law he liberated him into the fullness of the law, the law of Christ.

## Christ the Living Image

### Introduction: Christ and Man is the Images of God

In pursuance of our theme, ‘What think you of Christ?’ we now address the fact that he, uniquely, is the image of God and the living image. Man was created in the image of God but was he the image in the same way as was—and is—Christ? The rather mysterious passage of I Corinthians 15: 45–49 intrigues as to its meaning.

45 Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. 47 ‘The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 48 As with the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

The ‘second man’ seems to transcend the ‘first’. ‘The first is a living being, the second a life-giving spirit. The difference is important and we shall pursue it. Meanwhile we need to define the term ‘Image’.

### Man the Image of God

Normally the idea of an image is the representation of another person or thing. So Paul says in Acts 17:29 that people have imaged God in gold, silver or stone, ‘a representation by the art and imagination of man’. God told Israel that since they had not seen his form, they should not image him physically (Deut. 4:16, ‘Beware lest you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female’.

Man was formed in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–28),

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

From these words various views of man being the image of God have been formulated namely,

- (i) According to Luke 3:38 Man<sup>1</sup> is the son of God, has filial relationships with him and is intended to manifest him in this way.
- (ii) Man is to represent God as a viceroy of the whole earth, as God is King of all creation—of things celestial and terrestrial. Sometimes an image of a king was set up to remind his subjects of his rule over them.
- (iii) Man, bodily and in attributes such as holiness and righteousness, represents God to the universe.
- (iv) A more modern idea is that as God is a societal being—in Trinity—that the image of God is a societal one thus the man and the woman together denote God as love, that is they both have an 'I-Thou' relationship between themselves as they also have with God. As such Man (man–woman), then, is protological of Christ as the true image of God.

It is to be noted, too, that Karl Barth speaks of Man as being God's 'covenant **partner**', so that the image has much to do with vocation and really 'being in vocation'.. All of these ideas have much to commend them, but we have to distinguish between elements of being (essence) and elements of function (action). For this reason it seems best to take a simple understanding of Man being the 'image and likeness of God', namely that he was intended to reflect in his human way all that God is on the Divine level. Thus, all that God is, man *is like* that, but anything that God is Man is *none* of that. Man has no deity, and is himself complete as a human being. Harry R. Boer<sup>2</sup> speaks of the image in its relational and vocational aspects.

In creating Man God did indeed bring into being an *alter ego*, a bosom companion, a friend who sticks closer than a brother, the fellowship between Creator and creature must certainly express itself most fully and deeply in communion, in discourse, mutual response. That, first and foremost, is where the depth and breadth of Man's humanity lie. There was in the beginning a point of contact for Man in God and in God for Man, because Man was created in the image of God, who is the divine Original, after the human image was formed. For this reason God could see himself reflected in Man, and Man could find in God the infinitely larger self that underlay his own being. We may confidently say that the speech and response between God and Man stand at the very heart of Man's being as *imago Dei*. It is no accident that the Son as image of the Father is called the Word of God. Only by means of words is it possible adequately to communicate as soul mates and speak from heart to heart.

One New Testament commentary on the image of God is in Ephesians 4: 20–24 where Paul has contrasted the old humanity (*palaion anthropon*), i.e. the fallen humanity with the 'new humanity' and speaks of putting on 'the new humanity (*kainon anthropon*), created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness'. The new man' in Colossians 3:10 is said to be 'being renewed after the image of its creator'. If the two references are conflated, and if 'the image'<sup>3</sup> is then referred to Genesis 1:26 we see that the original image was 'in true righteousness and holiness', which of course it must have been. The 'new humanity' is the 'old humanity' renewed by redemption through the work of the Holy Spirit. Whilst corporately the 'new humanity'

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term 'Man' to cover two elements, (i) Man as created by God before the creation of Eve from his side, and (ii) Man as the man-woman entity, the 'one flesh being' constituting the whole image of God. In I Corinthians 11:3ff. Paul designates the man as 'the image of glory of God' and the woman as 'the glory of the man'. Without the woman the man will be bereft totally of glory: with her the two will constitute the image of God. Thus 'Man' designates the united man-woman entity, whilst 'man' denotes the male person.

<sup>2</sup> An Ember Still Glowing. Harry R. Boer (Eerdmans, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> The word 'image' is not in the text of Ephesians 4:24 but is supplied by some translators. In the NRSV 'after the likeness' is supplied.

is Christ as the 'old humanity' was corporately Adam as Man, yet each member of the 'new humanity' can be said personally said to be 'a new human being' (person)'.

## Man and the Fall

Much has been written about the fall. Some see Man as losing the image of God by the fall<sup>4</sup>, others as the image being defaced, and yet others as seeing the true image subjugated to the autonomous fallen person—the new, devised 'image' Man has an image of himself as autonomous. Meredith G. Kline in commenting on the image says, 'This divine image is neither losable nor reducible, but its ethical direction is reversible'. This seems to be an excellent description of Man as a result of the fall: all the elements of the image remain but they are now dreadful because reversed in their operations: all the attributes man derived from God in the *imago Dei* such as love, goodness, holiness, righteousness and truth now demand the prefix 'self' before them, e.g. 'self-love'—and so on.

Calvin commented on Man as still having 'remnants' or 'lineaments' of the image. In the first quote we see that Calvin views the image as virtually being destroyed.

But now, although some obscure lineaments of that image [the image of God] are found remaining in us, yet they are so vitiated and maimed, that they may truly be said to be destroyed. For besides the deformity which elsewhere appears unsightly, this evil is also added, that no part is free from the infection of sin.<sup>5</sup>

Such a statement draws immense anger from humanists, and also from many Christian theologians. At this point we simply observe that all human beings—apart from Christ—live under natural law and consider themselves to know God and his law, and cannot see how they could possibly be in this state of being where 'no part is free from the infection of sin'. Even so, some critics do not fully understand that Calvin's doctrine of depravity does not utterly make Man to cease to be Man. If in some sense the *imago Dei* seems to be obliterated, in another sense it is still present, as Calvin shows.

We are not to consider that men merit of themselves but to look upon the image of God in all men, to which we owe all honour and love ... Therefore, whatever man you meet who needs your aid, you have no reason to refuse to help him. . . Say, 'he is contemptible and worthless'; but the Lord shows him to be one to whom he has deigned to give the beauty of his image ...

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<sup>4</sup> Created in God's image. Anthony A. Hoekema (Eerdmans, 1986, p.65). Hoekema quotes Herman Bavinck as saying, "Man does not simply bear or have the image of God; he is the image of God. From the doctrine that man has been created in the image of God flows the clear implication that the image extends to man in all his entirety. Nothing in man is excluded from the image of God. All creatures reveal traces of God, but only man is the image of God. And he is that image totally, in soul and body, in all faults and powers, in all conditions and relationships. Man is the true image of God because and insofar as he is truly man, and he is man, true and real man, because and insofar as he is the image of God." Hoekema insists that although Calvin is said to have stated that Man lost the image, and that it was erased, yet other statements of Calvin show that he believed there were still 'some remaining traces (notes) of the image of God, which distinguish the entire human race from the other creatures' (Inst. I.15.4).

<sup>5</sup> The quote is by Hoekema (op. cit. p. 45) from Calvin's Commentary on Genesis (1:26: Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1948)

Say that he does not deserve even your least effort for his sake; but the image of God, which recommends him to you, is worthy of your giving yourself and all your possessions.<sup>6</sup>

What needs to be understood about the image of God is that Man is only this in purity when he has relational affinity with God. As a creature he is dependent upon God. As the true image he has affinity with God. *Man is only truly man when he is in union and communion with God.*

It is worth noting here that the image of God, that is, the man–woman entity, now becomes divided. The serpent has made his first assault upon the image that was intended to show God to the creation. Man now becomes, to some degree, a societal creature in division, a contradiction of what it is to be the image. If we take Genesis 2:24 to be protological of Christ and his Bride<sup>7</sup> and hence eschatological, then the attack upon the image of God, and so upon God and his creation is a powerful one. The man and the woman have to be in total union and communion in order to display the Godhead, which itself is and subsists by, that Trinitarian unity which Man is to reflect. Created Man in communion with God drew upon that power of God. Fallen Man, then, disparages his Creator and gives false views of him to creation.

### Man and His Images of God

**Romans 1:19–25** shows us Man’s rejection of God as he is. Because Man must worship—whatever—he must have something to which he can give worth. He gives with a view to getting a return. So he ‘images’ God. Much has been spoken on the idolatry Man practices. Idols or gods have no ontological reality, so Man must devise their characters, and he does this to his own benefit. Even so, the serpent—Satan—gets to the idols before he does and invests them with demonic powers. This is a clear teaching of the Old Testament as well as the New. The images are invested by both Satan and Man with the qualities which Man believes enables him to be free. In fact because Man is the image and glory of God they can give no full [ontological] satisfaction. Man, then, seeks to live by these idols, but also by the images his mind must conjecture in order to obtain more stimulation and emotional satisfaction. All mental images are ultimately lined with the primary idol–images.

The Old Testament gives much of its text to the matter of idolatry. The judgements are fierce which come on idolaters. Israel learned by bitter experience that it did not pay to worship the idols. God was more powerful than the idols and his judgements were unbeatable. By the time of Christ, it seems, there were no idols in Palestine. There were, however plenty of demonic powers present. Paul’s statement that ‘covetousness is idolatry’ helps us to realise how idolatry resorts to images in the mind whilst outwardly human beings profess to know and serve God and his Law.

All human beings, then, have an image of God. If they were to work from the image of themselves back to God then the image would necessarily be wrong. Even though they have transmogrified the glory of God into idolatrous forms, they each have an innate image by which their conscience works. Since the law of God is the law of God’s being, that is the modes by which the Triune Family subsists, and because Man is made in the image of God then the law of God is the true law of Man—the one by

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<sup>6</sup> Inst. III.7.6.

<sup>7</sup> The soteriological was also innate in the protological but its need to be so was not apparent until Man sinned and the man and the woman became relationally apart, divided by sin.

which he should subsist. However, because Man has abdicated his true image, that is, has reversed it, then his image of God and the law will not correspond to God's true being.

### **Fallen Man and the Natural Law**

In two passages in Romans (2:14–16 and 3:19) Paul shows that the knowledge of law is universal,

When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

These two passages, it would seem, point to a universal knowledge or idea of law. In the first passage Paul may not be claiming that all Gentiles have a knowledge of the Jewish law of God but he appears to be saying that all operate according to their idea or image of law and will accordingly be judged. In the second passage he is making it clear that *'every mouth'* will be stopped and that *'the whole world, through the law, is to be accountable to God.* Thus law is shown to be universal. We must note that the ideas (images) of God and law are linked with the conscience. This leads us on to the theological idea of natural law.

### **The Nature of Natural Law**

The term 'natural law' is seen under two different ideas. One idea is that through reason Man can discern the law of God: he can discern it through nature, and this has something to do with 'natural revelation'. This is not wholly the view to which we are pointing. The view we are presenting is that the law of God—that by which he subsists—is given to Man in creation as he is one with God. We sometimes call this 'Primal Law'. This primal law remains in Man but because of his rejection of God it is now rationalised into the form the 'natural man' (cf. I Cor. 2:14) or 'the unspiritual man' insists in regarding as true law. Thus fallen Man has an image of God and a corresponding image of law. It is by these two images the conscience works, as conscience holds its object to live, decide, and act in conformity with these images. It is obvious that all cultures have their respective images of God and their natural laws. Somewhere what is 'natural' will have a degree of universal nature and agreement. This must be so, since both God and his law, though transmogrified by the fall, are one. There will always be a God-law entity which governs the conscience and from which the object of concupiscence can never escape.

## Jonathan Edwards on Ideas and Images

In discovering the nature of images, namely that they are ideas, or clusters of ideas, Jonathan Edwards is most helpful. In a brilliant exposition entitled 'Trinity,'<sup>8</sup> he has the following ideas or ideas, if I understand him correctly. It is that God has an [the] idea of himself, and that this, naturally is perfect. He does not come to know anything through ideas. What is, is his idea. The idea then, of himself, is himself. He says,

... that which is the express and perfect image of God is God's idea of His own essence. There is nothing else [that] can be an express and fully perfect image of God, but God's idea. Ideas are images of things and there are no other images of things in the most proper sense but ideas, because other things are only called images as they beget an idea in us of the thing of which they are the image—so that all other images of things are but images in a secondary sense. But we know that [the] Son of God is the express and perfect image of God, and His image in the primary and most proper sense. (2 Corinthians 4:4, "lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." Philippians 2:6, "who being in the form of God." Coloss. 1:15, "who is the image of the visible God." Hebrews 1:3, "who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person.").

Edwards goes on further to say,

Again, that which is the express image of God, in which God enjoys infinite happiness, and is also the word of God is God's perfect idea of God. The word of God in its most proper meaning, is a transcript of the divine perfections. This word is either the declared word of God or the essential. 'Me one is the copy of the divine perfections given to us, the other is the perfect transcript thereof in God's own mind. But the perfect transcript of the perfections of God in the divine [mind] is the same with God's perfect idea of His own perfections. But I need tell none, how the Son of God is called the word of God.

What we derive from this section of the sermon is that God's idea of himself which is his essential self is known only by him. His idea of himself is unique to him, but he reveals this idea by the true image, his Son. There is only one true [idea] image of God and that is Christ. The idea of God can be transcribed by the word of God, but then Christ is that word of God. Undoubtedly Edwards is saying that when God speaks—giving the word of himself—he gives the image of himself, yet this image is an image in the secondary sense though it is authentic as an image. When Christ is, then he is the true image of God.

Almost in passing Edwards has said, '**Ideas are images of things,**' and this is a significant concept. When Man at the fall rejected the word of God in favour of the word of the serpent he necessarily altered his image of God and took on 'the transcript' or 'word' or 'image' given to him of God, Man (himself) and creation, and this image – or these images—were false. Man was told that his eyes were opened and that he was as God and that he knew good and evil. It was with these ideas/images that Man has had to live. It is no wonder that Man visibilised his images, that is, objectivised them.

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<sup>8</sup> The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards, sub-titled 'From His Private Notebooks' edited by Harvey G. Townsend (University of Oregon, 1955, then by Greenwood Press, 1977, pp. 252-258).

## The Natural Man and His Images

All human beings live in a pantheon of images. In one sense every idea is an image, thus we have many images. Genesis 6:5 says, 'The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually'. Here the wickedness is related to the 'thoughts' and the 'imaginings' (images). After the flood God repeats the idea (8:21) 'the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth'. Jeremiah 17:9 speaks of the heart being 'deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt'. Romans 1: 19–32 shows that when man made his images to worship the result was evil in every form. Images are powerful in that they determine the actions of the person holding them. The writer of Proverbs (4:23) tells his readers to keep their hearts with all diligence for from them flow the issues ('springs' NRSV) of life.

The natural Man—as indeed all persons—has two fixed images which determine all his life and action, the images of God and the law. Conscience can do nothing but hold the person to living by these images and if a person were willing and able to obey the dictates of his conscience then he would be at peace, that is to say, at peace with his conscience. Since—as we have seen above—the heart is not reliable but deceitful Man seeks to pit himself against his conscience or to use it by his own devious means to justify (prove) himself righteous. Thus he has a double conflict. Since, also, his conscience is not properly informed but holds the person to his/her own God–image and law–image.

If the two basis ideas or images—God and the law—are deficient and misleading—then all other ideas in regard to true living and relationships will also be deficient. In fact the people with whom each person has contact will likewise be deficient, that is to say the images of them will be wrong. This confused and tragic state is what the Bible calls 'dead in sins'. The 'deadness' comes because each image is bereft of true relational life: it is a dead image. Images cannot relate to images. There can be no communion of a person with an image as he will be an image to an image. Doubtless idol worshippers believe they have communion with their idols, and sacrifices are intended to accomplish this, but, ontologically speaking there is no idol but only as demonic counterfeit and counterpart of the true—the ontological, hence the failure to achieve emotional fulfilment, as well as the relational deceit which grips the worshipper. There is no way out of this human dilemma. Something must happen to destroy and dissolve this pantheon of images (ideas) and release the worshipper from such bondage. The way back to the true God and thus true images<sup>9</sup> must be an act of God himself, which it is, through his Son and his Spirit.

## Christ the Living Image of the Living God

We must remind ourselves that Man was made in the image of God and is the image of God—as being human. We saw that the fall did not obliterate that image, even though that image may have gone into reverse. Genesis 9:6 only makes sense if 'God made

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<sup>9</sup> We must recognise that there is nothing wrong per se with mental images. We work by ideas. It just the origin and nature of these images which makes them right or wrong. Even **before the incarnation of the Son** men and women had true images of God and his law insofar as they listened to **his word which came through creation** (Ps. 19: If.), angelic visitants, theophanies, covenant, the law—and so on. To attempt to form God in one's own imaging when God's form had not been disclosed is idol-making and, hence, idol worshipping.

man in his own image', somehow means that man is still in that image. Likewise Psalm 8 seems to presuppose this fact of man being the glory of God. I Corinthians 11:7 is very clear, 'Man is the image and glory of God', and likewise James 3:9 states that humans have been made in the likeness of God'. We quoted Bavinck as saying, 'Man is the true image of God because and insofar as he is truly man, and he is man, true and real man, because and insofar as he is the image of God.' Having said this, we know that image is far from its pristine state: and we also know that in I Corinthians 15:42–50 Paul is making a comparison of 'the first man' (Adam) and 'the last Adam' (Christ) saying the first man was from the earth, and the second from heaven. He is not saying that Christ was not truly man—elsewhere he shows he was—but he is speaking about origin. 'The first man was a living being (cf. Gen. 2:7), but the second man was 'a life-giving spirit'. Without trying to explain these from the point of view of substance it is evident that the last Adam was the image of God in a way which transcended the first man as the image of God. The first was given life, the second was able to give life.

