



New Creation Teaching Ministry

2002 Monthly Ministry STUDY GROUP NOTES

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The Church Loving His Appearing

THE FACT OF THE LORD'S COMING APPEARANCE

We need to see the *fact* of Christ's coming appearance on what is known as 'the Day of the Lord' for this prophesied reality greatly affects the church, as we saw in our last Study, 'Being the Eschatological Church' (3 December 2001). We will have occasion to see how this will happen and what it will entail but here we will look at the fact as it is set out in the New Testament. In John chapter 14 Jesus was speaking with his disciples, telling them that he was about to go to the Father, and undoubtedly they were dismayed. He comforted them with these words, 'And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also'. Later, these words must have again been a comfort to them. They would be taken to Christ's Father's house. Since 'faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen', they must have had a quiet confidence that Christ would return. This would have kept them going faithfully in ministry. This message was undoubtedly passed on to all whom they taught. Its reality was more than a comfort; it was also a power to keep them in action in the plan of the Father.

Behind it was a wider teaching of the Day of the Lord as we have it set out in both Old and New Testaments and the Coming or Return of Christ as Christ taught it to his disciples. It is evident that the early church was anticipating the return of Christ to the earth, a matter which will be discussed later. Here it is sufficient to show that it was part of the gospel taught by the apostles. One Thessalonians 1:9–10 has:

For they themselves report concerning us what a welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

'Wait[ing] for his Son from heaven' was as much part of the gospel as was the saving offered.

The apostles derived their assurance that there would be the return of Christ from the references Christ made to that day, especially in the Olivet discourse in Matthew chapters 24 and 25. In fact they asked about the destruction of the temple buildings which he had predicted, 'Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?' They must have believed much of what he had told them concerning the end-time and in particular his return.

THE DAY OF THE LORD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

This is a teaching which embraces three thoughts: (i) a day of judgment and destruction for Israel in general and Jerusalem in particular; (ii) the day of blessing, of the restoration of Israel in God's blessing; and (iii) the end of the age—the eschatological *telos*. In a distributive sense certain nations have their 'day' or 'time' in which retribution will come to them for the way they have treated Israel and worked out their destiny. So the nations as follows: Babylon (Isa. 13:1, 6, 9, 13); Edom (Isa. 34:8f.); Egypt (Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 30:3ff.); the Philistines (Jer. 47:4). Obadiah says that 'the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations', whilst Zechariah gives a fearful presentation of the desolation of Jerusalem on that day.

Isaiah 11:10–11 says:

In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious. In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant which is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Ethiopia, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.

Isaiah 61:2 speaks of ‘the year of the LORD’s favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn’. Malachi 3:1 and 4:1f. speak of both judgment to the sinful and joy to God’s true people. Isaiah 2:2–4 (cf. Mic. 4:1–3) speak of the ‘latter days’ and the peace and prosperity which will ensue.

Joel’s view of ‘the last days’—not ‘the last day’—is seen in Peter’s interpretation of Joel 2:28–32 in Acts 2:17–21 which seems to interpret Pentecost as fulfilling the first part of God’s visitation and what follows as leading up to ‘the great and terrible day of the LORD’ of Joel 2:31. In Jeremiah the term ‘day of the Lord’ is not used but phrases like ‘those days’ and ‘the days are coming’ (3:16ff.; 4:9; 50:4). Daniel, too, does not use the term, ‘Day of the Lord’ but it is implied in 12:1–4 in which the Prophet says:

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

We can sum up the ‘Day of the Lord’ in the Old Testament as being both a day of judgment and a day of blessing: judgment for those who have not obeyed God, and blessing for those who know His salvation. Sometimes a period is shown rather than just one day, but all references point to a climax of that period. The faithful remnant in Israel could look forward to that day, albeit judgment would attend it.

THE DAY OF THE LORD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The term, as such, appears often in Matthew chapters 24 and 25, and also in Mark chapter 13. In the Epistles we find mentions in 1 Corinthians 1:8 (‘the day of our Lord Jesus Christ’); 5:5 (‘the day of the Lord Jesus’); Philippians 1:6 (‘the day of Jesus Christ’); 1:10 (‘the day of Christ’); 2:16 (‘the day of Christ’); 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2–3; 2 Peter 3:10, 12 (‘the day of God’). The Book of the Revelation has two direct mentions—6:17 (‘the great day of their wrath’); and 16:14 (‘the great day of God the Almighty’). If we look at the contexts of all these references we learn much about ‘that day’, ‘the day of the Lord’. Again, it is very much like the teaching of the Old Testament on the theme: i.e. a day of judgment and of terror for sinners and nations who have gone against God; and of joy, peace and eternal liberation and life for those who have loved God.

A general summing up of the term ‘the day of the Lord’ would call us to see its vast importance throughout the whole Bible. It teaches that what nations and persons do that is wrong and evil will be met with a final, conclusive retribution in a ‘resurrection of judgment’ (John 5:29). At the same time it shows that there will be a ‘resurrection of life’ (John 5:29) and that the judgment will be wrought upon all godless people and evil powers which oppose God. Finally, it shows that the times and their systems which have existed throughout creation’s history will have come to their consummation and close in Christ, the Kingdom of God will be wholly fulfilled, and the people of God will reign on the earth.

As we have seen, the age in which we now live is called, variously, the *eschaton* (last or final age), ‘this age’, and ‘this present evil age’. That part of it which has gathered around Satan and his evil principalities and powers is really ‘this present evil age’ (Gal. 1:4; cf. John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 1 Cor. 1:20–21; 3:19; Gal. 6:16; 1 John 2:15–17; etc.), but it is not God’s created world. God’s created world is not in Satan’s grip for He is the Creator of all things, and no creature such as Satan can take it over. For example, when Ephesians 2:1–2 says:

And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience,

then the *course* of this world—i.e. *aeon*—is speaking of a system or an anti-system, and not of the world which God has made with the aid of the Word and the Holy Spirit, for that Satan could never have made. It is an evil system Satan has devised within the grand *kosmos* which God created. John observed, ‘and the world is passing away’ since Satan has no ability to uphold or sustain it. On the other hand Christ the Son upholds the created world by his powerful word (Heb. 1:3).

SOME TERMS RELATING TO HIS APPEARING

It is essential that we understand the terms relating to Christ’s return. One of the most used terms is ‘his coming’ which is in Greek, *parousia*. It is also used in Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8, 9; James 5:7, 8; 2 Peter 1:16; 3:4, 12; 1 John 2:28. Another term used is ‘his appearing’ (*epiphaneia*) in 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 1:10; 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13. The word *apocalypsis* is also used as ‘appearing’ or ‘unveiling’ but only in 1 Peter 1:7. It is a very rewarding exercise to seek these out in their contexts and to ponder them. We will do this in a limited way but first let us look at the general idea as it was in the minds of the apostles and their brethren.

CHRIST’S PAROUSIA, EPIPHANEIA OR APOCALYPSIS: HOW THE APOSTLES UNDERSTOOD HIS COMING

When in John 14:1–4 we read Jesus’ words:

Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way where I am going,

then it is clear that Jesus was saying that he was going and that he would return. He would be absent from them but in his absence would be preparing a place for them where the Father is. In John 13:1 it is written, ‘Jesus knew his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father’. Later in John 14:18–23 Jesus refers first to his resurrection when he will come to them again, and then to his presence with them although he will be bodily absent from them. In some way both he and the Father will live with the apostles. This is much the same as in Matthew 28:20, ‘I am with you always, even to the close of the age’.

As we pointed out before, in Matthew 24:3 they had asked him what would be the time of his coming. Even so, the passage of Acts 1:1–11 gives sense to his ascension when the two men in white say to the apostles, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’ This means that as the clouds of glory have taken him and concealed him from their sight, so Christ will come on the clouds of heaven. This would be in conformity with Matthew 24:30, ‘then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory’. Also, in Matthew 26:64, Jesus replied to the high priest, ‘You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.’

The high priest understood what Jesus was saying which went something like this, ‘You are asking me whether I am the Son of God, and that may well be the case, but I am

presenting to you the picture, primarily, of the Son of Man, for you know what is written in Daniel 7, verses 13 and 14. The one in that prophecy shall rule all nations and the one who rules all nations in Psalm 2 verses 5–9 is the Son of God. So, whether I am called Son of God or Son of Man, I am to rule all nations, I whom you are now impeaching.’ Daniel 7:13–14 says:

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

The apostles knew Jesus as the Son of God and the Son of Man, and these verses in Daniel 7 and Psalm 2 would be in their minds regarding Christ’s return to earth. This return was often depicted in powerful terms. It would be a day when everything would be consummated and all of history as it has been since Creation would be brought to a close. So in many ways the followers of Christ looked for that day. Christ had told the disciples that when things looked their worst he would appear:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matt. 24:29–31).

An element of Zechariah 12:10 is contained in Christ’s words, ‘all the tribes of the earth shall mourn’, and is also contained in Revelation 1:7, ‘Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.’ His coming, then, will be to gather and take back his elect, as also to climax history by means of judgment. For this reason we can be certain that the return of Christ could happen at any moment. They had been told that he would come as a thief in the night, i.e. unannounced. They had been told parables on this score, and were aware that their job was to proclaim the gospel, proclaim the Kingdom of God into which they had been transferred from the powers of darkness, and to live as Christ’s people, and they anticipated his return. Of course, in detail, there was much more than this to it, but the matter of his return would have been of great comfort. Of course, not only was his coming to be with great power, but also the outcome of it was to be his evident reigning over all creation. This is stated clearly in Ephesians 1:19–23 and then in Matthew 19:27–29, partly a parallel passage as we may see:

... and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all.

Then Peter said in reply, ‘Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.’

Briefly, then, we can see the apostolic understanding was that Christ would return when conditions on earth were very bad, and he would gather his saints to himself, judge the world, Satan and all evil powers and would reign with his people. There is, of course, much more to

his return, and these elements we will be later considering under the practical meaning of his appearing, and why we ought to love it.

THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA A GOOD EXAMPLE OF *PAROUSIA* ANTICIPATION

Because we are not trying to shape the *parousia* into an ideology, we need to look at its actions in history, and the significance of it to the apostolic church. The church at Thessalonica is a living example of what we are talking about and we will take them as an example of how a church should be, especially if we include the matter of Christ's return. It is interesting that Paul gives special teaching of the *parousia* in his two letters. We need to read the whole of chapter 1 in his first letter to see this. Although there had been 'much tribulation' as a result of the apostles' preaching the gospel, yet the Thessalonians had believed, and they were now an example in their region and even beyond. Verses 8 to 10 of the first chapter indicate their way of living:

For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us what a welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Notice the order: (i) you turned to God; (ii) from idols; (iii) to serve the living God; and (iv) to wait for His Son from heaven. We can note in passing that idols have no eschatology. They offer no hope for they offer no promises regarding the future. We can say that the Thessalonians lived as the eschatological church, always giving out the gospel and always aware of the return of God's Son from heaven. The theme is stressed in Paul's two letters. They lived under the pressure of a determined opposition, as determined as it had been among the Jews as they confronted the churches in Judea. Paul points to the fact that God's wrath has come upon their oppressors (1 Thess. 2:14–16). He prays for them that they be kept 'sound and blameless at the coming [*parousia*] of our Lord Jesus Christ'. In his second letter—as in his first—he opens with commendation to them for their faith, hope and love, which are always the elements of true eschatological living. He likewise reveals the judgment upon those who do not obey the gospel, which will attend Christ's appearing.

In chapter 2 of 2 Thessalonians Paul develops the action of 'the man of lawlessness, the son of perdition' and says, 'And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming'. We will have cause to return to the second letter, but from these passages mentioned we gather the conflict was fierce and this would add to their desire for the return of the Lord.

Peter is also eschatological in his writings. In his first letter (1:7–8) he shows the passion the believer has for Christ:

... so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy.

'Without having seen him you love him' speaks of an intense love. It also suggests that his readers will love Christ at even greater intensity when they see him at the *apocalypsis*, i.e. the revealing of him at his coming. Of course none of this will appear of any special quality if we are removed from the pressure of persecution, the conflict in proclamation, and the yearning for the very sight of the Lord of the church.

In his second letter Peter has much to say regarding the end of the age and the Day of the Lord. For Peter this is the grand climax of history, the conclusion of all history:

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:8–13).

John in his letters is about alerting his ‘little children’ in regard to the matter that these are the last times. He points out that many antichrists are coming. By this, he tells, you know that it is the last hour. He tells them not to believe every spirit, but to try such, ‘because many false prophets have gone out into the world’. All of this makes material for our conclusion to this Study. John’s mind is set on what we will be like when we will see the Lord; ‘we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is’.

TEACHING LINKED WITH HIS APPEARING

It has long been said that Christ’s appearing is a theme with strong ethical connotations, the idea being that because he is coming we heed his warnings, tidy ourselves up and seek to be found busy at his coming. This would seem to be the case, but is it about this that we have exhortations? Undoubtedly if exhortations are taken this way it may help to motivate folk to proper living. For a moment let us look at some teaching and some exhortation to active living and see how they are linked with his appearing since all these things will come to us when he appears:

- (a) The Gift of Immortality/Eternal Life. The following references are most powerful in assuring us that although ‘God alone has immortality’ yet He gives us immortality which is, in fact, eternal life. Time and again Jesus, in John’s Gospel, says that to believe is to receive everlasting or eternal life—John 3:14–16; 4:14; 5:24; etc. Verses which speak of either immortality or eternal life are 2 Timothy 1:10; 1 Corinthians 15:51–57; Revelation 21:1–4; cf. 2 Corinthians 4:18 – 5:9; Philippians 3:21.
- (b) We Will Receive a Crown of Righteousness and Rewards. For ‘righteousness’ see Romans 5:15–17; 2 Corinthians 5:21. For ‘rewards’ see 2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Corinthians 9:25; 2 John 1:8; Matthew 25:31ff.
- (c) We Will See Him, i.e. ‘who my soul loves’ (cf. 1 Peter 1:7–8); Revelation 22:4; 1 John 3:1–3; cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Corinthians 16:22; Ephesians 6:24.
- (d) The Whole Community, Past, Present, and Future Will Meet Together. One Thessalonians 4:13–18; Revelation 7:9–14. This will be the whole love-community perfected together as in Hebrews 11:13, 39.
- (e) The Battle Will Have Been Concluded. Ephesians 6:12f.; 2 Corinthians 10:1–5; Revelation 19:15ff. He will come to us having defeated all enemies. The last enemy is death. See 1 Corinthians 15:24–28, 55–57.
- (f) We Will Have Been Delivered from the Wrath to Come. One Thessalonians 1:9–10; cf.

2 Thessalonians 1:5–10; Revelation 15:1. The saints are already justified, see Romans 5:1, 9.

- (g) We Will Inhabit the Holy City/Paradise and the Temple of God. Revelation chapters 21 and 22; Hebrews 11:9–10. For details see the promises at the end of the seven letters in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. They are all to do with Paradise/Holy City.
- (h) We Will Know Even As We Are Known. 1 Corinthians 13:8–13.
- (i) We Will Be Kings and Priests unto Our God, and Reign Forever with Him. Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6; cf. 1 Peter 2:4–10.
- (j) We Shall Be Like Him. This is inferred in many of the references already given. It is clear that this will be the case from 1 John 3:1–3 but Romans 8:28–30 speaks strongly of the matter. Two Corinthians 3:18 (cf. Heb. 12:2) shows that this process of being conformed to his image is proceeding now.

MOTIVATION OF HIS APPEARING FOR OUR PRESENT LIFE UNTIL THE *TELOS*

I will set out the following principles which would seem to be motivation for present obedience in the light of his coming. What we will see is that we are urged to certain courses of action, and it seems this is a form of motivation. The elements outlined above may seem to be motivation enough on their own, but we add the following:

- (a) We Are to Be Alert and Watching. We pick this up in the parables of Jesus, parables of the Kingdom which speak of his coming. Prominent is the parable of the wise and foolish virgins.
- (b) The Present Joy of Serving the King. The reward will be, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter into the joy of your Lord’. The parable of the talents is apposite, and so is that of the sheep and the goats.
- (c) We Are to Persist in Being Faithful, Then He Will Give Us a Crown of Life. This pertains to so many Scriptures but Revelation 2:10 is clear enough. Hebrews 11 is a grand chapter to see that those who ‘endured, as seeing him who is invisible’ and seeing ‘the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God’.
- (d) The Joy of Being Light-bearers. Romans 13:11–14; Ephesians 5:14; Philippians 2:14–17; Matthew 5:14–16.

Now it would seem that the appearing of Christ is the grand motivation for the work we do as set out in these last two sections. In fact this is not quite the case; indeed it is not the case at all. In order to be able to come to a conclusion we will need to speak of the matter of the whole work of the Son of God which, of course, includes his going and his coming again.

THE WHOLE MATTER OF THE TIMES AND SEASONS, THE HOURS, AND THE DAY OF HIS APPEARING

It is natural enough that we would look to Christ’s coming, knowing that by it God will have fulfilled His plan which He had from before time, namely to create the entire universe, set in

place operations which would redeem Man in spite of the Fall and bring the whole creation—including His elect—to full sanctification, full glorification and full perfection. This would have to be a work of the Trinity—of Father, Son and Holy Spirit working wholly together. The consummation of this would entail His working to sum up or head up, i.e. summate *all things* in Christ. He would have to fill up *all things* which had become ‘empty’ by reason of the fall of Man. He would have to reconcile *all things*. In order to complete His plan all that happens in history has to be under His hand, no matter how much it may appear to be to the contrary.

This, then, means that history is a planned, determined operation in which there are no hiccups and hiatuses. To us with our views of how we would handle things, it may appear to be a long, drawn-out and tedious action. Some could understand God making numerous attempts, and when they failed devising other action. Those who follow dispensational theology generally see it this way. God’s sovereign planning of the destiny of all things means that nothing that is or happens in history is wasted. It is just that we cannot follow it all because of our human limits. The Scriptures make it plain that God plans things before their time, even tells of what will happen, and then it happens. He rarely tells us *when* they will happen. If we accept this principle then history is more easily comprehended. In the Olivet discourse in Matthew chapters 24 and 25 it is interesting to see that the disciples asked Jesus, ‘When will these things happen?’ His reply was partly that they could not know the hour of his coming but when they would see such-and-such things happen then such-and-such would follow. It is fascinating to mark the ‘whens’ and the ‘thens’. Partial time-marking takes place.

Ecclesiastes 3:1–11 is an interesting passage. The first nine verses tell us that ‘For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven’. A season is a prolonged matter, and a time is something which happens perhaps within that season, but is a single event which happens. In verse 11 it says of God, ‘He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man’s mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end’. The word ‘beautiful’ has the idea of ‘functional’, and the word ‘eternity’ is often translated ‘world’ or ‘universe’. It really means God has made everything ‘good’, nothing not good or wrong (Gen. 1:31). It means Man is made to be occupied with things of a great, even eternal, dimension. The three dimensions and the five senses cannot satisfy human beings. They want to know about everything but what they cannot know is ‘what God has done from the beginning to the end’. They would need the mind of God to be able to comprehend this. But for the prophets they would know considerably less than they do.

This is Man’s problem, i.e. time and what happens in it and when and why. As we have suggested, the Scriptures give him plenty of help, but if he has a power motive in mind then they will close on him. Revelation can only be received with humility and gratitude.

It is interesting to note that in matters eschatological Jesus says, ‘But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only . . . Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect’ (Matt. 24:36–44). It is much the same answer to his disciples in Acts 1:7, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority’, but in this case Jesus is telling them to get on with the work in which the Holy Spirit shall empower them. This may mean we are being guided in not knowing times or seasons. It must surely mean that the times and seasons are not for our contemplation, but we are to see what happens *in* them and *by* them.

We now come to the significant point that there is never a hiatus in the times and seasons although it may appear that there are these. Very helpful is the teaching that there are times and seasons, and linked with them special ‘hours’ and ‘days’ including the Day of the Lord,¹ and,

¹ Some readers of this paper may have difficulty with the Study because they have a prophetic or eschatological system. It would be one with its ‘times and seasons’ more or less fixed and in linear fashion. For example in Matthew 24 some see two ‘days’ of the Son of Man, one connected with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 under Titus and another at the end time. This could well be both threads making up the one ‘Son of Man’ action. Again there is the problem of where to place the millennium of Revelation chapter 20. Where does one place it? The attempts to do so may be commendable but is this the way to treat prophecy?

as we have seen, various days such as ‘the day of Babylon’, ‘the day of Edom’—and so on. Just as there are times and seasons for all humans so there are for nations. Having said all this we still need to see that what has happened in history has been one, uninterrupted, steady flow of God’s action, and no section of it has been by error, nor have all the sections, phases, times or series been without the purpose of being and fulfilling His plan. This means God would not proceed, say in the patriarchal period, to initiate the incarnation of His Son, or set forth his death, resurrection and ascension. However we may explain history it has to be seen as purposive at every step. All things develop from point to point. We are now in a position to look back through the biblical account, and to look forward through the promises and the prophecies, and see the whole story. We give this explanation because it helps us to understand our Lord’s ‘coming’, i.e. incarnation, and his ‘going’, i.e. ascension, as also his present presence, i.e. presence to faith by means of the Holy Spirit, even to his presence in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, or ‘when two or three are gathered together in my name’.

Put in a slightly different way, it was indispensable that Christ become incarnate, live his life here until all was fulfilled and then go, so that in his bodily absence from the affairs of his church he would fulfil his ministry until he returned to earth to still more fulfil the Father’s plan. Then, with his people, he would close off this present age, and commence the ‘age to come’ or ‘the ages to come’.

CHRIST AND THE PRESENT AGE OF HIS BODILY ABSENCE

We now make the important point by reiterating the principle. It is this: Christ as the Word and the Son of God was present in creation, in the antediluvian days, the postdiluvian days, the patriarchal times, in Israel and its history, and was incarnated, lived, ministered, died, rose, ascended and began the work of his ‘absence’. This ‘absence’ work being done, he can now—and must now—return to effect the climax of all history. If we ask what is this work being done in his bodily absence then the answer is given completely in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28:

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 [or, ‘all in all’].

What, then, is now before our eyes is what Christ is doing in this present age, unseen to human sight and reasoning, but ever present to faith. It is that he is working out the victory of the salvation he has wrought through his death and resurrection. This means that his incarnation was ‘in the fullness of time’, i.e. ‘on time’. His ascension was no less ‘on time’, and his coming will be no less ‘on time’. All of this means that each age or stage in history is of importance. When we look at the Corinthian quote above, we see that Christ is tying off the power of evil to the point of judgment, and that he is working with his church to accomplish the fulfilment of salvation. *The church is working with him and he with it, in this time of so-called ‘absence’.* Unless he is there—on the throne—then he cannot be with us here, until ‘the close [consummation] of the age’ (Matt. 28:20).

The Book of the Revelation is really the handbook for this present age. It introduces Christ as ‘King of kings, and Lord of lords’ in the first chapter, shows he has power over death and hell, declares that the seven (seven-fold, i.e. complete) churches are in his hand and, as the

The point is not so much when and in what order will these things happen as our regarding of them and our participation in them is concerned.

book which is a prophecy proceeds, so we see him as the Lamb who as it were had been slain. This Lamb is given the seven-sealed book. The seven seals are broken, one by one, and the last action introduces the seven trumpets, which, in turn, introduce the seven bowls of wrath. So the whole action of this age is revealed, that we may know it and work accordingly with the Lamb. At the close of the book those things are described which partly belong to the sealing of this age, and the initiation of the 'age to come'. On the one hand these are the judgments and destruction of all evil, and the climax of the wedding feast of the Bride and the Lamb and the entry into the Holy City of the people of God, now citizens of eternity, of paradise, and worshippers in the Temple which is, itself, God and the Lamb.

CONCLUSION: THOSE WHO LOVE HIS APPEARING, AND THOSE WHO DO NOT

We are now in a position to understand what it means to love his appearing. For example, take the section above headed 'Teaching Linked with His Appearing' and the ten points of that section. If we take each one particularly, the ten could be summed up as some kind of exhortation to live properly because he is coming. Some could be seen as stimulating us to 'hold on' for the end is near, or to 'freshen up' because he will soon be here. Whilst these ideas may not be bad and may even be good, yet that is not the thrust of them. The thrust of them is this, 'Christ is absent from us in body but not absent from us in fact. He is now working with his church and we are working with him. He has been fulfilling the plan of the Father, and we have been sharing with him in this. The work he is doing, unseen to us, is in its final stages of completion, and at any moment will be complete. This being the case, the next phase of his work, and ours, will be his coming. His coming will complete the work we have been called on to do in this world, and so we will then see him by sight, be with him, and go on working in the next phase of God's plan, what we call the eschatological climax or the *telos*, the goal fulfilled.'

We, then, love his appearing because it will mean all this of which we have been talking will be completed in and by his appearing. By the same token this will be the reason that many will not love his appearing. To go back to the Thessalonian epistles, we see that in the first letter Paul clarified the manner of Jesus' coming:

But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

The manner of his coming is clear and it is to be a source of comfort for them. The second letter is aimed at those who do not love his appearing. Chapter 1 verses 5 to 10 speak of those 'who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ':

They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at in all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed (2 Thess. 1:9-10).

The great theme of Revelation regarding the Lamb against all that is Satanic and rebellious is treated. Two Thessalonians chapter 2 verses 3 to 12 speaks about the mystery of lawlessness which commenced in Eden and is described in the Revelation:

Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming. The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Let us now repeat something we have said above, namely that all the exhortations to action before the coming of our Lord, such as putting off the things of darkness and putting on the garments of light, of now being light in the world, of being aware of his coming so that we are not caught in ignorance—indeed a whole host of things—are not just so that we might be all set up at the last. Rather, it is that we might be in action in God’s plan at the present, not even making a thing of his return but conscious that we are working in the same plan. He, absent from us, will fulfil the whole of ‘absent’ ministry and when it is complete he will come. At the same point as he comes it will be clear to us that we have filled out the work he has given us to do here. Now it is the ‘time’ for the consummation, the next part of the work. In this we are one, together. This is the prime meaning of loving his appearing. At the same time it is the countdown for the destruction of all that is evil. That is why Satan, his system and all his co-workers, will be angry and bitter about Christ’s appearing.

Of course, as the time ripens, there will be prayers for Christ’s soon coming. It is then that ‘The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let him who hears say, “Come.”’ (Rev. 22:17). In times of persecution and extreme difficulty the believer may long for his coming, to resolve the local situation, but Christ ‘absent’ is as much in that action and situation as if he were visible to sight. All things must be gone through until the work is fully finished. He will not come before that. The Thessalonians are constantly waiting for His Son to appear from heaven because already he has saved them from the wrath to come, that which will come upon all the world that has opposed God.

What will sustain us in all trials and tribulations will be the knowledge that he had to go to do what is needed, where he is lost to our present sight, but at the same time through the Holy Spirit he is present to us, as indeed is the Father. He is the Lord of the church, cares for it, walks among the candlesticks and praises, exhorts and rebukes the church in what it is, and in what it is doing. Seated above all in the highest place he has been ruling the world over these two thousand years and at the same time is not only Head of the church, but is working with it and through it. All his work—both ‘here’ and ‘there’—is one work. No wonder we look forward to his appearing.

What we have not brought out in full is the relationship of the Lord on the throne, and his people on earth. When we recognise that the throne is the place from which the actions of the seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls of wrath go forth, then we realise this is the same throne from which intercession proceeds for the whole church, and each of its members (Heb. 4:14–16; 7:25; Rom. 8:26–27, 31–35). The Holy Spirit is also linked with this intercession. It is the throne to which the church and its members come in time of need, as it is also the place where Christ assures us nothing can ever separate us from the love of God. His appearing brings to sight what only once could be seen by faith. This union in intercession is vital to the church, which on earth is still part of ‘the armies of heaven’ (Rev. 19:14), since though being on earth we are, at the same time, seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6), and in heavenly places war against ‘spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’ (Eph. 6:12). It is this which assures us that he being in heaven and we on earth are nevertheless one in the present operations which will conclude with his appearing.

The Church Living in the World— The Teaching of John's Gospel

INTRODUCTION: THE MATTER OF THE CHURCH LIVING IN THE WORLD

A reading of the New Testament will soon show us that the term 'world', whilst first meaning the world created by God and inhabited by human beings, animals of land, sea and air, along with what we might call the vegetable and mineral kingdoms, has also another meaning, namely a world within the world created by God, which is a system given over to evil, in rebellion against God, which seeks to operate outside the will of God and is actively opposed to the will of God. In the Old Testament it is possible to some degree to trace two streams of humanity; the first of which seeks to do the will of God and can be called 'the people of God', and the second which opposes the people of God and has the mind of the serpent and which we on New Testament criteria would call 'the world'. In the New Testament those two streams also appear, though there can be some confusion when we try to categorise Israel and the church of God. In the history of the world from the birth of the people of God at Pentecost, following on to the present times we can also see, generally speaking, the two streams flowing on. When we try to distinguish, specifically speaking, the two streams, then the task is much more difficult. We often hear the two terms, 'the church in the world' and 'the world in the church', and this helps to explain our predicament but it does not solve it.