Thus we accept that **Man qua Man** was the image of God but say that as in Hebrews 1:3 is said of the Son, 'He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature' (RSV), or 'He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being' (NRSV) so the sacred writer is saying something more of Christ as the image of God than he is of Man as the image of God. In I Corinthians 15:48 Paul is saying that bearing the image of the first Adam is transcended by bearing the image of the last Adam. We can work from this and say that Christ's being the image of God transcends Adam's being the image of God. Colossians 1:15 says, 'He is the image of the invisible God', and 11 Corinthians 4:4 speaks of 'the glory of Christ who is the likeness of God' and speaks of 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ'.

If we are honest we will admit that we cannot grasp the dimensions of these statements, but they do tell us Christ is uniquely the image and glory of God. This is borne out by the statement of John 1:14, 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father'.

In all this we are reminded of Edwards' statement that

...which is the express and perfect image of God is God's idea of His Own essence. There is nothing else [that] can be an express and fully perfect image of God, but God's idea. Ideas are images of things and there are no other images of things in the most proper sense but ideas, because other things are only called images as they beget an idea in us of the thing of which they are the image—so that all other images of things are but images in a secondary sense. But we know that [the] Son of God is the express and perfect image of God, and His image in the primary and most proper sense... Again, that which is the express image of God, in which God enjoys infinite happiness, and is also the word of God is God's perfect idea of God. The word of God in its most proper meaning, is a transcript of the divine perfections. This word is either the declared word of God or the essential. 'The one is the copy of the divine perfections given to us, the other is the perfect transcript thereof in God's own mind. But the perfect transcript of the perfections of God in the divine [mind] is the same with God's perfect idea of His own perfections. But I need tell none, how the Son of God is called the word of God.

From this we can gather that whilst our ideas of God [and his law] are ideas of *the* Idea which is God himself, only Christ is the [true] idea of the Idea, in fact is the Idea. When John says, 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'. The Greek has the idea of 'was face to face with God' (*en pros ton theon*) so that he was the intimate Word of God, in communion with him, and

able, uniquely, to image him to Man. Thus he could say, 'He that has seen me has seen the Father'. It would also explain the total dependence on the Father by the Son that he might image him as such. He was in the Father and the Father was in him. So he was 'the invisible image of the invisible God'.

Thomas F. Torrance comments on Calvin's view of the image being renewed by the Word and the Spirit,

*Imago dei* [the image of God] is essentially a reflection in and by the soul of the Word of God which is in itself the lively or quickening image of God. Therefore man has been made such that it is his 'special duty to give ear to the Word of God'; while, **on the other hand, it is** the work of the Holy Spirit who 'with a wondrous and special energy forms the ear to hear, and the mind to understand'<sup>10</sup>.

Man as created was the image of God and was 'a living being', but he was not one who had life in himself or could give life. John 5:26, 'For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself', tells us Christ—as a man—transcends the image he is as a man descended from Adam. We may not be able to explain how his origin as 'the man from heaven' makes him unique, but his being, as is any other man, the image of God, does not prevent him being the image of God in a way which transcends the Adam-image. That is why Edwards says, 'we know that [the] Son of God is the express and perfect image of God, and His image in the primary and most proper sense'.

### **Man the Image of God in Christ the Living Image of the Living God**

Ephesians 4:17–24 gives us the contrast between being in the old humanity and being in the new.

17 Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; 18 they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; 4:19 they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness. 20 You did not so learn Christ! — 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. 22 [NRSV, 'You were taught to'] Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, 23 and [NRSV, to] be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and [NRSV, to] put on the new nature, *created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*. (Emphasis mine)

Paul is saying—and it is clearer in the NRSV where the infinitives are not used as imperatives As in the RSV—that the old way of life came from their 'old humanity' (RSV 'old nature), and their new way of life comes from putting off the old and putting on the new humanity. Now this new humanity is Christ, 'the new man' (cf. Ephes. 2:15) in whom all believers live, so that 'if any man is in Christ he is a new creation' (11 Cor 5:17). Thus being in Christ is at the least restorative of the lost elements of the image in which Man had been made. Colossians 3:5–10 adds another insight.

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 3:7 In these you once walked, when you lived in them. 8 But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice,

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas F. Torrance's *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (Lutterworth, 1949, p.56).

slander, and foul talk from your mouth. 3:9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that You have put off the old nature with its practices 10 and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed iii knowledge after the image of its creator.

It repeats the same principle of Ephesians 4:17–24<sup>11</sup> but speaks about the new man (humanity) saying it is ‘being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator’. Curtis Vaughan comments,

The essential thought is that the new self (new nature) does not decay or grow old but by constant renewal takes on more and more of the image of its Creator. ‘Being renewed’ is present tense, expressing a continuous process of renewal. ‘Knowledge,’ which is represented here as the goal (object of eis) or as the sphere (NIV) of this process denotes true knowledge (cf. 1:9).<sup>12</sup>

Colossians 1:9 *represents knowledge* as ‘the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding’, whilst Ephesians 4:24 speaks of ‘the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness’ and the two references (Col. 3: 10 and Eph. 4:24) are surely saying that the new person in the new man, Christ, lives in the image of God that is Christ,<sup>13</sup> and personally is being renewed—as 11 Corinthians 3:18 put it—‘from one stage of glory to another’.

Put in plain language it must mean that as we once knew God in the affinity he gave us in creation but lost this intimate relational knowledge in the fall, yet now we are back fully in relation to God, and though as yet that knowledge is not total we are, moment by moment, being renewed in the knowledge. In practical terms it means the things of ‘the old man’ are constantly being rejected, and the things of ‘the new man’ are constantly being lived out, and within the true living image of God, Christ, we are being increasingly renewed in the knowledge of God, increasingly filling out the *imago Dei* and so, as it were ‘are shining more and more unto the perfect day’.

### **Conclusion: Redeemed Man, Living in the Living Image of God is Restored to the True *Imago Dei***

In Philippians 1:9–11 Paul speaks of a growth in the knowledge of God, and so of righteousness which comports well with Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3: 10. With this also is his prayer for the Thessalonians in I Thessalonians 3:11–13.

9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. (Phil 1:9–11)

11 Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you; 12 and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men, as we to

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<sup>11</sup> We note that we have put off the old humanity and have put on the new humanity and we take it that this has happened in baptism for Paul says in Galatians 3:27 that in baptism we have put on Christ. In Colossians 3:9–10 we are told we have definitively put off (aorist tenses) the old and put on the new, therefore we have grounds and obligations to live and walk in the new.

<sup>12</sup> The Expositor's Bible Commentary Volume II (Zondervan, 1978, 'Colossians' p. 213)

<sup>13</sup> This is made clear in I Corinthians 12:12–13 where we have been baptised into one body, i.e. into Christ. The sense of the corporate new man is parallel in Colossians 3:10, I Corinthians 12:12–13 and Galatians 3:27–28 where the old divisive distinctions of male and female, Jew and Gentile, slaves and free are no longer divisive. Thus both the personal and the corporate nature of the image of God are set forth.

you, 13 so that he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (1Thess. 3:11–13)

These two passages show us that in Christ the image of God is being daily renewed and so the knowledge of God is enlarging, but it is the relationship in communion with God that causes us to shine forth as the *imago Dei*. The practical effects of this are that our idolatry is destroyed, our images of God and the law we have had through natural law are likewise destroyed. For us true knowledge of God and his law has come as the defective views had been radicalised by the mind of Christ in us, that is through his Word and his Spirit.

In relational terms it means that our pantheon of images or eikons has been so destroyed that we no longer relate to God, to his law, to our fellow human creatures and to the things of creation through the principle—and lens—of our own conceived images or eikons. We will have discovered that we only know God through communion; firstly through his communion to and with us, and so our communion with him, in his Son and Spirit. Likewise we can only know others through communion with them. It may well be that not all will accept or respond to this approach of communion but that should not prevent us from loving them and understanding them within the humanity of our race, especially as we see the powers which lie in Divine reconciliation. In other words we will never be judges of our fellow—creatures. If we are granted discernment regarding them, we will not turn discernment into judgement, but in genuine humility look to God for mercy in regard to ourselves, and in intercession for others, for we will not work by eikons but by love.

Finally we need to realise that eikons conceived within our own minds are false, yet that does not mean images (ideas) are necessarily idolatrous. Only as 'dead' eikons are they thus. Christ is the living image of the living God and in him all our images can—and should be—living. That is, the dead images have come into new life. In communion with others we will have living images of them. These will be the fruit of love. We will in humility consider others better than ourselves, that is, we will primarily look on their things and secondarily on our own. We will not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. In this we will have love for the weak brethren and well as the strong brethren. We will not please ourselves, but seek to please our neighbour for his good. Thus will the image shine afresh in a naughty world, and this will our hearts be relieved of their oppressive idolatry. Our consciences,<sup>14</sup> rightly informed in Christ by the Word and the Spirit, will no longer tyrannise us but give us that beautiful freedom which comes in the light of living responsibly and in holy accountability for all that we are, and all that we do.

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<sup>14</sup> There is a whole story or subject here—the states in which our consciences live. Until redemption the conscience is 'a conscience of evil', i.e. an evil conscience. It can be a seared conscience. It can be a weak conscience. It can be a pure conscience only when in Christ. Luther said, 'The conscience must be filled with Christ'. The pure conscience will demand as much as the evil conscience, but in the first case the conscience will have been re-educated from its 'natural' way of operation. In the second case there will be an intimate knowledge of the true God out of which it makes its demands and judgements. P.T. Forsyth once wrote, 'Nothing will satisfy the conscience of man which does not first satisfy the conscience of God', and we must see God's conscience was satisfied with the act of propitiation of sins in Christ. Seeing this the conscience is quietened Dietrich Bonhoeffer has two excellent sections of conscience in his *Ethics* (SCM, 1955). See also my monograph, *Conscience Conquering or Conquered* (NCPI).

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# Christ Liberator of the Conscience

## Introduction: Man and the Matter of Conscience

In our series in ‘What think you of Christ?’ we need to understand the significance of Christ as Liberator of the human conscience. Hebrews 9:14 speaks of Christ’s blood purifying the conscience from dead works to serve [worship] the living God’. The term ‘liberator of conscience’ is not found in the biblical text, but the idea is certainly present. Even from the Hebrews’ text it can be seen that somehow human ‘dead works’ pollute the human conscience so that it cannot serve or worship God, and worship and service are God are primary in Man’s relationship to God. Man is made for true worship: true worship is of the essence of true human living.

### The Way We Will Go About Our Subject

We will need to see how Primal Man lived before God and his law—the law of the Triune God. This will take us into the realm of the human conscience, and, again, conscience as it operated prior to and following the fall. Even at this stage we can see that the conscience in innocent Man—if we are free to talk that way—would have been no tyrant but a given faculty in harmony with Man as he was in communion with God. We will then need to see how the conscience operates after the fall—its relation to the sinful person who rebels against the law but has conscience demanding obedience to a law which, whilst it is not fully the law of the Triune God nevertheless resembles it to a great degree, a law which has been called ‘the natural law’ and which is—for the most part—universally operative.

**Having dealt with conscience and law**, especially natural law, we will then need to see how Man can be liberated from the bondage of this attempt to conform the person to the tyrannous demands of conscience, so that the person is free; that is, is free from law—bondage and guilt bondage and is now brought into full relationship with God and can in such freedom know and love his law and be able to fulfil it, not that he will be justified by such obedience, but will know its fulfilment in himself to be the outworking of the life of God in him.

### Conscience and the Law

There is no word for conscience in the Old Testament, the closest to it being ‘heart’: David spoke of his heart smiting him. The writer of Proverbs (20:27) says, ‘The Spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all his innermost parts’. This may refer to the conscience. Just a few uses of the term in the New Testament give us some indication of the nature of conscience. ‘I . . . have a clear conscience before God and man’, ‘I thank God whom I serve with a clear conscience’, ‘holding faith and a good conscience’, ‘a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith’. As against these, ‘By rejecting conscience certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith’, ‘liars

whose consciences are seared', 'an evil conscience', 'a conscience [consciousness] of sins'. John talks about the heart condemning or not condemning and may be a Johannine way of using the idea of conscience (I John 3:17–21). These few New Testament quotes show the dynamic nature of conscience.

The Oxford Dictionary speaks of conscience (from the Latin *conscientia*) as 'privity of knowledge, consciousness, from *conscire*, know or be privy with another or oneself, inward knowledge or consciousness; internal conviction . . . The internal recognition of the moral quality of one's actions or motives: the faculty or principle which pronounces upon the moral quality of one's actions or motives, approving the right, condemning the wrong. . .' The Greek word *suneidesis* (noun) and *synoida* (verb) carrying the idea of 'being aware' really parallels the Latin–English term. So in I Corinthians 4:4, 'I am not aware (conscious) of anything against myself'. The word then could add up to something like 'conscious with', 'co-awareness', or 'joint awareness'. When we ask 'With what or whom?' the answer could be that in innocence Man had co-awareness with God, in which case he would have had a pure (innocent) conscience, but that following the fall he had a self-consciousness, a conscience aware with and of himself. Possibly it could be that he has an awareness of God and law according to his images.

Further attempts at defining conscience are, 'that faculty in man by which he distinguishes the morally right from the morally wrong, and which urges him to do that which he recognises to be right ... which passes judgements on his acts and executes that judgement within his soul'. A superseded word for conscience is 'inwit'!

C.A. Pierce quotes Menander as saying, '**Conscience is God in every man**' but warns against receiving this statement as a generalisation. The Puritan Sibbes observed, 'Conscience is not one power, but conscience is in all the powers of the soul ... in the understanding, in the will, in the affections ... it is understanding with God.'<sup>1</sup>

## The Theological Meaning and Value of Conscience

Helmut Thielicke argues,

The differences in the understanding of conscience clearly arise out of differences in the understanding of man. My view of conscience is determined by my understanding of what is the normative fact or determining human existence, e.g., practical reason, utility, or the sociological or biological structure. *Conscience is always incorporated within the framework of a particular anthropology.* Hence it is always indicative of a specific self-understanding of human existence. To this degree the ambiguity of the concept is in fact *a sign that the unifying centre has been lost*, and that there is now a wild and panic-stricken search for substitutes<sup>2</sup> (my emphasis)<sup>3</sup>.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says,

Conscience comes from a depth which lies beyond man's own will and his own reason and it makes itself heard as *the call of human existence to unity with itself*. Conscience comes as an indictment of the loss of thus unity and as a warning against the loss of one's self. Primarily it is directed not towards a particular kind of doing but towards a mode of being. It protests against a doing which *imperils the unity of this being with itself*. *So long as conscience can be formally defined in these terms it is extremely inadvisable to act against its authority, disregard for the call of conscience will necessarily entail the destruction of one's own being, not even a purposeful surrender of it; it will bring about the decline and collapse of human existence, Acts against one's own conscience runs parallel with as suicidal action against one's own life, and it*

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<sup>1</sup> For these quotes see my *Conscience—Conquering or Conquered* ((NCPI, 1987)

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 298

<sup>3</sup> *Theological Ethics*, Vol. I, Foundations (Eerdmans, 1979, p.314).

is not by chance that the two often go together. Responsible action which *did* violence to conscience in this formal sense would indeed be reprehensible (my emphasis)<sup>4</sup>.

If we take Bonhoeffer's statement that conscience 'makes itself heard as *the call of human existence to unity with itself*' we have to recognise that through the fall this 'self' is a divided or, better said, a self-deceived self. It is not 'co-aware' of itself and of God as it once was in innocence. At best it is co-aware of itself as fallen, as having lost pure communion with God, and so the knowledge or law by which it operates is according to its present images of God and the law, but this sort of thinking would be unusual, unless some kind of revelation invaded the self. Bonhoeffer insists that conscience 'is the voice of apostate life which desires at least to remain one with itself. It is the call to the unity of the man within himself.. The range of experience of conscience does not extend to the fact that thus unity presupposes disunion with God and with men and that consequently, beyond the disobedience to the prohibition, the prohibition itself, as the call of conscience, arises from disunion with the origin. This means that conscience is concerned not with man's relation to God and to other men but with man's relation to himself. But a relation of man to himself, in detachment from his relation to God and to other men, can arise only through man's becoming like God in the disunion'.<sup>5</sup>

Bonhoeffer points out that because of the fall Man sees himself to be like God in his knowledge of good and evil, and in his own eyes has become the origin of good and evil. 'He does not deny his evil; but in conscience man summons himself, who has become evil, back to his proper, better self, to good. This good, which consists in the unity of man with himself, is now to be the origin of all good. It is the good of God, and it is the good of one's neighbour. *Bearing within himself the knowledge of good and evil, man has become judge over God and men, just as he is judge over himself*'<sup>6</sup> (emphasis mine).