One of our problems is the use of words because we use the word 'world' for both the created world and the worldly system of evil. The Greek words *kosmos* and *aeon* which are translated 'world' in English do not help us very much for they are often used interchangeably. We can have a good and evil *kosmos* and a good and evil *aeon*. In 1 John 5:19—'We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one'—it would appear that Satan has control of the whole world but we know from other Scriptures that the created world being made by God belongs to Him and is in His power. In these studies we settle for the distinction made above: (i) the world as God has created it, which is under His control; and (ii) the system which Satan leads and which works against God in the world He has created.

These distinctions being understood we can approach our subject intelligently. We have seen that the church is the living community of God's people, and not just an aggregate of Christian persons. The terms, 'body of Christ', 'branches of the vine (Christ)', 'the flock of God', are terms which speak of any active community or fellowship in which all are 'members of one another', and this has been the case since at least the time of Abel, who is defined in the New Testament as a man of faith (Heb. 11:4) and a man of love (1 John 3:10–12). Faith, hope and love are the three marks of the church and its life, and in historical theology the marks of the church are 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic'. The world as a system under its ruler, Satan, does not have these marks which are foreign to its ethos.

We have seen that Man was created to fulfil the will of God which is His plan for His creation, that it would ultimately be transformed into a new heaven and a new earth, and that His elect humanity would become 'a kingdom and priests to our God' and would reign over creation. Exodus 19:5–6 denote Israel in the Old Testament as a kingdom of priests and 1 Peter 2:9–10 in the New Testament is virtually the same principle applied to the church.

In this introduction we simply indicate our intention to see and show how the church in the Old Testament was that body of God's people who served Him in this world but who were unceasingly opposed by what we understand as 'the world', this world being a system of

fallen celestial powers under the leadership of Satan and all human beings who opposed God the Creator as they were led by 'the Prince of the power of the air', i.e. 'that ancient serpent, who is the Devil'. The church in the New Testament, whilst created at Pentecost, had both continuity and discontinuity with the church of the Old Testament. Christ taught his disciples much about Satan, 'the god of this world', and the opposition of his—Satan's—system to that of the people of God, the church to come.

OUR METHOD OF STUDY

Because we believe a study of the church, the head of the church, the world and the world ruler are pertinent to our times, we will trace the teaching regarding the church and the world as opposed to one another in the Scripture from Eden to the new Eden. We will seek to achieve this through the teaching of the Gospels, especially through John's Gospel, then through the writings of the apostles, especially Paul, Peter and John. Having seen the biblical principles of conflict between the two communities, we will attempt a survey of that conflict in human history, and the way in which Satan and his powers constantly attempt to subvert the church. Paul once said, 'We are not ignorant of his schemes', and whilst that may have been true in apostolic teaching, we seem today to be largely unaware of Satan's devices. It is so strange that all who opposed Jesus were Jews, and that Jesus virtually named Jewry as 'the world'. They were a covenant people, and should have known God and have seen light and walked in light. Certainly other Gospels show people such as Mary, Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna, and Zechariah were people of light, but the point still stands; Israel as a nation was 'worldly'. Specifically, he came unto his own and his own received him not. At the last they were those who killed him.

We recognise that John had knowledge of the whole matter of the world, of Satan and of the place idolatry has in all this (1 John 5:19–21), but we see that Jesus set out the large fact of the world and its ruler, and worked for the sake of his people in the action of his teaching and ministry to help them to overcome the world.²

We will pick up the story of Satan and the world, as Christ taught it in the Gospel of John.

THE TEACHING REGARDING SATAN, THE WORLD AND THE CHURCH IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

We will take the chronological order of events in which the word 'world' (*kosmos*) is used in John's Gospel. John uses it some seventy-eight times. We will not be able to comment on every use.

1:4–5: *In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* The Word's life lights men to know what is the truth and to live in the truth. Darkness is the opposition to light but cannot overcome it. Light overcomes darkness.

1:9–10: *The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not.* Jesus is called 'the true light'. Only he enlightens a person who comes into the world. As *Logos* he created the world but it did not know him (John 1:3, 10; Heb. 1:1–3; Col. 1:15–17). Here the world did not recognise him as maker. The world—of humanity, especially Jewish humanity—did not receive him.

1:29: *The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'* John shows the Word as the Lamb, attending to

² Without looking at the Old Testament in detail we can say, by putting together Genesis 3:1–5 and Revelation chapter 12, that the serpent in the garden of Eden was the same power who opposed God and enslaved Man and that the community of evil—his 'world'—constantly opposed the people of God in the Old and New Testaments and continues to do so until the end of time.

the sin of the whole world, which parallels 3:16 where the love of the Father is for the world and is outworked through the Son.

3:16–19: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that who-ever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.* God loves the world which does not love Him. He sends His Son to save it. He who rejects this action of his incarnation does so in the presence of Him who is light, and so he is now under judgment. The world loves darkness, but hates the light.

4:42: *They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world'.* By the witness of the Samaritan woman the Samaritans recognise Jesus' concern for the world: he saves it! He is not repelled by it.

In **1:4, 9–10; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9; 12:46**, Jesus is said to be, or claims to be 'the *light* of the *world*' in the following order: In him was *life*, and the life was the *light* of men. The true *light* that enlightens every man was coming into the *world*. And this is the judgment, that the *light* has come into the *world*, and men loved *darkness* rather than *light*, because their deeds were evil. Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the *light* of the *world*; he who follows me will not walk in *darkness*, but will have the *light* of life'. 'As long as I am in the world, I am the *light* of the *world*.' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any one walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the *light* of this world.' 'I have come as *light* into the *world*, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.'

This strong teaching that in creation he was the light of men, which amounts to him being the light of the world, means that there cannot be true life without him present as the light, and that when darkness came into the world—presumably through Satan and the Fall—there has been the true light in the creational world but in the world of the Satanic ruler there has ever been darkness. Jesus' incarnation was to a darkened world. That the creational world was affected by darkness shows that the world is to be seen now as having something within it which was not there at creation. So the world now has an evil connotation. Being the light of the world Jesus is Man's only hope of that light which lightens from the darkness and which brings light in the believing person. The one who believes does not remain in the darkness, which means death and perishing, for his coming to the light means life to him.

In **6:14**, on the basis of his feeding the five thousand, the Jews say that Jesus is a *prophet who has come into the world*, and they so highly prize him as such that they would force him to be their king. This kind of people need a king such as Jesus appeared to them to be, for nothing like light has been their portion, i.e. this kind of king. In this they constitute the spirit of the world wanting not God as King but a human being different from themselves, or as is found in idols. The idea of the world being dark, evil, hating the light, dealing in death and not light has to be seen as not being the creational order of things but of another order. That, of course, does not make the creational order evil for it is essentially good (Gen. 1:31; cf. Rom. 14:14; Ps. 24:1; 1 Cor. 10:26).

In **6:33** Jesus is the sustainer of life—*For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world*. Just as the world is in darkness so it does not have life. Indeed here and other places it is reckoned to be in death. Jesus who is life comes down from heaven to rectify the situation. Bread came down to the Israelites in the form of manna and they lived by it.

In **6:51:** *I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.* Here the world has only death and Jesus comes to bring it life which necessitates the giving of his body for the world. So great a mortal world is it that its need requires the sacrifice of Jesus.

In 7:3–7: *So his brothers said to him, 'Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples may see the works you are doing. For no man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.'* For even his brothers did not believe in him. Jesus said to them, *'My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil.'* Jesus' brothers who did not believe in him want him to show himself to the world, the world meaning the Jewish community as gathering at Jerusalem, but to Jesus this is the world of evil and darkness which hates him. This is portrayed powerfully in 8:34–59 where the Jews clearly hate him.

Jesus in 8:23–24: *He said to them, 'You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he.'* He again makes the distinction of a death-dealing world of sin as against his life-dealing which will come to them if they believe (cf. John 10:10). Also is the teaching that what the world needs has to come from 'above' for 'below' is no source of life, i.e. light.

Then there is the matter of judgment; judgment of the world and those who are allied with it, including the 'ruler of this world'—i.e. those who will not believe in God. Firstly let us look at the non-judgment of believers. In 5:24 we have, *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.* Eternal life is perhaps the most prominent teaching in John's Gospel and relates to Paul's teaching on immortality which is that God alone has immortality but that He gives the gift of it to those who believe in His Son (cf. 5:28–29). These believers are *those who have done good, to the resurrection of life* whereas the unbelievers are *those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment*, and judgment corresponds to the 'perishing' of John 3:14–19 as against eternal life to the believer. In 5:19–29 Jesus is given the authority of all judgment. In 3:17 the purpose of sending Jesus is to save the world from judgment, i.e. from condemnation, *For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him*, but in 5:19–29 he is in the world with a view to its judgment for in 9:39, *Jesus said, 'For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind'*. It is interesting that in this passage the Pharisees have a sudden and uneasy perception that they might be blind. Here they are shown to be of the world. In 12:46–48 Jesus links light with darkness and darkness with the fact of its judgment: *I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day.*

Further to this matter of judgment is Jesus' judgment of the ruler of this world—Satan—and of the world itself. In 12:31 Jesus says, *Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out.* In 14:30–31 he recognises that the ruler of this world is coming to destroy him but that he has nothing *on* Jesus because he has nothing (i.e. sin for accusation) *in* Jesus. He will have everything *on* Jesus when Jesus takes *on* himself the sin of the world. *I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.* In 16:7–11 it is clear that the world is to be convicted of sin and righteousness and judgment, and linked with this is the fact that the ruler of this world has been judged: *Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; concerning judgment, because*

the ruler of this world is judged. We have come a long way since in chapter 1 there was the mention of *darkness* and *light* and the *world* created by the Word and yet not knowing him when he came into it. The world has been shown to be in darkness, the ruler of it has been unmasked and judged, and by the Spirit the world will be convicted. This most important passage of **16:7–11** involves the people of God and the conflict of which Jesus later speaks.

Another matter of which John speaks, which is linked closely with the nature of the world and which we must always keep in mind, is the matter of 'the truth'. John says (**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.* The word 'truth' is mentioned 22 times in John's Gospel. It is most important because just as darkness is the opposite of light, death of life, so the lie is the opposite of the truth. Lying is a mark of the world and of its father, the devil: the world is based on falsehood. **8:34–59** should be read thoughtfully. Jesus links the world of this passage with lying. Look at verses **42–47**: *Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But, because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.'* This enables us to look into the heart of the world and its ruler and see how evil it is. Jesus has to come as the Word, the truth. He says to the Jews, *'But now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God'* (**8:40**). He tells Pilate, *'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.'* Indeed, he tells the disciples that he has to leave them because the Holy Spirit must come to judge the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. **16:13** says: *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.* The Spirit in this pericope is using Christ's work against the world and its ruler.

In **chapters 14 – 17** the matters of truth, light, darkness, the world and its ruler are very much in Jesus' mind. Especially in **chapter 17** it is the word of truth which is prominent. In **15:3** this becomes, *You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken unto you*, and in **17:17**: *Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth*, and this is because *They are not of the world even as I am not of the world (17:16)*. The disciples must be equipped with the truth (cf. 1 John 5:7).

In coming to **John 15:18 – 16:15** we arrive at the fact stated by Jesus in **7:6–7**, where Jesus said to them, *'My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil.'* This shows the utter incompatibility of the world and Jesus. Because, at that time his brothers are 'of the world' in their unbelief in him, the world does not hate them. The case is different with the disciples in the upper room. They are believers and the world is against them. This world is no nebulous thing, the child of a paranoiac mind, but grim reality. We will now consider the structure of the passage to see Jesus' teaching:

18 If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. 21 But all this they will do to you on

my account, because they do not know him who sent me. 22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. 23 He who hates me hates my Father also. 24 If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. 25 It is to fulfil the word that is written in their law, 'They hated me without a cause.' 26 *But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; 27 and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning. 1 I have said all this to you to keep you from falling away. 2 They will put you out of the synagogues; indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. 3 And they will do this because they have not known the Father, nor me. 4 But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you of them. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. 5 But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' 6 But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. 7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; 10 concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; 11 concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. 12 I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.*

With the background of the Gospel up to this point we can see that the world, from one point of view, is a formidable system. It has Satan as its ruler. It catches up a large group even in Israel, for the leaders are 'of the world' and Jesus used the term 'the world' to describe all who oppose him. It includes even his own brothers. It is the whole operation of darkness in the world; it does not know the truth; it does not walk in light but opposes light; it is out to kill Jesus who is not of this world but is from above; it accuses Jesus of having a demon. Finally it judges him, but not according to the truth for it judges by false judgment, and then it crucifies him. This is the world against him which Jesus appraised for them in the passage above. It is a somewhat terrifying fact that the world at this point constituted *only* the Jews who opposed him and they were many. They opposed him because he came into the world with the truth, and was the light against the darkness, the truth against the lie, so that it has shown they had no true cause to hate him—'they hated me without a cause'³—and this is the essence of evil in refusing the truth.

Now we can draw out the principles of the passage quoted above and comment on some details. Jesus knows that although he has spoken on the world and the ruler of the world, they will not understand the import of what he is saying, i.e. *I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you of them.* They will be amongst the many things which were incomprehensible to them. He gives them the reason for now saying to them, *I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.* He could protect them when with them. What now confronts them are the dastardly things the world will do to them when they will preach the gospel. It is always surprising to humans when the world opposes them and is cruel and tells lies about them. Only to the cynical is it no

³ In Psalm 41:9 we read, 'Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me', and is quoted in John 13:18 of Judas. He had no reason to betray Jesus. In Psalm 35:19 it is written, 'Let not those rejoice over me who are wrongfully my foes, and let not those wink the eye who hated me without a cause'. This refers to an age-long enmity to God and His people often set out in the Psalter.

surprise. The world hated Jesus because he spoke of its sin. They will have hate for the disciples for the same reason. The disciples are to know that the one who will witness to the truth of Christ will be the Holy Spirit. Only by his aid will the world be convicted of sin, righteousness and judgment. He is the Spirit of truth, and that is his power, to witness over the lies of the world. He will lead the disciples into all the truth, i.e. the truth which is the gospel and—to use a Pauline phrase—‘the whole counsel of God’. All the things Jesus wants to say to them have to be put off for another time for they cannot yet bear them. The Spirit will also tell them things to come, so that they will know the future whilst working in the present.

At this part of our Study we should not forget that these words were aimed at all who would follow the disciples, and witness for the truth. We should not think these principles are dispensable, for by nature of the case they are perpetual and we grow careless of them to our peril. We must identify with all that Jesus said or there will be no point to our Study.

In **John 17:6–18** we have the final passage in John which deals with the matter of the world and its persecution of his people:

6 I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them to me, and they have kept thy word. 7 Now they know that everything that thou hast given me is from thee; 8 for I have given them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from thee; and they have believed that thou didst send me. 9 I am praying for them; I am not praying for the world but for those whom thou hast given me, for they are thine; 10 all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them. 11 And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to thee. Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I kept them in thy name, which thou hast given me; I have guarded them, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled. 13 But now I am coming to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth. 18 As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth.

It comes as a surprise to read that Jesus said to his Father in prayer that they had kept the Father's word, but this must have been the case. Although they comprehended little before the Cross and Resurrection, they had it all there, and it would take the Holy Spirit to make it all understandable. Short of the coming of the Holy Spirit they were ready for ministry. Jesus is praying for them for what lies ahead. He is not praying for the world but for the disciples as at this point they need the prayer. The world in its need for redemption is in his mind, as we shall see, but now he knows the titanic nature of the conflict about to break on the whole world for the whole of the age. His prayer at the same time has all disciples in view, through the years down to his coming. He asks the Father to keep them in His Name with all that that means. He is beginning his prayer for unity amongst the group of disciples and then unity between those who proclaim and those who believe them. He has worked to protect them, and to teach them, and to equip them with the truth. Only Judas, who was predestined to do what he did, has been lost.

Now his prayer intensifies as we see in **verse 13** onwards. They have been given the truth in the word so that in no way can they be part of the world. This has precipitated the world's harsh and cruel reaction to them and its intention to destroy them. The Evil One is as much in mind as his world. He prays that by his prayer they may be kept from the depredations of the Evil One. He does not want them taken out of the world. He prays that they may be sanctified

in the truth (cf. 15:3; 13:6–11). Then come the strong words, *As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world*. Long ago he has been sanctified by the Father for the task of incarnation and dying for these and others, but now it is near, it is intimate. In this last hour he is keenly aware he is sanctified to die for them and only his death can bring them to the setting themselves apart for the work in the unholy world to bring it to its redemption. In the whole passage above is the heart intercession of Christ for his servants.

The next passage—**verses 20–26**—he prays beyond the immediate disciples, to the great church which will open up in his name:

20 I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. 22 The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me. 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee; and these know that thou hast sent me. 26 I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

When we read church history much of it can send us into despair, so terrible is it—the divisions, the rivalry, the cruelty, the hardness of heart, the worldliness, the pomp and vanity, the sickening ambition, the politics and many more such things. At the same time we do not well to feed ourselves on self-righteous indignation and burning anger, for we have all these seeds of wrongdoing within us, were the occasion to arise and had not Christ prayed for us in this his high-priestly prayer. What we are mainly to see are the stupendous results of his prayer regarding the church. His vision, as we have said, reaches right to the end of the age, when the church will be gathered together for eternity as a sanctified, perfected and glorified community. Now his prayer concerns unity and it is to be in communion within the Triune Community. So the significant statement: *The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me*. The glory of God is seen in the unity of the Persons, and this glory has to be given to the church so that they may ever be one. Such words as here in this text can never be conceived let alone uttered by any other than the Son of God, himself. He has given the glory which God gave to him, for the glory *is* the communion and the unity. He received the glory from eternity and it will suffice for them all, here and in all eternity. Thus he prays that they will be there to see the glory given to him by the Father. Again, then, the heart cry, *O righteous Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee; and these know that thou hast sent me. I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them*. To the last his cry is for the world. *It has not known Him!* What a weight of sorrow and yearning in that!

After that he enters the garden and so there commences ‘the beginning of sorrows’ for the whole world in the action of the world seeking to humiliate him utterly. Its bitterness cannot contain itself. If anything Pilate is more open to this man than all Jewry for we see the world as it believes it has Christ at its mercy—a mercy which is no mercy. In **18:33–36** there is a last statement by Jesus and it concerns his battle with the world which would scorn his Kingship:

33 Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus, and said to him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ 34 Jesus answered, ‘Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?’ 35 Pilate answered, ‘Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?’ 36 Jesus answered, ‘My

kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world.'

Here is Christ's last word concerning the world. **Verse 36** tells all: his kingship is not of this world. It is not of the *spirit* of the world nor does it use the *ways* of the world, and on his account he has come to bear witness to the *truth* as against the *lie*. The lie is being worked out in their crucifying of him (cf. Acts 4:25–28). In John's later words, they 'walk in *darkness* . . . and *do not the truth*' (1 John 1:6 AV). We find plenty of evidence in Acts, the Epistles and the Revelation that true believers do not work this way. Where the world has gotten into the church, worldly ways work in it, darkness comes, the truth changes to the lie, the candlestick has to be removed.

If we see the heart of Christ for the church in the world it is not to set the disciples to be at enmity with the world in the sense that the church despises the world, is angry with it, and will fight it with its own weapons. This it cannot afford to do. His **John 17** prayer was for the church but it was because he had sent them into the world as the Father had sent him into the world (17:18; 20:21) and he prayed '*that the world may believe that thou has sent me*' (17:21; cf. 14:29–30; 5:24), and '*that the world may know that thou hast sent me and loved them even as thou hast loved me*' (17:23). This is in conformity with *God so loved the world* . . . This was why he came into the world and why he sends his disciples into the world.

Finally, Jesus' concern for the world is worked out in **John 21**. Indeed it seems to be firstly a concern for the church, for Jesus—so to speak—reinstates Peter not only for his own ease and joy, but also that reinstated, he might feed Christ's lambs and his sheep, and be the shepherd of the flock of Christ—the flock of God. This was ever in Peter's mind so that he says, many years afterward, '*Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering those in your charge but being examples to the flock*' (1 Pet. 5:2–3). In reality it is the church for which he has prayed in John chapter 17, i.e. the church which is sent into the world, and so Peter's shepherd-ministry is necessary for its wellbeing whilst it is witnessing to the truth of the gospel to the whole world (**20:22–23**).

CONCLUSION: THE CHURCH LIVING IN THE WORLD— IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

Whilst it is true to say that the church was born at Pentecost, it is also true to say—as we have pointed out—that the church began with Abel as the first nominated person of faith and love. Hebrews chapter 11 speaks of this people of God. The choice of the disciples in John's Gospel is distinctive. In 17:2, 6, 11, 24 Jesus speaks to the Father of those 'whom thou hast given me' and his prayers are for them as they are sent into the world. They are first the apostles and then 'those who [will] believe in me through their word'. In John 10 he speaks of the flock and Jesus says, 'I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep'. In verses 27–29 he speaks of the sheep knowing him and they follow him and he gives them eternal life, and no one is able to snatch them out of his hand. He also says, 'The Father has given them to me'. In 10:16 he says, 'And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.' In chapter 15 Christ speaks of the vine and the branches, and although it is primarily referred to the apostles, yet it refers also to what we call the church, those who are branches of the vine. In all, then, there is a community to which Christ speaks and they are those whom the Father has given him—the apostles—plus those in Palestine which have believed in him, and then those who yet believe at the word of the apostles and others.

This community has been drawn out of the world which is hostile to God, and its prince is

Satan. It is the system of darkness which treats darkness as though it were light, as we see in 8:34–39. It abhors the truth. Its ruler, Satan, set the scene to destroy Jesus. He was ‘coming’ to destroy him (14:30, 31) so that after Jesus gave the morsel to Judas, ‘Satan entered into him’. Jesus then said to him, ‘What you are going to do, do quickly’. Later, in front of the high priest, Jesus stated that he had preached freely in all places and so his teaching was known (18:19–22). They could indict him on this if he had spoken heresy. In the Cross he laid down his life for the sheep. He had given his flesh for the life of the world. John 10:10 gives the contrast of Jesus coming into the world to give life abundant and the thief—Satan—who comes in order steal and kill and destroy. He is the wolf who snatches at the flock and scatters them for the kill, but Jesus is the good shepherd who gives his life to save the sheep.

We saw in John 15:18 – 16:15 that Jesus was preparing his disciples—and thus the church—for living in the world. In 12:31–32 he had prophesied the judgment of the world and the casting down of Satan. In 16:7–12 he virtually sets out the operation in and by the church when the Holy Spirit will come. These verses show that the conviction of the world is firstly of sin ‘because they do not believe in me’; ‘concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father’, i.e. because Jesus is received by the Father and seated at His right hand; ‘concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged’, for this is the final proof to his hearers that Satan and his world are utterly defeated in and by the Cross. That is why Jesus can encourage them with, ‘I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world’ (16:33).

That is the ultimate word to the world and its ruler. In Christ, the community of the flock, the vine, the light, the truth, is no more under the dominion of the world ruler, and is not of this world. It is sent into the world to proclaim the gospel and to overcome it. John’s Epistles speak much of this later, but in the Gospel, the church overcomes in the Overcomer.

As we have suggested above, our Study is not meant merely to cover the themes we have discussed but to tell us that in principle nothing has changed. We are confronted by the world and its ruler and whilst their power has been cancelled by the death, resurrection and reigning of Christ yet the teaching of Jesus in John 15:18 – 16:15 is the teaching by which we must now work. We are the church living in the world which hates us, and only faith will ever overcome this world.

The Church Living in the World—The Teaching of Paul

INTRODUCTION: ISRAEL AND THE WORLD

It seems to be a fact that the Apostles were grounded in Israel's understanding of the world, i.e. of the whole creation, or as we would say, the universe. There was no word for 'universe' or for 'creation' in the Old Testament, but when in Genesis 1:1, 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth', is written and the verb *bara* is used which is the equivalent of the New Testament use of *ktizo* (to create), then the idea of a universe is certainly present in Israel. The New Testament uses the word *ktisis* for the term 'creature' or 'creation' and is the equivalent of *nephesh* in the Old Testament. Even so, 'the world' in Hebrew was mainly expressed by the word *tebel* which speaks of a world which is created by God, is firmly set on foundations, had been created in wisdom, its inhabitants are morally responsible to God and its nations are under His command and will be answerable to God when He judges them.

To Israel it was a wonderful world, and the Psalms and other writings speak in great praise of what God has created, how functional it is, how God provides for it and so on. Israel also knows that there will be an end to this world as it is presently known, but that there will be a new heaven and a new earth which will not have the same moral problems as now confront it. The world in some way is subject to supernatural powers, and they have in their grip the nations of the earth. From Israel's point of view the lords, gods and idols of the other nations were powerless to effect essential change seeing they were not able to create or fix the movements of the creation. Israel knew that God used angelic powers to effect His plans. It understood the principle of an eschaton and so knew that the beginning presupposed an end so that the world's significance lay in its historic actions as they led to and were consummated in the final climax.

This is but a rough sketch as to how the world appeared to Israel and hence to those who constituted the apostolic group. We need to keep this in mind as we seek to understand how Paul looked out into the world. It will also help us to understand how other speaking and writing apostles understood the world and, as we would say, 'the universe'.

PAUL AND THE WORLD

We meet the two words for 'world' in Paul, namely *kosmos* and *aeon* and, as we have seen in our last Study, *kosmos* is used in the Gospels, the Epistles and the Revelation. Paul uses this term 37 times, whilst *aeon* is used in the Synoptic Gospels and then in Paul's Epistles 12 times. The other writer to use it is the author of the Book of Hebrews. One Corinthians 1:19–21 uses *kosmos* and *aeon* as interchangeable. We recognise that whilst John used only the word *kosmos* yet in different contexts it really took on the meaning of *aeon*. The English versions of the New Testament generally translate 'world' and this is reasonable enough, for the context does give the sense of the world as the system of evil as Satan has arranged it and led it.

If at this point we may pre-empt something of our conclusion regarding living in this world, then Paul's injunction of Romans 12:1–2 could be helpful:

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Paul is saying that spiritual worship is the presentation of the body, in all its action, to God. The church is in danger of being conformed by the world to the configurations of the world, the word for 'world' being *aeon* or 'age'. Here *aeon* is not the created world inhabited by humanity and other creatures, but that system within the world which is under the rule of Satan whom Paul calls 'the god of this world' (2 Cor. 4:4) and so it is the system of 'the prince of the power of the air' (Eph. 2:2), showing that he is not only of the earth but also of 'the heavenly places' (cf. Eph. 6:12). In regard to the world that was created Paul says, 'the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it' (1 Cor. 10:26); 'I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean' (Rom. 14:14); 'For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving' (1 Tim. 4:4); and he speaks of God 'who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy' (1 Tim. 6:17).

If we pursue Paul's idea of the created world then we see that sin is not of its created essence for 'sin came into the world through one man and death through sin' (Rom. 5:12). 'The course of this world [age: *aeon*]' (Eph. 2:2) is linked with 'the wisdom of this world [*kosmos*]' as set forth by 'the debater of this age [*aeon*]' in the passage of 1 Corinthians 1:18–25. In one sense what Paul calls this 'present evil age' (Gal. 1:4) is really that system which has seized upon what it can of God's creation and is seeking to use it against God and His plan for its redemption and final glorification. This is really the way John sees it; i.e. (i) a created world which is good and belongs to God; and (ii) the world as Satan seeks to enslave it and use it against God. John never uses the word *aeon* but uses the word *kosmos* sometimes in the good sense of God's creation, and sometimes in the bad sense of a Satanic system (cf. John 12:31).

When we are speaking about the church living in the world, then we need to interpret the sense in which Paul used it. When people live *in* the world God created, and yet are not *of* the world as it is 'the present evil age', then the word 'world' will mean one thing, and they will enjoy that world as coming from God. However, all the time they must keep in mind that Satan is trying to make this world his own, and what he has accomplished and what he does is evil, and the created world must never be mistaken for the Satanic world or age. One Corinthians 7:31–35 is helpful here—7:31 says, 'and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away.'

At this point of our Study we can say that the church lives in a created world which it is to enjoy for it is beautiful, it is ruled over by God as its King and it is due one day to be renovated, i.e. to be a new world, and a glorified one. We must also observe that 'the evil will be ever mingled with the good' until 'the present evil age' is replaced by 'the age to come'.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE WORLD FOR ALL ITS AGES

By 'the structure of the world for all its ages' we mean two things: (i) what we might call the ontological structure, that divinely appointed functional system whereby God uses all things, including angels, men and other creatures, to fulfil His will for the world; and (ii) that system which has been subverted by the fallen celestial and human creatures who have been marshalled under Satan to obstruct the plan of God with a view to it ruling the world. Undoubtedly the apostles had these two pictures in their minds as to the creation of the world, its functional powers and operations and the system by which all was intended to operate, as well as the obstructing elements of Satan and his 'world'. They also had a clear eschatology and the shape of its *telos* which was opposing the forces of darkness. If we look closely at the Old Testament we can see something of its order which comes through in the story of creation, such as 'seven days', 'a light to rule for the day' and 'a light to rule for the night'. We also see what Man was created to be and to do (Gen. 1:26–28). We can also see Man was and is under a creational covenant which was partly declared in the matter of the Flood, and which later, in Abraham, concerned all the peoples of the earth—one way or another. We can

eventually discern the ruling order in heaven and on earth, as also the present evil age in which renegade powers and humanity oppose God. Certainly Paul presupposes his hearers and readers have the knowledge of 'all rule and authority and power and dominion, and . . . every name that is named' (Eph. 1:21). Whatever the meaning of each of these rulers and titles it is clear that there is some kind of systematic ruling to govern and keep together the universe. We need to know, as far as is possible, the meaning of each designation, but for the moment let us see that there can be no oversight of the whole universe which is not in some way connected with the earth. That Christ is the ruler above all rulers is seen in the full quote of Ephesians 1:19–23:

. . . and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all.

Paul does not elaborate on the terms he uses in this Ephesian section but he refers directly to them in 3:10 and 6:11–12. In 1:21 there is no suggestion that these rulers are all evil, but then again there is no statement of their goodness. It would seem that there is a ranging order which might be a hierarchy and that Christ surmounts it all. The reference in 3:10 could mean—as indeed 1:21 could mean—these supernatural rulers are both good ones and evil ones. In such a case—as is indicated elsewhere—there could be rulers who were appointed by God to be over kingdoms or principedoms but who changed their loyalty to God yet retained the mandates given them.⁴ Certainly in Ephesians 6:10 the principalities and powers are evil, habitate 'high places' and those who are members of the church wrestle with them.

In passing let us note that Paul does not explain the exact functions or ruling levels of these supernatural rulers, if indeed they all be supernatural. His statement in Romans 13:1, 'Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God', certainly applies to earthly rulers, but it could apply to heavenly rulers, in principle, if not directly. We can gather from it the nature of the work of the supernatural rulers.

Now we need to see the context in which the principalities and powers are mentioned in Pauline thinking. In Ephesians 1:19–23, Psalm 110:1 is undoubtedly in the apostle's mind, 'The LORD says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool."' When Christ is named as being raised above 'all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come', then it means he is Lord over all things, now and forever. If this description covers good and evil powers, then it is the equivalent to Psalm 110:1, 'till I make your enemies your footstool'. Whilst here we might as well link it with Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28 which is important for it undoubtedly refers—among other things—to those enemies who are the renegade super-powers:

⁴ In Daniel 10:13, 20 Michael the archangel has fought for an angel who was seeking to visit Daniel, and it is 'the prince of the Kingdom of Persia' he fought. The angel present to Daniel is returning to 'fight against the prince of Persia' and having overcome him 'the prince of Greece will come'. It seems clear that these princes are in the angelic category and their machinations are not good ones. In Deuteronomy 32:8, 9 it has been thought that God 'fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God' means certain sons of God were to be over the people or nations and that Israel was the one nation over which God Himself was the direct ruler. If as in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 angels 'left their proper dwelling' having sinned, yet retained their mandate and refused to return it, then it could mean that such rulers hung on to ruling their nations as 'people angels'. It could explain also that other angels were appointed in their stead and that the conflict of these rulers determines the situations of all nations. It is possible and even probable that this is the system Paul had in mind and would assume his readers would also have in mind.

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.

In Ephesians 4:8–10 Paul is speaking about a victory which Christ wrought by his life, death and resurrection:

Therefore it is said, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.' (In saying, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

Here we should see 'a host of captives' as being the evil enemy. When he 'fills all things' those things are what are now completed and are so because what is incomplete has been denied any place. This links with Ephesians 2:1–10. Verses 4–6 are significant for our purpose:

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and *made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*

Here the grace of God lifts Man up into the heavenly places, i.e. Man who has been deposed by sin and has had to 'follow the course of this world', and has also had to 'follow the prince of the power of the air'. In lifting up Man, God also *seats him with Himself* in Christ in the heavenly places, so that Man is a participator in the ruling Messiah! In this sense he who was empty is now filled.

Part of the church living in the world is dealt with in Ephesians 3:8–11 where Paul speaks of the stewardship given to him 'to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men⁵ see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in Christ'. Verse 10 recognises that the church is always showing 'the manifold wisdom of God' to the principalities and powers. This is quite amazing and it is 'according to the eternal purpose which he has realised in Christ Jesus our Lord'. Whether these powers are good ones or evil ones is not revealed but it almost certainly both. Evil powers will scorn this wisdom and good powers will know better how to do the will of God.

LIVING IN THE WORLD IS—AMONG OTHER THINGS— TO FIGHT EVIL POWERS

It is axiomatic that evil powers will seek to destroy all of God's works, i.e. His plan and, with it, His people, the church. Let us review and summarise Paul's understanding of the world as *kosmos* and *aeon*. He understands the world (*kosmos*) as created by God to be good. God's system as *aeon*, i.e. the time and structure situation as they are in the plan of God, is likewise to be good. No age that is from God can be wrong. Evil, however, seeks to subvert God's plan and devises its own. In another Study we will see that it imitates or devises a counterpart, i.e. counterfeit of what is true. Paul speaks little concerning this, as in 2 Corinthians 11:14 he speaks of Satan disguising himself as an angel of light. Paul understands the structure of the world with Satan at its head, the principalities and powers as Satan's leaders, the mind or course (*aiona*) (Rom. 12:2) of the world, and the human slaves of this world-system (Eph. 2:2). He also understand the so-called wisdom of this world (1 Cor. 1:18–25; cf. 3:18–20).

⁵ It is possible that Paul was not confining the enlightening to humans, but the 'all' here may mean 'all things' and thus include the super-powers. In any case verse 10 does speak of the principalities and powers being shown the plan of God.

In 1 Corinthians 2:8 Paul speaks of 'the rulers of this world' which is generally understood to be the super-powers of Satan, but some think it refers to the human rulers of the time; Pilate, Herod, the priests and so on (Acts 4:27, 28). Possibly it was both but Paul was ever conscious of the battle against Satan and his powers. It is his insight of 1 Corinthians 15:24–28 which shows us the battle is now ensuing and that it will be effective by Christ. He was also aware that world-system was passing away (1 Cor. 7:31), and that its rulers are 'doomed to pass away' (1 Cor. 2:6) as also the kingdom of darkness would be defeated and the Kingdom of God would be ultimately regnant under the Father (Col. 1:13; 1 Cor. 15:24). The battle which decided the ultimate outcome is that of the Cross (Col. 2:14–15) along with the Resurrection, and this will be explained later. With all this in his mind Paul constantly teaches how the church must live in the world. First let us look at the Epistle to the Colossians.

Colossians and the Powers of Evil, the Fullness of God and of the Church

Paul has many things in mind to teach this church he has never seen, founded as it was—it would seem—by Epaphras. It was probably the result of Epaphras hearing Paul as he taught for a long time in the school of Tyranus in Ephesus which is close to Colossae, and being fired up went back to Colossae and taught. In any case Paul feels responsible to write to the church and correct its teaching. The church is a thriving, loving one, but there are elements of heresy. It seems that we cannot trace those elements but we can see the primitive beginnings of the later Gnostic heresy. Since Paul speaks of the worship of angels it seems that the heresy was dualistic, and had the idea that God to be truly God would have no contact with material things as they were evil and delusive. Only that which was 'spiritual' related to God. Whatever or whoever created the universe was not of a high spiritual order. It may have been that the creation was bought into being by the lowest in a range of angels which stretched from the lowest angelic creature up to God Himself, He, as it were, being insulated from the material world by the angelic creatures below Him which, commencing with Him, ranged down to the last and most inferior angelic creature. Whatever the case it seems that Christ to this heresy was only one of these angels and perhaps the least of them.

Paul really presents a brilliant Christology to the Colossians, showing that he, as eternal Son of the Father is above all creatures, being before creation, creating all things and sustaining them, and has the pre-eminence in the entire universe. As for other supposed glorious creatures of power called 'principalities and powers' he has effectively unhanded these through the Cross, and so it is not right to worship them. These powers are angels but angels who are now disqualified to rule and so the Colossians are to refuse worship and service to them. Paul calls these creatures 'elemental spirits [*stoicheion tou kosmou*] of the universe' (2:8, 20). Though the heresy would exalt them they are only creatures and hence are subordinate to Christ, 'for in him all things were created . . . through and for [unto] him' (1:16). They as creatures are fallen, unable to redeem themselves, let alone others who are human, and what is more, by the Cross they have been disarmed and made foolish as those who have been hostile to God. No prince or ruling power is greater than Christ who is Cosmocrator, and all creatures are under him since he created them.

This is pertinent to the church living in the world. It is always to look at all powers as under Christ's control. These powers in the New Testament are linked with law, in their case 'natural law' which in some way is linked with the laws of idols and gods which they represent and control. Law, flesh and death in the New Testament are always linked with the principalities and powers, for it is by Man's guilt linked with 'the handwriting of ordinances that was against us' (2:14, AV), and at the Cross Christ bore the guilt of humanity in its breaking of the ordinances and so set it free from law, flesh, sin and (penal) death (2:8–23).

Whatever may have been the nature of the cultus of the powers, and the rituals thereby involved, the Colossians are no longer to worship these powers or to obey their ordinances. They have gone through the action of the Cross and are thereby destroyed as sinners and

enlivened as those translated from the powers of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the Son of his Love (1:13). Colossians 2:13–15 are powerful verses declaring this:

And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.

Paul, then, has taught the Colossians the truth of the nature and defeat of evil powers, has declared the supremacy of Christ over the whole of creation, and shown that the fullness (*pleroma*), about which much is spoken in the local heresy, does not belong to angelic powers but is God's fullness (1:19) which God was pleased should dwell in Christ. It does not belong to the powers but firstly to Christ (2:9) so that then his people may be 'filled full in him' and thus recognise that in the battle with evil powers they are the powerful ones. That fullness of Christ can be described in Paul's term of Ephesians 3:8 as 'the unsearchable riches of Christ' and in Colossians 2:3, 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'. These 'treasures' are moral treasures, or wisdom treasures. They are treasures needed to enrich redeemed Man so that he can face, work in and help to transform the moral condition of humanity, for it is the issue of the righteousness of God and Man which occupies much of Paul's thinking. Without consciously fighting evil, the righteousness of God which Christ brings to Man (1 Cor. 1:30–31) means the defeat of Satan to the degree that it means the image of God in Man is 'created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness' (Eph. 4:24; cf. Col. 3:9–10).

Again Paul also teaches the Galatians regarding 'the elemental spirits of the universe' (Gal. 4:3, 9). To some it seems that Paul is speaking more to Gentile converts at this point of his Epistle than to Jewish converts. The Jews would be aware of their godly inheritance in Israel, and their need to become full-grown heirs freed from the bondage of the law, so that what Paul says about being free to inherit all things without the bondage of the law would be an idea applicable to the Jews. It is when we meet 'the elemental spirits of the universe' that we meet an idea foreign to Judaism, but one which can apply to Gentiles. Prior to their adoption as sons of God they were under these elemental world powers and lived an unproductive and oppressive legalistic way of life. Here, too, we have a parallel to the Gentile religious way of life as we find it in Colossians chapter 2. These oppressive powers are called 'beggarly elements' in Galatians 4:8–10:

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years!

This parallels the passage of Colossians 2:16–23:

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, 'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch' (referring to things which all perish as they are used), according to human precepts and doctrines? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh.

Now we have at our fingertips the law-demands and bondage that principalities and powers have and use when humanity is in their grip. It is simply the power of guilt, fostered and compounded by the accusation of evil powers out of their own twisted configurations of

conscience-guilt. 'Doing righteousness' of the legal kind is temporarily a relief to the conscience and an encouragement to human pride. Paul covers this temper of sinful man under the 'beggarly elements' in so many passages, that we will not attempt to verify what we have just written. It does, however, give substance to Paul's exhortation of Galatians 5:1, 'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery'.

Wisdom (*sophia*) and the Church's Conflict with the World of Satan

In Ephesians 3:10 the mystery God has shown to Paul is called 'the manifold wisdom of God' and in Colossians 2:3 it is 'the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'. Because this matter of wisdom is basic to the church living in the world, we turn now to the centrality of wisdom which is essential to the triumph of Christ being worked out through the church.

What, then, is wisdom (*sophia*) but the knowledge of God and His will and therefore being enlightened as to the will of God. In Ephesians 5:15–17 Paul enjoins being enlightened as to knowing the will of God. He has just been talking of light and darkness in an almost Johannine way and since the Ephesians are in light his words make sense:

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Light is knowing and walking in the will of God, and darkness is refusing to know and do the will of God, choosing rather to oppose it.

We saw in 1 Corinthians 2:8 that the rulers of this world crucified the Lord of glory. This was out of their so-called 'wisdom', but it was a false wisdom as they, themselves, were beaten by the work of Christ in the Cross (Col. 2:13–15) and so were made to look foolish. Their 'dominion of darkness' is made futile since, by the Cross, we have been delivered from it. In terms of the church living in the world it means these principalities and powers cannot have power over us. Paul shows this when he talks of us doing battle with them in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12) and, presumably, overcoming them, because we are seated with Christ on his most powerful throne (Eph. 2:5–10). Again in Romans 8:37–38 he shows that although these powers are working up situations which seem disastrous to believers, and so much so that they are 'being killed all the day long . . . accounted as sheep for the slaughter', yet in the ultimate they are 'more than conquerors':

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 (vv. 37–39).

We need to make the point here that the wisdom of this world as discussed in 1 Corinthians 1:18–31 and 3:16–23 tells us that the world's wisdom can never succeed as it is the antithesis of the divine wisdom. We should not then seek to rival worldly wisdom in order to overcome it since Christ crucified is both the power of God and the wisdom of God and Christ has been made God's wisdom to us in righteousness, sanctification and redemption (1 Cor 1:22–25, 30). It is a fact that the wisdom of Satan dictated the Cross as the means of destroying him, but that wisdom was false inasmuch as in the Cross Satan and his principalities and powers were ignominiously defeated. Again, the methods of Satan in seeking to destroy Man seem, often, to be most powerful. As we will see a little later, they are impotent against the spiritual weapons of those who are the church. Always when we are 'wise as to what is good and guileless as to what is evil', then the God of peace will soon crush Satan under our feet (Rom. 16:19–20). In fact, in regard to worldly wisdom it should be noted that God does not leave it unattended to do as it will but goes after it to destroy it. Of course the wisdom of God is eternal and that of the world temporary so that God's wisdom must inevitably win, but the wisdom of the

Cross—‘Christ crucified . . . the power of God and the wisdom of God’—has already defeated the wisdom of the world. God is ever deliberately catching the worldly-wise as 1 Corinthians 3:18–20:

Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, ‘He catches the wise in their craftiness,’ and again, ‘The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.’

Further to our discussion on ‘the wisdom of the world’ we revisit 1 Corinthians 2:6–8:

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Regarding this wisdom which previously Paul denoted of the Cross, he now introduces the intent and purpose of that wisdom, namely that ‘secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages [*ton aionon*] for our glorification’. Later in the chapter Paul explains why this wisdom is not known in general:

The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:14–16).

It is in the conflict between the world system and the church that the church has to remember that if it is to live in the world then Christ’s wisdom and that alone must be espoused. God’s wisdom is the truth and the light and the life—to put it in John’s terms—but Paul’s view of these three sets of opposites would not differ, even if he does not make these contrasts in quite the same way.

PAUL’S ESCHATOLOGY AND THE CHURCH LIVING IN THIS WORLD

We now come to Paul’s understanding of eschatology which is really his understanding of ‘the whole counsel of God’. This lies in Christ and the Kingdom of God. The ‘mystery of his [God’s] will’ is that Christ is the one who in the fullness of time will summate *all things* (Eph. 1:9–10), i.e. head up and unify the whole creation. In 4:7ff. it is that Christ will fill *all things*, and in Colossians 1:19–22 it is that Christ will reconcile *all things*. Looked at from another Pauline point of view it is that Christ will have put down all the enemies of God, and in doing so will present the Kingdom to his Father that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:24–28). The kingdom of Satan (Col. 1:13) has constituted the enmity against God from Eden, at least. Paul’s mind is fixed on the idea of ‘the secret and hidden wisdom of God . . . for our glorification’ (1 Cor. 2:6–7). Ordinary sinful humanity will not inherit the Kingdom, but only those who will have put off corruption and put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:51–57). That glorification—the gift of immortality—will come at the end of the age so that the children of God will enter ‘the liberty of the glory of the children of God’ (Rom. 8:21). All of God’s creation will enter into that. This ultimate of creation’s liberation will constitute the coming of the Kingdom and the inheriting of it by the saints.

None of this will happen without every action of it being contested by Satan and his system. One Thessalonians 4:13–18 show the manner of Christ’s *parousia*. Two Thessalonians 2:1–11 show how the plan of God, especially in regard to the resurrection to life, will be contested by ‘the man of sin [lawlessness] . . . the son of perdition’ making out in the temple (the church) that he is very God. At this time ‘the mystery of lawlessness’ (v. 7; cf. Rev.

17:6ff.) will be revealed and Christ 'will slay him with the breath [Spirit] of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming'. Some of the strongest words of Paul are written in 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10:

This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be made worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering—since indeed God deems it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant rest with us to you who are afflicted, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at in all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

Paul, then, sees that the battle of the church with the Satanic world is ever in action. He knows that even the inner discipline of the church will be attacked by Satan (2:5–11). He speaks about a required act of forgiveness to a man who had sinned in the church and been severely disciplined, 'to keep Satan from gaining the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his designs' (2 Cor. 2:11). All the time we need to know his designs. Equally we need to know our weapons. We saw in Romans 16:19–20 that being wise as to what is good and guileless to what is evil is the mind to have, for then God will soon crush Satan under our feet.

This brings us back to our discussion on wisdom (*sophia*). Wisdom is knowing the whole of God's plan and how to live in it, how to be the church living in the world. In Christ we are more than conquerors, and we can do all things in him, but we do it via the weapons given to us:

For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete (2 Cor. 10:3–6).

To live in this world as the church is to know the ways in which Satan works and then to use the weapons by which we destroy the works of the evil one (cf. 1 John 3:8), i.e. the way God destroys them, for the armour is His—'the whole armour of God' (cf. Isa. 59:16ff.; Eph. 6:10ff.). In regard to the church militant, as it is often called, it may seem to have weapons of defence, but this is not, strictly speaking, the whole case. The Pauline view of the work of Christ is that the battle has already been won and the enemy defeated, and that the final, irreversible destruction of all enemies is proceeding in the action of Christ as Lord over all the powers (1 Cor. 15:24–28). There is no need to lose heart, because present action is based on past victory and victory presently proceeding.

It is not the purpose of our Study to nominate and describe the spiritual weapons which present a formidable armoury to the enemy, but if we look at 2 Corinthians 10:3f., 1 Thessalonians 5:8, and Ephesians 6:10–18 (cf. Isa. 59:12–20), we will see that the weapons Paul nominates are faith, hope and love, truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, salvation and the sword of the Spirit. We can say that the weapons of evil are the opposites of those of the church, namely unbelief, hopelessness ('without hope in this world'), hatred ('hated by men and hating one another'), deceit, unrighteousness, the 'gospel' of no peace, and the sword of the flesh. Satan works by disguising himself and his followers as 'angels of light' when they are 'creatures of darkness'. His is 'the communion of darkness' and not 'the kingdom of the Son of his [the Father's] love'. What Paul does not nominate specifically as a weapon is the experience and action of suffering, yet this is one of the most powerful anti-evil forces. Paul sees suffering as being of the nature of Christ's suffering—'the fellowship of his sufferings, (Phil. 3:10)—not that we ever exercise redemptive suffering, but at the heart of true suffering is the setting forth of Christ's redemption as in 2 Corinthians 4:7–18, and especially verses 10–12:

. . . always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

To be so identified with Christ that the believer is constantly manifesting the killing of the Lord Jesus is ever to be an affront to the powers of evil and the human powers who—representing the present evil age—have made the most awful mistake that can be made in all the universe. Darkness is ever manifested by this marvellous light of the Cross, and so the guilt of the perpetrators—all devilish creatures and all humanity—is brought into devastating action. If the powers of darkness find immense power in accusing the human race, then so do they come into the vale of bitterness and terror by the confrontation of the conscience by the word and Spirit of God unmasking them to themselves for their dreadful deed in crucifying the Lord of glory. This is surely the action upon them as set out in Colossians 2:14–15. The reaction to their own guilt is to further harden creatures who are so incorrigible that their vicious nature ensures that they who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution, but the enduring of that suffering is, as we say, the weapon by which all evil is defeated. In Johannine language the Lion is the Lamb who terrifies the powers of darkness. In Pauline language, 'this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison', and 'I consider that the sufferings of this present time [*nun kairou*] are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us'.

CONCLUSION: THE CHURCH LIVING IN THE WORLD

We have observed that the Pauline and Johannine categories of God and Satan, light and darkness, truth and deceit, and life and death are at root the same, however much the modes and manners of stating them are concerned. If we add the Johannine teaching in the Epistles then the agreement is even stronger. The cosmology of both is not greatly variant.

To sum up Paul's idea of the church living in the world we understand that he sees the church as the company of Christ who is bringing the message of God's judgment on Satan, the worldly powers and the worldly system; and the message of the eschatological liberation of the created universe, based on his incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension. Whatever the functions of the original creation allotted to angelic powers in regard to ruling and serving principdoms, it is seen that many of them are functioning against their original mandate, and are part of the Satanic force which is at enmity against God. Against these powers and their ruler, Satan, Christ has fought, and thus they have been defeated by the work of the Cross.

The company of Christ's people are, in themselves, the antithesis of what is the world. With Christ in his battle with the world they are active because the doom of the world-system is sealed. The church is aware of Satan's devices and acts accordingly. Its way of living is moral but far from being moralistic. By living in faith, hope and love it defeats all that is antithetic to it. They are strongly aware of Christ in whom they can do all things and overcome the most terrible opposition. Their life is not just given to fighting evil powers and worldliness, but is given to living in Christ, who is the real Victor in the moral battle, and anticipating the *parousia* by which it shall be transformed, and by which the powers of the world shall be defeated, judged and destroyed. By using the term 'transformed' we mean glorified. Man who is mortal shall be glorified and given the gift of immortality. He shall have a body like unto Christ's body of glory. The measure of his suffering shall also determine the dimensions of his 'weight of glory'. Of course we cannot detail all the means by which the church lives in the world for these means are many. We do know that Christ has sent us into the world, and that is all we need to know.

The Church Living in the World—The Teaching of John in His Epistles and the Revelation

INTRODUCTION: GENERAL JOHANNINE TEACHING

By 'Johannine teaching' we mean the Gospel of John, the three Epistles of John and the Book of the Revelation. The authorship of these books has been widely debated as to whether there were at least three Johns, i.e. the Apostle, the Elder and the Divine, but for purposes of this Study we will not enter into question of authorship but treat the body of teaching we find in the Epistles and the Revelation and simply call the writing Johannine. If John is not the author of all these books, nevertheless they are books of the one mind. We have already dealt with the church living in the world in John's Gospel. In that Gospel Jesus made it clear to the Father in 17:12–19 that he was sending his disciples into the world, and in 20:19–23 he spoke of them having ministry to the world. With this in mind we will look at the Epistles and the Revelation.

THE WORLD AND THE CHURCH IN JOHN'S EPISTLES

In our studies on the church living in the world we have seen that John's Gospel defines the whole matter of the two communities, i.e. the *ecclesia* of God, and the community of the Devil. Jesus gave clear insight into the two and warned his disciples against the children of the Devil. In a way they had experienced much of the conflict between the two whilst with their Lord, but he also had forewarned them of the conflict to come. Paul's experience of the two communities and his teaching regarding the church living in the world were at the point where the church was living in the world, and in many ways overcoming the world, working as they were in the ministry of the Kingdom. What we now study are the three Letters of John who, himself, was also in the practical outworking of the gospel as he wrote to his brethren—'my little children'—giving them the kind of teaching which would enable them to be the church in the world.

In our study on John's Gospel we found the following opposites or contrasts: (i) The church and the world; (ii) Light and darkness; (iii) Life and death; (iv) Truth and deceit; in John's Epistles we may add (v) Love and hate; and (vi) Obedience and lawlessness. In fact, looking back, these last two items can also be found in the Gospel. Doubtless there may be many more opposites but at this juncture we want to see the matter of the church living in the world into which Christ sent his people. We will use these opposites to develop the picture of the Epistles, so that we have a detailed coverage of what is the world in which the church is living.

The Church and the World

The Church

The Letter is addressed to a church which is in full action. Its nature is that of the *koinonia* or fellowship. To live in the life of the fellowship is to be in fellowship first with the Father and the Son and then with one another (1 John 1:3, 6). The church is composed of God's children (3:2) who are thus brethren, a word used much in the Epistles. The children are those of the Father (3:1–3). The church is rooted in the Fatherhood. Those of the church abide in the Father, and the Father in them. The children of God do right, i.e. works of righteousness (3:7) and love one another.

The World

The good use of the world (*kosmos*) can be seen in 2:2—‘for the sins of the whole world’. The world-system is evil because it ‘lies [in] the evil one’(5:19), its elements being ‘the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life’ (2:15). They love the world (2:15). Its inhabitants are first ‘the evil one’ (5:19), i.e. ‘the devil’ (3:8), and then they who sin, i.e. those who are of the Devil (3:8) and are called ‘the children of the devil’ (3:10). They are sinners by their participation with the Devil (3:8). Cain is one of these who are of the evil one (3:12). Obviously the ‘antichrists’ (2:18–22) are those who are of ‘the spirit of antichrist’ (4:3) and are of the world. As such they are ‘the spirits’(4:1ff.) who go out into the *kosmos* although they were once, outwardly, members of the church: ‘They went out from us, but they were not of us’ (2:19). The distinction is clear, ‘for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us’. Those of the world hate those who are of God, i.e. members of the church (3:13). Those of the world are those living in darkness (2:9–11). The world with its lust is passing away (2:17) because it is of darkness and not of light, of hatred and not of love, of lawlessness and not of obedience.

Light and Darkness***Light***

‘God is light and in him is no darkness at all’ (1:5). Walking in light is the order of the people of God. God is said to be ‘in the light’ (1:7) because that is His realm. He lights it. Light and truth are one. The principle is, ‘He who loves his brother abides in the light’(2:10).

Darkness

Darkness is being outside the light, and acting contrary to it (1:6). It is therefore not doing right acts. This is especially so when a person hates his brother, for he ‘walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going’ (2:8–11). Darkness is, then, all that is not of light, not of God, not of love, not of the truth, but is of sin, disobedience and hatred.

Life and Death***Life***

One John 1:1–3 needs to be looked at in particular detail:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Here the subject is ‘the word of life’. This was the ‘eternal life’ which was with the Father and which is now made manifest to the apostles and so to the church. All that has to do with him—‘his Son Jesus Christ’—is life. ‘And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ’ (3:23) is typical of the Gospel for receiving eternal life, i.e. by means of believing. We can reasonably conclude all that is light, love, truth and obedience is life. This matter of life is powerfully summed up in 5:11–12, ‘And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life.’

Death

One John 3:15 says, ‘Any one who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him’. If we speak of life in and through Christ we also

speak of death by contrast. Obviously the readers of John's Epistles already had the mind of all the issues he raised in those letters. The letters are not there to teach them, since 'you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know' or, 'you know all things', but John was refreshing them in these matters, sharing his wisdom with them.

Truth and Deceit

Truth

In the three Letters John uses the word 'truth' some twenty times, five each in the Letters 2 and 3. It seems to have become much in his mature thinking. 'Truth' and 'believing' are linked together. The passage of 1 John 3:19–23 is helpful here:

By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

We know we are of the truth because (i) we keep his commandments; and (ii) the commandment is that we believe on Christ. Truth can only be in action when we walk in the light (1:5–6) and truth is something you *do* and not just doctrine you know *about*. 'If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (1:8). Truth is the way of life. It is so important that we need to have a witness to the truth otherwise we could not be sure it is truth, and this witness is the Holy Spirit (cf. 5:6–11) for the Spirit *is* the truth. In 2:21 the principle is stated, 'no lie is of the truth'. The truth of God reversed *is* the lie. In a way the whole matter is summed up in 4:6, 'We are of God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and he who is not of God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.'