This raises the whole question of the origins and shape of these eikons where they seem to differ in the exercise of natural law. Basically Man would universally be as Bonhoeffer has described him in his understanding of himself but then each conscience would have to have its own particular images within the principle of Man being 'judge over God and man, just as he is judge over himself', though doubtless these would be greatly formed and conditioned by the culture, religion, mores and thinking of that person's social group. This comports with Thielicke's statement, '*Conscience is always incorporated within the framework of a particular anthropology*'. Because Man in innocence had a co-awareness of God and himself, he understood himself from being known by God and knowing God, i.e. in communion. Bonhoeffer says that having lost true knowledge of God and himself 'Self knowledge is now the measure and goal of life . . . Self-knowledge is man's interminable striving to overcome his disunion with himself by thought; by unceasingly distinguishing himself from himself he endeavours to achieve unity with himself'<sup>7</sup>. This certainly denotes what we see in Man's endeavours for righteousness. Because of the loss of true knowledge and divine-human co-awareness all things must be in disunion for Man, hence his anxiety in trying to comprehend and control them through his knowledge of what is good and evil, and his direction to the self in the form of prohibition, which is an endeavour to do the good, but is not an actual doing of good.

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<sup>4</sup> Ethics (SCM, 1955, p. 149).

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit. pp. 148-149.

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit. pp. 149.

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit. pp. 149-150

If we take ‘co-awareness’ as a reasonable description of conscience and understand by this Man’s awareness of his being which comes with his awareness of God, then this would be how Man lived in conscience in innocence. The fall altered this *state* of conscience, though not its *principle*. Man—that is man and woman together were one with God and one with themselves in communion with God, for this is the true meaning of Man being the image of God. When that communion was altered by Man seeking to be *as* God in his being, and *like* God as regards ‘the knowledge of good and evil’, he was assured he knew what was good and what was evil. Henceforth he would make his own decisions in regard to what was right and what was wrong. He did not need God for that exercise.

His problem was that now he had what the writer of Hebrews calls ‘a conscience of sins’. Often translated ‘a consciousness of sins’ it is even more than that. It is a conscience which has to do with the guilt of sin. In other words it is a conscience which is not tranquil because of the person’s guilt. The same writer calls it ‘an evil conscience’ and he describes it as being polluted with ‘dead works’ (sins). That is, it is defiled<sup>8</sup>. It is the opposite to what he calls ‘a cleansed conscience’ and what Paul calls ‘a good conscience’ and ‘a clear conscience’. Paul also speaks of a ‘seared conscience’, that is, one which cannot be sensitive to moral values and principles, and of a ‘corrupted’, that is, a ‘defiled’ conscience<sup>9</sup>, something approximating to the ‘evil conscience’ of Hebrews.

As we have said, the operative principle of conscience did not alter with the fall. Man has to have an image of God, an image of the law and, hence, an image of himself. He has virtually taken God’s place in deciding what is good and evil, but his consciousness on the one hand of Deity and on the other of the fact that he is not yet perfect keep him in a state of disunity within himself. Because he is a creature and does not have deity he is taking upon himself what he could only accomplish in union with God. His conscience is ever concerned with his attaining of unity, that is perfection within himself, hence its prohibitions of evil and its demands for the person to do what is good, even though that conscience does not really know what is *essentially* good and evil<sup>10</sup>. If we add to this the burden of guilt for failure in every area then we see Man has lost his inner integrity—something that could only obtain in full communion with God.

To this point, then, we can see that the conscience is not merely a monitor of what a person is doing, i.e. whether good or bad, but is that faculty which attempts to unify the person by bringing it from its evil to the good and so bringing the person to full integrity. In this way a person is his own god. It must be terrifying to go against one’s own conscience, and the inability to achieve the goal of self-unification must bring much anxiety and *angst* since the conscience really turns on the person as a demanding, commanding tyrant, yet a tyrant which can never enable the person to achieve inner unity.

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<sup>8</sup> See Hebrews 10:2, 22; 9:14 for these bad states of conscience. See 13:18 for a good conscience.

<sup>9</sup> For Paul on a good and a clear conscience see Acts 23:1; Romans 9:1; 11 Corinthians 1:12; 1 Tim. 1:5, 9; 11 Tim. 1:3, 3:9; Titus 1:15.

<sup>10</sup> This is not to deny that behind its present deficient state the whole of God’s law may not be wholly present, in one sense threatening the devised images of God, law and Man, and confronting them with the real; in other words with ontological demands for a pure conscience and true law obedience. P. T. Forsyth once said, ‘Nothing will satisfy the conscience of man which does not first satisfy the conscience of God’.

## Natural Law and the Conscience

The reason for looking at this subject is that since the conscience is universal and because it always pertains to law, then law is significant. We wonder at the variety of laws tribes and cultures know, and the compulsion that comes with conscience to constrain men and women to obey these laws. The idea of a law being in some senses common to all cultures seems to be contained in Paul's view of the nations and their laws. In Romans 2:12–16 he says, '**All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.** For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus'.

Here he is saying that the Jews have one law and the nations have laws which are different but yet are somewhat analogous to the Mosaic law. Verse 15 is important, 'They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them'. It would seem that since the fall there has always been natural law, but the theological philosophical idea of natural law from a Christian point of view was developed by Thomas Aquinas along with his natural theology though the idea of natural law was extant long before his treatment of it. He thought human beings could gain considerable knowledge of God's law without having biblical revelation, and although they might not call it 'God's law' they would see it as natural to human living. Roman Catholic theologians have strongly developed the idea of natural law. More and more Protestant theologians are leaning on the idea though not necessarily in its Thomist form.

It is an interesting fact that when the Nuremberg War Trials took place there had to be some kind of resolution of the varying views of law. The Chief Prosecutor for the French Republic, M. Francois de Menthon said, 'There can be no well-balanced and enduring nation without a common consent in the essential rules of social living, without a general standard of behaviour before the claims of conscience, without the adherence of all citizens to identical concepts of good and evil'.<sup>11</sup> It is interesting in this case that the fact and value of conscience is taken for granted, as indeed the idea of 'identical concepts of good and evil'.

Another view of natural law would be that cultures and tribes do not so much come to their laws by observing and reasoning—though that may well be so—as that there is an inner ontological pressure on them to observe the law of God innate in Man from creation so that their laws which form over a period of time generally take the shape of what we call 'the moral law'. Conscience, in some sense, has a consciousness of moral law and so cultures are driven by such an image or related images. Luther observed that the natural law 'is clearly and well summarised at Mount Sinai and in a better way than by the philosophers'. He said,

Therefore, there is one law which runs through all the ages, is known to all men, is written in the hearts of all people, and leaves no one from beginning to end with an excuse, although for the Jews ceremonies were added and the other nations has their laws, which were not binding upon the whole world, but only this one which the Holy Spirit dictates unceasingly in the hearts of all <sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup>Quoted by Helmu Thielicke in his *Theological Ethics, Vol. L* (Eermans, 1079, p. 386).

<sup>12</sup>Lectures on *Galatians* (1519), LW 27:355, in his exegesis of Gal. 5:14, quoted by Hans Schwarz in *Christian Dogmatics Volume II* (Fortress, 1984, p. 271).

Calvin speaks similarly,

We observe that there exist in all men's minds universal impressions of a certain civic honesty and order. Since no man is to be found who does not understand that every sort of human organisation ought to be regulated by laws, and who does not comprehend the principles of those laws. Hence arises that unvarying consent of all nations and of all individual mortals with regards to laws. For their seeds have, without teacher or lawgiver, been implanted by all men <sup>13</sup>. It is a fact that the law of God which we call the moral law is nothing else than a testimony of natural law and of that conscience which God engraved upon the hearts of men. Consequently the entire scheme of this equity of which we are now speaking has been prescribed in it. Hence this equity alone must be the goal and rule and limit of all laws. Whatever laws shall be framed to that rule, directed to that goal, bound by that limit, there is no reason we should disapprove of them, howsoever they may differ from Jewish laws, or among themselves<sup>14</sup>.

### **The Shape of Laws for the Conscience**

The general idea seems to be that it is impossible for human beings to live without some kind of law and that they are not left to do so. Examination of actual laws would take us into the realm of the development of cultures, and the Pauline idea that Man in rebelling against God substituted idols for God and worshipped them, means the matter is quite complex. For example, did the idolaters see the idols as having moral laws and demands? Was the law of God transposed to the idols, at least in some form or other? Questions like these are not easy to answer. Linked also with the formation of natural law—any law—is the worship cultus and the priestly hierarchies that go with that cultus. All cultures train the conscience to have certain standards for behaviour. In addition we need to look at the break up of a more monolithic humanity as a result of the event of the tower of Babel. Languages are at the roots of a culture and knowledge of them leads us to the heart of that culture.

What concerns us mainly in the matter of natural law is the idea that the concept of law is universal, and that, roughly speaking, the form of law is universally moral. It would seem that even behind the patterns and mores any culture uses to train the conscience there is still the law of God and the image of God, that is to say there are images of God and images of law. The fall of man has to a great degree altered the primal image of law and the image of God known by Man in innocence. Man could not face the full force of these two things and has had to transmogrify them to some extent, in order to be able to be free of them. Thus his substitute for God is the polytheistic idols, or a religious and philosophical monotheism, whilst his substitute for the law of God is his natural law by which he seeks to maintain some order of morality so that the community has a form of collective social security. Natural law is not thought, by those who hold it, to be a substitute for ontological law, but to be of the very nature of it.

Already we can see how the subject of natural law demands an understanding of the human conscience. Man cannot get away from an image of God and an image of law, and thus his conscience drives him on, and subjects him to misery when he does not conform to law, that is, to the natural law he knows. We cannot here talk of the deeper conflict he may know from what we call the ontological pressure from God's true law, for that image may well be deeply seated within him and often try his defences which he may have erected in his formalised 'natural images'. Van Til thinks the voice of God is never silent towards Man so that he cannot be allowed even to have his own world of his images without God speaking over, above, in and beyond them. Cornelius Van Til speaks a more modest word,

As made in the image of God no man can escape becoming the interpretative medium of God's general revelation both in his intellectual (Rom. 1:20) and in his [mom] consciousness (Romans2:14, 15).

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<sup>13</sup> Institutes 11.2.13.

<sup>14</sup> Institutes IV.20.16

No matter which button of the radio he presses, he always hears the voice of God. Even when he presses the button of his own psychological self-conscious activity, through which as a last resort the sinner might hope to hear another voice, he still hears the voice of God <sup>15</sup>.

From the passage we quoted above and the one we are now quoting from Romans 3:19–20 we see that at some point in a person’s history—if not continually the law of God confronts men and women *universally*. ‘Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin’. The use of the ‘every mouth’ and ‘the whole world’ must mean that God’s law is what essentially—and perhaps ultimately—confronts Man.

We can conclude then that all human beings have an image of law and an image of deity and that they live with these in the context of their consciences. Ultimately all will have to face the true God and his true law. In all of this we are assuming what relates to salvation and ultimate judgement\_ We can only add the observation that often in the history of the church—and perhaps most often—it has happened that theologians have mistaken the true law of God—the law of his Being for natural law. This would account for much confusion in what are called ‘Christian ethics’. It would also account for deficient views of the need for, and the nature of salvation, since those who hold to natural law and its so-called ‘oughtness’ seem to claim the ability of Man to keep such law. Whilst the conscience brings a sense of guilt where there is failure to keep the law, and with that guilt often a sense of misery, yet even so, something within Man generally holds an optimism that he cannot either ‘make it up’, atone, or eventually succeed. The Reformers saw the first use of the law to be a guide to society in promoting civic righteousness, but its second use as that of bringing conviction of sin and driving sinners to Christ. Natural law, as such, does not have that kind of scheme of salvation which obtains through the Christian gospel. Those who use the law may devise scheme of self-justification or salvation through it but this does not belong to the law, or to the nature of law itself.

## **The Bondage of Conscience Under Which Man Exists**

### **Conscience and Idolatry**

Because Man has a need for God, for some deity to which he can refer, and indeed something he can worship—give worth to—the idols become his substitute for God. He thinks he can handle the idols for after all he devises them! Leaving aside the biblical teaching that idol shrines become the habitations of demons, the system or culture which grows up around idols now sets the pattern of values for the conscience. Our previous comments on natural law have dealt somewhat with the fact that the conscience does its work in the light of its images, but we can see now a further confusing factor. Ontologically there is only one God—the Triune God—so that confusion must constantly arise within the person concerning the true god and the gods. We have suggested that because Man is in the image of God that he can never be wholly free from the image of God himself, which means at the same time the image of the law of God and the authentic image of Man. We are not suggesting that these are seen clearly and brilliantly but only dimly, yet that is enough to bring unease to the person. The conscience struggles to get the person to perfection, but without avail, and

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<sup>15</sup> Common Gace and the Gospel (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977, pp. 53-54).

the back–pressure of failure and its guilt are devastating to the person. Of course the idols are of no help.

### **Conscience is as Conscience Sees**

What we are talking about may approximate to what Jesus was teaching about ‘the eye’. He said (Matt. 6:22–23), ‘The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if the eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!’ This may have some link with Proverbs 20:27, ‘The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all his innermost parts’. Jesus—who does not otherwise mention conscience as such—could well be saying, ‘The conscience is the eye which when healthy—can bring a flow of light to the whole person, but if the conscience be unhealthy then it will bring only darkness. If you think it is bringing light to you when in fact its light is darkness—you have mistaken it for this!—then how great is that deceiving darkness. It is, as it were, double darkness’. Something like this is found in Psalm 18: 25–26 where the writer says, ‘With the pure thou dost show thyself pure; and with the crooked thou dost show thyself perverse’. It accords with Titus 1:15, ‘To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted’.

### **The Bondage of the Conscience—Bonhoeffer**

The conscience is tyrannical: it will never let the person off the hook. This is its functioning nature, whether the person relationally knows God or only the idol. As we have seen and as we now repeat, Dietrich Bonhoeffer points the dynamics of conscience when he says,

*‘Conscience comes from a depth which ties beyond man’s own will and his own reason and it makes itself heard as the call of human existence to unity with itself. Conscience comes as an indictment of the loss of this unity and as a warning against the loss of one’s self. Primarily it is directed not towards a particular kind of doing but towards a mode of being. It protests against a doing which imperils the unity of this being with itself. So long as conscience can be formally defined in these terms it is extremely inadvisable to act against its authority; disregard for the call of conscience will necessarily entail the destruction of one’s own being, not even a purposeful surrender of it; it will bring about the decline and collapse of human existence, Acts against one’s own conscience runs parallel with as suicidal action against one’s own life, and it is not by chance that the two often go together. Responsible action which did violence to conscience in this formal sense would indeed be reprehensible ‘(my emphasis)<sup>16</sup>.*

The referents the conscience uses are the natural law, the images of God, Man and creation, and within the insistent use of these is the unease of sin consciousness, sin guilt, and—if we may use the term—the conscience of God behind the conscience of Man. How then, does Man escape from this tyrant, his conscience?

## **Christ the Liberator from the Conscience**

In a stroke the writer of Hebrews tells us the story when he compares the cleansing rituals of the covenant of Moses and the covenant of Christ. In Hebrews 9:13–14 he says, ‘For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God’.

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<sup>16</sup> Ethics (SCM, 1955, p. 149).

He is saying that the sacrificial death of Christ purifies the conscience from its long history of dead works so that the person is now free, indeed is powerfully constrained, to worship the living God. The fact is amazing. At last the conscience is freed. It is no longer corrupted, fraught with a consciousness of sins, evil and guilt but is utterly purified. Of course the writer has set out his thesis in a determined argument, showing that Christ is the Son of God, the outshining radiance of the Father's glory, the creator and owner of all the ages, is greater than angels, greater than Moses, greater in his Melchizedekian priest than was Aaron in his Levitical priesthood, and that whereas the priesthood of Aaron dealt mainly with the outer court, Christ takes us into the inner court, the holy of holies, and not through blood which had to be often up yearly in the sacrifice of atonement, but 'once for all' in his sacrifice on the Cross. Moreover this sanctuary into which Christ takes us is not a copy of the heavenly one, but the heavenly one itself.

All of this needs more treatment to bring it as an unveiled mystery to the human spirit, but we do not have here the time and space to do this. It is the 'once' and 'once for all'<sup>17</sup> (hapax: *ephapax*) of Christ's sacrifice that has 'once for all' ended the conflict of a 'conscience of evil' and has established the purified conscience. Daily certain sacrifices were offered in Israel for the sins of the people, and yearly the whole nation was atoned for in the propitiatory sacrifice, but the conscience—even if it experienced a certain temporary relief—remained basically unchanged. Now, through the work of Christ, it becomes transformed. In terms of Hebrews it comes a cleansed conscience and a good conscience. In Pauline terms it becomes the conscience of a justified person. The conscience is delivered from corruption and becomes good and pure. It also testifies to the rightness of life of the person. Justification is the key to the liberation of conscience in Paul. Sanctification is inseparable from justification. In this twin reality the conscience is at peace<sup>18</sup>.

### **Liberty of Conscience in the Forgiven, Purified and justified Person**

Relating to what we have said above the person now lives in communion with God. His old 'consciousness of sins' has been exchanged for a true consciousness of God. This means a true knowledge of the law of God and of the nature of created Man, Man who has now been redeemed and regenerated, the one who is 'a new [renewed] creation'. The old images have fragmented, and the new has come. Or, we might say, the old images have been transformed into the new. Instead of guilt the new conscience is aware of God as love, as grace, and not as grim, vengeful, legalistic and condemning. Living with a pure conscience is a wholly new experience.

### **The Place of Faith in the Liberty of the Conscience**

Here the writer of Hebrews is most helpful. We note that on the hapax; *ephapax*—the 'once' and 'once for all'—the conscience is for ever cleared. It is not, however, cleared by an idea—the hapax; *ephapax*—idea, but by Christ *himself*. Thus in chapter 11 the writer directs us to faith in God through Christ, and in chapter 12 to Christ himself who is 'the author and completer of our faith'. In other words the conscience is kept quiet, good and pure only in Christ. Luther once remarked that the conscience had to be 'filled with Christ'. If we look at the faith of the saints in chapter 11 and the object of that faith in chapter 12 then conscience will remain free to do its proper work. Apart from this

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<sup>17</sup> Hebrews 9:12; 9: 20: 9:28; 10:10.