Deceit

The truth is to keep God's word and commandments, especially the one to love. Not to do so is to be a liar. So 2:4, 'He who says "I know him" but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him'. Likewise in 1 John 4:20, 'If any one says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen'. Deceit comes from the Devil, as we saw in studying John's Gospel, and in this Letter he is 'the evil one'. In Revelation he is the one who goes out to deceive the whole world; in John 8:44 Jesus addressed the Jews:

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

In John's First Letter he—the Devil—works the lie in the ones linked with him. In 4:1 the story is told, 'Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world'. Here 'the spirits' are 'false prophets', i.e. those who call the lie the truth, and the truth a lie. Hence as we have seen in 2:4 and 4:20, certain men are liars. This is also seen in 2:22, 'Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?' John then goes on to say, 'This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son'. Then comes the fearful statement, 'No one who denies the Son has the Father'. Not to have the Father is not to be a son, and it is to have nothing. This accords with 5:10, 'He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. He who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne to his Son.' We see, then, that unbelief is denying the witness of the Spirit of truth, the very witness which would be in the heart of a person, were he to believe. To believe the

liar—the evil one, the antichrist—results in total loss of the truth, in that person becoming a liar, and then that one making out God to be a liar. This is dreadful apostasy. Is John saying this is the sin which is mortal and for which we do not have to pray?

Love and Hate

Love

Of all the epistles and other books of the Bible, this Letter stands out as the one of love. There are 22 verses which explicitly state the word ‘love’ in nounal and verbal forms. The principle of love can be seen in the following. God is love (4:8, 16). His love is shown in sending His Son into the world that we might live through him (4:9). This entails the total act of love in God making His Son to be the propitiation for the sin of the world (4:10; 3:16f.; 2:1f.). When this love comes to a person by revelation then it can be said, ‘We love, because he first loved us’ (4:19). This is not just a return love to God for His love, but love for all—God and Man in entirety. This coming to love is said to be by the act of new birth—‘he who loves is born of God and loves God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love’ (4:7–8). The command to love is ‘from the beginning’ (2:7f.). The test of having passed out of death into life is that we lay down our lives for the brethren (3:16) and we share this world’s goods where the brethren are in genuine need (3:17–19). For the rest, love is seen in its action of obedience to God and His law. One John 5:1–3 repeats the theme often found in these Epistles that to love is to obey, and obedience is especially seen in love for God and all others:

Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God, and every one who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

Hate

On the one hand those who are the children of God love the Father who sent the Son, and the Son who became the propitiation for their sins. This results in the children of God dwelling in God and God in them (2:23–24; 3:24; 4:12–16) which is equal to living in love. On the other hand there are those who hate God and hate their fellow-creatures. One John 3:13 alerts us to this fact:

Do not wonder, brethren, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Any one who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

Not to love and not to respond to love by another, is being in death whilst yet existing. It is walking in darkness in which one stumbles (2:11) and does not know where one is going—a most frightful thought concerning a human being who must therefore be bereft of hope. Hatred is the reverse of genuine loving and has a deadly power. The world hates God, and refuses to love Him. Instead of love it has only lust to fulfil its emotional and physical desires (2:15–17) and this world is passing away.

Obedience and Lawlessness

Obedience

Obedience is a very rich theme in the three Letters. It would take much text to describe it in its full detail. In 1 John 1:7 it is walking in the light. In 2:4–5 it is obeying God’s commandments by which the love of God is perfected in us. This is a parallel to 4:11–12 where loving one another results in love being perfected in us. In 2:10 it is abiding in the light. In 2:24 it is letting what has been heard from the beginning abide in one. In 3:9 it is not sinning

as do those who are linked with the Devil, for the seed of God dwells in a person who believes. In 3:16 it is loving the brethren and laying down our lives for them. In 3:22–24 it is keeping all His commandments, one of which is to love the brethren. In 5:1–3 we come close to seeing that believing results in obedience:

Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God, and every one who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

Obedience, then, is knowing the truth, believing it, and walking according to it in love.

Lawlessness

In one way we can see all that lawlessness is. It is the opposite to all that is obedience. This is a most powerful contrast, showing the delusion of error and where it takes a person in lawlessness and death. It is unbelief, perversion of the truth, it is living in darkness, it is living the lie, it is making both God and men into liars by refusing the truth and reshaping it in devilish fashion (cf. Isa. 5:20–21). One John 3:4–10 should be read and pondered at one reading, for it reveals the root and principle of lawlessness and true obedience. The Devil is at the root of all lawlessness and God is at the root of all obedience in that He sent His Son to destroy all the works of the Devil:

Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous, as he is righteous. He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God. By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother.

Looking across the panorama of the Letter we see the massive lawlessness of the evil one; the antichrist; the many antichrists; the spirits; the false prophets; the world-system with its lusts and hatred of God, His Son, and His children. Knowing that there is unceasing conflict between the two communities, we will look at them both, and the outcome of this conflict.

THE MATTER OF THE TWO COMMUNITIES

In 1 John 3:10, John says there are the children of God and there are the children of the Devil. The church is one community and the world another. Throughout John's Letters the head of Christ's community is the Father. He constantly takes the initiative in helping His people to be His family. The Devil exercises leadership of the world-system—'the whole world lies in the evil one'. All his 'children' are in him, and do his will in that they are lawless, liars, people of the darkness, lustful, given to murder by simply hating, are given to idolatry and do not know God. This community has no hope for the future, not knowing the truth, not seeing the light and being in the process of 'passing away' (2:8, 17).

By contrast the people of God, who are the children of God, who are the church, have been forgiven all sins, and have an Advocate before the Father should they ever sin. They have a rich fellowship (*koinonia*) and live in light, walking in it as also in love and obedience. They live in the truth, having the witness of the truth in their hearts, possessing the Father and the Son (2:23–25). They abide in the Father and the Son who also indwell them. They likewise abide in God's love. They are children of God by new birth and so do righteousness (2:29), do not sin as a way of life (3:9; 5:18), love God and know His love and so love others (3:17), overcome

the world (5:4), and the evil one does not touch them (5:18). They have the hope of being in the full glory of the Son (3:1–3) for the Father in love has called them the ‘children of God’.

As to the conflict between the communities, the world hates and goes out on its murderous intent, but ‘the young men’ of 2:12–14 are strong and have overcome the evil one. This is because ‘he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world’ (4:4), and ‘whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith’ (5:4). The victory is that of Christ who dwells in us, and our faith in him is that he is the one who has come in the flesh (4:2), and that Christ keeps us so that the evil one does not touch us (5:18). This settles the matter of the triumph of God. The community lives by the Holy Spirit as well as by the Father and the Son because they are not as those spirits which are not of God (4:1), but they are of the Holy Spirit who is the witness because he is the truth (5:7) and so the believer has the witness in his heart (5:10). The Spirit testifies to us that Christ abides in us (3:24), and that God abides in us and we in him (4:12).

We conclude, then, that John the author of the Epistles has given us a clear picture of the church living in God’s whole world, and in particular, living amongst those of the Devil’s world-system. It refuses to be ruled by that system, but rather proclaims the truth to it and sheds its light upon it. In this way it overcomes the company of evil by the power of God and His love.

THE CHURCH LIVING IN THE WORLD AS SET OUT IN THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

Does the Book of the Revelation portray the church as living in the world and does it show the manner of its living by prophetic revelation? Our answer is that it certainly does, but that we have to understand the apocalyptic means used in Revelation, i.e. the unveiling by symbolic language and pictures. We must be careful to see that the apocalyptic shows only realities but that these realities are not literal, as such, but nonetheless are facts—a symbol is not a fact but represents the fact it is symbolising. It is with these facts that we have to deal.

We need to note that there is a progression throughout this Book which is called a prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 18, 19). Prophecy has primarily to do with a setting forth of the truth in a hortatory manner, and secondarily to do with prediction. This is why the Revelation has been used variously by so many interpreters, for its principles can be applied in many ways to varying situations. It is not our intention to take up the hermeneutics of the text.

The Book opens in chapter 1 with the intention to show the Book as a prophecy of Christ given by God to John, the author. In it we have the picture shown to the seven churches of ‘one like a son of man’ who walks among the seven candlesticks which are the seven—sevenfold—churches. They show him as the Priest–Conqueror who has defeated death and is alive forevermore. John is to write these things and Christ tells him the mystery of the seven churches, a mystery which has been revealed fully by the last chapter of the Book, ‘I Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star’ (22:16).

The church living in the world is portrayed in principle in chapters 2 and 3 where the angels of each church are in Christ’s right hand, and therefore so are the churches. Christ forever walks amongst the seven (sevenfold) candlesticks so that they are under his protection as well as direction. We cannot here sum up all the teaching about the churches living in the world but the directions for living commence in these two chapters. They show that the churches will never be left to themselves for Christ is ever with them. At the same time we discover that Satan is in the world and present to the churches by way of antagonism and opposition. There are such statements as ‘a synagogue of Satan’ (2:9), ‘where Satan’s throne is . . . where Satan dwells’ (2:13), ‘the deep things of Satan’ (2:24), ‘the synagogue of Satan’ (3:9), and in addition many references to the worldly evil which has penetrated the churches. There can be no doubt about the fact that Satan is in the action of destroying churches. At the same time all are

exhorted by Christ to be overcomers or conquerors of Satan and evil (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; cf. 21:7).

The first three chapters make the setting for the Book. Worship is set out in chapter 4 of God as holy Creator, and in chapter 5 it is worship of God and the Lamb together. In chapter 5 the Lion of Judah is the Lamb who carries the marks of his victory upon the Cross. He alone is worthy to open the book with the seven seals, for in this book is all history to come. In opening the seals Christ is bringing judgments upon the nations. When the opening seven seals is completed then the first set of judgments has been fulfilled. These give way to the seven trumpet calls which are the second set of judgments to be carried out. The third set of judgments are those of the bowls of wrath and these, too, are carried out. With each set of seven, other events happen which are germane to the central idea of God's act of universal retribution, and are indeed the history of the world as evil power seeks to engage God in a mortal battle.

We now proceed to explore the action of evil under Satan. In 6:9–11 the killing work of Satan is seen in the matter of the martyrs who are now under the altar, but the explicit beginning of the revelation of Satan and his power is seen in chapter 11 where the two prophetic witnesses appear. It is here the beast is first mentioned (11:7) who ascends from the bottomless pit and attacks and kills the two witnesses. It is made clear by God's resurrection of the witnesses, and the announcement concerning the imminent wrath of God, that the battle is joined between God and Satan:

And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, 'We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear thy name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth' (11:16–18).

In chapter 12 the matter of the battle of the kingdom of Satan (16:10) becomes explicit and persists through even to the end of chapter 20. Along the way the church is living in the world in which powers of darkness seem so victorious and universally regarded as substantial. There can be no doubt that Satan—now called the red dragon—makes his move first against the pre-eminent woman, against the child (Christ), and then against the church. The chapter ends with the dragon going 'to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus' (12:17).

In chapter 13 the beast arises from the sea which 17:15 interprets 'are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues'. The beast arises out of the nations which are bestly and projects himself as a member of the false trinity, the dragon being as the Father, the beast as the Son, and the false prophet (or, second beast) as the Holy Spirit. Man's ontological need of the Creator-Trinity is partially fulfilled. In any case the beast is dangerous because it apes Christ even to having a mortal wound and then a resurrection (13:1–4). 'It was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them' (13:7). Here is the church truly living in the world, this world of evil which seeks to destroy the church. What should be its stance in this difficulty? The answer is, 'If any one is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if any one slays with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints' (13:10). This is a significant statement for 'patient endurance and faith' are to be the church's mode of living. Who then are the saints but in this case the whole church. In 7:1–17 the church is the 144,000 and 'the great multitude' who are numberless, but they are the flock of the Shepherd. In chapter 14, verses 1–5, we meet the church, or at least the 144,000 who are the first fruits for God and the Lamb and represent the whole church. These are chaste, and follow the Lamb wherever he goes. So in the battle the church is one with Christ. Even so, many will die in the Lord so that:

Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord

henceforth.’ ‘Blessed indeed,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!’ (14:12–13).

In chapter 15 the remarkable news is that those of the church ‘have conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name’ (15:2). In the light of 13:7–10 and 14:12 this is indeed wonderful news. So it is that:

... they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, ‘Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages! Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord? For thou alone art holy. All nations shall come and worship thee, for thy judgments have been revealed’ (15:3–4).

We should note that there are encouragement passages in the midst of the conflict, the judgment and the movements of nations, which show the church that God is in sovereign control. These are 11:15–18; 14:6–8; 15:2–4; 19:1–3.

In chapters 17 and 18 we are told of ‘the mystery of the woman’ (17:7) who is ‘Babylon . . . mother of harlots and earth’s abominations’. Here, if anything, is the world, although the term ‘world’ is not used in Revelation except to name the created universe. There is a prophetic intimation of a fall to come of Babylon in 14:8, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of her impure passion’. We must recognise that throughout history Babylon has been a powerful enemy of the people of God. We must take her being and presence into constant consideration, as her worldly ways are constantly invading the church of God, connected as she is with idols, and as idols are with Satan. The cruelty and evil of this city is beyond competent description, but a passage such as 17:1–6 goes a fair way in describing her:

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who is seated upon many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the dwellers on earth have become drunk.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication; and on her forehead was written a name of mystery: ‘Babylon the great, mother of harlots and of earth’s abominations.’ And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

The entire eighteenth chapter gives further information concerning her horrible nature. So verses 1–3:

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority; and the earth was made bright with his splendor. And he called out with a mighty voice, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! It has become a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every foul and hateful bird; for all nations have drunk the wine of her impure passion, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich with the wealth of her wantonness.’

Chapter 18 and verse 24, ‘And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth’.

We could be excused for thinking that with much that goes on in history the church is virtually protected, and much that goes on in the world does not involve her, and that she has minimal knowledge of it. How utterly wrong we would be! We have already seen the cruelty that has caused—as it will yet cause—the martyrdom of many. We have viewed the battle, power and action of the church in chapter 15, the persecution of the church in chapters 12 to 18. Revelation 17:7–18 is quite detailed in its description of the war of the enemies of God including Babylon, the beast, and ‘the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world’. There are also the ten kings—‘they will

make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful' (17:14):

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself. He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. 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. Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in midheaven, 'Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.' And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who sits upon the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had worked the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur. And the rest were slain by the sword of him who sits upon the horse, the sword that issues from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh (19:11–21).

The battle of God against His enemies involves the church, for the statement 'the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses' surely includes those who in Ephesians 2:6 (cf. Col. 3:1; Rev. 3:21) are seated with him in heavenly places now, and do battle with 'spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' now (Eph. 6:12; cf. Rev. 2:26–27). It is the saints—the church—who are in their camp and the beloved city, who are surrounded. The full picture is seen in 20:7–10:

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Thus we see the triumph of God, His celestial creatures and the church in the final outcome of history. The church has lived in the world and has not been overcome by it, but in its Lord it has helped to overcome the world.

CONCLUSION: THE MATTER OF VIEWING THE CHURCH'S LIVING IN HISTORY IN THE PLAN OF GOD

Undoubtedly we are keenly interested in all the materials of our Studies regarding the church living in the world. To these materials we could add more from other New Testament writers such as Peter, James and Jude, to say nothing of the other Gospellers. Their materials would be most valuable, but we conclude with an exhortation.

How easy it would be for us to agree with the materials presented, nod our heads, and be glad to know more about the life we live as the church in today's world as also yesterday's world and tomorrow's world, but recognition is not enough: we are accountable for what we have learned and what we do with it. The questions are, 'Are we really involved in the plan of God?' 'Is martyrdom unreal to us who live in virtually protected countries?' 'Do we really see the seals opened, the trumpets blown, and the bowls of wrath being poured out?' 'Have we caught the horrific and dreadful nature of this entire conflict?' 'Do we relate it all with the flow of moral evil which has inundated the world, and indescribable cruelty and shocking hatred which is amongst all nations and which constantly seeks to penetrate the church?'

We have a habit of knowing facts, but of not being involved in them, counting them as matters which are said to have happened and are happening, but not really being moved by

them as though they are in another sphere of action in which we are not involved. Yet they are things which confront us continually and to which we must respond by proper actions. We know that the world will not have been established in peace and tranquillity before and by the time of his coming. We have seen that he will come for the purposes of judging and of destroying all enemies and climaxing history with the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb and other beautiful happenings. Let us not relegate our Studies to a file, but let us be prayerful in our contemplation, alert in our warfare, and let us see that the sevenfold church hears the voice of this prophecy showing his servants ‘what must soon take place’ so that we are one in the Bride and the Spirit in anticipating his return.

The revelational key to understanding all of God’s history is the Cross as it becomes ‘the word of the Cross’ to us. We cannot just will ourselves to understand the significance of the strange works of God by sheer concentration of the will upon them, but all our attitudes and actions must be the outworking of our crucifixion with Christ, and the outworking of our resurrection in him, and our being translated to his throne to reign and rule with him. Only this will bring the necessary understanding of the flow of history and our part in it. This, then, will be our understanding of the wisdom of God. Meanwhile we wait patiently to know even as we ourselves are known.

‘The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let him who hears say, “Come.” And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price.’

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G. Bingham

The Church Living in the World As Community—1

INTRODUCTION: THE MATTER OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY

Over the last couple of years we have been looking at the nature of the church. We have seen that God had planned those whom we term 'the people of God', also seeing those named as 'the sons of God' in contradistinction to those nominated 'the daughters of men'. We have traced the roll-call of the nations as set out in Genesis chapter 10, after which we saw the formation of Israel beginning at chapter 12 of Genesis with the covenant made with Abraham. We have traced the people of God through the history of Israel, and then the birth of the church at Pentecost where there was both continuity and discontinuity with Israel. With discontinuity two streams flowed in history, i.e. the two peoples—Israel and the church—and these have virtually lived their lives apart. Of course there has also been the stream of humanity which espouses neither Israel nor the church.

In this paper we are looking at the fact of the whole world being the community of God as intended by God when He created, and the principle by which created Man was to live. Because of the rift of the children of Adam, doubtless due to Adam's sin of rebellion against God, there are, roughly speaking, two streams of humanity—those who are in God, and those who are not. We could put it in other ways: those in Adam and those in Christ; those whose Father is God and those who are children of the devil; those who are of the world—as we have set it out in previous Studies—and those who can be called Christ's people. We could also say 'those who are in the covenant of God and those who are not'.

The matter of the world community is constantly set before us. All human beings are said to be 'in Adam'. Paul put it, 'And 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' (Acts 17:26). In Romans 5:12–21 he talks about the solidary nature of the human race as it is in Adam. In 2 Corinthians 5:14 Paul speaks of Christ being one with the solidary human race, 'we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died'. To this degree, then, the human race is a solidary whole.

In practice, in history, the human race has been deeply divided, and not simply into two blocks of people. The history of nations and wars between them tell us how little unity there has been or now is in the realm of Man. This has been so since the beginning of human history and we are setting out to see the nature of Man as community after the order of his creation, and the rifts that have taken place in history.

MAN IN COMMUNITY STATE FROM THE BEGINNING

In seeking to show that Man is a world-wide community by the intention of God in creating him we will draw on the whole text of Scripture as our source and resource. We will need also to approach the matter through theology. We are basing our claim that humanity is one community by creation on two simple facts: (i) Man was made, and is still, in the image of God; and (ii) that God is community not simply by being three Persons in one Godhead, but by the fact that essentially He is love. The fact is that love does not exist outside relationships and true relationships cannot exist outside of love.

The action of the triune God is that the three Persons honour one another, serve one another, and give to and receive from one another. These points are discernible in John's Gospel. The whole of this action can be called love, since love is being 'other person/s centred'. Paul's

picture of it in Philippians 2:1–4 is: (i) ‘in humility count others better than yourselves’; and (ii) ‘Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but to the interests of others’. One’s counting others better than one’s self is putting them before one’s self, and not looking to one’s own interest is to look primarily to the interests of others. Whilst the theological concept of *perichoresis*⁶ did not emerge for some centuries after the birth of the church it was inherently present in the fellowship or *koinonia* of the church.

I think, then, that it is necessary for us to grasp something of the nature of perichoresis. I give a few quotes of the nature of *perichoresis*.

Cornelius Plantinga in an essay, ‘Social Trinity and Tritheism’, while speaking of the relationships of the three Persons as set out in John’s Gospel and their inter-dwelling, comments on *perichoresis*:

So much for Paul.⁷ Through John’s Gospel runs an even richer vein for the church’s doctrine of the Trinity—a wide, deep, and subtle account of divine distinction within unity. In John, Father, Son, and usually the Spirit or Paraclete are clearly distinct divine persons who play differentiated roles within the general divine enterprise of life-giving and life-disclosing. Yet they are primordially united—a claim typically made in the Fourth Gospel . . . Father and Son are said to be in each other. This is the base claim for the Greek Fathers’ doctrine of *perichoresis*, a sort of intratrinitarian hospitality concept. According to this concept, each trinitarian person graciously makes room for the others in his own inner life and envelops or enfolds that person there. Each is *in* the other two.

In John, Father and Son are also said to be one with each other. Though the relation of in-ness and oneness is not clearly set forth, it is close in context and apparently in concept. Perhaps in-ness is the main exhibition of oneness.

In any case, the primal unity of Father, Son, and Paraclete is revealed, exemplified, and maybe partly constituted by common will, work, word, and knowledge among them, and by their reciprocal love and glorifying. These same six phenomena both distinguish the three persons and also unite them, typically by a functional subordination relation that obtains among the three.⁸

In an article titled ‘Circumincession’ in the encyclopedia *Trinitas*, the writer speaks of the Latin term and does not use the Greek term *perichoresis*. *Circumincession* is the equivalent Latin term. The writer explains the difference between ‘circumincession’ and ‘circuminsession’:

The word denotes the mutual immanence of the three divine persons, their reciprocal interiority, their ceaseless vital presence to each other, inter-penetration. *Circuminsession* emphasizes the abiding reality; *circumincession* the dynamic circulation of Trinitarian life from each to the others. The first appeals more to the Latin mind which thinks first of the divine essence, the second to the Greek which begins from the persons, borne to each other eternally, irresistibly, by their very identity as subsistent relations. It is infinitely more than community or participation as understood in human existence.⁹

Two theologians who deal much with the perichoresis, especially in the interests of Christian sociology, are Jürgen Moltmann and Leonardo Boff. In his book *Trinity and Society*, Boff describes perichoresis after he has spoken of the Three Persons being one together in communion:

The term perichoresis once was used in two different fields of theology: that having to do with the relationship between God and matter and that having to do with the relationship of the two natures in

⁶ The subject is vast and deep and we cannot treat it wholly in this Paper. For NCTM source materials see the Studies from June to December 1991 in the Pastors’ Monday Studies and the Pastors’ School notes of 1991. More condensed but most valuable is Study 3 of The Pastors’ School Evening Study Notes for 2000. It is titled ‘*Perichoresis* and the Giving and Receiving of God’. It also has a separately printed Introduction. All these Notes are available on the NCTM Website, www.newcreation.org.au, and some Notes are available from NCTM.

⁷ Plantinga has been speaking of the ‘in’ concept in Paul.

⁸ *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement: Philosophical & Theological Essays*, eds Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1989), p. 25.

⁹ *Trinitas: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Holy Trinity* by Michael O’Carroll (Michael Glazier, Wilmington, 1987), pp. 68–9.

Christ. God is said to penetrate all the matter of creation; God is in the world; God's presence, actions and providence pervade the world. But there is no reciprocity, since matter is not capable of responding consciously to God and of being in God. This perichoresis is not complete. In Jesus Christ two natures, human and divine, co-exist, united in the Person of the Son. This union is so deep that the properties of one nature are interchangeable with those of the other. So it is correct to say: 'God appeared on earth, suffered and died,' or 'This man is uncreated and eternal.' The two natures interpenetrate each other, without fusion or confusion; divine nature takes on human nature, each occupying the totality of the same divine hypostasis and so producing a true perichoresis (also referred to as *communicatio idiomatum*).

Finally, the term perichoresis gained currency in trinitarian theology, though it is only in recent times that it has come to occupy a central position in this field. We need now to look more closely at what it means as applied to the Trinity, since the concept is central to the relevance of the Trinity to our desire for a society that lives together in more open communion, equality and respectful acceptance of differences.¹⁰

Jürgen Moltmann sees deep sociological meaning in the concept of *perichoresis*. In his book on *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* he has the following to say on *perichoresis*:

If the concept of person comes to be understood in trinitarian terms – that is, in terms of relation and historically – then the Persons do not only subsist in the common divine substance; they also exist in their relations to the other Persons. More – they are alive in one another and through the others in each several case.

This idea found expression in the early church's doctrine about the *immanentia* and *inexistentia* of the trinitarian Persons: *intima et perfecta inhabitatio unius personae in alia*.

John Damascene's profound doctrine of the eternal [perichoresis] or *circumincessio* of the trinitarian Persons goes even further. For this concept grasps the circulatory character of the eternal divine life. An eternal life process takes place in the triune God through the exchange of energies. The Father exists in the Son, the Son in the Father, and both of them in the Spirit, just as the Spirit exists in both the Father and the Son. By virtue of their eternal love they live in one another to such an extent, and dwell in one another to such an extent, that they are one. It is a process of most perfect and intense empathy. Precisely through the personal characteristics that distinguish them from one another, the Father, the Son and the Spirit dwell in one another and communicate eternal life to one another. In the perichoresis, the very thing that divides them becomes that which binds them together. The 'circulation' of the eternal divine life becomes perfect through the fellowship and unity of the different Persons in the eternal love. In their perichoresis and because of it, the trinitarian persons are not to be understood as three different individuals, who only subsequently enter into relationship with one another (which is the customary reproach, under the name of 'tritheism'). But they are not, either, three modes of being or three repetitions of the One God, as the modalistic interpretation suggests. The doctrine of the perichoresis links together in a brilliant way the threeness and the unity, without reducing the threeness to the unity, or dissolving the unity in the threeness. The unity of the triunity lies in the eternal perichoresis of the trinitarian persons. Interpreted perichoretically, the trinitarian persons form their own unity by themselves in the circulation of the divine life.¹¹

Finally a note on the historical development of the idea of *perichoresis*. We have noted that the idea of *perichoresis* was present with Pseudo-Cyril in the sixth century, and that John of Damascus adopted and used it to make clear his ideas of the Trinity. Not all have embraced it and such theologians as Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas did not use it, but it was taken up by the Franciscan School of Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, William of Occam and those who followed in their train.

From the beginning the word 'perichoresis' was developed from the verb *perichoreo*. This verb means 'to go round', 'to rotate', 'to be transferred to', 'to come to in succession'. The word *chora* means 'space or room in which a thing is defined as partly occupied space', 'generally place, a spot'.¹² The verb in NT Greek, *choreo*—without the prefix *peri*—means 'to go out or away, to be in motion, go forward, make progress, to have room for, to hold, to

¹⁰ *Trinity and Society* by Leonardo Boff, trans. by Paul Burnes (Burns and Oates, Tunbridge Wells, 1988), p. 136.

¹¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God* (SCM Press, London, 1981), pp. 174–5.

¹² *A Greek-English Lexicon* by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott (Clarendon, Oxford, 1996 edition).

contain', 'to accept comprehend, understand'.¹³ It is impossible for us to know what the Greek word meant at that time, especially as it came to the theologians who used it. Moltmann notes that 'Patricia Wilson-Kastner has understood *perichoresis* as *perichoreusis*, and depicted it as a round dance',¹⁴ and many such ideas are being given as being the original idea of the verb *perichoreo*, which cannot be substantiated. *Choros* means 'dance' and *chorobateo* means 'to dance in chorus', but these words are not related to *perichoreo* and *perichoresis*.¹⁵

According to Boff the word *perichoresis* has a double meaning: (i) the idea of one thing contained in another, i.e. dwelling in it, but emphasising its static, i.e. continuing state; and (ii) this is the active state within the static, signifying the interweaving and interpenetration of the one Person with the others and in the others.¹⁶ The first meaning was translated into Latin by the word *circuminsessio*—from *sedere* and *sessio* meaning 'being seated', 'having its seat in'—and the second by *circumincessio* derived from *incedere* which means 'to interpenetrate, permeate, penetrate'. Thus the word *perichoresis* can be seen to be dynamic in its meaning and representation.

Again, Plantinga says, 'Father and Son are said to be *in* each other. This is the base claim for the Greek Fathers' doctrine of *perichoresis*, a sort of *intratrinitarian hospitality* concept. According to this concept, *each trinitarian person graciously makes room for the others in his own inner life and envelops or enfolds that person there.*'¹⁷ This shows what we have emphasised in the note on the development of the concept of *perichoresis* is that 'occupying space', i.e. each member of the Trinity gives space to the others, or 'hospitality' as Plantinga says. We also note that 'Patricia Wilson-Kastner has understood *perichoresis* as *perichoreusis*, and depicted it as a round dance',¹⁸ and many such ideas are being given as being the original idea of the verb *perichoreo*, which cannot be substantiated. *Choros* means 'dance' and *chorobateo* means 'to dance in chorus' but these words are not related to *perichoreo* and *perichoresis*.