<sup>18</sup> In order to understand this afresh we need to look back to those chapters which deal with the nature of law as lethal and the Cross as redeeming.

assurance of faith the person will retrogress to the self-justification of works and so turn sanctification into a legal tyranny. The old images of God, law and Man will return with disastrous consequences. Keeping faith may then seem a difficult condition for continuing freedom of conscience but when we realise that our faith is cradled—so to speak—in the faithfulness of God and of Christ, then the task is not a heavy one. The statement in Galatians 2:20, ‘The life which I now live I live by *the faithfulness of the Son of God*,’ is the way we must see faith.

There are other factors which we cannot fully develop here, the first being that we are now the children of God, sons of the Father. The old legal image of ‘God’ has been replaced by the warm, loving and securing image of the Father. Our view of law is the view of the family law of God. At the same time the presence of the Spirit is the assurance of our sonship for ‘As many as are led by the Spirit are the sons of God’. Paul said, ‘I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit’.

What we are really saying is that in the context of Christ, of the Father and the Holy Spirit our consciences will be kept clean, fresh, alive to God, and give us that divine-human ‘co-awareness’ which will permit us to live in the liberty of conscience. The law of God will no longer be a tyrant but the source of perpetual sweetness.

### **Faith Continually, Whether Weak or Strong**

In I Timothy 1: 19 Paul spoke of ‘holding faith and a good conscience’, and in 3:8–9, in speaking of deacons, said, ‘Deacons must likewise be serious, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for gain; they must *hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience*’. Holding the mystery of faith is the practical way of life, of living. The opposite to this is ‘By rejecting conscience certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith’.

This brings us to the situation in which we see some Christian believers are ‘weak in faith’ or ‘weak in conscience’. Their weakness in faith and conscience are surely linked. Paul counsels those strong in faith and conscience to tread gently in such situations. Romans chapters 14 and 15 and I Corinthians chapter 8 are two sections where he deals with these matters. For those strong in faith—and so strong in conscience—all things are lawful. Surely this means that when our faith is in the *hapax, ephapax* of Christ’s work then the conscience is rock solid: justification makes us strong against legalistic view of law and salvation. Even so, the strong in faith and conscience are counselled to take the weaker brethren into consideration and treat them with loving understanding, not demanding strong faith and strong conscience.

### **Conclusion: Christ the Liberator and Maintainer of a Good Conscience**

Paul can sometimes talk of ‘the testimony of conscience’. In Acts 23:1 he told the Sanhedrin, ‘Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience to this day’. He told the Roman Governor Felix, ‘So I always take pains to have a clear conscience before God and towards men.’ In II Corinthians 1: 12 he wrote, ‘For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience what we have behaved in the world, and still more towards you, with holiness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God’. Later in the letter he says, ‘Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. ‘We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God’, and ‘Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men; but what we are is known

to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience'. Paul is careful to cover his tracks in a passage such as I Corinthians 4:1–5, and so warn us against presumption of pride of well– doing as though infallibly commended by conscience.

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart' Men every man will receive his commendation from God.

Given all these elements the most precious of all is 'the testimony of a good conscience'. The Reformers–Lutheran and Calvinistic alike–saw this as the desired goal. Luther saw it as the fruits of the theology of the Cross (*theologia crucis*), a theology in which God reveals himself under an appearance that contradicts revealed truth. The conscience itself cannot be trusted to witness to itself concerning God's grace towards the person but it must believe and trust in the testimony of the word of God to the conscience<sup>19</sup>. Calvin's teaching of the testimony of a good conscience is couched in the language and thought of adoption, of filial life with the Father. No less than Luther he points to the liberation wrought by justification and then points on to sanctification as the way of life lived in the law which confirms the conscience in the matter of its testimony to the person.

The object of regeneration . . . is to manifest in the life of the believers a harmony and agreement between God's righteousness and their obedience, and thus to confirm the adoption they have received as sons (Gal. 4:5; cf. 2 Peter 1:10]. The law of God contains in itself that newness by which his image can be restored in us.<sup>20</sup>

R. C. Zachman comments,

Calvin agrees with Luther that faith is a matter of the conscience, but he insists, in contrast to Luther, that the worship of the Christian community conform with the nature and character of God revealed in the Word. Far from norming the Ten Commandments by the natural law . . . Calvin norms the natural law by the Ten Commandments... The law of Moses ... clearly portrays the spiritual nature and character of God: hence is the norm of the natural law<sup>21</sup>

Luther's doctrine was concerned more with the inner understanding of the gospel (*conscientia in evangelio, caro in lege*—'the conscience in the gospel, the flesh in the law'), and faith in the salvific promises of God and their fulfilment in Christ whereas Calvin's doctrine, although it embraced this theology, looked for an outward action in holiness of life that removed contradictions from any hypocritical claim to the witness of a pure conscience. For Luther the law has no less dynamic than it does for Calvin. Karl Barth quotes Luther, ' "He writes the Law of God with living fire in our hearts", and consequently, the law is "not doctrine but Life, not word, but Existence, not a sign but very Fullness"<sup>22</sup>.

These are issues far wider than our paper and our book, but they need to be taken up and examined. The relationship of the conscience to the law is immensely important. What is immediately rich to us is the sheer relief, joy and peace from having the conscience liberated by Christ as it is cleansed from dead works so that one can know the joy of true law without legalism, obedience without self–justification and entrance into the Community of the Trinity to share the life of love and holiness with the three Persons.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. R. C. Zachman's *The Assurance of Faith* (Fortress, 1993, p.5).

<sup>20</sup> Institutes III.6.1.

<sup>21</sup> Zachman, op. cit. p. 240.

<sup>22</sup> The Epistle to the Romans (Oxford, 1968, p. 275).

# Christ: The Mediator of the Better Covenant–I

## Introduction: Christ and Covenant

**Continuing** our Year's theme of 'What think you of Christ?' we ask what we think of him as 'the only Mediator between God and Man' and 'the Mediator of the New Covenant'<sup>1</sup>. In thinking of biblical covenants, of which there are many, we can say the ones we primarily need to consider are

- (i) the covenant of creation,
- (ii) the covenant established with Noah,
- (iii) the covenant with Abraham,
- (iv) the covenant with Israel,
- (v) the covenant with David, and that known as 'the new covenant'.

Our question particularly as it relates to Christ its Mediator—would seem to be, 'What is it that is special about the new covenant in contradistinction to all other covenants?' In fact, that is not quite the question we should ask since the adjective 'everlasting' or 'eternal' is applied to all the covenants, and, in some way or another they must constitute the one. First, then, we must establish the nature of 'covenant' as we generally find it in the bible.

### The Nature of Covenant

0. Palmer Robertson<sup>2</sup> defines a covenant as 'a bond in blood sovereignly administered. When God enters into a covenant relationship with men, he sovereignly institutes a life-and-death bond. A covenant is a bond in blood, or a bond of life and death, sovereignly administered.' Generally speaking this definition holds well, but when we ask whether this was always with the case we face some problems. If we commence with the Hebrew word used for covenant, namely *berith*<sup>3</sup> we are faced with a number of opinions as to its derivation. A definition given by M. Weinfeld in his article on *berith* in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Vol. II* (Eerdmans, 1975, p.4.) gives us the idea of covenant being a bond, or making a bond.

The most plausible solution seems to be that the one that associates *berith* with Akk. *biritu*, "clasp", "fetter" (cf. the Talmudic *byryt*). This is supported by the Akkadian and Hittite forms for treaty: Akk, *riku*, Hitt. *ishiul*, both meaning "bond". The concept of a *binding* settlement also stand behind Arab. '*aqd*, Lat. *viniculum fidei*, "bond of faith," *contractus*, "contract" and is likewise in German *Bund*. This etymology might support the reading *ma'asoreth habberith* in Ezek. 20:37 ("I will make you enter into the *bond* of the covenant") suggested long ago. The Greek terms for covenant, *syntheke*, *harmonia* (*Iliad* xxii.255), *synthesia* (i.339) and *synemosyne* (xxii.261) also express the idea of binding/putting together. The "bond" metaphor

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<sup>1</sup> I Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 9:15; 12:24.

<sup>2</sup> *The Christ of the Covenants* (Presbyterian and Reformed, Phillipsburg, 1980, pp. 4ff.)

<sup>3</sup> The New Testament equivalents are *diatheke*, *syntheke* and even *entole*. We will have occasion, later to look at these.

explains the use of “strengthening” or “fastening” to convey the idea of the “validity” or “reliability” of the treaty. Thus we find in Akk. *dunnunu rikstate*, “to fasten the bonds” (= to validate the treaty), or *riksu dannu*, “strong persistent bond” (=a valid and reliable treaty). and similarly in Aram. *lethaqqaphah ‘esar*, “strengthen the bond” (Dnl. 6:8). The Greek term for annulling the pact is *lyein*, “to loosen” which, which also points to the understanding of the treaty as a bond.

If we hold that a covenant is a bond, or it involves ‘bonding’ then the idea of covenant comes to life. Today we talk of ‘bonding’ as an intimate relational thing—a mother bonding her baby, and a father sharing in that bonding. We even talk of a bonding with pets, such as taking a baby budgerigar and acting as a person who cares for and feeds it. This is surely the principle and drive in the keeping of pets. We also have the more general bonding of agreements, from conditional ones to contractual, and in some cases such covenants are without relational elements. Marriage in the bible is sometimes called a covenant<sup>4</sup>, and if of course intimately relational. We can think of nothing more bonding than man and woman becoming ‘one flesh’. In the bible we have covenants between Abraham and Abimelech, Isaac and Abimelech, Laban and Jacob, Jonathan and David; indeed they are many, sometimes being in the forms of varying treaties, even treaties with the land, with things and even with death. The covenant of David and Jonathan has that quality of two souls being knit together—a beautiful bonding indeed. Whether described or not as bonding, friendship is a covenant of the richest order<sup>5</sup>. If we recognised some of our own ‘treaties’ that we also make in life. then we might not think of covenants so much as biblical matters with religious connotation but as warm, living and relational matters. On the other hand the bonding—so called—may be of a merely formal and legal nature, a bonding of convenience shaped to the advantage of both parties, carrying no intimacy whatever.

## Biblical Covenant and Bonding

### God’s Way of Going About Covenant

All understanding of covenant is based on the fact of a covenant of creation and we need to understand the way God approaches covenant. There are a number of terms in the Old Testament which give us certain view of the covenants God makes. Various translations use equivalent terms such as ‘league’, ‘treaty’, ‘compact’, ‘solemn compact’, ‘agreement’. In one case—Psalm 55:20—it is virtually a synonym of light. The bonding, then, is no light thing. The mode of covenant is also defined. *Karat berith* is ‘to cut a covenant’. *Heqim berith* is ‘to establish a covenant’. *Natan berith* is ‘to grant a covenant’, *sim berith* ‘to set down’ and *siwwa berith* ‘to command’ a covenant. In their contexts the use of the various verbs is understandable.

Linked with covenant are ideas of God having commanded his law, his statutes and the mention of his judgements which related to Israel’s transgressing, breaking, sinning against and rejected his covenant. The bond between God and Israel is not to be taken lightly, for breaking the covenant brings cursings, just as keeping it brings blessings. In one sense, as we shall further see, the covenant of God and the law of God are virtually one, are as synonymous.

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<sup>4</sup> Malachi 2:14; cf. Ezekiel 16:8, 59-62; Proverbs 2:17.

<sup>5</sup> In Psalm 55:20 it is recorded, ‘My companion stretched out his hand against his friends, he violated his covenant.’

## All God's Covenants are Unilateral

Whilst we have spoken of human covenants have elements of the contractual this cannot be said of God's covenants. They are by his initiative and must be seen as such. When God commands a covenant then he also places a covenantal obligation to obedience in response to his goodness, for such covenants are for blessing. What we must avoid thinking is that he makes parity agreements. Certainly the elements of covenants which appear to begin with Noah and continue into the New Covenant are covenants of grace.

### Establishing and Cutting a Covenant: The Covenant of Creation

As we saw above, *Karat berith* is 'to cut a covenant'. *Heqim berith* is 'to establish a covenant'. *Natan berith* is 'to grant a covenant', *sim berith* 'to set down' and *siwwa berith* 'to command' a covenant. In their contexts the use of the various verbs is understandable. There is no 'cutting a covenant' in regard to the covenant of creation. Indeed there is no explicit mention of a covenant of creation in the early chapters of Genesis. Isaiah 24:5 *passim* is said to be this covenant, 'The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.' Sometimes Hosea 6:8 is said to relate to it, but exegesis seems to be against this. Jeremiah 33:20–26 speaks of God making a covenant with 'day and night and the ordinances of heaven and earth'.

A key to the creation covenant lies in Genesis 6:18 where God says to Noah before the Flood, 'I will establish my covenant (*Heqim, berith*) with you.' That is, God is establishing or confirming a covenant already made. In Genesis 9:9–17, God says again 'I will establish my covenant with you,' and it is clear from the context that he speaking of creation and Man, that he already has made a covenant with them. There is, here, no talk or action of 'cutting a covenant' (*Karat berith*). Once this established and we hear God calling it 'the everlasting covenant' (Gen. 9:16)<sup>6</sup>, then we know this to be the primary covenant. We may also see that all covenants have a universal connotation. The covenant of creation embraces all creation, the covenants with Abraham is linked with all the nations (Gen. 12:3; etc), and so is the covenant with Israel (Exod. 19:5–6; cf. I Pet. 2:9–10).

### How Does the Covenant of Creation Relate to 'Bonding'?

When God creates Man in his own image (Gen. 1: 16f.) then Man is in total relationship with God. I Corinthians 11:7 says 'Man is the image and glory of God'. Whilst some have spoken of the 'image' being—as in ancient times—a representation and reminder of the king, and us such functional in his lordship over creation, yet Man as the *imago Dei* must be more than this. He reflects God in every detail and whilst the image is functional it also has all its equivalents of the ontological elements of the Creator. Man is made in the image of the Triune Godhead and so is no bare monad. He is created for relational living. Indeed he is fully the image only when 'male and female' are the one entity.

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<sup>6</sup> Note that all the covenants—of creation, with Abraham, Israel, David including the new covenant- are called 'everlasting' or 'eternal' covenants'.

What we must grasp beyond all things is that Man is one with God by reason of creation, and that we can only speak of bonding where two elements or persons have not previously come together, or having been 'one' have breached that unity and are being reunited. God, in creation, did not bond Man to himself: Man was one with God. As the 'internal' relationships of the Three Persons constituted—and constitutes—the Godhead so Man was relationally one with God<sup>7</sup>. Man, as created, could not be more one with God. The worst that could happen was for this unity to be breached.

### **The Power of the Primal Relationship**

If we take *berith* as the reality of this creational relationship then we must pause to see the immense power of it. Man is one with God who is himself One. He is not composed of three monads joined and held together by love. The Father is love, the Son the Son of his love, and the Holy Spirit the Spirit of love. The Father is *fons divinitatis* and the other Two Persons flow—so to speak—from that Fountain. The power of creation ensures that the one-ness of God and Man lie in the love of God, and of Man being loved by God, in God. Only if this relationship of totality can be breached can the covenant of creation be breached<sup>8</sup>.

I would now like to make a point which I think is crucial to all theology, and indeed to all life, however theologically and however reasonably we may describe the great realities of God and Man. It is this: if we do not comprehend to a large measure the nature of God as love<sup>9</sup>, we cannot comprehend the nature of Man as created. If we do not comprehend via revelation, via the unveiling of the mystery of God and his creation, via God's word and his intimate communication of himself—and of us—to our hearts, then our theology will always be deficient, always lacking in the immense dynamic of the 'I-Thou' relationship, if indeed what we have can be called 'relationship'. If we have anything of the 'subject-object'<sup>10</sup> approach to relationship, then we will stand within ourselves, and never outside of or beyond ourselves in that intimate relationship we have by nature, by creation, and—through grace—by redemption in reconciliation with the Father—Creator of the universe. If for this brilliant, powerful and yet gentle and loving relationship we substitute relationship on the terms of mysticism—whether the direct approach to God or the approach by means of rituals—we will only be concocting a 'spirituality' which will be unauthentic and doomed to ultimate tragedy.

No: we must begin at the end. We must hear what God is saying to us out of the word which at creation was protological even as it was ontological, and we must see its eschatological outcome, its authentic *telos*. We must travel the whole range of the

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<sup>7</sup> John 17:20ff. gives the intrasubjectivity of the Father and the Son, and the prayer of Christ for redeemed Man to be included within this Divine unity.

<sup>8</sup> Note, for example Colossians 3:3, 'Your life is hid with Christ in God', and I John 4:16, 'He who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him.' 11 Peter 1:4 is also relevant, 'partakers of the divine nature', i.e. participators in the divine nature.

<sup>9</sup> That God is love is a revelation to be received and a mystery in which to live. There are many fine expositions of the nature of God as love but such expositions cannot per se give us revelation or cause us to live in love's mystery. Even so, they are of great value. From among many, I would like to recommend Eberhard Jungel's Essay 'What does it mean to say, "God is love" ' in the *Book Christ in our Place* edited by Trevor Hart and Daniel Thimell (The Paternoster Press, and Pickwick Publications, 1989, pp. 294-312).