We note that:

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.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 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 (Gen. 1:26–28).

This must mean that Man was made in the image of the Triune God, and as such was in the image of what God was and is, namely the communion or fellowship which we call perichoretic. We take it that when the woman was made out of the man then the two constituted the full image of God. To coin a statement, 'Man became a social being'. He lived corporately, i.e. man and woman together with a view to being family together. All in Adam were created to be one family, one fellowship, one community.

For the purpose of our Study this communion or community is the basis on which we need to build our life and humanity. It will require that we believe that Man was created as the human community, but then as the human community of God. We see communities of one kind and another in the story of biblical history. All were intended to be under the one covenant and Covenant God and to be one people.¹⁹ What we must not fail to remember is what a high order it is for human beings to be ecclesial—living members of a magnificent community. We need

¹³ A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by Walter Bauer, eds W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1959), pp. 889–90.

¹⁴ *History and the Triune God*, p. 132.

¹⁵ cf. Liddell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon*, ad. loc.

¹⁶ Boff, op. cit., pp. 135f.

¹⁷ Plantinga, op. cit., p. 25, emphasis mine.

¹⁸ *History and the Triune God*, p. 132.

¹⁹ See Bill Dumbrell's *Creation and Covenant* (Paternoster Press, London, 1984) and my *Love's Most Glorious Covenant* (Redeemer Baptist Press, Castle Hill, 1997) for material on 'the everlasting covenant'.

to give much time contemplating the Divine Community and all that inheres its being, its being of pure communion and the inter-action of honouring, serving, loving, giving and receiving. Every element of that kind of life and ministry is what is contained in the human community as created by God. This is the ideality though not the ideology of it. As we have suggested, to contemplate it continually is to see the glory of God and the shape and configurations of true human community.

In history, of course, there have been many communities, whatever name we may use for them such as ‘family’, ‘clan’, ‘tribe’, ‘people’, ‘nation’, ‘empire’ and even ‘world community’. When we look for community at its best it is probably the family but then families are also apt to breed hatred, enmity and dissension. The family of parents and children exists with the families of the tribe or clan—and so on. There have been no ideal families of which we can speak. Israel comes to mind as a very large family, stemming as it did from Abraham who as ‘Abram’ was ‘exalted father’, and as Abraham ‘father of many nations’. As fine a people as Israel was, it left much to be desired. It is when we come to the church which came into observable being on the day of Pentecost that we find the community which surpassed all other communities. The church as seen in the New Testament was certainly unique in human history, and rightly understood in all history.

The question we ask is, ‘Was Man created as “ecclesial”?’ We need to understand what we mean by the question. We have no problem in seeing that Man is gregarious, that he likes to live in a community congenial to him. Apart from some who believe they like to live alone, human beings are generally social. So, for that matter, many insects, animal and bird creatures are social in habit. God created the birds and the fish to develop into swarms. Ants and bees are extremely social. Some birds and animals like to relate to human beings, especially those which we call ‘domestic’. Wild birds and animals have their own domestic communities for the most part.

So, then, are we saying, simply, that Man is gregarious by nature? This, of course, is generally true, yet we are saying more. We are saying that as God is, so too, is Man. He has been created to be true community, reflecting the unity God knows within Himself. Further, we are saying that the communion which is in the Godhead is what Man is created to reflect. We are saying that before Man was affected by the serpent in Eden, he lived in true community. The propensity for this had been given in creation and he lived that community life by his union with the Creator. What we are saying is that as God is ecclesial according to His Triune being and His perichoretic unity and love, so Man—created in His image—will be no less community by nature. We can say that God is essentially Community and that Man—His image—must likewise be ecclesial, i.e. ‘of the perichoretic human nature’ and hence a world community.

The idea that Man was essentially *ecclesial* has to be explained. The term *ecclesia* is used for the congregation of Israel in Acts 7:38, ‘This is he [Moses] who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living oracles to give to us’. The Hebrew terms *qahal* and *edah* give the idea of a company of people, not merely an aggregate of individuals. The company often congregates, i.e. at special events in the life of the community, but ‘community’ is a good word for *ecclesia*. The community is still the *ecclesia* when it is not gathered together. When Paul says, ‘So then, my brethren, when you come together . . .’ he is envisaging all Christian persons, i.e. ‘the company of them that believed’ as being a community and coming together for certain acts of worship, fellowships, eating, etc. (Acts 2:44–47; 4:32).

The term ‘ecclesia’ at the time of the New Testament was a word signifying in society ‘coming together for an arranged meeting’, or it would mean the meeting of a group for some purpose. We saw in Acts 7:38 that the word applied to the congregation of Israel, equalling *qahal* in meaning. The church or *ecclesia* is the gathered community and not simply the aggregate of Christians. Some have suggested the idea is primarily ‘called out’ but I think the better meaning is ‘called to’, as in ‘gathered together’. The fellowship or *koinonia* is a community, or *the* community as distinct from all other communities.

MAN, THE FALL, AND THE LOSS OF ECCLESIAL RELATIONSHIPS

What we have to realise is that Man in his primal innocence was essentially ecclesial. He did not become ecclesial by the coming of Christ's ecclesia. At best we can say that he flowered out in the apostolic community which was called 'the church of God'.²⁰ At Pentecost true ecclesia began and so Man's essential need was met in his being introduced into true ecclesia. It was not that he shed being ecclesial at the Fall, but rather his ecclesial nature sought out its active expression in one community or another.

What, then, were the results of this change in him? To understand these results we have to clear a view which we may have, namely that the Christian church could be seen as something which God was about developing over history through the community experienced by those who believed in 'the Most High',²¹ later known in the community of Israel as Yahweh, the thought being that God was preparing Man for the new miracle of the ecclesia in Christ. What we ought to see is that the community of believers, as outlined in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews—i.e. 'the people of faith'—was ever the ecclesia but was brought into its fullness by the person and work of Christ.

We can now say that fallen Man was ever mindful of the fact of the lost experience of pure community which Adam knew before the Fall, and that he would have felt this loss of true ecclesial being as a form of human misery. No matter what form of ecclesia he sought to raise up, it would be defective and not satisfy his ontological need. It would drive him on to devise forms of ecclesia to fulfil his need, only to realise that every form was defective. In this sense we may say that fallen Man was ever dysfunctional, by nature of the case, even though he would be blind to this fact.

In order to heighten our view of post-Eden Man, we need to know the state Man had in ecclesial fullness prior to the Fall, and there we can only conjecture theologically. I mean that we can say that the communion of the Triune Godhead must be conjectured by us, and we can only compare what was probably the bliss of innocent Man—the man with the woman and both with 'the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day'. Man would have lived in the absence of craven fear and terror and the heaviness of guilt. His Edenic habitation, i.e. his home, would have been an experience of peace, serenity, joy, love and delight, as against the heaviness and darkness which came with his rebellion against God. There would have been no division in the human couple, as there was no separation of persons in the Godhead. Because of the Fall, Man would ever live in a state where trust could not be in God or his/her fellow creatures or in the person of the self. The wonder of the unity and communion of God would be lost to sight, so that Man, in himself, because of the Fall would only be able to express his ecclesiality in forms lower than the ideality of the original, created ecclesia.

MAN'S ECCLESIAL EXPERIENCE IN HISTORY

We are now considering a plethora of human activity and sociality when we take on the story of human history. It has been reckoned, for example, that mankind has only ever had one year of peace in every thirteen years of history. This immediately tells us something about community living. But we do best to see the principle which the Scriptures open to us. We saw

²⁰ The phrase 'the church of God' is used some ten times in the New Testament. It is never called 'the church of Christ' for as we shall see it is the Father who creates the church to be the Body of Christ.

²¹ In Genesis 14:17–24 there is the account of Melchizedek, 'priest of the Most High', who solicits blessing on Abraham (Abram) by 'God Most High' and then offers Abraham the spoils of the battle, to which Abraham replies, 'I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is yours, lest you should say, "I have made Abram rich"'. This Name denotes the God which is above all gods known and worshipped of men.

that in Acts 17:24–28 Paul tells us God created us from one man—Adam—and set in history ‘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’. He then points out the futility of idols which are the Greek ideas of how and what God is.

What should be read at this point is the passage of Romans 1:18–32. Paul says God’s wrath is on the human race because though knowing God it rejected Him, failing to recognise His glory and to give Him praise and thanksgiving. No sooner had Man rejected God than he turned to idols of all forms. ‘Put another way’, Paul said, ‘they worshiped and served the creation rather than the Creator’. At this point—the point of idolatry—God gave them up to their error of idolatry (cf. Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:19–23). The *result*—seen in verses 26 to 32—was the loss of true relationships and the invasion into humanity of every form of evil. This amounts to loss of true community and its appropriate ecclesial expression. Love of idols destroys true human living:

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God’s decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them.

Having read that, then, we think in terms of human relationships, all within the general world community, and so realise how many communities make up that world community. Then we ask how many communities have the division within them of other communities. We soon see the tangle of all the communities which go to make up our world. Man’s ecclesial spirit of unity deteriorates into endless divisions, even down to the fierce splinter groups by which our world is constantly troubled. Persons—we might almost say ‘individuals’—are not fed and watered from the great issues of life, from the interrelating giving of support, help, healing and maturative gifts which are part of the corporate wisdom of the race. Whatever laws, customs and cultures may make a given community, the problem of Romans chapter 1 continually confronts it, i.e. idolatry and the relationships which issue from it.

THE CHAOS OF IDOLATRY WHICH CONFRONTS COMMUNITY

One of the reasons for the shame and humiliation of Man is that he does not look to his creational origin and of what high quality it is. Quoting Isaiah 51:1–3 is apt here:

Hearken to me, you who pursue deliverance, you who seek the LORD; look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were digged. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for when he was but one I called him, and I blessed him and made him many. For the LORD will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song.

Whilst the Lord is applying His principle to Israel’s origins in Abraham and Sarah, it is most apt if we apply its principle to original creation which would be articulated thus, ‘Look to your creational beginnings and what you were made to be by the hand of the Creator. If you look to what you were, and where you were, then this is what will come to you again; i.e. the fullness of Eden, and all the community you knew, and the promise of wider community which you knew in the creating Lord—all its abundant blessing and comfort and joy and gladness, its thanksgiving and singing—for true Paradise it will be again.’

If one refuses the reason for which one was created then creational ontology in that sense is violated. One has existence but not valid existence. When one refuses one's true ecclesiality then one is faced with a chaos.²² Being dysfunctional one cannot pursue ideality, i.e. true living. Rejection of God is rejection of the whole creational order. Questions are asked and satisfactory answers are not given; indeed cannot be given. All things are a chaos to Man. Romans 1:18–24 is before us. Here Man rejects God and goes into idolatry. Going into idolatry can be explained in numerous ways. Man is only alive and appropriately active when he is in union with God. The perichoretic action of the Godhead flows into Man who is ecclesial or perichoretic himself within the community of Man which is at one with the Divine community. Man is enveloped with and by God, and thus life is sane even to the point where rebellion against God can be comprehended. When, then, Man rejects God he has no true ontology. Since true ontology posits the God who is Creator and Father—the One who is one with His Son and His Spirit—then naked Man must have a system which parallels the true order of things. Thus he devises the god who exhibits itself as all that God is and promises as much, if not more than the true God does.

We see in the Ten Words, i.e. the Decalogue, that making any image of God is strictly forbidden since nothing God has created can contain or even suggest all that God is. Moses told Israel:

Therefore take good heed to yourselves. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. And beware lest you lift up your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and worship them and serve them, things which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. But the LORD has taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own possession, as at this day (Deut. 4:15–20).

It is clear from this passage that idolatry is dangerous in that it gives the character of a thing—or things—created, to be God. It limits the nature of God, and is part of 'worshipping the creature rather than the Creator'. Verse 20 shows that true worship is essential to true community, 'But the LORD has taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, *to be a people of his own possession, as at this day*'.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD SET FORTH IN IDOLATRY

Paul's Jewish readers of the Epistle to the Romans would accord all that was idolatry to the Gentiles, and they would be correct. Paul, nevertheless, virtually speaks of a form of idolatry present in Israel. He asks these Jewish readers, 'You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?' Basically, however, idolatry is the pursuit of the Gentiles. In Acts 17:16–17 Paul showed his dislike of idols:

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the market place every day with those who chanced to be there.

Later he argued:

²² I am indebted, here, for the insight of Edward Farley in his book *Ecclesial Man* subtitled 'A Social Phenomenology of Faith and Reality', Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1975. The passage heading is 'B. Disrupted Historical Existence' and has two subheadings, '1. Idolatry' and '2. Flight' and the passage is from pp. 139–146. I might add here that I have used the term 'ecclesial man' to develop my principle of community which I have treated in other books, e.g. my *Christ's People in Today's World* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1985), and *Love's Most Glorious Covenant*.

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man. 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 the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:29–31).

His argument is that we are God's children and should not portray God our Father in fixed forms, no matter how beautiful they may be. The term 'children' points to familial living.

We can rightly reason that Man, being created to be the human community of God and personally to be the image of God, to be the creatures of God the Creator, and His children and to fulfil the commission of the mandate as set out in Genesis 1:28f., should not find in idolatry that union and communion which is essential to his authentic being. He needs all elements that are in God even though his rebellion blinds him to their true essence. God's original relation to Man is in respect of covenant, vocation, law and the promises of the living God, i.e. the God who is always acting at every point of time in this world, and who will bring all history to its purposive climax in the *telos*.

We do not have space and time here to set out these points in detail, but we know that covenant is essential to true living. Idolatry demands that there be a community of worshippers who gather around the god of their community. Idolatry demands that its devotees work in its system of custom and culture, to advance the god in its purposes. This is to be its primary vocation, though that is distributed through the various subsidiary vocations which make up life on the earth. There are laws of the idol and its cultus which demand obedience to the deity or lord that is the idol. Adherence to these laws is imperative under threat of the idol. Human conscience is conditioned to think the laws of culture and customs calls for primary obedience. The idol also promises coming rewards for full obedience. The very culture and customs provide a kind of delight for the obedient. 'The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life' are primary elements within idolatry. Some idols even promise bliss in the *telos*.

We see, then, that the system of idolatry sets out to pacify the person who senses the ontological realities which pertain to Man. More than that, it sets up itself in the place of God, as a god who is more immediate, who communicates through visible icons and images, who works to give delight to the flesh through the five senses within the practical dimensions of this world. Even so, this attempt to use idolatry to beat back chaos does not succeed, for here is a chaos more evil and frightening than the blank of 'no god'. Idolatry leads to innumerable contacts with other gods. For the idolater there is no moral–ethical integrity. There is no future based on actions of love by the idol/s—i.e. no redemptive or life-changing promise. There is no response to the true God 'in whom we live and move and have our being', and no relationship with Him in truth. Perhaps, most of all, there is no promise, especially no promise of redemption and none of ultimate holiness, glorification and perfection. If the need for redemption were sensed by the idolater then the idol can do no act by which redemption can be assured. Where the idol's acts should show love to the devotee and open him/her to a liberated future, yet this cannot be forgiveness. There is no cross in the history of the idols, but only hate that pins Another to the Cross.

So, then, we have surely said enough to show that the communities of the idolaters cannot be essentially true communities, i.e. the communities of love. In previous Studies we have seen that the communities of those opposing God dislike the confrontation of the community of Christ. Christ's community will always be hated, as Christ taught his disciples in John 15:18 – 16:11, and history keeps revealing this fact. Cain killed his brother because his brother's deeds were righteous and his own were evil (1 John 3:8–18, esp. vv. 11 and 12). At this point we refer back to our previous three Studies on 'The Church Living in the World' to see the nature of the Community of the world and the Community of Christ. Here we need to see what it is that deals with the evil Community of Satan, i.e. world powers, and rebellious, idolatrous Man, and what causes the elect of the Adamic race to become the true Community of God, i.e. the church of God.

CONCLUSION: THE IMMENSE POWER OF THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION TO EFFECT THE TRUE COMMUNITY OF GOD

What we cram into these last few paragraphs of this Study we will need to elaborate in a future Study or Studies, for it is most important. My question is, ‘What can we do in regard to true community when the world of human beings is gripped by so many group loyalties, varying customs and cultures which are set like concrete, and what can change humanity and bring it to the communion and inter-subjectivity of all persons which we outlined above?’ Just to contemplate the world on these scores is to abandon hope of a regeneration which would affect billions of people. That seems to be a sane estimate of things as they now are.

Not being a ‘how to do things’ person I admit the impossibility of succeeding in such a venture, but then I know what has been done and is even now proceeding, and that is that something has happened in history which makes all the differences in the human scene. Primarily it is that, whereas all human creatures are one humanity in Adam, now another humanity has been born—one new humanity in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We say correctly that we are all members of the Adamic body and so are members of one another—in Adam. What we have to see is that by reason of Christ’s death, all in Adam have been crucified in the cross of Christ. ‘We are convinced that one [i.e. Christ] has died for all; therefore all have died’. Adam was intended to be the first son of God (Luke 3:38; cf. Acts 17:26–28) and through him all of us would be sons of God, but the first man became a prodigal son and it would take the suffering of the Cross to bring us to second birth, to being new creations.

It took the bearing of all the sins and all the guilts of the human race to remove the mountainous impediment between men and God and so to reconcile all the race to its Creator—Father, and then, severally, to one another. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:11 to 3:11 that the divergent Gentiles (nations) and Israel are reconciled to become one Community—communities in unity—so that now there is ‘one new Man’ in which all humans can be one together.

Idolatry is the devising of many cultures and customs which divide the human race. Membership of the kingdom of darkness is not the membership of love, for in this kingdom there is no true love, no *agape*. There is no inter-serving, no inter-honouring, no inter-loving and no inter-giving and receiving. In the Kingdom of God there is the revelation and experience of God’s love, for love has acted in the redemptive work of the Father and the Son. The promise of Genesis 3:15 at the beginning of Man’s history, on which the faithful based their continuing hope, has been fulfilled in the bruising of the Cross, and the crushing of the serpent. The ecclesia was there at the beginning, from the time of Abel at least. The elect are all in Christ. The planned sonship and the true family of the Father will be ‘the multitude that no man can number’. That new, true community will be the one which rules and governs in the new age, the age to come. It will be a community of kings and priests, God’s true Kingdom, and with Him will be occupied in strangely wonderful work for all eternity, as it lives in a kosmos ‘wherein dwells only righteousness’.

The Church Living in the World As Community—2

INTRODUCTION: MAN ALWAYS ECCLESIAL, CORRESPONDING TO GOD'S COMMUNITY LIFE

In our last Study we saw that Man is ecclesial by creation. This is so because Man was created in God's image and because God is ecclesial—i.e. God is Community in Himself—then Man must have community either *de jure* or *de facto*. That he has community is seen in the enormous variety of human communities throughout the world. Even in one culture there may be many sub-communities some of which will be essential to the varying cultures, and some just being *ad hoc* to meet the need for functional operations within any specific culture. We have said that communities fill Man's ontological need, and that any community may not be *de jure* but *de facto* simply in order to fulfil that ontological need or demand.

We saw that true community is God Himself, the community which we call 'trinitarian'. The three Persons coinhere one another, i.e. they have on the Divine level what we on the human level call intra-subjectivity. This is also called 'inter-dwelling,' 'inter-penetration,' 'reciprocal interiority' and 'coinherence'. The doctrine of *perichoresis* really means that the three Persons of the Trinity differ not as to their substance or essence, but only as to their persons whose differentiations—i.e. 'Father', 'Son' and 'Spirit [of]—give to each other of these differentiations which combine to make the already established unity to be perpetually substantial.

We also saw in *perichoresis* that there is a circularity (*peri*) movement which is a movement of honouring, serving, and of mutual giving and receiving. We saw that the Greek verb *choreo* means 'to go out or away, to be in motion, to go forward, make progress, so have room for, to hold, to contain, to accept, comprehend, understand'. We saw that Cornelius Plantinga describes *perichoresis* as 'a sort of intratrinitarian hospitality concept. According to this concept, each trinitarian person makes room for the others in his own inner life and envelops or enfolds that person there. Each is *in* the other two.'²³

What we seek to do in this and following Studies is to show that true earthly Community arises and operates from the Divine Community. We mean that for Man to be in the image of God means that the corporate Community—Man—will operate by the principles set out above which describe the Divine Community in its ontological being and its economic activity. We should, then, expect that human community from its beginning will manifest the Divine Community, and that such living will be ecclesial, but because Man has fallen, such a manifestation is impossible, but under grace. Man is assisted to live that way and so witness by grace to the Divine Community in whose image he has been made.

LOOKING AT COMMUNITY FROM THE BEGINNING

Here we need to look at two things: (i) God's intention for Man to be community, a community, God's community; and (ii) the created nature of Man as ecclesial, i.e. he is community-structured by creation, whether he follows the will of God or seeks to establish his own will. In this respect we have seen in the previous Study that Man is in the shape and

²³ For reference and text see last Monthly Ministry Study for June 2002, p. 2. In the same context Plantinga says that the three Persons are united by a functional subordination relation that obtains among them. In a future Study we will seek to explore whether or not there is a hierarchy in the Trinity.

configurations of community, even when he refuses to be the true community of God. This is because he is made in God's image. Before Man's fall in Eden he lived in true community—in fellowship with God—and in wonderful conditions. The marital union of the first couple was perfect because of their innocence, but it was divided by their later refusal to be God's image in the world. Man lived in his own image which could no longer be substantial (ontological), or truly familial. 'Truly familial' would mean firstly 'of the family of God, under Him as Father', and secondly it would mean that the parents and children would be one corporate unit. Only by God's grace—over and above human endeavour—could true community be and operate. For God the Community is Three who are One. For Man in Eden it is two—the man and his wife who had become one. That one-ness (unity) was then divided by sin. Their unity as created was because they were wholly in the image of God. All ontological being and economic action was innate to the Triune being, the action which we call 'perichoresis'. When the couple changed their relationship with God, it was thus changed from their relationships with one another in innocence.

The Matter and Manner of Human Relationships

Full relationships obtain between God and Man only when Man lives according to his image with God. God is never static, and His true being ontologically is relational since three Persons constitute the Godhead. Man is a creature, and to be himself he must be in union with God. This means that true relationships within the community of Man can only be so when: (i) he is perichoretic in his community as God is in His; (ii) he is in true union with God, i.e. receives the perichoretic flow from God which spreads throughout the human race and so obtains for all members; and (iii) in this perichoretic action all members of the human community have 'a sort of intra-human hospitality, coinhering one another, and having reciprocal interiority'.

In saying all this we are not looking at community ideologically but as an ideality—the way things truly are when they are ontological. In God we have the key to what it is to be Man as created. Obviously we are not permitted to devise a praxis from this knowledge of true community, but it is mandatory that we know the essence of true community. Later we will see that our knowledge comes from the law of God, as well as the prophetic and didactic word of God.

We have yet one more thing to observe, namely that God **is** (Heb. 11:6). What He is we cannot deduce from any created thing or order of things. 'Only God can tell God' is axiomatic. Analogies fail. We cannot predicate God, i.e. say, 'God **is**' and then add the predicate, e.g. 'God **is**—love'. This would mean we knew the nature of the predicate, that we knew what love is. God has to tell us, and He communicates Himself by His word. Even when it is written as to what He is, it needs the Spirit of God to reveal meaning, for God is all a mystery to us. When we take two statements, 'God is light', and 'God is love', then it has to be revealed to us what love and light really are. In fact if we look at the context of 'light' in 1 John 1:5 – 2:11 we will see that by revelation alone can we know what is the nature of light. Likewise if we look at 1 John 4:7–21 we will come to know what love is from the textual context. Whilst something of cognition is present yet the revelation of love is shown by God's actions which are described.

At least five of God's attributes which are communicable²⁴ can be stated—righteousness, holiness, goodness, truth and love. Matters such as mercy and long-suffering are subsumed under goodness—and so on. Humanity is expected to live in these attributes which in God are His, but in us are derived. No human being can be love, but he must love because the participation in the Divine properties is what makes him truly Man.²⁵ Man is not righteous or

²⁴ Communicable attributes are those in which we can participate, but incommunicable attributes are those which belong to God. Included in these are His omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence, infinitude, and His presence to all things—and so on. This is a large subject, and beyond our discussion here.

²⁵ Reformed theologians used to talk of 'original righteousness', 'original holiness' and so on, so that following regeneration we may now speak of 'renewed or restored righteousness, holiness, etc.'

holy of himself, but he is required to act in righteousness and holiness as given to him in God.²⁶ Being aware of these things we may now proceed to speak of community as in God and Man, and in God's intention, especially where we are seeking to comprehend that intention and its modes of fulfilment.

GOD'S INTENTION FOR CREATION, MAN IN PARTICULAR, AND GOD'S COMMUNITY

The Divine Intention

What was—and is—God's intention for creation, and especially the creation of Man? The first intimation is from the Genesis 1:26–30, namely that Man, being in the image of God, is to be fruitful and multiply, to fill up the earth, to subdue the earth and be ruler over it, thus showing the image reflects God's own Being and what He does. As the Scriptures develop we see that because of sin the fulfilment of this commission is hindered and that grace is needed, especially for God's people of faith, for the mandate to be completed. Throughout the Old Testament and the New, God's ultimate purpose becomes revealed. We see that God's community of faith has eschatological connotation which we will later examine, but let us conclude that God will ultimately have His *am segullah*—‘a people for His own possession’ (Exod. 19:5–6; cf. Deut. 7:6–11)—otherwise known as His *laos periousios*, i.e. ‘a people of His own’ (Titus 2:14; cf. Deut. 4:20) who will one day be ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Pet. 1:3–4). This community will be constituted of members of the *koinonia* (fellowship, community) of God who will be ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, God's own people’ (1 Pet. 2:4–10; Exod. 19:5–6) and who will reign on the earth for ever (Rev. 5:10; 1:6; 21:3) as they inherit the whole of the new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 21:7). To be participators in the divine nature is to share with God in His plan for, and work of, eternity.

The human community then was, from before time, designed to become that special people of God who would share with Him in all that He has planned for eternity, from the point where it climaxes in the things called the marriage feast of the bride and the Lamb, the new temple, and the holy city which is the New Eden and paradise. We can say that the new community is trained for eternity to be what it will be, virtually God's peer community. Other terms could be ‘the family of the Father’, ‘the covenant people of God’, ‘the royal community’ of which the Father is King who, in turn, will have His Son reign with Him as Shepherd of the flock of God.

It may seem somewhat premature to speak of God's intention at this point, but we will see it is indispensable to understanding community, as also to understanding the Community of God.

The Story of Community

Since we are following a biblical–theological line of discussion we need to draw our understanding from the text of the Scriptures. If we begin this part of our discussion from the time of the ejection of Man from Eden, then we immediately come up against the problem of community as discussed in Genesis chapters 4 – 11. That it is a community discussion is clear if we read the text from the Cain–Abel–Noah–Noah's progeny situation to the Abrahamic establishment action.

Taking Cain and Abel first we see that in the primal Adamic family Cain, measured by our community criteria set out above—relational and of participation in God's attributes—does not fulfil community living. On the other hand Abel does fulfil these. Abel is discussed in Scripture as: (i) being a prophet (Luke 11:50–51); (ii) being a man of faith (Heb. 11:4);

²⁶ For discussion of God's attributes see Otto Weber's *Foundations of Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1981), pp. 397–460.

(iii) being a man of love (1 John 3:11–12); and (iv) being a man who was righteous (Matt. 23:35; 1 John 3:11–12). Abel obviously loved his brother and was open to him but Cain closed himself to Abel. In terms we have used we can say Cain was not perichoretic. He neither gave nor received. The statement of Eve, ‘God has appointed me another child instead of Abel, for Cain slew him’, after which she named him Seth—i.e. the substitute for Abel—appears to indicate that the character of Abel would be replaced in Seth. At the time of Seth’s son being born, ‘men began to call on the name of the LORD’. This seems to be community.

Let us return to Abel for a moment for he embodies the principle of community. In being prophetic he would have God’s ultimate intention in mind and it is possible that Cain hated him for this. God’s community is always eschatological, looking, as it does, to the *telos* or climax of history. An example of this is recorded by Jude, ‘It was of these also that Enoch in the seventh generation from Adam prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord came with his holy myriads, to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness which they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him”’ (Jude 14–15). Such was prophetic understanding in the early era.

Abel was a righteous man and that shows he lived in the gift of all God’s attributes. Then we see that he lived in faith, hope and love. Now faith, hope and love are the three virtues in which the New Testament church lived. There are many places where they are mentioned together, especially in the Epistles, for without them there is no true community, and they constitute perichoretic action. It is a fact that no person can have one virtue without the other two. One Corinthians 13:13 sums it up, ‘So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love’. Here we might add that God’s communicable attributes are either all present in a person and a community, or none of them is operative. One cannot be righteous without being holy or truthful—and so on.

What we would expect, then, would be to see these virtues as being from the time of Man’s creation and it is so. They were clearly in Abel and we should see them in the children of Seth, those who called on the Lord and were named ‘sons of God’. We now have the key to the life of the human community of God, i.e. living in the life of God and His *attributes*, as also being active in the *virtues* of faith, hope and love. We should see that the possession and use of these three virtues is not dependent upon human beings working them up, but upon God who gives them to human beings. Let us now look at them:

- (a) **The Virtue of Faith**—Adam had every reason and experience of God that he should have had faith in Him, i.e. God’s goodness was in creating Man and his whole habitat, i.e. the whole earth in general and the garden in particular. All Adam had to do was to believe God for his goodness which was so vast, but the voice of the serpent changed Adam’s mind. He no longer trusted God for everything. He did not believe His word. When Man then was ejected and had to live in the wider habitat of the earth, he had to depend upon the goodness of God in grace in order to live. God’s faithfulness was no less than it had been. It is God’s faithfulness which generates faith in us relating to His will and plan. By creation it is *natural* for Man to believe in God. By grace Man is brought to trust God and live in faith. In Ephesians 2:8–10 and Philippians 1:29 it is clear that faith is a gift of God and not an attainment of Man.
- (b) **The Virtue of Hope**—We have already seen that God has revealed His intention for His creation. It is a new heaven and a new earth, and the new royal, priestly community, living in the New Eden, the Holy City, and worshipping in the New Temple which is really God and the Lamb. In the promise of the ultimate are many promises for the various stages of history, promises which keep the faithful steady in their living as community. Where God’s promises are brought to the fore and emphasised then there hope grows. Hebrews 11:1 states the affinity of faith and hope, ‘Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen’.

- (c) **The Virtue of Love**—We note that it is never inferred that God is faith, although it is said God is faithful, and that His faithfulness reaches to the heavens (Ps. 36:5). It is never said that God is hope, although He is called ‘the God of hope’ (Rom. 15:13). By contrast it is said that God is love. Just as our faith is the response to His faithfulness and our hope the response to His promises, so love in us is generated by the revelation of His love—His loving us. ‘We love, because he first loved us’ (1 John 4:19). Love, like hope and faith, is not an entity, an object, or a power, influence, or a metaphysical ‘thing’. God is love and so He indwells His people who thus have what we might call ‘the perichoresis of love’.

Summing up we can say that wherever persons or a community are joined to God there will be in the person and the community the flow of God’s life into them, so that the circularity of God’s Being becomes the circularity of the human community and flows back to God in the service of worship. The community is thus the community of faith, hope and love. This would be as much for Abel and those following him in all past days as it would be today for the *ecclesia*, and for the church glorified.

THE COMMUNITY OF ISRAEL

The calling into being of the community of Israel, its establishment as the people of God, and the manner in which it lived would demand volumes of explanatory materials. The vast mass of study materials already produced confirm that in the annals of history there have been many communities, nations, kingdoms, and some have been quite remarkable, but there has never been a community to equal that of Israel. What we call ‘the Old Testament Scriptures’ are also unparalleled in any religion or faith. Every book of those Scriptures is a remarkable one. One might call Deuteronomy the handbook of Israel. It is a warm, living document, and 4:5–8 puts the matter of community quite clearly. Other nations comparing their nations with Israel will ask two questions: (i) what nation has so powerful a law as this one; and (ii) what nation is there that has a god like Israel’s LORD (Yahweh)?

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. 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.’ 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? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?

We have to confine ourselves in dealing with the matter of Israel, so immense are the materials. We will try to cover matters such as covenant, community life and the law of God as received at Sinai.

God’s Covenant with Israel

Some who study God’s covenants in both Old and New Testaments claim that God’s covenant with Man was innate in creation.²⁷ When it comes to the matter of the Flood, God established the covenant, but did not cut another covenant. He already had this covenant with humanity and the world. The expectation that Noah and his family would live by this covenant was not fulfilled, not, anyway, other than by God’s calling of Abram ‘when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran’ (Acts 7:2). Abram (‘exalted father’) became Abraham (‘father of multitudes’) and was to be the one through whom all nations were to be blessed.

²⁷ The literature on the subject is voluminous. My book *Love’s Most Glorious Covenant* (Redeemer Baptist Press, Castle Hill, 1997), covers much of the subject and has a valuable Bibliography.

For some nations who opposed Abraham, cursing would come. This covenant was also to Isaac and then to Jacob. Jacob had twelve sons who came to constitute Israel as a people. Exodus 2:23–25 speaks of the bondage which came to them in Egypt, and that ‘God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob’. The story of their becoming God’s full community stretches from Genesis 11:27 to the end of Deuteronomy. In particular God, within His own eternal covenant, made a special covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai (Exod. 24:1–8). Now the community led by Moses was God’s covenant community. A covenant made by God is unilateral and not at all a contract. God’s covenants with sinful humanity are those of grace and not a contract of law. We understand they were His beloved, elect community. Deuteronomy 7:6–11 speaks of Israel’s selection by God:

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. 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; 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. 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, 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. You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment, and the statutes, and the ordinances, which I command you this day.

Exodus 19:5–6 speaks of Israel as God’s nation among and for all other nations:

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. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.

Community Life and the Law of the LORD

This is the area we need most to explore and as we do we must keep in mind the nations of the earth, their covenants (contracts in their case) with their idols, the kind of community which develops the *cultus* (worship), and the *culture* of the land/s. As far back as Abram in Mesopotamia, as Isaac in Canaan, Israel in Egypt and coming to the idolatries of Canaan, the covenant people had been exposed to the superstition and seduction of idols. God’s law, which was also the basis of Israel’s worship and culture, had to be one which instituted and maintained the worship of Yahweh and kept alive and active Israel as God’s *am segullah* (Exod. 19:5–6; cf. 1 Pet. 2:9–10), i.e. His ‘own possession’ (Deut. 4:20; cf. Titus 2:14).

The Law of the Lord is so often misunderstood because some mistake the nature or essence of the law, judging it to be onerous, hard to be obeyed and lethal, i.e. bringing death in judgment.²⁸ That this is not the true story for those who are of God’s community needs to be shown and received. We find no complaints from Israel about God’s law. Moses’ statement in Deuteronomy 4:7–8 shows that Israel’s greatness is in: (i) their God being near them; and (ii) that no other nation has ‘statutes and ordinances . . . which I set before you this day’. The Psalms often praise the law in high terms. Psalms 1, 19 and 119 are testimony to the beauty and truth presented by the law and we ought to read their testimony.

J. A. Motyer in his article ‘The Biblical Concept of Law’²⁹ says, ‘Man is the living, personal image of God: law is the written, preceptual image of God’. We here quote at length his presentation of the law:

²⁸ I suggest the reading of my *The Law of Eternal Delight* (NCPI, Blackwood, 2001), which has an excellent Bibliography, or a lighter version of it—*Sweeter than Honey, More Precious than Gold* (same publisher, 1995)—in order to grasp the true nature of God’s Law.

²⁹ *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell (ed.), Baker, Grand Rapids, 1984), pp. 623–5.

Law in the Image of God. Turning now to a very different genre of Scripture, we find in Lev. 19 that God has provided another image of himself on earth. Every aspect of human experience is gathered into this rich review of man's life under God's law: filial duty (vs. 3), religious commitment (vs. 4), ritual exactness (vs. 5), care of the needy (vs. 9), honesty in deed and word (vss. 11–12), and many more, touching on relationships and even on dress, hygiene, and horticulture. Yet all this variety suspends from one central truth: 'I am the Lord.' Lord is the divine name, the 'I am what I am' (Exod. 3:14), so that the significance of the recurring claim is not 'You must do what I tell you' (i.e., 'lord' as an authority word) but 'You must do this or that because I am what I am'; every precept of the law is a reflection of 'what I am.' Man is the living, personal image of God; the law is the written, preceptual image of God. The intention of Lev. 19 is declared at the outset: 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy' (vs. 2). The Lord longs for his people to live in his image, and to that end he has given them his law.

A Truly Human Life. When man in the image of God and law in the image of God come together in the fully obedient life, then man is indeed 'being himself.' His nature is the image of God, and the law is given both to activate and to direct that nature into a truly human life; any other life is subhuman. Of course, it is true that in a world of sinners the law, regrettably, has to give itself to the task of curbing and rebuking antisocial and degrading practices, but OT law has, to a far greater extent, the function of liberating man to live according to his true nature. For it is only when man finds the law of liberty that he becomes free. For this reason the OT asserts that the law has been given for our good, to bring us to a hitherto unrealized fullness of life (Deut. 4:1; 5:33; 8:1).

In regard to this brilliant statement on law we have to ask questions about the giving of the law. 'Was this law innate to Man at creation, and if so does that mean it was the law of the covenant?' 'Does this mean law has always been in the community of Man?' 'Was the law promulgated at Sinai the law as it always had been?' 'What, then, are we to think of what is called "the natural law"?'

Answers to these questions have to take a number of factors into consideration. The first is that Man at creation was made in the image of God and as such would be given the law in his creation as he faced the world, fellow humanity and God, as he was a serving, worshipping creature. God's law given at Sinai had as its background the everlasting covenant—the Noahic, Abrahamic, and Sinaitic covenants. Ahead of, but linked with, the Sinaitic covenant was the covenant God made with David which would extend Israel as His people (2 Samuel 7:14ff.; 1 Chron. 17:16ff.; cf. Isa. 55:3) and His Kingdom, and was possibly to be the New covenant spoken of by Ezekiel and Jeremiah.

The heart of the matter of law was: (i) God Himself *spoke* this word to the people of Israel (Deut. 4:12–14), 'Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice. And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone. And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and ordinances, that you might do them in the land which you are going over to possess', so that the law was directly communicated by God as well as written in hard copy; (ii) The summary of the law by Christ was as follows: 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength . . . You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:30–31); (iii) The law was 'the law of liberty' as Motyer states above (cf. Ps. 119; James 2:12); and (iv) The law was prescribed for Israel, but it was also a teaching law, guiding them into right community relationships. It covered all kinds of contingencies which were circumstantial and criminal.

As for the matter of 'natural' law, the debate still rages, some arguing that it is the creational law adapted as human beings find it functional and natural.³⁰ There is a good case for saying that most religions and cultures accept the principle of law and that they make their adaptations to fit the morality they espouse in their religions. Paul's statement of Romans 2:12–16 is seen by many to be a discussion of natural law.

³⁰ See my *Law of Eternal Delight*, pp. 14–18.

THE LAW OF GOD A COMMUNITY LAW FOR ALL TIME

We have noted that ‘Man is the living, personal image of God; the law is the written, preceptual image of God’, and it would be difficult to claim that there is in any change of law from the initial creation to our times, and, indeed, beyond our times. Recognising that many of Israel’s laws were necessary for their special social and living conditions, as also for their worship situation in the processes of covenant living, we see there is no need for Christianity to embody the law in totality. The writer of the Book of Hebrews has dealt remarkably with this matter. Somewhere John Calvin says that every religion is outmoded, superseded and finished by the Epistle to the Hebrews. It is interesting, then, when the writer says in 7:12, ‘For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well’, that he was saying that Christ’s priesthood of the order of Melchizedek transcended that of Aaron, although he—the author of Hebrews—often refers to the sacrificial system of Israel. In order to explain some of the changes from Israel’s law, scholars talk about the moral law at the heart of Israel’s life, and say that certain elements, such as sanitation, hygiene, horticulture and sacrificial offering, are outdated and superseded by the coming of Christ. It is, indeed, a matter to be well considered. Much of our difficulty lies in the particular understanding we have of God’s law. Take, for example, the matter of the Sermon on the Mount. To me it appears, simply, as the way of community for all who worship God, and in fact, all who acknowledge God as Father of those people who constitute His Kingdom which is at the same time His family.

We know that the Sermon on the Mount is not a new law given as an alternative for the old. Only Christ could preach this Sermon for he was, and is, the Son of the Father. He did not give a new set of standards to be obeyed, but a way of life to be lived. Only those who are blessed can live out this life because they are children of the Father. In Matthew 5:17 he said, ‘Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them’. This is often taken to mean that Christ as a man proposed to do what no other persons have succeeded in doing, namely, fulfil the law in every detail. It is true that he obeyed every demand of the law, but he is not referring to this. If we take the word ‘fulfil’ to mean ‘establish’ then the verse can be properly seen. Note, too, that he was not here speaking just about law but about the entire Old Testament; i.e. ‘the law’ which was the whole Pentateuch, and ‘the prophets’ which were meant to cover the remaining books.³¹

Romans 10:4 is often quoted as saying that the law ended with Christ because in fulfilling the law he had outmoded it. What Paul meant was that Christ was the goal or *telos* of the law—indeed the goal of the law and prophets (Matt. 5:17; Gal. 2:19–20; Rev. 19:10), for the goal of the law is justification by faith. Only by Christ could this goal be fulfilled. This being the case, the law is no longer a demanding, threatening and lethal thing. ‘I through the law died to the law . . . I have been crucified with Christ’ fits with Romans 7:6, ‘But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit’. When it is suggested that a new law has come which is the law of the Spirit (Rom. 8:2) or the law of Christ, then it must be understood that love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:10; Gal. 5:14).

When in John 13:34 and 15:12, 17, Jesus says he gives a new commandment it does not mean this commandment has been given for the first time.³² Love is mandatory though many of us would think it should be involuntary. Loving is a matter of the will. There is no reason why what is mandatory should not be involuntary, but with the form of the law of love before us it is obedience which matters primarily. True morality always demands discernment and

³¹ Strictly speaking the Pentateuch was ‘the Law’, Joshua to Nehemiah ‘the Former Prophets’, Esther to the Song of Solomon ‘the Holy Writings’ or ‘the Wisdom Books’, and Isaiah to Daniel ‘the Major Prophets’, and the remaining 12 Prophets ‘the Minor Prophets’. From Isaiah to Malachi were the books also known as ‘the Latter Prophets’.

³² John uses the term *kainen* (new, fresh, renewed) and not *neos* (new, as in different and other than) which would appear to mean ‘a commandment which comes freshly to you’ because it was Jesus who loved them who gave it to them.

decision, i.e. that this is the will of God. As we will see, love is the life of the community, and it is reiterated time again that we should love God and also love our neighbour.

MADE IN HIS LIKENESS: ISRAEL AND THE ECCLESIA

Man at the beginning—i.e. Adam and Eve, the man and his wife—were created in the likeness of God. The reading of Genesis 1:26–30 and 2:18–25 shows us that the couple, together, constituted the image of God. They were made in His likeness. From that point onwards the whole human race is the image and likeness of God in its corporate, solidary nature. We may well speak of the image as being marred and not as it was originally created since sin and death entered the world through the first man, but God's demands of Man are that he be perfect Man as created. To demand less is to take away human dignity.

We have seen something of a division between the man and the woman as effected by the serpent in the garden. They who had worshipped God freely and properly in the Garden were now in difficulty since they had broken the communion with God which was Edenic. That worship continued outside the Garden is shown by the offerings Cain and Abel brought to the Lord. We know Cain's offering was rejected as unsuitable, and that Abel's offering, offered in faith to God, was accepted. There are many principles involved in this sacrifice, such as praise, thanksgiving, communion, fellowship and propitiation in certain contexts, but in essence worship is the offering up of the body sanctified by God (Rom. 12:1–2) as the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving (1 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:15–16). The principle of the plurality–unity of the body corporate is seen in the worship of Israel in its sacrifices, its times of festivals and fasts and its association of worship in the Tabernacle and Temple. In the New Testament, worship is also the plurality–unity of the body corporate. This is described as to principle in 1 Peter 2:4–10, Hebrews 12:18–20, 13:15–16 (cf. Phil. 3:3), and the many events of Christian worship, especially as they are described in 1 Corinthians chapter 14.

The Tabernacle/Temple in Israel's Worship

We are still discussing the matter of *perichoresis* as it is operative in the Godhead and operative in humanity, as in the true company of the faithful. We take it that worship was first in the Garden of Eden, where there was communion between God and Man. In Eden as in the Eden to come there was no sanctuary as such. Perhaps we can think of the whole of Eden as the worship sanctuary. In Revelation 21:22 it is said, 'And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb'. The Holy City is of course the Garden of Eden.

After the ejection of the first couple we are not told of sanctuaries as such, and not all cairns of stone were necessarily altars. We are not told of altars and sanctuaries before Noah although there may well have been such. It appears that Noah was the first builder of an altar. Abraham also built altars. The first regular construction of an altar in Israel was when Moses made one (Exod. 17:15) and this seems to be rather a memorial than a place of sacrifice. It is not until Israel comes to Sinai that an altar of sacrifice is said to be built, God giving instructions regarding the construction of an altar made of earth or of one made of stone (Exod. 20:24–26). Prior to Sinai there seems not to have been an altar though Exodus 19:24 mentions priests. Prior to this there was no mention of priests in Israel. Instruction for building an altar are given in Exodus chapter 27. From that point onwards, i.e. the covenant made between God and Israel, Israel has a sanctuary and priests who act as mediatorial ministers in that sanctuary. I suggest, here, that we read the Living Faith Study no. 40 titled 'The Tabernacle, and the True and Living Way'. A sanctuary with mediatorial ministers is the means by which human beings approach Almighty God. At the same time it is the sanctuary which represents God and His people. The Tabernacle was placed at the centre of the Community and signified God's Presence and His relationship with His people: the Community was not complete without a sanctuary and without

its prescribed gradations, i.e. the court of the people, the court of sacrifice, the holy place and the Holy of Holies. It was called by many names such as ‘the tent of meeting’, ‘the tent of testimony’ and just ‘the Tent’. It exemplified a people on the move, hence its special construction. The Tabernacle was built on the view Moses had into heaven where true worship is to be found. In principle the Temple which replaced it was the same. For our purposes of discussion it was the place of *perichoresis*, God meeting with His people, and the flow of His life into them as the people, too, returned that flow in the act of worship.

The Temple, then, was the gathering together of the *qahal* or *edah*, i.e. the congregation of the people *in* the house of God, and, in another sense, *as* the house of God. What we must note clearly is that the congregation of Israel lived in the three virtues of faith, hope and love. These virtues were ever, and are ever, in the Community of God, for they are protological, ecclesiological and eschatological. Wherever they are present there is the *ecclesia* of God.

The Tabernacle/Temple in the Ecclesia’s Worship

In the New Testament from the coming of *ecclesia* at Pentecost there was no constructed sanctuary, nor was there any sanctuary. Whilst Jesus attended the Temple and called it ‘the house of God’ and ‘the house of prayer for all nations’ (Isa. 56:6–8), yet he did speak of the coming new worship to the Samaritan woman in John 4, showing that such worship would have no constructed sanctuary. Worship would be by the aid of the Spirit since it was true worship (John 4:19–24). Aaronic worship was to cease. With the change of priesthood there was necessarily a change in the law of worship as Aaronic worship was replaced by Mekchizedekian priesthood. The last bloody sacrifice was done on the Cross, the altar being the place of completion of all sacrifice of that kind, Christ being the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. Jesus predicted the razing to the ground of the Temple built by Herod. Indeed they accused him of seeking to destroy it, but the key was that his own body was to replace the Temple, for his body was to be the new *ecclesia*. The worship which was to obtain was to be in a sanctuary described in Ephesians 2:19–22 and 1 Peter 2:4–10, which was no material sanctuary. This sanctuary was built on the cornerstone which is Christ, and Christ’s people are bonded together to form this unseen sanctuary. It is wholly relational for it is the very nature of God’s new Community. In 1 Peter 2:4–10 all members are ‘living stones’—built on the ‘living stone’, Christ (cf. Eph. 2:19–22). As such, the sanctuary is ‘a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ’. The writer of Hebrews concluded, ‘We have an altar from which those who serve the tent [Tabernacle] have no right to eat’. The invisible altar—the Cross—takes the place of the visible Jewish altar.

Put another way, we see that the *ecclesia* is the new and living sanctuary in which the *perichoresis* of the true social circulatory movement by the life of the Community of God is lived out in the true worship of the Spirit, and is being returned to God in worship—in thanksgiving and praise. In Revelation 21:22 the Temple is God and the Lamb and this without a mediatorial sanctuary. Christ’s ministry was to finish the system of the Israelite sanctuary and its worship and to be the true Temple—forever. Thus the notion of Israel as the priestly nation and kingdom is not so much replaced but extended by the *ecclesia* being ‘a royal priesthood’, God’s own people who once were no such people (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9–10).

CONCLUSION: GOD AND MAN IN ECCLESIALITY

We come back to the Study given last month (June), and see how God is, in Himself, Community. The Three Persons are *the* Community. Each is in the Other, and all are One. To quote Cornelius Plantinga yet again:

Father and Son are said to be *in* each other. This is the base claim for the Greek Fathers’ doctrine of

perichoresis, a sort of *intratrinitarian hospitality* concept. According to this concept, *each trinitarian person graciously makes room for the others in his own inner life and envelops or enfolds that person there.*

Boff's comments are also helpful here. According to him the word *perichoresis* has a double meaning: (i) the idea of one thing contained in another, ie. dwelling in it, but emphasising its static, ie. continuing state; and (ii) this is the active state within the static, signifying the interweaving and interpenetration of the one Person with the others and in the others.

We are drawn to the conclusion that the whole body of humanity as being the image of God is intended to reflect God in the perichoretic circularity from which and for which it was created. Ultimately God must have a people—an *am segulla*, a *laos periousios*—who are so like Him, so much in fellowship with Him that they are sharing the Divine nature (2 Pet. 1:1–4). God as Father is *fons divinitatis* and from His Fatherhood comes the redeeming, and from the Holy Spirit's life-giving comes the true *ecclesia* and its participation in the Divine nature, i.e. the sharing of the Marriage of the Bride and Lamb, the new and eternal worship in the New Temple, the life of virtue as the *ecclesia* reigns over all creation with the Divine Community.

When we speak of the church living in the world we mean it must be itself, and know itself and know for what it has been created to be and to do, so that it can live after the manner of faith, hope and love as these three are most powerful. It must also be aware of the parlous state of the world, its evil, and the unwilling bondage of many of its captors. As the ecclesial company it must open itself as wide to God and the world, as God opens Himself to all the human race, especially His elect people for whom He has formed all history.

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G. Bingham

The Church Living in the World As Community–3

We have thus far made these points: (i) that when Man was created the primal community—as we saw it in Eden—was the community of Man based on the Community of God; (ii) that this earthly community was to serve God and the creation by carrying out the commission given to Man by God as in Genesis 1:26–30; and (iii) that both God and Man are ecclesial by nature and indeed Man's community essentially derived from God's, and in ideality is dependent upon it for its substance and action. We also saw that when Man sinned then a change took place in which the community of Man became divided so that, widely speaking, two communities inhabit the earth: (i) the community which is one of faith, living under the grace of God; and (ii) the community which is not of faith in God, nor does it look to grace for its life and action. In practice we find that internally these two general communities—if we may call them that—are composed of a number of varied units which differ in format and culture.

GOD'S PURPOSE AND MAN'S FUTURE

What we have scarcely touched on is the *purpose* of these two communities. In the primal commission which God gave to Man there is more than a hint of purpose, for when Man will have filled up the earth, subdued it, becoming lord over it—what then? The 'what then?' indicates there will be some *eschaton* or time of *telos*—God's goal for His creation—and so the plan of God, though not explicitly stated at the creation of Man, will eventually come to its fulfilment. Much has been written on this score, particularly about creation being the beginning of the end, and the *telos* being the end of the beginning, so that throughout history God is purposive,³³ Much of western society has in mind the purpose of the creation, i.e. why creation was brought into being. In particular western Man asks why he was created, what is his role and what is his expectation for the entire creation and his own existence—if there be one—beyond death. It is supposed that much of his thinking has been generally affected by the teachings of the Bible, involving both Israel and the Christian community. Because our mind is mainly on 'community' then at this point we may ask regarding the purpose of the human community of God—the ecclesia. We need, then, to keep in mind that the primal community—the Edenic one—was split into the two communities we described above. We should be mindful that for Man, as total community, God's purpose would always be for the total human community, but in practice that section of humanity which does not wish to do the will of God has always ignored, and even opposed, God's will. God's declared will was that Man should do all He required of the human race in the primal commission. Fulfilling that commission demanded all the human race to be in unity of intent and action, This has not been the case in history, because for Man to do all required of him demands that the human race be first in communion with God, receive the perichoretic flow of life, being and action which flows from Him to the human race so that it acts according to His purpose in obedience to Him.

Practically speaking, it appears that the community of faith and grace is that community which seeks to do the will of God. We still need to ask what is that purpose and will of God. If

³³ We need to keep in mind that the Book of Genesis was written within the community of Israel which had been liberated from Egypt, Whatever records had been kept from ancient times from which the book was composed. the matter of God's eternal covenant was already known. and the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants were especially known. So we can conclude that the community of faith, hope. and love-God's special community-always had God's purpose in mind. This is confirmed by the matter as set forth in Hebrews chapter II.

we scan the Scriptures we will find plenty of materials to help us come to know the will and purpose of God. A good place to commence is Hebrews chapter 11. Verses 1 to 3 state,:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old received divine approval. By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.

Here the writer identifies faith with ‘things hoped for’ and ‘the assurance of things not seen’. The whole chapter is about promises, and the promises are about things we would call ‘eschatological’ which define action in the present in the light of the climactic future. The people of the community of faith and hope are clear about God’s purpose in general: it is to fulfil His promises and bring His people to a holy city ‘whose builder and maker is God’. This is also called ‘a reward’. It is spoken of as ‘a better country’, (v. 16). The fulfilment of God’s will and purpose is clearly defined, and so much so that the people of God’s community will endure the most dreadful sufferings in order to inherit the promises.

In recounting all this the writer speaks of Moses who ‘endured as seeing him who is invisible’ (v. 27)—a most significant statement: All things of God were comprehensible in the light of faith, which meant that the whole community had *the sight of faith*. By this they saw God. He who is Spirit and is invisible to human sight always was—and is—present to faith. Eventually the community will *see* God (Rev. 22:4; Matt. 5:8; 1 John 3:2) but at present it is ‘faith–sight’ by which they see Him and His promises. It is clear from Hebrews that faith–sight acts on God’s word, God’s promises so clearly stated. The word is the means by which God communicates with Man. Responsive service and worship are the means by which Man responds to God. He receives the living word which is the perichoretic flow of God into him and the circuit of receiving and returning are via Man’s worship of God.

What, then, do we conclude from this? We conclude that whereas the Edenic community saw God and knew His presence in their midst, yet a change took place in relationships because of the Fall. Being ejected from Eden, Man was being ejected from the known place of His presence. It is the matter of God’s Presence which is so significant for our Studies on community. God being ecclesial, and Man as His image being ecclesial, how does Man live following the Fall, and what are his eternal prospects? God’s first promise—the one of Genesis 3: 1–5—ameliorated their relational situation to some degree, for it showed God had not abandoned them. The first two children born had some kind of relationship to God, for one as a farmer of the soil and the other as a shepherd of sheep both brought their offerings to God and this was an act of relationship. The word ‘offering’ (Heb. *minhah*) does not mean a sacrifice (*zebah*), and was ‘an offering of the fruit of the fruit of the ground’ in Cain’s case, and in Abel’s, *minhah* was parts of his firstlings of the flock. Such a *minhah* was thanksgiving and should have been a joyous time. However, God’s rejection of Cain’s offering depressed and angered Cain, even though the way to forgiveness was shown to him (Gen. 4:7, ‘If you do well, shall you not be forgiven?’). After the murder of his brother, God passed sentence. Cain objected to the sentence as being intolerable and this denotes his failure to worship truly (cf. Ps. 51:17).

His protest was in these words,:

Cain said to the LORD, ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground; and *from thy face I shall be hidden*; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me.’ Then the LORD said to him, ‘Not so! If anyone slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.’ And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him (Gen. 4:13–15).

Cain did not want to go where he would be hidden from the face of God. Verse 16 says, ‘Then Cain went *away from the presence of the LORD*, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden’. Cain probably coveted being in the presence of the Lord for the protection it afforded. His punishment was a terrible one, but fitting for one who attacked the image of God—Abel—and

dared to use God's prerogative (Gen. 9:4–6) and so to alter the will and purpose of God in history. It could easily be that the serpent of Eden (cf. Rev. 12:9, *passim*) singled out the first born of woman, Cain, as the seed of woman which was to crush it under his heel, and so tried by every measure to subvert him. John in his First Letter said simply, 'He who sins is of the devil'.

ECCLESIAL MAN AND THE WORSHIP OF GOD

The communion of the Persons in the Godhead is the utmost in mutual worshipping and , honouring. Likewise when Man communes with God he worships and honours Him. At the same time he cannot worship God without honouring his fellow creatures. The action of the Divine perichoresis—as we have seen—does not remain within the Godhead but extends to Man and flows through him, thus creating genuine human relationships. These relationships of honouring, serving, giving to and receiving from others have their fullness when Man in gratitude for the flow of Divine perichoresis returns that flow—so to speak—in the high act of worship of God, thus completing perichoretic circularity. As he worships God he honours Man. Part of being ecclesial—community—minded and community—active—is worship; true and rich worship.