<sup>10</sup> There is, of course, an objectivity in the other person and thing, and we must not subjectivise this to the detriment of knowing its objectivity but with persons a subject to subject relationship is how we really come to know the other, especially where this relationship is reciprocated.

mystery of Christ, the mystery of godliness, the mystery of the divine will in ‘the plan of the mystery’ and we must worship as we see the holy initiative and the holy whole completion of the nature of ‘all things’ as God in his Triune Being brings things to their holy love *telos*. Only if this is at the heart of our theology can we dare to go on, and have the courage and holy audacity to speak of God’s covenant of creation, and of it as the covenant of love<sup>11</sup>.

### The Elements of the Covenant of Creation

**These are** three and each is linked with Man being the image of God, and living as such in God’s creation. They are

- (i) living out the mandate given by God to Man,
- (ii) living in the rest of the seventh day, and
- (iii) living in male–female union<sup>12</sup>.

We must avoid speaking here of creation as a contract as though God were saying, ‘You do this and I will do that,’ or ‘I will do this and you must do that.’ All of creation was a gift and not a matter of grace<sup>13</sup>.

Some Reformers had to see a covenant of works in creation. Other theologians, realising the covenantal grace revealed in the agreement with Noah and the creation—as well as later covenants of grace—had to read back grace into the work of creation. It should be noted that God simply planned creation. Whilst his planning certainly had grace in view, for example Ephesians 1:3–14, yet grace always has the idea of restoration from some fallen position of a person or nation. *Chen* as favour, and *chesid* as loving kindness in restorative and supportive action, really add up to *charis* in the New Testament. Exodus 34:6–7 shows the nature of God as grace, and this particularly so as linked with the cutting of covenants. Some commentators link the Exodus statement with John 1: 14, ‘full of grace and truth’. ‘Everything created by God is good and to be enjoyed,’ and ‘He has given us all things richly to enjoy’, tell us of God creating in love, and so we say ‘in love’ rather than ‘in grace’. Man was one with God in God’s love—something we must further explore.

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<sup>11</sup> There is no question that the love of God can-and must-be traced through all the covenants, the great one of creation and the others subsumed under it, but we speak of God’s ‘covenant love’ as though it were a love that is expressed in a special grace, God almost going out of himself to have such love, that love being an extraordinary thing to reach sinful Man. Whatever of truth there may be in such a view, it falls vastly short of the truth that ‘God is love’, and that ‘covenant love’ is not love in some special act of grace, but the very nature of God expressing itself in the re-bonding of Man to himself that the union-by-creation may have its full way.

<sup>12</sup> One of the weaknesses of this paper is that the full relationship of God and Man—God as God and Man as his image cannot be comprehended unless we explore the magnitude of these three elements. After all, the mandate given to Man is the outworking of the plan of God for all; history, the rest of the seventh day is the very rest of God himself who had-and has completed all things so that such a mandate is viable, is dynamic and can spring into action, whilst marriage is, like all things of the created beginning, protological of the eschatological. The mystery of the marriage bond can only be understood in the light of the bond of the Lamb and his Bride. To make the materials of this paper substantial we must explore these three inseparables—vocation, sabbath rest and marriage.

<sup>13</sup> I have claimed (above) that grace is always restorative. Creation is bringing into being what was not previously in being. Some theologians exhibit humility of a kind in insisting that Man did not deserve being created and so it was by the grace of God that he was. This statement is really a *non sequitur*. Creation is a gift to Man, and the goodness and generosity of God should be seen in this light, i.e. as unconditional, the expression of the full love of God. It is difficult to convey this idea since difficulty arises in receiving it.

## Man the Partner of God in the Covenant of Creation

The Holy Scriptures are a unity and only when we understand the purpose of God in his telos<sup>14</sup>—his goal—for creation do we understand the place of Man in God’s history. There are many indications of God’s ultimate intention for Man and creation and so the three elements mentioned above—of vocation (the mandate), of living in God’s sabbath rest, and of marriage are the ways in which Man is at one with God in that intention. Often described as ‘God’s covenant partner’<sup>15</sup>, Man is intended to work towards the telos God has designed. This paper cannot hope to describe the intimacy Man has with God—in whose image he is made, and whom he reflects in all his actions—nor the dreadful nature of **the fall when Man rejects** his true place in history in the interests of what he sees as his autonomy.

When we speak of ‘Man the Covenant partner’ of whom are we speaking? We are speaking of all humanity. If we think of the two streams of humanity sometimes represented by ‘the sons of God’ and ‘the daughters of men’, those of Cain the dark murderer and those of Seth who are the sons of God and the people of faith, it is nevertheless of both whom we must understand to be those under the covenant of creation. When we think of the post-deluvian humanity which is fragmented at Babel into tribes, peoples and nations, then we hear Paul’s statement to the Athenians, ‘He made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for “in him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your poets have said, “For we are indeed his offspring”.’ Paul, with this knowledge of all humanity being under the covenant of creation could not forbear to say—and could only say it authentically—‘The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge all the world by a man whom he has appointed.’<sup>16</sup>

This drives us to see that the God of creation is the God of all the tribes and their cultures. He is close to all—‘not very far from each one of us’—and his covenant is for all. We can breach it, but we cannot undo it. The nations who will be compulsorily present as sheep or goats at the great assize of Christ the Judge, will have known the Presence of God with them down through the millenniums. They could only have infringed the covenant or espoused it: no other way lay open to them, and no other action of being and doing.

For us the value of this reality is that no favourite nation and not even a favourite people of faith constitutes the whole scope of God’s grace and his judgement. We may view the plethora of cultures, religions and peoples and think they have been entitled to their privacy and independence as cultural units or groups, but what they devise and

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<sup>14</sup> Something eschatological is implied in the mandate of Genesis 1:28. The earth is to be *filled* up by Man. In passages such as Numbers 14:21; Habakkuk 2:14 (cf. Isa. 6:3) the whole earth is to be filled with the glory of the Lord. The statement of Genesis 3:15 implies a redemptive telos. Beyond these however, are all the statements regarding the ultimate glorification of all things—the new heavens and the new earth, Man coming into his inheritance, the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, the Holy City— and the like. The creation by God is protological of the eschatological, but requires the act of God’s redemption to make the original intention for Man capable of fulfilment. Our point is that there is not simply a creational norm of innocent Man subsisting, but Man is involved in God’s ultimate intention for him and the whole of creation.

<sup>15</sup> Redeemed Man is said to be a fellow-worker and a fellow-builder with God (I Cor. 3:9) and even the temple of God (I Cor. 3:16), and that his works are significant for the outcome of history (e.g. Eph. 2:10; Rev. 14:13, etc.).

<sup>16</sup> Acts 17:26-31.

develop must be culpable if not in conformity with the covenant of creation or praiseworthy if so. What it does is take away the fragmentation of the human race and the worship of monadic units which would claim exclusivity for themselves and awe for their accomplishments. Political ethnic correctness must give way to the fact that in the ultimate nothing of God's covenant is political, but God is the Creator Covenant Father of all humanity. All are his children, whether disobedient or obedient. They cannot claim immunity from God, the immunity of their sacred places, their modes of worship, their devised religions, or their expressions through art of their theologies, anthropologies and cosmologies.

Something of universal familyhood breaks through to us with an understanding of the covenant of creation. We may shudder at the immensity of human evil, or thrill to ontological underlay of pure divine love, but we cannot deny that we are one because of the covenant of creation. Our eschatological bliss or damnation lies in this reality.

### **The Law of God and Man: Covenant Law**

We often think of the law of a covenant, for where covenants are bilateral they have contracts, and so binding laws. We could talk of a law of the covenant of creation, but it is the law of the Triune Being, the law by which they subsist, but no law *under* which the Three Persons subsist. The— law is themselves relationally in action. This is the law of love, the law of Their being. The human transcript of the divine law is love to God and to one's neighbour. Man was created out of love, for love and so for loving. Yet the principle of the mandate—true human vocation—of living in God's seventh day rest, and of marriage are all expressions of the creational relationships of God and Man. When the Psalmist calls the law 'sweeter than honey: more glorious than gold' he is speaking of the rich inner essence and nature of true law. The primal couple in innocence had no trouble with ideas of authority, law, demands, commands for they were the natural ways of life. God only had good for the human race.

#### **Law and the Breach of Covenant**

It was not until the serpent suggested that the prohibitory law of not eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil had set a restriction upon Man's fullness of wisdom that the covenant breach was affected. It can be seen that the union of God and Man was breached, and so the oneness of Man with himself—the man—woman union was also breached. Genesis 9: 1 ff. shows us that dread came between man and the creatures.

What must be understood is the enormity of the relational breach, in terms of Man losing fellowship with God, and the distortion of all relationships, the inner convolutions, the alienation, the tragedy of the rent human spirit, the darkness and the rebellion against the Creator, and the rejection of true communion with God and all things. Man, so to speak, swirling in the vortex of an alien world, desperately seeking to make sense, form and pattern of 'things as they might seem to be', but failing this reinvention of the ontological, and convoluting through every means of art, religion, culture, and intellectual endeavour in such frenetic devising that always seems doomed to failure, leading as it does into labyrinths of an eternal maze. This frightening situation would continue to be until somehow Man could be bonded again to his Father – Creator, and so the human race could thus be reconciled within itself.

We are faced then with the fact that infraction of God's holy law is infraction of his holy Being and that Man faces holy confrontation which works out to be holy wrath working through the human conscience. It is no wonder that great minds—if not wholly illumined minds—have said that nothing less than blood can deal with the affront done to the holy Creator. Cutting as covenant in blood to heal the breach must mean that nothing less than death can restore the fraction of love made by sin, yet 'How to cut such a covenant' is beyond the full understanding of Man, and certainly beyond his moral and spiritual resources.

## God's Covenants To Affirm and Renew the Covenant of Creation

### The Abrahamic Covenant

Some Reformed theologians assert that the Father made a covenant of redemption with the Son before creation. Some see God making a covenant of works with Man at creation. Some see a covenant of redemption coming into being with the Proto-evangel of Genesis 3: 15. Whatever merit these views may have, no covenant is cut until the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15), as God reveals his glory to the patriarch in many ways (Cf. Acts 7:1–2). Redemption is indeed promised in Genesis 3:15 and doubtless Abel, the prophet, was in possession of the truth of propitiatory sacrifice when he offered up his acceptable sacrifice in faith<sup>17</sup>. The grace of redemption seems always to have accompanied Man in his fallen state almost as though it were inherent in the very covenant of creation.

When we look at God's intention for his covenant with Abraham it must be seen to refer not only to the inheritance which would come to the seed of Abraham<sup>18</sup>, but to the whole world *through* the seed of Abraham. In Genesis 12:1–3 Abraham is to be a blessing, so that nations will receive blessing on his account, and the nations who oppose him will receive cursing. There can be no doubt that God always has the nations in mind and that his *telos* for them is their redemption and glorification. In Revelation 7:9–14 and 21:22–5:4 the redeemed nation will participate in the fulfilled covenant of creation. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, indicates the redemptive purpose of the Abrahamic covenant not only for Israel but for all [the nations] who 'sit in darkness and in the shadow of death' and whose feet God will 'guide into the way of peace [*shalom*]'.

### The Covenant With Israel

The covenant with Israel was substantially the covenant God made with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (cf. Exod. 2:23–25), for 'God *remembered* his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.'

In the course of those many days the king of Egypt died. And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. And God

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<sup>17</sup> Genesis 4:4; 1 John 3:10-11; Hebrews 11:4 indicate that from the beginning, the fall notwithstanding there was always the people of God who were the people of faith and named as the children of God. Redemption became active at this point yet not as a further covenant so much as the establishment of the covenant of creation—its rehabilitation, so to speak, or, better still, that action of God which had its ultimate fulfilment in hand.

<sup>18</sup> Doubtless Abraham was to inherit the earth (Rom. 4:13) but this is shown in the New Testament to mean, and to include, all people of faith, for such—the meek—would inherit the earth.

heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew their condition.

At the same time God had particular purposes for this people whom he had chosen, namely that they should be the priestly revelation of God to the nations<sup>19</sup>. God does not simply utilise Israel but loves her, his love being covenantal and so, precious<sup>20</sup>.

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. 7:7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; 7:8 but it is because the LORD loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 7:9 Know therefore **that the LORD** your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, 7:10 and requites to their face those who hate him, by destroying them; he will not be slack with him who hates him, he will requite him to his face. 7:11 You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment, and the statutes, and the ordinances, which I command you this day.

Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land which you are entering to take possession of it. 4:6 Keep them and do them; for that will be your wisdom. and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' 4:7 For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? 4:8 And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?

These two passages teach us that the giving to Israel of 'the sonship, the glory, the covenants, . . . the law, the worship and the promises' was no light thing. To think of Israel has having these elements in an inferior way is to demean the magnificent gifts of God to his Covenant people. It is to drain away the awe and majesty of Sinai, and to reduce it to little better than the flat earth of our modern democratic politicisation of all things, where any elevation of things is found to be insufferable.

### **Israel has Universal Connotation With the Nations, With the Created World**

Again, we do not have the time and space in this paper to detail the universal significance of God's covenant with Israel. We know from the Old Testament that Israel knew the Creator to be the God of the nations, and that Israel was not only his witness to himself as love, righteousness and holiness but that by idolatry, false worship and unrighteous living Israel could profane God in the eyes of the nation. We also know that the Davidic covenant given within the national covenant with Israel, was intended to lead them out of a narrow, provincial and sectarian view of themselves, into an understanding of the universality of Messiah and the kingdom of God, thus making the two great elements of covenant and kingdom inseparable. Thus the Abrahamic covenant proceeds through the covenant with Israel, and, as we have seen in Zechariah's Benedictus the covenant flowers into universal fullness with the coming of

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<sup>19</sup> Exodus 19:5-6, cf. I Peter 2:9-10 for the elucidation of the Exodus passage.

<sup>20</sup> Deuteronomy 7:6-11; 4:5-8.

Mary's Son, Jesus. Hence the gospel John the Baptist preaches is the gospel of the kingdom, as in Isaiah 52:7—'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns".'

To this might be added the great eschatological passages of the reign of Messiah, of Mount Zion being the hub of the world into which the nations are drawn, when the law and the word of God go forth from Jerusalem. Also the passages of the renewal of the heavens and the earth take us into the atmosphere of Revelation chapters 21 and 22, whilst a passage such as Isaiah 25:6–9 speaks of the final covenantal salvation expressed in Revelation 21:1– and **Isaiah 56:6–8 speaks** of the new temple in terms worthy of the New Testament view of the church, the people of God, being the New Temple.

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

"And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,  
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,  
and to be his servants,  
every one who keeps the sabbath,  
and does not profane it,  
and holds fast my covenant –  
these I will bring to my holy mountain,  
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;  
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices  
will be accepted on my altar;  
for my house shall be called a house of prayer  
for all peoples.  
Thus says the Lord GOD,  
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,  
I will gather yet others to him  
besides those already gathered."

### **Israel and the New Covenant**

We have not dealt with the matter of Israel's prophetic teaching of her place in history until we cover the matter of the new covenant. Whilst as a people, the nation may not have seen herself as the witness to the world of God's redemptive purposes yet these are innate in the prophetic teaching of the new covenant. In Jeremiah 31:31–34 and related passages God is still amongst his people Israel, yet something is envisaged beyond the sacrificial cultus of Israel—Israel's internal source of forgiveness and cleansing—and that is a purification and forgiveness of sins which extends to the nations. Here kingdom and covenant emerge into the light of the day, spreading salvation to the nations.

After this long time of God's tutelage to Israel and the nations, we have the teaching to which our paper has been taking us, namely the talk and teaching of 'a better covenant' which whilst it is redemptive is, nevertheless, the covenant of creation coming into its own, for it is the covenant which is for all the nations, no less than predicted to Abraham, but much more in its immediacy in proclamation to the nations and in its insistence that the nations all come to the obedience of faith, the fulfilment of

Jacob's prophecy given over Judah in Genesis 49:10<sup>21</sup>, and reiterated in Psalms such as 2, 89, and 110<sup>22</sup>.

### **Christ and the New Covenant**

It is at this point we will begin our next Study, but Luke 1:68–79 links the Abrahamic covenant with what we call 'the new covenant' in the light of Matthew 26:27–28, the theme which the New Testament—and in particular the Epistle to the Hebrews—takes up. The new covenant is still the covenant of creation, as we must see.

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<sup>21</sup> 'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.' This theme is pursued in Psalms 2, 89, and 110—amongst others—in regard to God's defeat of the nations, a theme taken up by Christ and outlined by Paul in the passage of I Corinthians 15:24–28, which in turn is the theme of the prophecy of the Revelation. Paul also emphasises this 'obedience of faith of the nations' in Romans 1:5; 15:18 (passim) and 16:25–27.

<sup>22</sup> In these Psalms as in other prophetic Scriptures the Messiah as Son of God as Davidic King and as the Priest King of God has the nations given into his hands. It is he who will proceed to bring the nations to kneel to him, and it is he who will restore the breach made in the covenant of creation. Of this Coming One Israel is the holy matrix, the womb for the male child who is to rule the nations with a rod of iron.

## **Christ: The Mediator of the Better Covenant–II**

### **Introduction: The Elements of the Covenant of Creation**

We have already mentioned these as

- (i) **vocation** (Gen. 1:28f.; cf. 2:17; 9: 1 ff.),
- (ii) the seventh day **sabbath rest** of God for Man (Gen. 2:1–3),
- (iii) the matter of **marriage**—the primal union of the man and the woman drawn from him.