There is some kind of a history of worship—its nature and development—in the Pentateuch. This is too vast a subject for us to attempt to cover, but what we need to know is there. It has to do with the nature of God as Covenant Father, with the nature of Israel as His people, His family and especially his *am segullah* (Exod. 19:5–6; cf. Deut. 7:6ff.), and with God's provision for all elements of their living which are material, social, moral and spiritual.

Worship prior to Israel's special covenant with God at Mount Sinai is not easy to define. The growing family of Adam and Eve are seen to be in the presence of God and to have lived before His face (Gen. 4: 14–16). The two sons of Eve offered their first fruits as a *minhah* to God. Abel offered his *minhah* by faith. Cain needed to worship God with a different heart and his worship of faith would bring liberation from sin (Gen. 4:6–7). Elsewhere we have shown that Abel was a prophet and that faith, hope and love were the virtues of his life. Where these virtues are there is true worship. Where there is true worship these virtues will be present. At the same time we must not read our own form or idea of worship back into those primeval times. Perhaps Genesis 4:26 could help us; 'At that time men began to call upon the name of the LORD'. The Sethites certainly at this time of primeval worship are shown to worship Yahweh as their God:

*The name of God signifies in general 'the whole nature of God, by which He attests His personal presence in the relation into which He has entered with man, the divine self-manifestation, or the whole of that revealed side of the divine nature, which is turned towards man.'*³⁴

To *call* on the name of the Lord is really to show that the worshipper is invoking God and at the same time proclaiming that He is God.

From the man ward side it is Man invoking God (see Gen. 12:8; 13:4; etc.) and from the Godward side it is God calling out or proclaiming His name, His character, His authority (see Exod. 33: 19; 34:5; etc.) and this is the expression (*dabar; logos*) of Himself and is revelatory. Again we need to remember the materials of the Pentateuch represent Israel's knowledge of its own identity, its election, and the history of mankind seen from its own perspective. This helps us to understand how distinctive Israel saw itself as the worshipping people of God, as over and against the nations who did not worship God as Yahweh, nor truly call on His name. For example, see Jonah's worship as it was linked with covenant, then the history of the Shemmites; Shem being one of Noah's sons, and Abram (Abraham) a descendant of Shem.

³⁴ See Genesis 4:26 in Keil-Delitzsch's *The Pentateuch. Commentary on the Old Testament. vol. I* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids. reprinted 1980) p. 120.

Abram was an idolater (Josh. 24:2) but ‘the God of glory appeared unto’ him (Acts 7:2). As a result God cut a covenant with Abraham and henceforth all worship was covenant worship.

ISRAEL AND THE WORSHIP OF GOD

When Israel was eventually in a parlous state in Egypt then God, as Yahweh, ‘remembered’ His covenant and liberated His people. He bid Moses tell the Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me"; if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son’ (Exod. 4:22–23). The word ‘serve’ here also means ‘worship’ and it was significant that Israel had to leave Egypt in order to truly worship God as a people, and as His people. Israel lived in a land of gods and idols, and they had been involved in false worship as Joshua later pointed out. He faced them with a worship– decision:

Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. And if you be unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD (Josh. 24:14–15).

This shows that the children of Israel up to their point of being liberated from Egypt are charged in Joshua 24: 14–15 with the fact that their fathers beyond the River, i.e. ‘beyond the Euphrates’ (cf. Josh. 24:2f.), and ‘also in Egypt’ (cf. Ezek. 20:7; 23:3, 8), had served other gods. This means that there has been a vein, even in the children of Abraham, of idolatrous worship.

Up to this point our survey of Old Testament worship is a very truncated one, quite insufficient for fully understanding the cultus–i.e. the worship system–of Israel as it is set out in the Pentateuch. In order to understand Israel as the worshipping community of God along the lines of ecclesial God and ecclesial Man mentioned in a previous Study, we need to adduce certain principles concerning community configurations for both God and Man from the materials we have at hand.’

To begin with we may say that Man was ejected from Eden which to the primal couple had been the sanctuary of God. In the garden was no structured sanctuary. A study of Ezekiel 28: 11–18 might confirm us in this claim, for the mention of ‘the holy mountain’ in verses 14 and 16 and of Adam being cast down from that mountain appear to indicate a place sanctuary rather than a constructed one. It is interesting that a set, structured sanctuary does not figure much in the history of the people of God until the tabernacle was constructed, but that was mobile, for they were on a journey to their promised Eden. It was much later that the stationary temple was built. A sanctuary relates to a cultus, and worship at that shrine seems to require sacerdotal ministry, i.e. mediatorial or priestly service. This seems not to be the case in Eden, and certainly is not the case in the future Eden where there will be no temple, i.e. God and the Lamb are themselves the temple, which indicates direct relationships of true worshippers and God. All mediatorial ministry will be made unnecessary.

What appears to emerge as a principle in worship is that because of the presence of God to His people, His people would be drawn by Him to worship Him. The presence of God meant much to Cain, as we have seen, but he was deprived of it. Cain also saw himself as driven from ‘the face of God’, i.e. the personal ‘face of God’. This being the case, how could he worship God without total repentance and thrusting himself upon the grace of God as Abel seems to have done in his time? Since God is Spirit and invisible, and the word and the act had to proclaim Him rather than theophanies, then the community of faith had to know Him by faith– relationship rather than by an image or images. Because the idols and lords imaged themselves materially, their worshippers could speak of a ‘presence’ and of a ‘sight’ of their deities, and that made much sense to them. They could see their gods face–to–face should they wish to do

so, but Israel ridiculed this position. Only the God they could not see would be worthy of worship. The idolaters saw Israel as atheistic. Israel retorted in effect, 'See what our invisible God has done for us, and goes on doing!'

In Isaiah 63:9–10 the prophet spoke of three beings who conducted Israel through the wilderness to Canaan, i.e. Yahweh, the angel of His presence, and Yahweh's Holy Spirit. 'The angel of his presence', or 'the angel of his face' (cf. Deut. 4:37; Exod. 33:14–15) is the angel who is never seen but communicates the presence of God in a manner no visualisation could do as effectively. Undoubtedly this was linked with 'the cloud of his presence'. God promised Moses His presence would go with them (Exod. 33: 14–15). That meant the people could worship God.

Moses had a tent outside the camp and there folk would watch as the cloud of Yahweh's presence would be manifested. Joshua seem to have been some kind of guard of the tent. It was called 'the tent of meeting'. It is where Moses met God for the cloud of glory came when the Lord visited him. Then when the tabernacle was prescribed, made and dedicated, it—the tabernacle—was filled with the glory of the Lord. Likewise Solomon's temple at its dedication. In Exodus 25:8 God said, 'let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. According to all that I show you according to the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.' After all the instructions God gave according to building of the tabernacle He said:

There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory; I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate, to serve me as priests. And I will dwell among the people of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them forth out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them; I am the LORD their God (Exod. 29:43–46).

Israel's cultus was a brilliant one. Worship of God, the liturgical and sacrificial worship, are of such a quality and shape as to demand infinite patience in studying it and comprehending its principles. The 'if you do well' word of God to Cain is here present. Every element of daily living, human relationships, ethics, morals and true worship are catered for. Israel has a sanctuary which transcends all humanly devised shrines and temples. No wonder it has had a magnificent history and no wonder it was deeply missed when destroyed, when remembered in exile, when reconstructed twice and as its eternal and final reconstruction has been anticipated over almost two millenniums of time. It outmoded all shrines and sanctuaries of the idols and gods. Likewise it has stood in constant danger of itself being idolised and so made a part of Israel that worshippers could come to the point of grave error in crying, 'The temple! The temple! The temple of the Lord!' (Jer.7:1–4).

The point we need to draw is that an earthly sanctuary could at best ensure the people that God was dwelling with them, and they were His personal community. At best it was the shrine at which their highest communion was with God and therefore with one another. The ecclesial nature of God and Man had their best opportunity to be lived out in daily life and true worship. The glory of God and Man in perichoretic inter-relationships had its most potent hours of experience in temple and tabernacle. Sadly enough, as the writer of Hebrews well tells us, good as it was—and it was good!—it was never to reach the pitch 'the true tent' (Heb. 8:2) was to provide. It was a shadow of things to come. This is not to say that the worship in Israel was not powerful and sufficient. The cultus of Aaron was sufficient for those times. It was a learning cultus and truly functional also, for its time. We might observe there was a higher cultus:—i.e. that of Melchizedek—and Christ was to be that high priest. What, however, must be said here is that the period of Israel's worship history ought to be recognised as one of the great marvels of history, if not the greatest. What such worship with its sacrificial cultus and its unique law did for Israel can never be computed. We may well speak of the morality that Israel experienced and witnessed to far beyond its own perimeters, and what that nation gave to the world and in its way still gives to all humanity is itself a great accomplishment. It is to the reality of that 'true tent' to which we now advert, the unseen

heavenly tent which dispossesses all temples of idols and even the Temple of Israel, the long-called 'house of God'.

THE NEW HOUSE OF GOD, THE TRUE TEMPLE OF GOD AND ITS WORSHIP

History changed radically with the incarnation of Christ. He came as the Son of his Father's Kingdom, announcing that Kingdom and calling for repentance and even baptism into his own name. Whilst Jesus lived in the law and worship of Israel, giving reverence to the temple and observing feasts and fasts, yet his ministry was such that the ruling powers at the temple knew that he claimed authority in the temple by twice cleansing it (cf. Mal. 3:1–4) and that other indications were that he would outmode the temple as the place and means of true worship. He spoke of the temple as 'my Father's house' and 'the house of prayer for many nations', the latter statement deriving from Isaiah 56:6–8. In one sense they were correct when they discerned from his criticisms of themselves that he opposed them as ruling powers. They knew he held a view of the temple which was other than high reverence for the Herodian construction and the contemporary cultus practiced within it. They were shrewd enough to know his ideas differed from theirs, though they never rightly perceived what they were.

A number of factors present themselves to us in regard to the nature and true worship of the congregation of Israel, the first one being the Kingdom of God. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. chs 5 to 7) has sometimes been called 'the radicalising of the law' but it would be better called 'the true perception of the law already given' and then its revelation to hearing listeners. Receiving this teaching was not optional. One must receive and live by it for it is the only way of the Kingdom and proper human living. This would be part of the new worship of God. The priests and rulers were enraged by a ministry which seemed to threaten their very existence.

The second factor is the position Jesus took in Israel as a person of authority. What he accomplished in his works and words could mean nothing else than that he was the true Messiah and the Son of God. It was difficult for any Israelite of that time to accept such a claim, albeit John the Baptist had testified to him that he was that One which was to come. In the synagogue at Nazareth they attempted to kill Jesus for inferring this was so. The signs, wonders and works which he did and the teaching he gave were all essential to the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom. Without them there was no way in which listeners could believe him to be the Messiah. We do not simply look back on those things so that now they make sense to us—i.e. after the time of their happening. It was primarily the resurrection which stirred the community of that time as being a remarkable act and which authenticated the Cross as God's will whilst ascension sealed the gospel as God's truth (Acts 2:23–24; 4:27–28).

The third factor was Jesus' teaching concerning the congregation of Israel and its responsibility before God to live as the witnessing community in the world in the light of Exodus 19:4–6 (cf. Isa. 43:8–12). Much was missing in its cultus action and in its moral living. All that he spoke regarding Israel was the principle by which a new congregation should live. Thus, innate in all his teaching, signs, wonders and works, the new people is in mind. Christ does not explicitly bring this to the congregation of Israel, but there is teaching given in some of the parables regarding the judgments which will come upon Israel, and how Gentiles will be given the Kingdom. Such teaching highly enraged the leaders of the Jews. Mostly, however, there was the teaching regarding the new worship as set out to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4: 19–26 and that regarding the new ecclesia which he will build in Matthew 16: 13–20 and 18: 15–20. Both teachings are quite vast in their implications and we need to look at them.

Especially significant is the passage in John's Gospel—John 4: 19–26. We know that the Samaritans were not full Jews, and they knew only the Pentateuch. They were faced continually with the contempt of Israel on certain scores. The woman voiced the mind of her people:

The woman said to him, 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship' (vv. 19–20).

Jesus' answer was clear:

Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth' (vv. 21–24).

Jesus was saying that there would be no exclusive sanctuary anywhere, as such, and no worship denied to all but a special people. At the same time, since God is true and is Father and Spirit without visibility, He would henceforth be worshipped in the way of Spirit and the truth.

In saying what he said about God as Father and Spirit, as invisible, and not localised to a worship sanctuary, Jesus is simply reiterating how God, Man and worship functioned in Eden, and from Pentecost onwards would again be bound to worship. Paul took this up when he said, 'For we are the true circumcision who worship God in spirit [Spirit?] and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh'. Putting 'confidence in the flesh', as he shows, is having religious qualifications which would seem to make one to be a righteous person and so qualified to worship, but that worship would then be 'according to the flesh'. This does not at all mean that those who worshipped according to the prescriptions given at Sinai worshipped according to the flesh. Many times God had to reproach Israel for its wrong worship, although the motions of its worship were outwardly correct. The principle which David knew to be true worship was that of Psalm 51:15–17:

O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise. For thou hast no delight in sacrifice; were I to give a burnt offering, thou wouldst not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

We may conclude, then, that the words Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman were radical and spelled the doom of Jerusalem as the worship centre of the world, and Levitical worship as the true cultus.

The verses we quoted—Matthew 16: 13–20 and 18: 15–20—related not so much to worship as to the new ecclesia Jesus would build, but then a new ecclesia would presuppose a new worship. It was put as simply as this, that 'if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst.' Note the 'Father in heaven' and the Son 'in the midst'.

All of this is so far from the Jewish cultus that we must ask what it is which would radically change the nature and mode of worship. A number of ideas come to mind but what stands out is that they must be of a major nature, and nothing to do with human ideas of reform. So far as we know, the cultus in Israel was not regarded as temporary. It had lasted quite a few centuries and seemed destined for more centuries to come. What, then, changed the cultus situation? We ask this question because at the back of our minds we have the Community in mind—the new community of Christ. We know that what happened in Christ determined the kind of community it would become.

THE DETERMINED CHANGE OF OLD QAHAL TO NEW ECCLESIA

We have seen that God was present to Israel in the Tabernacle and then in the Temple in the Holy of Holies. This meant He was present to all Israel and so the *koinonia* (fellowship) of God and Israel was operative. God was neither locked into, nor locked out of Israel because of His covenant Presence. The Temple could be—and was—destroyed. Some of the Psalms of lament reveal a puzzled and anxious holy remnant, contemplating the loss of the sanctuary of God. Where was God? When would He restore the sanctuary? How could they be a community when He was deliberately absent from them? When He was present in the restored

sanctuary there were the dangers of perfunctory worship, or placing Yahweh among the lesser gods—syncretistically. Yet, being the Covenant Father, He persisted with His love.

Christ's incarnation introduced new dimensions. Immanuel was now present in Israel, and then to all the world for various of his sayings confirmed this, i.e. the sayings in John's Gospel of being sent (some 40 times). He said that if anyone had seen him—the Son—then he had seen the Father. However, at the same time Yahweh seemed to be present in the Temple, for He had not vacated it. We gather this from Christ's own adherence to the cultus. Again His own Son was in the community in all the ways of which the prophets had spoken. In the Son the Kingdom of the Father was present and active, and the Son accorded this activity to the Father. The Son spoke and acted as though a radical change was coming in cultus and community, and it was virtually because of this language and the sign of his cleansing the temple that he was tried, condemned and put to death. The beginnings of the new ecclesia were present in Christ and his community. God—so to speak—was not in the Holy of Holies so much as he was in His Son. The days of the temple and its cultus were drawing to an end. The days of the new cultus and the new temple were drawing nigh.

With the crucifixion the transforming change had come; 'we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died' (2 Cor. 5: 14), Paul said. He did not die only for the members of Israel but also for all members of the human race. In his crucified body all the human race was slain. Something far transcending the Jewish 'Day of Atonement' happened as the Son of God became the atoning sacrifice for all mankind. Baptism was to teach this. Israel was by no means abandoned but to remain as the true Israel it must believe in Messiah and his bloody sacrifice. In those hours of darkness on the Cross the sin of the world was propitiated by the love of God. In that act the new church was taken through the death and resurrection and was born, crucified and raised with his holy body as the new ecclesia. To be correct the new ecclesia is him. He is its head and it is his body and both are the one. As we will see, the new temple was not a formation of stone but was—and is—built on the living foundation/cornerstone, each member being a living stone and all being the temple (*oikos*: house) of living persons.

For those '[skilled] in the word of righteousness' (Heb. 5:7–14), there is the powerful knowledge that Christ is the true High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. His wounded body was given in atoning sacrifice. The New Community has been forgiven, purified, justified, sanctified and glorified; whichever *order—ordo salutis—you* may choose. The church now is present in Christ. Although he has ascended, yet he is not absent from his ecclesia (Matt. 28:20) for they too are with him as living persons, for they have been seated with him in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6; Col. 3: 1–3).

In the forty days before his ascension and the ten days afterwards, his faithful company of disciples awaited Pentecost to burst into conscious being as the ecclesia. No one doubted—whether friend or enemy—that here was a company of a most dynamic nature who acted as though they were filled with new wine. Few might have understood, but these men and women were the beginning of the new ecclesia because: (i) they had participated not only in the death and resurrection of Jesus on Cross and in Tomb, but also in his Ascension, and were now spiritually seated with him in heavenly places, one with him and reigning with him; and (ii) the Spirit had come upon them and made all things clear to them, so that with the power of the Spirit they were now able to witness to Christ (Acts 1:8). No one would ever be able to reverse the works of the incarnate Son of God. The church had been built by his hands.

WHAT THEN OF THE NEW WORSHIP?

The matter of who are in the new ecclesia has been a lively issue over two Christian millenniums. Obviously all who were at the Pentecost happening were Jews. Not until the killing of Stephen—himself a Hellenistic Jew—was the gospel taken to other places when Greeks and others were incorporated in the visible community by the baptism which made clear their participation in Christ and his effective work. In Christian history there has persisted an

error in thinking, namely that the Jews deserved a prior place in the church and the Gentiles needed much grace to be admitted. There have been debates over whether or not the term ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal. 6: 16; cf. Rom. II :25–27) applies to the church so that the church is the new Israel. Whatever the debate, Paul’s words should make it clear that Jews and Gentiles who become Christians are one body and that all are wholly—without gradation—the ecclesia of Christ:

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; 6 that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (Eph. 3: 1–6).

As we remember worship in Israel we realise it was the community which received the covenant at Sinai. Even before this God promised it would be the priest–nation among all nations and would have purity of worship unknown to other nations (Exod. 19:5–6; Deut. 4:5–8, 20). Obedience to God was the condition for the pure cultus God had gifted to them: ‘if you will obey my voice, and keep my covenant, then you shall be my own possession among all peoples’. It followed that in Israel there would be a special sanctuary, and that the modes of worship would be related to its three courts of divisions—the court of worship, the holy place and the holy of holies—with their graded values and functions, and that the sanctuary determined the way of life lived outside that sanctuary. Sacrifices were needed, both piacular and of fellowship, peace, and thanksgiving offerings.

Now, from Pentecost onwards, the worship most evidently changed. We know the Christians at Jerusalem did not sever their links with the temple, and this fact, in itself, meant many things, one of which is that they did not see themselves as cut off from Israel. Stephen’s thought seemed to be much along the line of Christ’s in this respect. Whatever may have been the case, the ecclesia eventually slipped its moorings with the temple. What is significant is that *the temple was no longer the sanctuary of the ecclesia*. The ecclesia was in itself the new temple, no building whatsoever being envisaged as the ecclesia. In Ephesians 2: 13–22 Paul addresses the ecclesia at Ephesus—which, like all local churches, was composed of those who had been Jews and Gentiles—and tells them that Christ has come and because of his work on the cross has created a new humanity in which distinctions between Jew and Gentile have been dissolved, so that they are the new, holy temple, having been joined together and grown into this temple. What is significant is that they—as the ecclesia—are built into this temple ‘*for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit*’:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 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 (Eph. 2: 13–22).

We should note in the quotation above, ‘holy temple’ means ‘holy shrine [*naos*]’—the sanctuary part of the temple and ‘dwelling place’ is really the ‘Holy of holies’ which is quite significant. If we go to 1 Peter 2:4–10, then the ‘spiritual house’ (*oikos pneumatikos*) is literally as translated, so that the new building is the whole temple from one point of view and from another point of view is the whole people of God which was Israel under the Covenant—Father. Let us then look at I Peter 2:4–10 in order to discover more regarding the new worship:

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. For it stands in scripture: 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and he who believes in him will not be put to shame.' To you therefore who believe, he is precious, but for those who do not believe, 'The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner, and a stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall'; for they stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. 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.

Christ is the 'living stone', which is similar to Revelation 1:17–18: 'When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.'" We know that 'the rock' or 'stone' was a messianic term (cf. Isa. 8: 14; 28: 16; 51: 1 f.; Ps. 118:22; cf. Dan. 2:34; Zech. 12:3) and that he was rejected fits Christ's case before the leaders of Israel and its worship. The stone which is the cornerstone has to be rejected even though in its character it is the only stone which is acceptable to God. Those who believe in him—the living stone—are built into him as living stones built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. So in Christ the whole church is a spiritual priesthood (cf. Exod. 19:4–6) as against a Levitical—mediatorial—one, and it offers spiritual sacrifices—as against material and animal sacrifices—through Christ Jesus. This priestly community is in Christ and it is through him that it offers its worship, its sacrifices.

What, then, are spiritual sacrifices? From Peter's way of speaking they are those sacrifices offered in the Old Testament, e.g. prayer, thanksgiving, praise and repentance (Ps. 50:14; 51:19; 107:22; 141:2)—indeed the same elements that worship has ever had. From the Pauline way of speaking we gather from Romans 12: 1 that first the offering of our bodies is the true and living worship which results from the mercies of God coming to us, and so in Philippians 2: 17 Paul can speak of himself being 'poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith', and can speak of the gifts the Philippians have sent via Epaphroditus as 'a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God'. From the point of view of the author of Hebrews, Christ is the leader (*leitourgos*) 'in the sanctuary and the true tent' (8:2) and that we are to 'offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire' (12:28–29). He then exhorts the ecclesia, 'Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God' (Heb. 13:15–16). Both praise—the fruit of the lips—and doing good and sharing what we have constitute true worship. Since Christ is the *leitourgos* (leader) then 'to worship God in Spirit and in truth' is to worship through Christ. Because Christ is our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Gen. 14: 17–20) then our worship is no longer Aaronic but is of another order (Heb. 7: 12ff.).

CONCLUSION: THE WORSHIP WHICH IS TRULY OF THE COMMUNITY OF GOD

We have not described the worship—pattern itself but we know that 'community' and 'worship' are inseparable elements. We have seen that honouring, serving, giving and receiving are all parts of worship and so, as in the Trinitarian Community, so in the community on earth which is the living, acting community known as the ecclesia. Elsewhere we have noted that the words for 'worship' and 'service' are virtually identical in both Old and New Testaments. Thus to serve is to worship and to worship is to serve. Adam's rejection of God's word was his decision not to worship and not to serve. Such a decision was bound to lead to idolatry which is worshipping and serving the creature rather than the creator (Rom. 1 :24–25).

All those offerings of which Paul, Peter and the writer of Hebrews speak—to say nothing of the writer of Revelation—are the ways of living within the community of Christ. In another Study we will see that the church is attended by Trinitarian love and grace, but I advert now to the perichoretic flow within the Godhead, the flow of it then to the ecclesia on earth, and then the circular flow of it back to the Godhead in worship and service. This is a very beautiful thing. No one controls this worship. It is the people of God in communion with the Father, via the eternal High-Priesthood of Christ, and the Spirit who aids the ecclesia to worship in their spirits and in the truth. All that they are, and all that they do, is caught up in this worship.

How, then, can we be in communion with God, but by worship? Romans 12: I says it is when we realise the mercies of God and receive them in repentance and faith that we become true worshippers. Hebrews 9: 14 teaches that when our consciences are cleansed from dead works by the blood of Christ it is then that we worship (serve) the living God. It is then that we are members one of another, that we give inner hospitality to one another, and that we become one in knowing the purpose of God for His community, and so live as one in His will. It is then that joy of the Lord is set free in a flood of love and thanksgiving. This is *koinonia*—fellowship, communion, community—at its utmost. In 1 Corinthians 14:24–25 Paul speaks of Christian worship in action:

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.

The Church Living in the World As Community—4

INTRODUCTION: THE CHURCH WITNESSES TO THE WORLD AS THE COMMUNITY OF GOD

We have talked much about the differences in the two communities in the world, the community which is under Christ, the ecclesia, and the community which is of the world, the community of those not in the ecclesia of Christ, and who are under the prince of this world (Eph. 2:1–3; cf. John 8:44ff.; 1 John 3:8f.). We have seen that the people of God are that community of God in which all members have their life and being within and from God Himself. Man, as created, is that community which is in the image of God and reflects Him. God is that Community of the Father, the Son and the Spirit in which all members are one, and so have given to Man the ecclesial gift by which they, too, are one in themselves as they are the community of love. The true ecclesia, living in the midst of the world, is a saving community in that its members have been saved by God and are now intent on saving others out of the world's community. Their work is primarily to witness to the world, and proclaim to them the gospel of God. One part of their work is to proclaim the gospel (*kerugma*) and another part to present a defence of the same gospel, especially when called upon.

In Philippians 1:7 Paul talks about others sharing with him in 'the defence [*apologia*] and confirmation [*bebaiosie*: substantiation] of the gospel'. In 1 Peter 3:15 the apostle writes, 'Always be prepared to make a defence [*apologia*] to any one who calls you to account for the *hope* that is within you'. In the first case it is a defence for the whole gospel and in the second for the hope of the gospel. One work of the community was to so be in the gospel and so of it that an *apologia* could be given when needed. We must not think that *apologia* means an apology but that it is a properly reasoned defence which then means it is a confrontation of the person or persons who demand the *apologia*. In some cases this will satisfy some listeners, and some cases it will be rejected.

What we need to see at this point is that the two communities mentioned above are so different that the ecclesia of Christ has not just to represent itself to be a good and moral community, but as a community which is radically different to any that the human race has ever seen. Yes, even beyond the community of Israel, though in many ways it will resemble that nation to some degree. Now we have to be careful how we present this thesis. We are not saying that the community of Christ will be endeavouring on the highest plane of all to be a successful moral people, outshining all human sinners, and all other human moral endeavour. No, whilst it may have such things in mind, we are saying that the community of the Holy Spirit is showing a way of living which others have never envisaged, let alone attained. It is the community of love shown in its humility, gentleness and meekness to be unique and yet, in no contradiction to its humility, to be incredibly strong.

Some Christian persons who have been used to hearing statements like the one I have just made would nod their agreement, but yet not have a notion of what has been said. What has been said is to lay claim that in the history of mankind there had never been a

community of this calibre, but in the ecclesia it has come into being. In this Study we will endeavour to show that, ‘It is the community of love shown in its humility, gentleness and meekness to be unique and yet, in no contradiction to its humility, to be incredibly strong’. One of the reasons why some readers will not be convinced of the claim I have made is that in its history of some two thousand years of existence it appears not to be the case that the ecclesia is the unique community of humility, gentleness and meekness and of incredible strength.

Let us look at certain statements which pertain to the character I have claimed for the church. These need to be set out for reading and assessment:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law (Gal. 5:22–23).

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1 Cor. 13:4–7).

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all (Eph. 4:1–6).

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:1–8).

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you (Phil. 4:8–9).

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind. Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing (1 Pet. 3:8–9).

There are many, many more such passages. One of them is the entire Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s Gospel, chapters 5 to 7. How many of us have yearned to see the world live according to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount? Others of us viewing the quotations above are sad that all those beautiful ways of life are lived out by so few and so rarely. Be that as it may, does Christ’s ecclesia live out these wonderful ways? The answer is ‘yes!’ and ‘no!’ For the moment we will simply say that Christ’s community is seen doing these things only when it lives under grace. Apart from grace it accomplishes none of it. At the same time we observe that the whole community is *in* Christ, and that what we see quoted above is the life of the Lord of the church himself as he works out these wonderful ways in his people, by his power and his grace. The fact is that the church is a community of human beings which have been redeemed and so are those who are working out the matter of their salvation by God who energises them

within (Phil. 2:12–13). All have the urge to be humble, gentle and loving, but they need God’s energising to do this.