We have pointed out that the profound relationship which God has with Man and Man with God arises from creation and creation only. Therefore to miss this reality of Man's union and relationship with God is to miss the meaning of the unspoken covenant of creation, and so to miss the nature of both God and Man. If these three elements constitute that relationship then we would expect to find them (i) throughout history as the true order of things, and (ii) as integral to all God's covenants, whether the overarching one of creation or the ones called 'Noahic', 'Abrahamic' 'Sinaitic' 'Davidic' or 'New'. Our expectancy would be that what was in the beginning—'protological'—would find its fulfilment and culmination in the end in what we call 'eschatological'. This is surely how it is. In order to understand the covenant of creation—and so the significance of the new covenant and Christ as 'the Mediator of a better covenant' we need to see the three elements set forth above, and then see whether these are prominent in the new covenant, especially as set forth in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

### **The Three Elements Which Constitute and Flow From Man's Creational Relationship Which is the Image of God**

#### **(i) The Image of God in Vocation or the Creational Mandate**

Sometimes called 'God's covenant partner' the purpose of the mandate is for Man to be lord over the creation by being fruitful, multiplying, filling up the earth, subduing it and so having dominion over it. Psalm 8:3ff. clearly defines Man as being 'crowned with glory and honour' and having 'all things [put] under his feet'. This vocation includes all human beings so that we visualise the particular vocation of every person as being within the overall vocation given to the human race. Without participating in this vocation a person is not truly human but is out of kilter with his/her being truly human. Proverbs 4:23 states that God has had made everything for its own purpose. Jeremiah 10:23–24 states that the way of a person is not in himself: Man cannot direct his own footsteps.

It is clear that the children of God—also known as 'the people of faith'—follow the will of God in the mandate, and those who the children of darkness follow their ambitions, refusing the essential demands of the mandate (cf. I John 3: 10–11; Hebrews 11:4ff.).

Thus Cain and later Nimrod and his ilk go against the creational mandate, preferring to carve out their own cities and kingdoms. The people of faith look for a city to come, and a kingdom not of this world, but work faithfully in the creational mandate. Those within God's covenants are always doing his will, especially as shown in obedience to his law and in witnessing to the whole world the nature and purpose of God. In the New Testament the same principles obtain. The people of God are spoken of 'God's fellow workers' and are **incorporated in the new mandate** of proclaiming the gospel to all the world and witnessing to the holiness of God. The outcome of vocation obedience is 'Well done, you good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord'. Such as have overcome inherit all things. The last chapters of the Book of the Revelation show that the creational mandate not only culminates in the eschaton, but continues to be operative in God's community in being 'kings and priests unto their God'.

## (ii) The Image of God and Living in the Rest of God

Genesis 2:1–3 describe this creational rest, the nature of the rest within the covenant of creation.

I Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 2 And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation.

Other passages to be considered are Exodus 20:8–11, 23:12 and 31:13–17 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15. The sum of all these passages is that God has finished all his work of creation. It is complete. He desists from further primary creation. It is for a God a day of rest. He *blessed* is—something strange for a day or a thing—and hallows it. His nature is rest. There is no end to this day—as with the other 6 days. It is continuing: Hebrews 4:8–10 shows it is eschatological.

God has completed all of creation and now Man may enjoy it. He must do his work in six days and rest from it on the seventh day. All the time God is the God of peace and joy: he works within his rest, his own sovereignty, his own knowing the climax (the new creation) will take place. The final 'rest' will happen. Man as the image of God, must always be in rest, at rest in his relationship with God. God has blessed the day of rest, has given it—we would say—as a covenant sign<sup>1</sup> for all creation. In the Exodus and Deuteronomy passages above it is shown

- (i) that the Sabbath rest is inherent in the covenant of creation, and
- (ii) that it secondly a sign of God's covenant of redemption with Israel. In Egypt they laboured seven days a week. In this sense it is not a new principle given, but the old one confirmed and established.

When Man breaks covenant with God he goes into restlessness—'The wicked are like the restless sea which casts up mire and dirt. There is no peace to the wicked' (Isa. 5:21). The godly know God's shalom. Hebrews 3:7–4:13 shows that rest was promised to Israel in Canaan but the disobedient never entered into it. We will see that the Davidic covenant arose out of 'the rest' God had given to Israel. Even so, in Psalm 95:7–11 David says Israel did not enter into rest, that such rest is ahead, and this will be known at the climax of the covenant of creation. Even so, the writer of Hebrews informs us, we can share that rest now, even in the conflict of this age.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that in Genesis 9:12-17 the bow is the sign of the establishment of the covenant for all creation, but it is a sign to God of his promise of that covenant.

We discover that the rest of God was always known in worship, the sanctuary of God. Thus wherever the saints have worshipped, they have made a sanctuary. The ultimate sanctuary is the holy city, and God indeed is the temple. Then the protological rest of creation (Eden) shall find its fulfilment in the new creation in the holy city. Between Eden and the holy city Jesus says, 'Come unto me all you that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest ... you shall find rest unto your souls. This is rest by the blood of the Cross.

### **(iii) The Image of God in Living in Marriage**

This third element—marriage—is undoubtedly part of the image of God, when viewed from the relational point of view. Man as Adam was the image of God, and from him was created the woman, so that he would say, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; he shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' The two now constituted the one being in relationship, reflecting the relationship between Man and God. The unity they had was derived from the unity of the Triune God, the unity of the Three Persons. Only in relationship with God could the image be complete and authentically operative.

That the creational marriage was protological is clearly shown by Paul in Ephesians 5:21–23. Marriage is the 'profound mystery'. It is also the key to the history and climax of the covenant of creation. In the Old Testament God is the husband of the wife Israel, and in the New Testament Christ is the Bridegroom of his Bride the church. God blessed them before giving them the vocation which could only be fulfilled through marriage (Gen. 1:28). With the breaking of the relationship with God through the fall, the serpent also broke the relationship of the man and the woman. Hence the sabbath rest of the covenant was replaced by relational unrest and the vocation was rejected as the true way of life. Thus was needed the healing and we find *Christus Soter* coming to the marriage rescue. The way in which he would give true rest and restore Man to true vocation would be by giving himself for his bride—his elect people—and reconciling them to God, this restoring the relationship which was the foundation and life of the covenant of creation. The man and the woman together could now, again, be the full image of God, the man being 'the image and glory of God' and the woman, 'the glory of the man' and move towards the eschatological climax when the woman would have 'the glory of God' (Rev. 21:11) and the marriage feast of the Bride and the Lamb would take place, which, in other related figures are the new Jerusalem, the holy city and the temple. This is the climax of the covenant of creation. The holy sanctuary—God and the Lamb are the temple—brings the rest of God into the people of God, or brings them into the rest of God, that is within the holy sanctuary.

Thus the elements of the image—vocation, sabbath rest and the heavenly marriage are all consummated in the telos of the covenant. What is immensely important to note is that none of this happens without Messiah. Whilst explicitly called the mediator of a better covenant—the new covenant—he is, in reality the mediator of the covenant of creation. We may now look at the idea of Christ being the mediator of a better covenant.

## **Christ the Mediator of a Better Covenant**

In the Epistle to the Hebrews it is evident that the writer is not demeaning the Mosaic covenant. Far from doing that, he is giving us, so to speak, every good inch of it, just as Paul does in Romans 9:4 (passim) regarding the same covenant. Even so the writer of Hebrews' argument is that God's covenant with Israel could not accomplish for its members what the new covenant accomplishes.

### **The Covenant With Israel Exceeded Other Covenants**

By this we mean that all human covenants, some of which were quite notable, yet even given that the Sinaitic covenant was within, and part of the Abrahamic covenant

nevertheless it exceeded all other covenants. That is shown by the following points,

- (i) It was the covenant which made its people a priestly people. Exodus 19:5–6, cf. I Peter 2:9–10. The latter reference sheds light back upon the essential nature of God's people.
- (ii) It was a covenant which had Moses as its mediator. Numbers 12:1–8 shows Moses exceptional nature of a priest–prophet leader. Hebrews 3:1–6 supports this fact, for both Aaron and Miriam claim parity with Moses as a prophet and are told God has a special relationship with Moses, one that transcends his relationship with them. When Korah also claims parity with Moses, not only for himself but all the congregation of Israel, then he is destroyed for his arrogance.. Hebrews 5:1, 4 shows that to have the office of a priest, is something no man can arrogate to himself. In fact whilst Moses was a priest, Aaron's sons and descendants were allotted to the priesthood, but Aaron's priesthood is shown by the writer of Hebrews as inferior in order to that of Melchizedec, and that since Christ's priesthood was like that of Melchizedec then his priesthood was superior to that of Aaron.
- (iii) It had a remarkable, unique worship, having the Levitical priesthood (cf. Rom. 9:4), a sanctuary which was a copy of the heavenly pattern shown to Moses in the Mount, and a soteriological cultus which met the worship–salvation needs of the people (cf. Lev. chs 1–6; the peace, sin, burnt, and atonement offerings, etc.. Israel loved its worship when it was true to God (e.g. Psa. 42; 63, etc.).
- (iv) It had a remarkable and unique law (Rom. 9:4; Deut. 4:5–14; 10: 12–11: 1, etc.). It had 'the ten words of God'–his torah–dabar law–which was first the internal law of Yahweh, and then the transcript for national and personal life (cf. Psa. 1; 19; 119, etc.).

### **The Covenant Fell Short of the New Covenant**

- (i) the sanctuary was only a copy of the heavenly one
- (ii) its priesthood was of fallible human beings and their ministry was constituted of a succession of priests

(iii) the mediator of that covenant was Moses who was a servant in the house but not the builder of it. It needed a better mediator, and Christ was this in that he had created that house<sup>2</sup>.

(iv) the covenant was confined to Israel: the new covenant was universal. NB The Mosaic covenant was 'everlasting' but only within the covenant of creation.

(v) a better covenant, a better surety and a better system of atonement was **needed** (Hebrews 7:12, 18, 22: cf. 9:13–14; 10:1–4) and better system of worship (8:2; 12: 18–21 with 8:22–24.

(vi) a better system of atonement was needed, the conscience never being satisfied or purified by the old system (Heb. 9:14–15; cf. 10: 1–4; 19–22.

It never occurred to those in Israel that the covenant would ever be superseded. It was called 'everlasting', yet within its covenant it had

- (i) the promise of the Davidic covenant—a promise by which it continually lived in Judah—and
- (ii) the promise of the new covenant.

The thinking in Israel would have little difficulty in seeing these and within and as part of the Mosaic covenant. It would be assumed that they would always proceed with the Davidic and New covenant— Hence the claim of the church that Jesus was the fulfilment as well as the Mediator of both, appeared preposterous to the Jews, and certainly the writer of Hebrews has to set out his case clearly, and it has to be rooted in the Old Testament. The coming of Jesus, his acts and his person have to be in conformity with, and arise from the 'former covenant' and so be shown to outmode and supersede all that it was.

First we will look at the facts of Jesus' mediatorship of the new covenant as the writer of Hebrews presents them.

### **Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant. The Better One**

- (i) Jesus is called 'the mediator of a new covenant' (Heb. 9:15; 12:24). See Hebrews 8:6–7, 'But he has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better since it is enacted on better promises. For if the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for the second.' He is also called 'the surety [assurance, guarantee] of a better covenant' (7:22)
- (ii) the sanctuary with which Jesus had to do as high priest was the heavenly one and not a copy of it (cf. 9:1–5; cf. 9: 12, 24). This speaks then of the quality of the sanctuary. and of the mediator, who, the writer further shows is the King–Priest.
- (iii) He was like the priestly order of Melchizedek and not of Aaron, hence his 'Where there is a change in the priesthood there is necessarily a change in the law [i.e. of sacrifice] as well', Hebrews 7:12. This means, of course, that the law of Moses was inseparably linked with the sanctuary of worship and the sacrificial cultus carried out within it. A 'change of law' does not mean 'a change of the law of God', for this law precedes and antecedes Israel. It means a change in which certain elements as they were known in Israel's worship system will be outmoded

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<sup>2</sup> The passage of Hebrews 3:1-6 might give the impression (v.4) that the builder of the house was God. Whilst he is the builder of all things yet verse 3 makes it clear that Jesus was the builder of the house. The 'house' in this passage cannot refer only to the house of Israel, but all God's house, that is the Creation of which God is Covenant-Creator.

because the new has come. An example of this is the prophecies regarding the new covenant as in Jeremiah 31:31–34 and Ezekiel 36:24–28 where it is presumed the sacrificial system known in Israel will be superseded. We will later discuss the wider issues of a Mechizedeckian priesthood as they are in contradistinction to a Levitical priesthood.

- (iv) his was not the blood of the first covenant but ‘the blood of the everlasting covenant’ (13:21). See ‘own blood securing eternal redemption’ (9:12), ‘purifying the conscience’ (9:14: cf. 10:22), ‘his own blood’ putting away sins) (10:25)), being ‘the blood of the covenant’ (10:29), ‘the blood that speaks more graciously’ (12:24), and ‘sanctifies’ (13:12) and ‘brings from the dead’ (13:21: cf. Rom. 1:4–5; 6:4). All of these statements are of the highest importance.
- (v) The priest must have ‘somewhat to offer’ (Heb. 5: 1; 7:27; 8:3) and his oblation was his body, his blood, himself. Hebrews 10:5–10 shows the preparing of the body, the giving of it in sacrifice—the offering of the body ‘once for all’. He offers himself as the oblation (Heb. 7:27; 10:10). We need to understand the quality of this oblation, that is its perfection for redemption, as against the oblations of the former covenant which could never effect ‘eternal salvation’ (Heb. 5:9). This is enormously important.
- (vi) Only Christ’s priesthood could effect a ‘once’ and ‘once for all’ (hapax; ephapax). See Hebrews 7:27, 9:12; 9:26; 10: 10 as against the continual offerings (Heb. 5:3; 10: 1–4; cf. 7:23).
- (vi) Only his high–priesthood, his blood, his oblation, his sacrifice can effectively purify the conscience from (a) ‘dead works’ (Heb. 9:14), (b) ‘an evil conscience’ (Heb. 10:2, 22).
- (vii) Only his high–priesthood and priestly sacrifice can give access to the Holy of Holies for the people of God (10:19–22). By this means Man is again bonded to God, covenantally, personally, intimately, ritually and relationally, that is the initial relationship of Man as created by God is renewed. In that sense, as we shall see, Man is now fully one with God in the Covenant of Creation. The New Covenant is really the culmination of the Covenant of Creation, and not a covenant beyond it, anymore than it is a covenant apart from it.

### **The Historical, Prophetic Making of the Royal Mediator, the Messianic Priest King**

The writer of Hebrews has a strong point to make, and one which we did not sufficiently make in the former part of this paper. We dealt with the fact that the new sanctuary, or the new temple, the church, has universal connotation, but did not show how the new covenant comes to have this status and function. The key to understanding this universality is

- (i) the Davidic Covenant God made in Israel with that king, so that the universal reign of this Messianic King would be that of the Priest King, and
- (ii) the fulfilment of the covenant of creation would be the reign and ministry of this Messianic Priest King.

In order to see these matters in perspective we need to remember

- (i) all covenants of God are within the covenant of creation, the covenant with Noah being the establishing or confirming of the covenant of creation, it being spoken of as ‘everlasting’ and its scope being the whole of creation,
- (ii) the Abrahamic covenant being the covenant ‘cut’, yet was to be universal, affecting all the nations of the earth, and so was intended—as seen in the New Testament—to embrace all nations, and was everlasting,

- (iii) the covenant with Israel—the Mosaic covenant—issued from and was part of the Abrahamic covenant and had universal connotation, and was everlasting. Its universal connotation is particularly strong in that within Israel God made his covenant with David,
- (iv) the Messianic Davidic covenant can be seen to proceed beyond the covenant made with Israel, and yet is one with it. It is a universal covenant, and is everlasting, and as such is a fulfilling of the covenant of creation,
- (v) the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants are linked **with the new** covenant which is itself the fulfilment of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants and so becomes the culminating covenant by which the covenant of creation is fulfilled, reaching its telos, that is, the eschatological fulfilment of elements found in all the covenants which are protological and prophetic of that telos.

When these elements come together then they assist us to see

- (i) that the Son is the builder of the house under the Father by whom all things are built,
- (ii) that as the prophesied Davidic King so that he is in reality the Priest King whose universal ministry has to do with all humanity, so that
- (iii) two realities of the new covenant and the kingdom of God are, in fact, one, or two entities inseparably joined or the one, so that
- (iv) the covenant of creation—God being ‘faithful creator’—the mystery of the plan of God is to join, reconcile, unify, fulfil, harmonise and summate all things in Christ.

We now have to fill in the gap left in our paper by neglecting to speak of the Davidic Covenant<sup>3</sup>.

## The Davidic Covenant

Undoubtedly the primary text of this covenant is II Samuel 7 and in particular the message God sent to David through Nathan—verses six to 17

8 ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel; 9 and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. 10 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, I I from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. 12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. 14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; 15 but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.’” 17 In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The material written below owes a lot to the treatments of the Davidic covenant in Dumbrell's *Covenant of Creation* (pp. 127-163; 0. Palmer Robertson's *The Christ of the Covenants* (pp. 229—269) and the essay 'The Blessing of David, Charter for Humanity' by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr in *The Law and the Prophets* Ed. John S. Skilton (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974, pp. 298-318). All three show the immense significance of covenant and kingdom being the one, and the transition of Mt. Sion and the universalising of the kingdom of Israel into the kingdom of God. Kaiser's essay is particularly powerful in showing that the covenant of David is reality nominated by God as 'The Charter for Humanity', a law and a way of life for all humanity.

<sup>4</sup> The history of all Israel can be said to pivot around the Davidic covenant, that is, it leads up to this promise of God and then on to the coming of the Davidic king-Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God-and so to the proclamation and

This passage is clear enough. Also there is the parallel passage of I Chronicles 17:3–15 though with some simple differences.. At first sight we might not think of God’s promise to David, of establishing for him an everlasting dynasty, as a covenant, but many scriptures indicate it was a covenant. Isaiah 55:3 speaks of ‘an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David,’ a statement confirmed in Acts 13:34—spoken of Jesus as ‘great David’s greater son’—’And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he spoke in this way, “I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.”‘ When we come to Psalm 89, the whole of which is an exposition of the Davidic covenant, verses 3 and 4 speak of II Chronicles 7:16, ‘Thou hast said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen servant, I have sworn to David my servant: I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations’. Psalm 132:1112 repeat the thought and word of ‘covenant’. In II Samuel 23:5 David says, ‘. . . he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure.’ Jeremiah 33:19–26 places the covenant with David amongst the unbreakable covenants, those God has made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and with the Levites. There are many more references and they all point to the importance of this covenant.

### **Covenant and Kingdom**

Exodus 19:5–6 speak in covenantal terms of Israel being a ‘kingdom of priests’, thus making Israel the priest nation amongst all the nations. I Chronicles 29:10–13—amongst many other passages—certainly shows that Israel saw God’s kingdom as universal, but Israel saw God’s covenant with it as everlasting, and itself as the kingdom of God in a special way that other nations were not that kind of kingdom. Even so, it is with the pronouncement of the Davidic covenant that Israel now sees the promise to Israel of its being the centre of the Kingdom of God, of Mount Zion as having an importance, not simply as a localised divine royal throne, but in the widest and deepest—sense the spiritual centre of all the world, the throne of the Messianic Davidic King. First, however it should be seen that God does not allow David to build the temple for this is not fitting until David’s dynasty is established for the temple must be in juxtaposition with the covenant. David’s conquests have brought ‘rest’ to Israel and the temple to be built will be the sanctuary which is God’s rest for Israel, but this must be in the right order—the Davidic covenant, and its outcome the temple in Israel, yet in the wider prophetic context, the new temple [to be] will be built by Solomon, but then, beyond that the New Temple which the ‘old’ temple prefigures, which, again, is the New Jerusalem, and which will be the fulfilment of the Davidic covenant, and, from our point of view, the fulfilment of the covenant of creation.

Palmer Robertson says,

The prophetic expansion of the Davidic promise fits into this same pattern. As the kingdom crumbles all about them, these seers anticipated the greater day, A greater occupant of David’s throne shall come. He shall sit on the throne of his father David forever. He shall rule the whole world in righteousness. He shall merge God’s throne with his own, for he shall be Immanuel, Mighty God, God himself<sup>5</sup>.

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establishment of his universal kingdom, he, at the same time, being 'the mediator of a better covenant', for in him kingdom and covenant meet.

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit p.251

Dumbrell, Palmer Robertson and Kaiser all go to great lengths to show the Davidic covenant is rooted in the covenant with Abraham, if not in the covenant of creation. They trace the history of Israel, the leadership first of Moses, then of Joshua, the Judges, Samuel and finally the formation of the monarchy, and the fortunes of all Israel under David and Solomon, the judgements on the nation in the division into two kingdoms; and then the destruction of both kingdoms, the teaching of the prophets, so that indeed, the literary–theological structure of the Old Testament has to be understood as leading to and climaxing in the Davidic covenant with its Messianic connotation, thus making way for the coming of ‘great David’s greater son’, the son of God who is to be king over all the earth and, as such, the mediator of a better covenant.

Kaiser<sup>6</sup> has a special point to make from II Samuel 7:19 which is often translated misleadingly, the RSV saying ‘thou hast shown me the future,’ though adding, in a footnote, ‘Heb. this is the law for man,’ whilst the NRSV has ‘May this be instruction for the people’. Kaiser discusses the Hebrew which he translates in its literal form ‘this is the law of man’ and concludes that

Since the ‘this’ of II Samuel 7:19 refers to the content of the promise, more specifically, the seed of Abraham, Israel and David, which is to live and reign forever and be the Lord’s channel of blessing to all the nations of the earth, the law in this context is a principle by which all mankind is to be blessed. The genitive, then, is an objective genitive and David’s response is one of pleasant astonishment as he grasps the fact that the promise given to him is to be ‘The Charter for Humanity’. We call this torah a ‘charter’ a charter because it is the plan and prescription for God’s kingdom whereby the whole world shall be blessed with the total content of the promise doctrine. It is a grant conferring powers, rights, and privileges to David and his seed for the benefit of all mankind... So the ancient promise of blessing to all mankind would continue: only now it would involve David’s dynasty, throne and kingdom. Indeed it was a veritable ‘charter’ granted as God’s gift for the future of all mankind<sup>7</sup>.

### **The Epistle to the Hebrews: Jesus as the King–Priest**

Thus—as above—we see that Davidic Messiah is to be king of all the nations. This is an important conclusion, but how does it figure in the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews? Generally it figures because ‘receiving a kingdom’ (1:8; 12:28) and ‘the new covenant’ are linked, kindred concepts. Indeed they are inseparable. The connection is also brought out in the fact that Christ is the Son of God<sup>8</sup> and his throne is for ever and ever, his sceptre the righteous sceptre of the kingdom. Thus his kingship is set out and in terms of II Samuel 7:14; Psalm 45:6–7; Psalm 40:7–8, all of which can be shown to have Davidic connotation.

#### ***(i) Jesus The Son***

The concept of Jesus being the Son of God is explicitly stated (4:14; 6:6; 10:29; cf. 7:3) and is inescapable in 8 other references. In Psalm 89:26–27 the Davidic king sees God as his Father. The idea of his Sonship cannot be separated from his office as king. In

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<sup>6</sup> Dumbrell following Kaiser has a clear exposition of this verse (op. cit. p. 151-152).

<sup>7</sup> Kaiser (op. cit. p. 315) then examines the parallel passage in I Chronicles 17:17, and translates it 'and though art regarding me according to the upbringing torah of mankind, O Lord God!'

<sup>8</sup> The king being

this respect Psalm 2 is brought into use regarding his kingship and his Sonship, they being virtually the one. In 1:5 Psalm 2:6–7 is quoted in regard to his Sonship and kingship and in 1:13 Psalm 110:1 is quoted in regard to his being seated at the universal place of power, the right hand of God.

It is when we come to 5:54 that we see Psalms 2 and 110 brought together, that is kingship and priesthood,

So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him  
who said to him,  
“Thou art my Son,  
today I have begotten thee”; as he says also in another place,  
“Thou art a priest for ever,  
after the order of Melchizedek.”

In verses 7–10 his Sonship and priesthood are linked, in this in his role of Melchizedekian high-priesthood.

Then in 7:1–3 we see Jesus as the priest-king or king-priest, something Levitical priest were not, Jesus being ‘a high priest like the order of Melchizedek’ (5:10).

I For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him; 2 and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. 3 He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest for ever.

Here we are reminded of 1:8–9, quoted from Psalm 45:6–7, surely a Messianic Psalm, ‘Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee with the oil of gladness beyond thy comrades,’ because ‘love of righteousness’ links with ‘king of righteousness’. ‘King of peace [Salem]’ reminds us of his being ‘king of Jerusalem’ the Messiah who gives rest. Yet at the same time he ‘priest of the Most High God’. When, then, Jesus is called ‘the mediator of a better covenant’ (8:6), ‘the mediator of a new covenant’ (9:15: 12:14; cf. 13:20) he is all that as Son-King and Priest-King.

## Conclusion to ‘The Mediator of a Better Covenant’

Above we have made a comparison of the two covenants as the writer of Hebrews presents them and we need to study these comparisons and catch their implications. The new covenant needs to be seen in terms of Christ the High-Priest, the altar (the Cross), the victim-oblation and the intercessor. It is obvious that the difference between Moses and Jesus is a vast one, as also the difference between the two covenants is vast. If we can talk of David himself of having been the mediator of the Davidic Covenant, then the comparison of him and Jesus as the true Davidic Messiah<sup>9</sup> must also be vast. Even so, we may seek to grasp the concept of Jesus as King-Priest and so domesticate it that it narrows down to the people of the church and their practice.

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<sup>9</sup> I am not convinced that David as David can be counted as being a mediator of the covenant God made with him. The one who is pointed to is ‘great David’s greater Son’ and Jesus seems to indicate that Psalm I 10:1 refers not to the David of history, but another, a greater one.

What we have to grasp is the fact that the Davidic covenant brings to us, namely that Jesus is universal King–Priest, that Davidic King is one with Melchizedeckian King–Priest, that is that his High–Priesthood is universal, have reality only in the covenant of creation, and being the very working of that covenant. Likewise his Davidic, Messianic Kingship is wholly universal and there is nothing that remains unembraced by it, and the two are the one. When we have grasped that then we lift the doctrine of Christ’s High–Priesthood, out of a confined ecclesiastical understanding and see all humanity under it, as also we see the Kingship for all mankind, since all mankind is under the covenant of creation.

We might add at the last, even if briefly, that the elements of the image vocation, sabbath rest and the eschatological marriage—can be found in this Epistle, even if often innate and not formalised, but nevertheless present. Under the regime of the King–Priest they gather immense significance and importance.

We need not, then, make the application of the pastoral power of our Study. If we fail to see its universal nature, power and application, then we might retreat to a more domestic and churchly situation and blur the vast perspective in a myopic limited view and understanding of it.

# God's Covenant: Its Commencement and Culmination

## Introduction: One Covenant Only

This year we have concentrated on asking and answering the important question, 'What think you of Christ?' In pursuance of that we have looked at various of the 'offices' of Christ. In viewing his office of High Priest or King–Priest, we have been driven back to examine the principle of covenant, particularly because Christ is not a high priest of the Mosaic covenant, but of the New covenant, a better one than the Sinaitic covenant. In our previous two Studies on Covenant we covered the fact that creation is, in itself a covenant, though not in any sense a bilateral or conditional—i.e. contractual—covenant. We saw, via various references, that God did not cut a covenant with Noah but *affirmed* one that already existed. From Jeremiah 33:19–26; Isaiah 24:5 and context, and possibly Hosea 6:7 we may gather the reality of the everlasting Covenant of creation. We gathered that within this Covenant of creation are the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New covenants. Each is called 'everlasting' and it is best seen as that everlasting element which is within the over–arching covenant of creation. Within this Study we hope to show

- (i) that the New Covenant is the final covenant, and
- (ii) that this New Covenant culminates all that was—and is— inherent in the Covenant of creation.

In our last Study we went directly to the fact that the Mosaic covenant was inferior to the New covenant in that its sacrificial system could not redeem fallen man completely, especially because the blood of animals could not take away sins, and because it has a priesthood that was not eternal since priest had to succeed priest, and being Levitical was inferior to the Melchizedekian order. Christ alone was to be the true High Priest, and he alone could effect salvation which purified 'once for all' the conscience of Man. We also took into consideration the fact that the Davidic covenant had universal connotation, was one with the Mosaic covenant but extended its governance over all creation under the Messianic King and brought into view the Kingdom of God, placing it in juxtaposition with the Mosaic and New Covenants, so that Covenant and Kingdom become inextricably linked. Thus when we look to the culmination of the Covenant of creation we shall find it in the New covenant and the Kingdom of God. Jesus as the King–Priest is not limited in that office to the church, but is active and present as such to all creation.

**Note:** At this point we need to remind ourselves that the Covenant of creation relates to all humanity, embracing all men and women throughout the ages, and that although created Man—in Adam—breached that covenant, yet God has not breached it with Man, but has effected reconciliation for Man through the Cross, and demands that all shall come to him through Christ 'the mediator of a better covenant'. Thus, because of the Cross (the Atonement) all stand before God as responsible to respond to him, and refusal of that New covenant atonement is culpable, demanding eternal punishment. In one sense, refusal of the New covenant redemption is the continuance of the breaching

of the covenant of Creation.<sup>1</sup> Acceptance of it is personal affirmation of the Creator and of his Covenant of creation.

## **The Matter of Covenant, Cursings and Blessings**

If we take the covenant of Creation as the reality of creation itself, we see it contains warnings against death which would come from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and also the fact of blessing by living in the image of God in creation. To live thus is to be blessed, and the explicit blessing of God in Genesis 1:28 that went with the mandate, as also the blessing of the day of rest, show the two elements we have named. If we add to this the blessing of marriage and its vocation, then we see the threefold blessing of living out the image of God in the world into which he has placed us. The fall of Man—death to God—increasingly brought cursing, and the compounding practice of evil, of violence and corruption, in turn brought the curse of the flood. The Noahic covenant brought restoration of blessing to the earth or the affirming of the blessing of creation.

The Abrahamic covenant was also connected with the promise of blessing and the warning of cursing. This is clear in Genesis 12:1–3 and subsequent relationships of nations with Abraham and his descendants. Again, the Mosaic covenant is given with rich promises of blessings to those within Israel who adhere to it, and with dire warnings of cursings to those of Israel who do not. Nor are the nations who seek to destroy Israel exempt from the cursings. Even though God may use a nation to punish Israel, he will still require punishment of that nation. The covenant made with David promises blessing to the Davidic dynasty as it is obedient to God but chastisement where it is rebellious. Again, also, the nations which go against the Davidic covenant people will meet with judgments.<sup>2</sup>

What confronts us is the immeasurable suffering of Israel as a nation, and indeed the whole matter of universal evil, of the suffering of the human race under the judgements of God, and of the ingratitude to God for His creational blessings. Only when we face all this squarely can we develop a true theodicy. The Book of the Revelation is a clear presentation of the principle we are trying to adduce. Keeping in mind the fact that, in our last Study, we have already seen the New covenant under Christ and compared it with the former covenant under Moses, yet via the history of Israel and the other nations we will make a different approach to the subject which includes the cursings and the blessings related to the Mosaic–Davidic covenants and which can then lead us on to the nature of the New covenant as the culmination of all covenants, and, in particular the covenant of Creation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere I have pursued the idea that all humanity was present at the Cross and crucified Christ, and that, indeed, all humanity was crucified with Christ either to its redemption or its ultimate judgment. Galatians 6:14 speaks of the world as having been crucified to Christ. In 11 Corinthians 5:14 Paul claims that if 'one died for all, then did all die'. In Acts 4:23–28 the early church said that 'the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel' were gathered to crucify Christ. Certainly Christ did not die only for Israel. The question is whether the sins of all the world were not laid upon him (cf. Isa. 53:6, 12; 1 John 2:2; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18; 11 Cor. 5:21) and if so, then were not all not only crucifying him, but being crucified with him. When we consider the doctrine of Romans 5:12–21, namely that of the solidary nature of the human race we ask whether we can say that Christ was not crucified by Adam, and Adam not crucified with Christ, especially in the light of Galatians 2:20 and context.

<sup>2</sup> This subject is a vast one but we do not here purpose to verify it by appropriate references.

<sup>3</sup> We are not emphasising the fact at this point that to refuse the New covenant is the most reprehensible of all sin. The Book of the Revelation shows us the process of history in doing this, and the Book of Hebrews warns against apostasy from the covenant. Blessings and cursings are wholly linked with the New covenant, i.e. the Covenant of creation.

It also keeps before our eyes the continuing matter of God's judgments of the nations for breaching the Covenant of creation. God's creational blessings come naturally to all creation, a fact underlined by the covenant with Noah.<sup>4</sup>

## The Old Testament and the New Covenant

Leaving aside the interesting fact that the Christian canon of the bible has divided the Jewish and Christian books into 'The Old Testament' and 'The New Testament',<sup>5</sup> it seems clear enough from the prophecies of the Old Testament that a covenant was to be made with Israel which would be a distinctively new one.

That Israel needed a new covenant seemed clear since it had failed in the one made at Sinai, and the destruction of the Northern and Southern kingdoms had proved this. Following these judgments of exile, the people returning to Palestine were a small chastened group. The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah and the Minor Prophets show them to be in need of a dramatic renewal. Even the Davidic **covenant with its high promise** of a king who would rule the nations seems to have receded almost into obscurity. Towards the end it looked at though Israel might almost have abandoned its original understanding of covenant, especially the Davidic covenant and the world-wide hope of its fulfilment, and even have lost sight of its world-wide perspective.

Not so. We must not forget that God's covenant of creation was never rescinded; that his covenant with Israel was never abrogated; that his Davidic covenant was never withdrawn and that the prophets had spoken of two great principles, (i) that of the remnant, and (ii) that of the new covenant which was one day to come into being.

One important factor must be constantly taken into consideration and it is linked with the doctrine of 'the remnant'. Always, at the heart of Israel the concept of God's covenant with Abraham was indelibly branded.<sup>6</sup> Inevitably the Sinaitic covenant was ineradicable. The faithful in Israel knew God, not merely in theological or even nationalistic terms, but in intimate, personal terms. Their national sense of loss in exile was not greater than their sense of loss of the pure worship they had known in the tabernacle and the temple. Had they not known 'the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law and the promises', and had not the patriarchs belonged to them, then the promise of Messiah would have had no meaning for them. No: this remnant

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<sup>4</sup> The Covenant with Noah promised the continuity of creation to humanity and the creation itself, a fact borne out by Acts 14:15-17 and 17:24-28. As for continuing judgments, Acts 17:29-31 makes it clear that in some sense God 'overlooked' the sin of the nations, that is, He did not make an end to them as at the Flood, even though they deserved such an end. Romans 3:25 speaks of God's forbearance, that 'he had passed over former sins'. Even so, Ecclesiastes 8:11 points out that if judgment is not executed speedily against an evil deed then the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil.

<sup>5</sup> The term 'old covenant' is used only once in the New Testament (if Cor. 3:14). The idea (of 'old' by comparison is expressed in speaking of the Mosaic covenant as 'the first covenant' and 'formerly ratified'. The term 'new' used 7 times of the covenant in the NT implies that the former covenant has given way to the 'new' covenant. The term 'better' (used twice in Hebrews) implies a higher covenant order. The Hebrew berith is translated by the Greek diatheke some 30 times in the LXX, and passes into the NT in this form, although it has the technical meaning in Greek of a 'testament' such as is in, or is a will. It seems generally agreed that diatheke covers the whole idea of berith and is therefore used in reference to the former covenant and the new covenant.

<sup>6</sup> Here we do not raise the question of whether the universal covenant of creation has always been present—even if denied—in the hearts of all humanity. If it were in the hearts of Israel, then it would give us reason to think the other covenants could not be obliterated in their minds.

always persisted, in the face of what seemed horrific **judgements and the ceasing** of their national identity.

### The Principle of the Remnant

Throughout the history of Israel we read of the rise and fall of true covenantal obedience, of judgments, of national repentance and renewal of the nation. At times the renewal of Israel in the covenant seems beyond possibility.<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 1: 1–20—amongst other passages—gives us a picture of God's rejection of Israel in its state of covenant breaching. It is significant in that Israel seems to be keeping the law of God. As Stephen later insisted it was not covenant keeping.

2 Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth;  
for the LORD has spoken:  
“Sons have I reared and brought up,  
but they have rebelled against me.  
3 The ox knows its owner,  
and the ass its master's crib;  
but Israel does not know,  
my people does not understand.”  
4 Ah, sinful nation, a  
people laden with iniquity,  
offspring of evildoers,  
sons who deal corruptly!  
They have forsaken the LORD,  
they have despised the Holy One of Israel,  
they are utterly estranged.  
5 Why will you still be smitten,  
that you continue to rebel?  
The whole head is sick,  
and the whole heart faint.  
6 From the sole of the foot even **to the head**,  
there is no soundness in it,  
but bruises and sores  
and bleeding wounds;  
they are not pressed out, or bound up,  
or softened with oil.  
7 Your country lies desolate,  
your cities are burned with fire;  
in your very presence  
aliens devour your land;  
it is desolate, as overthrown by aliens.  
8 And the daughter of Zion is left  
like a booth in a vineyard, like  
a lodge in a cucumber field,  
like a besieged city.  
9 If the LORD of hosts  
had not left us a few survivors,  
we should have been like Sodom,  
and become like Gomor'rah.  
  
10 Hear the word of the LORD,

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<sup>7</sup> For example, William Dumbrell comes up with the interesting idea that Elijah looked to God to make him a 'second Moses, the founder of a new Israel' (op. cit., p. 157). Some in Israel had 'forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars; and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left' (I Kings 19:10, 14).

you rulers of Sodom!  
Give ear to the teaching of our God,  
you people of Gomor'rah!  
11 "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?  
says the LORD;  
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams  
and the fat of fed beasts;  
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,  
or of lambs, or of he-goats.  
12 "When you come to appear before me,  
who requires of you  
this trampling of my courts?  
13 Bring no more vain offerings;  
incense is an abomination to me.  
New moon and sabbath and the calling of assemblies—  
I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.  
14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts  
my soul hates;  
they have become a burden to me,  
I am weary of bearing them.  
15 When you spread forth your hands,  
I will hide my eyes from you;  
even though you make many prayers,  
I will not listen;  
your hands are full of blood.  
16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;  
remove the evil of your doings  
from before my eyes;  
cease to do evil,  
  
17 learn to do good;  
seek justice,  
correct oppression;  
defend the fatherless,  
plead for the widow.

It is true that even in this context God offers renewal of the nation, but the desire for it never went deep<sup>8</sup>. Not even the revivals of Josiah and Hezekiah were really from the grass roots. Isaiah 6 speaks of the prophet, himself transformed, preaching to his people, the result of which was to be a hardening of hearts already stubborn, but the doctrine of the 'holy remnant' or 'holy seed' appears in verse 13b, 'The holy seed<sup>9</sup> is its stump'. The principle is developed in 11: 1ff.—a great Messianic and eschatological passage. In Jeremiah 23:5–6 the concept of the remnant is linked with the fulfilment of the Davidic covenant.

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 26 In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

Here 'righteous Branch' can be translated 'righteous Shoot' as in Isaiah 11: 1. Jeremiah 3:14–26 strongly develops this, reiterating all aspects of the Davidic covenant as

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Kings 8 gives the whole story or thesis of God's dealings with Israel, their sin, his judgments and their renewal when they repent. The temple is the assurance of God's dwelling in their midst, and it is this Presence with which they must take account. It is a judging as well as a redemptive Presence.

<sup>9</sup> See also Isaiah 41:8; 43:5; 45:25; 53:10; 59:21; 65:9, 23; 66:22.

irreversible. Our main point is that in accordance with I Kings chapter 8 and 11 Samuel 7:14f. the promises of God's covenants with Israel are not abandoned. It is interesting that in this same prophet the new covenant is prophesied.

### **The Prophetic Principle of the New Covenant**

We have noted that the Minor Prophets have certainly not abandoned the idea of God's covenant with Israel. Hosea, in particular, denotes it under the relationship of God as husband to Israel, a theme which Jeremiah mentions in his classic prophecy of the new covenant in 31:31–34.

#### ***(a) Jeremiah and the New Covenant***

Jeremiah in chapter 23:5–6 certainly reinforces the promise of God to David regarding the Messianic king of 11 Samuel 7:14ff.—the Davidic covenant and dynasty which seems, by Jeremiah's time to have almost been lost in the welter of judgments that come with Israel's breaching of the Sinaitic covenant.

5 Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land, 6 In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

This promise is reinforced and elaborated in Jeremiah 33:14–26 so that the Davidic covenant is certainly not abrogated, but its link is surely with chapter 31 where, in the first few verses, God shows his 'everlasting love'.

I At that time, says the LORD, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.  
2 Thus says the LORD:  
"The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness;  
when Israel sought for rest,  
3 the LORD appeared to him from afar.  
I have loved you with an everlasting love;  
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.  
4 Again I will build you, and you shall be built,  
O virgin Israel!  
Again you shall adorn yourself with timbrels,  
and shall go forth in the dance of the merrymakers.

Then in verses 31–34 the full promise of the new covenant is given:

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. 33 But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD, for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

The elements of this new covenant are clear enough:

- (i) It is a covenant other than the Sinaitic one.

- (ii) It is to be with all Israel—i.e. Ephraim and Judah.
- (iii) The Sinaitic covenant was broken even though God was intimately husband<sup>10</sup> to Israel the wife.
- (iv) God will plant his law in the hearts of his people.
- (v) God will be their covenant God and they shall be his covenant people.
- (vi) They will all know God and not need to teach one another such knowledge.
- (vii) Their knowledge will arise out of the fact of his forgiving all their sins and refusing to remember their iniquities.

If we think of this as a literal, historical promise of fulfilment to the people of the Northern and Southern kingdoms, the entire people of Israel, then it is indeed astonishing,<sup>11</sup> and we would be locked into this as exclusive to literal Israel but for Jesus' utterance of Matthew 26:28, and the other uses of this passage in the New Testament.

### **(b) Ezekiel and the New Covenant**

Ezekiel is also concerned with the new covenant much along the same lines, although at first sight this may not appear to be so. The prophecies regarding God's judgments on Israel for idolatry and immorality are clear. In chapter 33 Abraham is referred to as having been given the land in covenant, but—contrary to Abraham's obedience and faith—Israel has apostatised. Even so, in chapter 34 God speaks of himself as the Shepherd of his sheep, gathering them together so that (vv. 22–24) Israel will be restored and governed under the Davidic dynasty.

22 I will save my flock, they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. 23 And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24 And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

Chapter 36 speaks clearly of God's punishment of Israel for profaning his name in the eyes of the nations, but to sanctify his name he will restore Israel to the land, and the land to Israel. Thus comes the parallel to Jeremiah 31:31–34 in verses 22–38, of which we quote only verses 24–28.

24 For I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. 25 I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. 28 You shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

The purging of Israel from its impurity and idolatry, the giving to it of a new heart and the placing a new Spirit within it, are all promises which correspond to Jeremiah's language regarding God's renewal of Israel in covenant. Likewise in chapter 37 there is

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<sup>10</sup> It has been pointed out that the word 'husband' here can also be translated 'master' but the emphasis seems to be on the idea of husband

<sup>11</sup> See also Jeremiah 32:27-41 for an historical promise to Israel of return to the land and the everlasting covenant relating to the land.

the first section of verses 1–14 where Israel is resurrected from its state of dry death that has come from breaching the covenant. In the second section of verses 15–28 the two kingdoms are again united into the one people and David is to be shepherd over all Israel—the Davidic covenant in fulfilment. This covenant will be a ‘covenant of peace’ and ‘an everlasting covenant’.<sup>12</sup>

A few passages in Isaiah give us the general idea that literal Israel, whilst not being excluded, does not exclusively cover the wide panorama of the covenantal prophecies. In Isaiah 24 we have—so to speak—the original creation and its covenant conflated with Israel’s, that is, God’s covenant with it. In Isaiah 25:6–9 we have the telos which covers the nations as well as Israel,

6 On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. 27 And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. 28 He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken.

9 It will be said on that day, ‘Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.’

Verse 28 is virtually quoted in Revelation 21:3–4. Isaiah 2:1–4 is also eschatological of Israel and the nations,

The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

2:2 It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it,

2:3 and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

2:4 He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Yet again, Isaiah 55 is the great passage which speaks of the revival of Israel, and promises, ‘I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. Behold I will make of him a witness to the peoples, a leader and a commander for the peoples.’ This, coming on the heels of chapter 54 where God is husband to Israel and has punished her by what almost seems a divorce, but has, ‘everlasting love’ and ‘compassion’ for her and promises, ‘For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and *my covenant of peace* shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on

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<sup>12</sup> The later section of Isaiah—chapters 40–66—contain valuable material which is related to the New covenant. However the matter is too complex and diverse for us to deal with in this paper. An excellent treatment is given by Dumbrell in his *Covenant and Creation*, pages 190–198, and should be studied.

you', encourages us to think of the eschatological denouement of this divine marriage especially as it is linked with Christ and his covenantal Bride, if we may use that term.

### **The New Covenant in the New Testament**

If we ask, 'Does the promise of the New covenant relate simply and only to Israel?', then there can be no satisfactory answer to this question until we come to the New Testament and consider its teaching. For example, Paul in Romans 4:13 speaks of Abraham inheriting the earth and obviously includes the church, the people of God initiated at Pentecost, as being participators in the Abrahamic covenant. This is borne out in his treatment of the people of faith being the sons of Abraham in Galatians chapter three. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus speaks of the meek inheriting the earth, and this must have some reference to the people of Abraham and whilst it was spoken to a Jewish audience yet John the Baptist, Jesus and Paul all make the point that being children of Abraham by blood descent does not necessarily constitute being children of Abraham or of God. In Romans chapters 9–11 Paul opens the whole question of Israel and God's promises to it, whilst the writers of Hebrews and the Revelation so broaden the horizons of ultimate inheritance that certainly Palestine as such cannot contain them. At this point we note what we have observed in our study of the Davidic covenant, namely that it is a covenant which ultimately proves, also, to be universal and everlasting.

At the last supper Jesus is reported in Luke 22:20 as saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood,' and Paul records it as, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood', but the use of the term 'new covenant' is limited in the New Testament. In 11 Corinthians 3:6 Paul says that God 'has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant', and contrasts it with 'the old covenant'. It is, however, the writer of Hebrews who makes it clear that the old—the 'first'—covenant has been rendered obsolete, and that the New covenant not only supersedes it in Israel, but has universal connotation. The entire Epistle is given over to this matter, and the two quotings of Jeremiah 31:31–34 in 8:8–12 and 10: 16–17 verify the fact that not only does the covenant bring total forgiveness of sins to Israel, but to all humankind. The statement, 'For I will be merciful towards their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more must bring into view God's forgiveness for the breaching of the Covenant of creation. This grace, then, is seen to be of incredible proportions. The New covenant brings humanity into the fullness of that Covenant of creation.<sup>13</sup>

### **The New Covenant Brings the Culmination of the Covenant of Creation**

We have seen previously that Man being in the image of God has the outworking of that dynamic image in three ways. The first is in the active fulfilling of the creation mandate of Genesis 1: 18f., as though Man is the covenant partner of God in God's plan for creation. The second is the partaking of the seventh day rest of God, the sabbath day constituting the era that is capped by the eternal Sabbath rest in the sanctuary of God. The third is the living out of the marriage relationship which is not

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<sup>13</sup> Note that our previous two Studies have dealt with Christ as the Priest-King and have covered the redemption wrought by him in the New covenant, and have indicated that his Messianic, Davidic Kingship should not be seen apart from his being Priest-King.

simply ontological (creational) for the man and the woman, but is protological of the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. We find in the Old Testament that God is Husband to his wife, Israel, so that in that sense the human marriage is always typical, as also protological, of God and his people. If we find some difficulty in having—it would seem—two brides/wives—Israel and the Church— and two Husbands—Yahweh and Christ—then Bromiley's comment on the matter may be helpful.

In creating man—male and female—in his own image, and joining them together, so that they become one flesh, God makes us copies of himself in his trinitarian unity and distinction as one God and three persons and of himself in relation to the people of his gracious election. Analogically, what is between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and what ought to be and is and shall be between God and Israel and Christ and the church is what also is meant to be in the relation of man and woman and more specifically of husband and wife. Neither the intratrinitarian relationship nor the union between the heavenly bridegroom and the bride is a good copy of a bad original. Earthly marriage is now lived out as a bad copy of a good original. ... It is simpler, however, because God himself took the initiative at the level of both original and copy. At the level of the original the deserted husband went to look for the erring bride and brought her back. He did this by offering himself in the person of the divine Son, as the price of redemption.

The last sentence of this quote serves to let us see that Christ was always the intended Husband, 'He [the Father] did this by offering himself in the person of the divine Son, as the price of redemption'.

## **Revelation Chapters 18–21 and the Culmination of the Covenant of Creation**

In these chapters we are certainly in 'the end things' or, better still, the end actions of the Triune God, for eschatology is never a set of 'end events' but the concluding actions of the Triune God. These can be summed up as

### **The Conclusion of the Cursings and the Judgements**

- (i) Babylon, the false counterpart of the pure Bride whose liaison has been with the beast and the ten kings of the earth is destroyed, and so evil is erased,
- (ii) The beast, the false prophet and the devil are defeated and are thrown into the lake of fire. All evil is finally undone and its power ended. This is accomplished by the one who sits on the white horse, Christ, and from his mouth goes the word (the sword) by which the nations are cast down.

### **The Consummation of the Blessings**

- (i) Preparations are made for the marriage feast of the Bride and the Lamb.
- (ii) God's renewing action of creation takes place in the heaven and the earth.
- (iii) The holy city, prepared as a bride for her husband descends from heaven, and is shown as having the glory of God, no distinction being made between the Bride and the holy city.
- (iv) The city is shown as having no temple as such, but 'Its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb, and this city is open day and night for the pure nations to bring their glory and honour into it.

- (v) The city is shown to be the throne place of God and the Lamb, and from that throne derives the river of the water of life, and the tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.
- (vi) In this city the servants of God shall worship God and his name shall be on their foreheads, and they shall see his face and reign for ever and ever.

### **Conclusion: The Covenant of Creation is Completed in the Consummating Actions of the New Covenant**

Our Study cannot fully develop what we began in these last two Studies, but what is evident is as follows:

- (1) The outworking in history of the image of God in the Covenant of creation has been effected. The mandate which is God's plan for creation and into which Man was drawn as his covenant partner, is brought to the pitch of his being the overcomer and inheritor of all things. That is, the mandate climaxes in the telos, but then leads on to Man constituting a 'kingdom of priests' and reigning for ever on the earth. Whilst he receives 'The well done thou good and faithful servant', it is at the same time, 'Now, in Christ your Priest-King take your power and reign over all creation, for that is the mandate I originally gave you', In other words the mandate has been fulfilled and leads on to what we might term 'the eternal mandate'.
- (ii) Man has entered into his eternal rest, the very rest of the nature of God, that rest which is innate to the Triune Godhead, but is the essence of created Man as dependent upon the God of all peace. We have seen that such rest is always related to intimacy with God in creational union—communion and finds its expression in the life of worship. In particular it is always known in the sanctuary. In the culmination the sanctuary is God himself and the Lamb who are the temple, yet the temple is never apart from the holy city, and the holy city is the people of God, which through covenant has always been the holy temple, the holy priesthood and exercised the holy vocation.
- (iii) The marriage of the Bride and the Lamb culminates all marriage throughout all time. Man as the Bride—wife of God is ultimately taken into the Godhead through the Son who has become man in order to wed himself to the bride. <sup>14</sup> Thus the marriage supper of the Bride and the Lamb has been the holy intention of God from the beginning. Human marriage which was at once ontological, typological, protological and so eschatological is the situation into which humankind comes at the end. All eternity is the bliss and fruitfulness of the holy Couple, the induction of humanity into the inner fellowship of the Triune family. In this way the Father's plan for his Son, his 'daughter-in-law' and his eternal family, comes to its fulfilment.

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<sup>14</sup> For a fuller treatment of the Divine-human marriage, and the human marriage see my book *The Profound Mystery* (NCPI, 1995).