THE CHANGE WROUGHT IN HUMANITY BY GOD’S REDEMPTIVE ACTION

In our last Study we spoke of God’s purpose for His community which was—and is—to create a special community of human beings who will gladly carry out His purposes both for the telos or climax of history, and then in the action of eternity sometimes called ‘the ages upon the ages’. This community has stretched in time from Abel to the present and will stretch to the coming climax of all things and even beyond. It was to redeem this community and to train it to live now up to the telos and then in all eternity, witnessing that Christ, the Word of God and the Son of God, came to earth. Without him the community could not be redeemed. Israel lived on the prophecies concerning this Coming One, but in all their thinking they never envisaged God coming to this earth as a man, in what we call ‘the Incarnation’. Immanuel means ‘God with us’ (Isa. 7:14), but who dreamed that it could be so in reality?

One of the elements we have come to know from the action of Christ’s incarnation is what we call *kenosis* or ‘the self-emptying’. Another element we will look at is what has been called *plerosis* or the ‘self-filling’. As we proceed we will find that the incarnation of Christ and the *kenosis* and *plerosis* involved are immediately more to do with salvation than with some lifting up and bettering humanity as a race so that it becomes the perfect community. The latter idea of humanity being given dignity and a higher view of itself must come primarily through salvation and not through Christ infusing, as it were, a higher quality of life and being by himself becoming a human being. *It is by the work of salvation that Man comes to share in the Divine nature* (2 Pet. 1:1–4).

When we say the moral transformation of persons of the community of Christ comes through salvation we mean at the outset that sinful Man is redeemed when he is saved by grace, by repentance and faith, as indicated in a passage such as Ephesians 2:8–10:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Here we see that the purpose of redeeming Man is to bring him, in Christ, to do good works, i.e. to be that community which is determined by God for righteous living.

Other passages, such as Romans 3:21–26, show God justifying Man from the judgment of the law:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus.

In this salvation is included the matter of the principle of new birth or regeneration. Jesus’ two statements regarding being a person ‘begotten from above’ were, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, *he cannot see the kingdom of God*’, and

‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, *he cannot enter the kingdom of God*’. Now regeneration or new birth is a most dynamic action in salvation, so much so that Paul could say, ‘if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation’ (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). Peter wrote, ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you’ (1 Pet. 1:3–4). He also wrote, ‘Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God’ (1 Pet. 1:22–23). John likewise speaks of the dynamics of new birth in 1 John 3:9, 4:7, 5:1, 4, 18, and tells what amazing and radical changes take place in a person and a community when regeneration comes to them. The crisis change wrought by salvation continues on in a process of the same redemption. Philippians 2:12–13 puts this clearly, ‘Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out³⁵ your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure’. The climax of this inner work will be seen at the telos when salvation will be completed. Because of what we have just said about the radical change wrought by redemption, it will be expected of us that we, as persons and as community, will have this radically transformed action present in our own lives, so that as we live in the world our witness by word and life will be convincing as it is in ‘the defence and confirmation of the gospel’. Because salvation makes a deep and vast impact throughout a person’s being, so does the regenerated community show radical, holy living.

THE CHURCH AS THE KENOTIC COMMUNITY

The word *kenosis* is not found as such in the New Testament, but the idea of it is present in the phrase *heauton ekenosen*, ‘emptied himself’. It has led to the event of Christ emptying himself (Phil. 2:7) being described as Christ’s ‘self-emptying’ and then to be called ‘kenosis’ which is the noun derived from the Greek verb *kenoo*, ‘to empty’. In our Studies we will take self-kenosis to mean ‘Christ’s self-emptying’. He is not spoken of as being emptied, vacated and wholly evacuated. We now have to set about seeing more fully the meaning of kenosis and the idea of the kenotic community, i.e. the ecclesia working on the principle of kenosis. Another way of describing kenosis is ‘being humble’.

We see kenosis clearly in the passage of Philippians 2:5–8 to be the act by which he—the Son of God:

... who, though he was in the form [*morphe*] of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form [*morphe*] of a servant, being born in the likeness [*homoiomati*] of men. And being found in human form [*hos anthropos*] he humbled himself [*etapeinosen heautov*] and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (vv. 6–8).

This passage is on its own in the New Testament. The use of the verb *kenoo* is seen in many passages and simply means ‘to make empty’ and is the antonym of *pleroo* which means ‘to make full’. Examples of the use of the first verb are found in Mark 9:12 (‘set at nought’); Romans 4:14 (‘faith is null’); 1 Corinthians 1:17 (‘emptied of its power’); 1 Corinthians 9:15 (‘shall empty; deprive’); 2 Corinthians 9:3 (‘not deprive; make vain’), and some of these indicate the use found in Philippians 2:7. The *idea* is certainly found in 2 Corinthians 8:9, ‘For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich’. The question we ask is, ‘Was becoming poor—i.e. becoming human—an exercise of joy and delight for Christ, or are we to think of it as a heavy demand, something to be borne and fulfilled, yet not, indeed, Christ’s great act of pure love?’

³⁵ Note Paul does not say ‘work at your own salvation’, but ‘work out your own salvation’.

What then is meant by the kenosis, the self-emptying? History has seen many attempts to explain it but with little success. Certainly the ‘how’ of it is unexplainable. By nature of the case, self-emptying in terms of metaphysics evades us. The principle of self-emptying is certainly present in 2 Corinthians 8:9 and helps us to understand Philippians 2:7 et al. Yet what we need to see is the passage of Philippians 2:1–4:

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others (NRSV).

In this passage Paul is pointing to the immense resources which the church has for true daily living, and which persons can use for such living. First there is ‘encouragement’ in Christ (*paraklesis*), then ‘consolation’ (*paramuthion*) of love (*agape*), followed by ‘sharing’ (*koinonia*) in the Spirit, then compassion (*splanchna*) and sympathy (*oiktirmoi*), all of which are most powerful, personal and intimate elements in relationships. Each demands contemplative study. Then in verse 2, Paul exhorts his readers in strong terms, ‘make my joy complete: being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind’. What would be the communal outcome of such a ‘mind’ and ‘action’? In verse 3 he exhorts, ‘Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves’. We wonder whether Paul might be asking what is beyond human power to do. Firstly all ambition and conceit is to be put away, and secondly the powerful word ‘humility’ (*tapeinophrosune*) is put forward. Out of humility each is to regard another better than himself, or as surpassing himself. ‘Is such possible?’, we ask, and surely the answer is that we are simply to put others before ourselves. Verse 4 is also asking much: ‘Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others’. In this translation (NRSV) there is no ‘also’ mentioned which is found in most other versions. It says directly, ‘Primarily direct your mind to the interests of others’.³⁶ Put all of this together and you have a very demanding call to a life of humility and devotion to others. For any person to fill out this exhortation fully he/she would have to be *emptied of self which looks only to its own interests, its own position and its own status and does not consider any other person as better than itself*.

³⁶ The NASB has ‘do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others’, whilst NRSV has, ‘Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others’, and TREB has, ‘Look to each other’s interests and not merely to your own’. The translators are possibly taking the point of verse 3 where readers are to account others *better* than themselves. Probably the idea is that the interest one takes in one’s own things must not be more than one takes in others’ things. It may also measure any over-emphasis one might have in one’s own interests. There is, of course, a legitimate interest in one’s own things, but such must include interest in the things of others.

Notice clearly that Paul describes all this attitude and action of verses 1 to 4 as being ‘the mind of Christ’. He then goes on to say that Christ as formerly being one with God, had done all of this which Paul requires of his readers in relation to others. Christ, in relation to others, emptied himself in the face of the human race, and for the human race, not being reluctant to let go of being equal with God³⁷ and of being in action in another sphere, in order that he could become a man and die for the human race. To our self-oriented minds this desire of his mind is not humanly comprehensible. That he should prefer to become a man and remain so for ever and go to a foul cross for our redemption defeats human imagination. In all this he is not exchanging deity for humanity, but showing us love in a manner not hitherto seen.

The whole act of taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of humanity, and being a human being is a stunning concept, let alone a matter for belief. We first notice that—according to the text—he did not humble himself to become a man. He was not humiliated by becoming a human being, for this is what he desired passionately to do. It was in his incarnation already accomplished that he humbled himself and became obedient to the death of the Cross in order to redeem Man. This was what he greatly wished to do and in all its action he was not humiliated for he who is humble cannot be humiliated. Some see it was his will so that he could uplift the level of humanity in order to make it into a higher bracket of human creature—higher than ever it had been, even at creation. They would account our ‘being participators of the divine nature’ not to redemption but to incarnation.

This, however, was not the primary purpose. His primary purpose in becoming human was to save lost and condemned humanity and bring it back to its true being, dignity and status intended by God in creating it. It is true that the *ultimate* outcome of the death of the Cross will be to make humanity ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Pet. 1:4), but incarnation of itself does not accomplish this. Man from creation and by reason of the creational mandate (Gen. 1:26–30) was purposed to participate in the action of God in creation.

Now, if we ask, ‘What did his self-emptying constitute? Does it mean he emptied himself of his deity and its attributes or properties?’, then we are asking the wrong questions. It has often been said, ‘Only God can tell God’ and this is true, so that we say, ‘His emptying of himself’ was so loving us that all his godly powers were directed to: (i) putting us before himself, counting us better than himself; and (ii) not simply looking to his own *interests*—so called by some—such as remaining in equality with God and never becoming man, but becoming man in order to redeem humanity and so set mankind up for reaching that goal God had intended for it before He began creating the world. For the Son to become man does not mean denuding himself of his God-being (Godself), but it means his becoming a man in addition to being God. Because human beings, as sinners, do not make so huge a decision then we assume that such decisions, in principle, cannot be made. How wrong we are! This is the decision he made and he acted upon it.

You will note that in the paragraph immediately above, the word ‘interests’ is in italics. This was because wanting to remain in equality with God and not wanting to become a

³⁷ The text of verse 6, ‘did not think equality with God a thing to be grasped’, does not necessarily mean he relinquished equality with God but that he was simply prepared to do this. It relates to verse 3, ‘in humility count others better than yourselves’ was what he was prepared to do—and did! If this reasoning is correct then those who saw him as a man would naturally think of him as having lost his former status. In the text above we argue there was no status to lose by his tremendous act of love. To a person who is self-regarding it would seem to be a great lowering of his being. It was just the norm of his action or behaviour as the one who acts from love.

man were never his interests. That situation would never arise. We from our self-centred, glory-seeking, human way of thinking assume that such were his interests and that he had a gigantic decision to make and perhaps made it with difficulty. Wrong! It is true Godhead which makes this decision without a tremor or a struggle. This is the way of love and the strength of love. We do not say, ‘This is the way of love’, in a thoughtless or cavalier manner. We say it with amazement and gratitude in our voices. How great a love is His—God’s—that He would love the entire world and send His Son to die for us, as is the like love of the Son to become a man!

I venture to say at this point that Christ had no decision-crisis about becoming a man. To him there was nothing demeaning about becoming a man who is in the image of God. Was it in God’s mind that when he made Man in his image, He, God, could become Man? Certain it is that the intention was always in God to become man, hence it may be said that it is in the nature of God to become a man! A man to some degree may reflect this self-kenosis of God in being genuinely humble in a given situation, but God expressed it in Christ, showing us love in a manner not hitherto seen, because of His nature in the face of the desperate state of Man. He showed it in the Incarnation. We might say that Christ’s incarnation was inevitable and that it happened as though it were inevitable, and so without fuss!

Ask not, then, ‘How does his Godhead—his deity—live with his humanity?’ We are not going to call this a mystery or a thing to be reasoned through, any more than we are going to ignore the matter. We are saying that all analogies are frail and inadequate in their substance as answers. We are saying that the passage of Paul—Philippians 2:1–11—was never intended to teach us *how* the Son of God as God could become Jesus Christ the man—for ever—and *how* his deity and humanity could co-exist. We are simply saying that because the matter is beyond our comprehension it does not mean it is impossible to grasp it cognitively. All writers of the New Testament call us to believe the *fact* before them of the One who was at once God and a man. In this case believing is knowing what is good for us to know. Surely we should allow men and women to ask questions and puzzle the facts on the one hand which show something of his deity, and those facts on the other hand which mark his humanity, but let there be no anger because we cannot rationalise the whole matter. That *happening*—though not the *manner* of the happening—can be grasped even cognitively.

Rather, then, let us say something like these words of mine, ‘It is self-evident that Man rebelled against God in the most glorious garden—the primal garden, Eden—and here the bliss of innocence turned to burdensome guilt so that Man became the slave of sin, being cut off in spirit from the life of God. Where once he drank of God, as of the river of Eden, now he was empty of the life he had once known, and the future which had been set for him. Whilst Man can make reservoirs for the waters he would preserve and drink, yet he was created to drink of the river of God.³⁸ Moreover God tells him that reservoirs such a man makes cannot hold water (Jer. 2:13). Man, of himself, will be dry forever; his true thirst spiritual but unquenched. Because of the emptiness of Man, the Son of God dies in order that Man may again drink and have his deepest inner thirst fully quenched (John 4:7–16; cf. 7:37–39), no longer remaining *empty*. It was in order to accomplish this that Christ cried on the cross, “I thirst!”’

So then Philippians 2:1–11 is explained by 2 Corinthians 8:9, ‘For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich’. Once we see this we are free to

³⁸ For a development of this idea see my little book, *The River of God* (NCPI, Blackwood, 2001).

trace all the elements of self-kenosis in the New Testament, and to realise that they are many and altogether wonderful. Christ's kenosis forever remains a matter of wonder. For the moment let our minds rest as we contemplate the lovely poem of Henry Vaughan (1621–1695):

The Incarnation and Passion

Lord! when thou didst thy self undress,
Laying by the robes of glory,
To make us more, thou wouldst be less,
And becamest a woeful story.

To put on Clouds instead of light,
And clothe the morning-star with dust,
Was a translation of such height
As, but in thee, was ne'er expressed;

Brave worms, and Earth! that thus could have
A God enclosed within your Cell,
Your maker pent up in a grave,
Life locked in death, heaven in a shell;

Ah, my dear Lord! what couldst thou spy
In this impure, rebellious clay,
That made thee thus resolve to die
For those that kill thee every day?

O what strange wonders could thee move
To slight thy precious blood, and breath!
Sure it was *love*, my Lord; for *love*
Is only stronger far than death.³⁹

The poem is able to speak in terms of the mystery of incarnation in a manner which excels explanation. Even so, the poem is not pure theology. For example, the poet is saying the Son was 'Laying by the robes of glory'. Was this so? John said, 'We beheld his glory as of the only Son of the Father'. This beholding was certainly not confined to the Baptism and the Transfiguration. We need to walk thoughtfully amongst the wonders of his incarnation, for they were of love, and incarnate love is of no less quality or power than the discarnate love of that same Son.

THE COMMUNITY OF GOD, OF MAN AND THE PLACE OF KENOSIS

The Community of God

It seems that we know, intuitively, that the Community of God—i.e. the Trinity—is essentially kenotic. Let us define what we mean by 'kenotic'. We mean that where God is love, the principles of considering others and making others their primary interest and in this manner 'preferring one another', is the true order of both the Community of God—the Trinity—and the true community of Man which we call 'the ecclesia':

³⁹ Henry Vaughan: *The Complete Poems* (Penguin Classics, London, 1976), p. 168.

- (a) It is a fact that *in the Trinity each Member prefers the other Members* of the Community, i.e. puts the other one first. The term ‘prefer’ (verb: *proegeomai*) in Romans 12:10 really means ‘each places the other before himself’, somewhat corresponding to Philippians 2:3—‘count others better than yourselves’. The question of one being *superior* to another does not arise. When each has the other/s in mind then all are honourable in honouring:
- The Son is always honouring, i.e. glorifying, the Father (John 3:35; 5:26–27; 10:29; 13:3; 17:2, 4, 5, 11–12).
 - The Father is always honouring the Son (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; John 1:14; 11:4, 40; 13:31–32; 14:13; 17:2).
 - The Spirit always glorifies the Father and the Son, as we see the principle in John 16:14–15. He is always the ‘the Spirit of [the] Father’ (Matt. 10:20) and ‘the Spirit of the Son’ (Gal. 4:6; cf. Rom. 8:9–10).
 - The Father and the Son are always glorifying the Spirit for he is ‘the Lord and giver of life’ (Rom. 8:2; 2 Cor. 3:6). Both honour the Holy Spirit in saying that sin against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven (Matt. 12:31), even though sin against the Son of Man is not in that high category. Here we have given but a few verses which make the point of mutual honouring of the Persons, but the principle is found throughout the New Testament. This mutual honouring is, indeed, a glorifying and worshipping—one of the others.
- (b) Again, it is a fact that *all members of the Trinity serve one another*. The Father loves the Son and has given all things—i.e. all history and powers—into his hands, so deep is His trust (John 3:35; Matt. 11:25–27). John’s Gospel makes it clear that the Son obeys the Father as the Father pursues the fulfilling of His plan. The Son is never alone for the Father is always with him (John 16:32) and this is how the Son is enabled to serve the Father. The Spirit ever serves the Father and the Son in the works of creation (Job 33:4; Ps. 33:6; 104:30) and in redemption (Matt. 3:16; Luke 4:18–19; Heb. 9:14).
- (c) Further, it is a fact that *all members of the Trinity give to and receive from one another*. The one who serves another is giving in service and worship—if that be the required case. The one who receives but does not give is not really receiving. The one who gives but refuses to receive is not really giving. Only in the intimacy of love does true giving–receiving take place. To give obedience is true giving and true honouring. We need not here enlarge on the inter-giving of the three Persons but in John 17 alone the Father’s giving to the Son is mentioned 16 times. In all that we have said in these few paragraphs we have but touched the tip of this great iceberg—so vast it is. The Father receives from the Son honour and worship and obedience to His will.

What we have in mind is that since all members of the Trinity prefer one another—no matter what their place is in that Community—*then it must be that the Godhead is kenotic!* If we cast our minds back to Philippians 2:1–4 we see that Paul exhorts his readers to be kenotic by first of all calling them to treat all others in love and to place others before them, for he says, ‘This is the mind of Christ’. Then he adds, ‘Have this mind among yourselves which you have in Christ Jesus’, meaning that they may—and

should—live according to the mind already among the community ‘*in* Christ Jesus’. In verses 5 to 8 he shows that Christ’s self-kenosis in his incarnation and obedience to the Cross. In verses 9 to 11 he shows that Christ’s self-kenosis leads to and is indispensable in his becoming Lord over all things *to the glory of the Father!* We may anticipate what we are yet to say about plerosis⁴⁰ and point out that in the community self-kenosis is essential to self-plerosis, and that plerosis achieved is nevertheless one with kenosis which does not cease with plerosis. This we shall have to consider.

We sum up this section by saying that the Godhead has always been self-kenotic, and did not have to become so at the point of incarnation. Christ preferring all humanity before himself was self-kenotic, but he did not empty himself of his deity and its attributes. We would have to be God in order to understand the ‘how?’ and ‘what?’ of the kenosis. We can only say he never used his deity to effect the works of his humanity. He became truly a man before God, and still is—in all his fullness (Eph. 1:23, *pleroma*)—a man and he is filling all things (*pleroumenon*: Eph. 1:23; 4:10). His being God was—and is—without diminution in his becoming a man, whilst his being a man was without expansion of his humanity by being God. This is what makes his self-kenosis a true one. We will later see that he constantly effected human plerosis in his incarnation.

If, then, the church, God’s *ecclesia* on earth, is cast after the form of the Trinity—the Community of God—then its very being is self-kenotic. Thus Paul’s exhortations as in Philippians 2:1–8 and Ephesians 4:1–6 are essential to the church being the church.⁴¹ He is not calling for high endeavours and special behaviour, but for the church to be itself—true community that is ever self-kenotic and, as we will later see, ever self-plerotic.

One more thing has to be added: Christ does not *become* self-kenotic at the point of his incarnation, he ever having been the Son of God. Nor does the Trinity *become* kenotic at that point of incarnation. Christ’s incarnation is the expression and manifestation of the Trinity. The Trinity is kenotic within its self as the immanent Community of God (*theologia*), and who Christ is and what he does via incarnation is the expression of the *oikonomia*, i.e. the Trinity working in creation, redemption, *theosis* and the consummation of history. In other words, we have to say that God had ever planned the Incarnation because that Incarnation was indispensable to God’s way of redemption with a view to the eschatological–teleological climax of which we spoke in our Study, ‘The Church Living in the World as Community—1’.⁴² We mean by this that God’s true community—His *am segullah* or *laos periousios* of Exodus 19:5–6 and Titus 2:14—was to be established as His *theotic* community. Here *theotic* pertains to *theosis*, i.e. the community who will ultimately participate in the Divine nature (2 Pet. 1:1–4) and become kings and priests unto their God and reign with Him forever.

With this understanding in mind we can now approach the community which we call the *ecclesia*.

The Community of the Ecclesia

As is the Community of God, so are they to be who are in the community of Man—humanity. This we explored in our previous Study where we said that God is ecclesial

⁴⁰ *Plerosis* is a subject with which we shall deal. It means to fill up something, as *kenosis* is the emptying of something.

⁴¹ There are many passages in the Epistles which are of the same ilk as Philippians 2:1–4 and Ephesians 4:1–6. They are not to be seen simply as paranetics (exhortations, hortatory demands), but as the way members of Christ’s community should live, because that is the way God is and so the way in which His children should live. See July 2002 Monthly Ministry Study, page 7, on ‘The Law of God’.

⁴² This was the Monthly Ministry Study for June 2002.

and so Man, being in His image, is necessarily ecclesia. We have seen that where human beings do not belong to the ecclesia of faith they have their own community which is called ‘the world’, but this word ‘world’ is not to be confused with the whole created *kosmos*. From Abel onwards the people of God have been ecclesial and have ever formed the church, i.e. the ecclesia. The point of our whole Study is to discover what it means to be the church living in the created world where there is also another community whose inhabitants are of another kingdom than the Kingdom of God, and for whom self-kenosis is a foolish concept whilst for it self-plerosis can only be understood as grossing power, wealth, possessions, position, status, and other equivalents.

What we now discuss is the fact that the church should be self-kenotic. To do this we must now come out plainly and state what this self-kenosis is in clear fact and practice. In doing this let us go back to Philippians 2:1–11. Christ as God, as the Son of the Father, was fully God, though what this means is difficult for us to tell. He was not a man. When it is said ‘he emptied himself’, this cannot mean ‘he emptied out some things out of himself’. Nothing that he had or was could have been superfluous to him being God. It must mean that he had never had that kind of regard for his position which fallen humanity has for its position or status in the universe. Here we have to pause and consider that position or status, when of the Divine order and not of Man’s making, cannot be seen as wrong or dispensable. In fact such positions are functional to a proper universe. Likewise on earth, certain powers are appointed of God (Rom. 13:1ff.; 1 Pet. 2:13–19; cf. Heb. 13:7, 17). Of the believing community it is said they will become kings and priests, but these terms are not the mark of authoritarian domination. It is apparent that there are many powers that are amongst celestial creatures, even to a number of hierarchies. If, however, regard for these elements of position or status is wrong, then repentance and reformation of that wrong regard must take place. The wrong attitude deforms the position and status.⁴³

We need to understand that what is true or proper (ontological) can be viewed wrongly where the viewer has a wrong mind. Let us look at Isaiah 5:18–23:

Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sin as with cart ropes, who say: ‘Let him make haste, let him speed his work that we may see it; let the purpose of the Holy One of Israel draw near, and let it come, that we may know it!’ Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight! Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right!

Here it is evident that the prophet is speaking about perverse human beings. As Paul later said, ‘To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted’ (Titus 1:15). These are such of whom Isaiah was speaking. They sneered at God and His purpose. They could see no good in what was good, and only good in what was evil. Their criticism was aimed at God. We will later examine the pride and arrogance of Satan and his hosts, and those

⁴³ Some well-intentioned theologians hold the view that position, status and hierarchy will all fade in the ‘age to come’, holding that position and status are temporary, being incompatible with love and true unity. One might think that the self-kenosis of Jesus was the sign of the end of position and status, but it may simply have been designed to end pride and arrogance and establish humility. If humility is the total acceptance of things as God has made and instituted them then status and position would be seen to be functional. In any case they have never been a matter of superiority but of responsibility and function, in short the actions of true love.

human beings who defy God and His rule and of course those whom He has appointed to rule. These would never undertake self-emptying! They who hated God and His rulers would covet having equality with God and even to ruling over Him! Indeed this is the history of ‘that ancient serpent . . . the Devil’ and all under his power. They oppose position and status but covet it for themselves!

Christ as the Son of God had no opposition to position or status, but whereas a human being would be appalled at losing position or status Christ counted that as nothing. No human being who has been untouched by humility would ever surrender anything of status and position. If the church is to be self-kenotic it must not mean the church has to be emptied of all elements other than serving, but rather that it be filled with humility and do the will of God. Status and position will never be idealised. They who serve will be counted greatest but where humility is there is really no notion of personal greatness.

CONCLUSION: THE FULLNESS OF SELF-KENOSIS

We now have to ask ourselves whether not having regard for position or status is all that constitutes self-kenosis and the answer must be, ‘No! It was just that Christ did not covet being God so much that he disdained to become a man.’ Even this does not tell us all. There would be no point to him becoming a man if it were not to save the human race, and bring it to the pitch of being God’s special community—His *am segullah*, His *laos periousios*. Further, the eternal future of the entire creation in some sense depended upon the community of love, this family of the Father, this flock of God, this Bride of Christ. If it is to be the people of humility, the community of the humble, then it would be essential for it to be in communion with Christ. Indeed it would be essential for the community to be in Christ, and for Christ to be its Head, and for it to be his Body, and for both to be one ecclesia in which all members would be ‘members one of another’. How else can human beings count others better than themselves, look primarily on the interests of others, and refuse pride and arrogance in the light of true humility, even to giving their lives for others? I think this is the clear idea of self-kenosis and with it ought also to be self-plerosis, i.e. self-filling from all the resources of Christ the Son, God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The Church Living in the World As Community—5

INTRODUCTION: REVIEW OF GOD'S INTENTION FOR HIS ECCLESIA

We have noted somewhere that the ecclesia in the New Testament is ten times called the church of God, and is never directly called the church of Christ though he is head of the church and in Romans 16:16 Paul speaks of 'the churches of Christ'. The letters of Paul to the Thessalonian church both open with 'To the church which is in the Father'. Of course the term 'God' in the New Testament Epistles is used generally for the one who is the Father. The Father's intention for creation is that the community of Christ shall reign over it, being 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Pet. 1:1–14) in the sense that they will share the great works of God in eternity, having already shared the works of the eschaton—the works prior to the telos.

THE WORK OF THE CHURCH IN THIS PRESENT AND LAST AGE

There could be no church in this present age but for the person and work of Christ as the Emmanuel of God. This work was constituted in his incarnation, his life, his ministry, his death on the Cross, his rising from the dead, his ascending into heaven and being seated at the right hand of God over all the creation. His elect people—the church of the Father—constitute the corporate image of God, so that they reflect the Community of God, and because of their union with God they express who God is by what they are and what they do, and they demand a response to the gospel by which they confront the world with the need to believe in Him and obey Him:

- (i) *What God firstly requires them to do is to fulfil the commission of Christ to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, to make disciples of all nations, and to teach them all that Christ had taught them*

There are many aspects to this commission. As we mentioned in our two previous Studies, the ministry of witnessing to Christ in all the nations is a prime aspect. In Acts 1:8 Jesus said: 'But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth'. He had said in Luke 24:46–49:

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. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.

There is a whole story in the words 'witness', 'testify' and 'testimony', for they are used over twenty times in the Book of Acts. In Acts 1:1–11 the idea of witnessing is linked with the Kingdom of God, and 'the gospel of the kingdom' as it was on the lips of John the Baptist and Jesus is found, in living principle, in the Book of Acts in 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31; cf. 1:1–8. In Acts 2:14–21 Peter said that the outpouring

of the Spirit on the assembled believers was the fulfilment of Joel 2:28–32, and that the church would be the prophetic community, the Spirit being poured out on all flesh—i.e. ‘on your sons and your daughters’, ‘your old men’, ‘your young men’, ‘my menservants and my maidservants’. The key to this matter of witness is found in Revelation 19:10:

Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.’ For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

This last statement appears to be said not by the angel but by John who wrote the prophecy of the Book of the Revelation, and he was saying that all of prophecy was to do with Jesus.⁴⁴ One Peter 1:10–12 speaks of ‘the Spirit of Christ’ being within the prophets ‘when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory’, and 2 Peter 1:16–21 speaks of this ‘prophetic word made sure’.

What, then, was ‘witness’ as mentioned in Luke 24:48 and Acts 1:8. ‘Witnessing’ meant ‘testifying to the truth of’. In John 18:37 we see this:

Pilate said to him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.’

In the Lukan passages Jesus said, ‘You are witnesses of these things’, i.e. ‘that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled’. He himself opened these things to them so that they would first understand, saying that the essence of the Scriptures was, ‘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’.

So, then, that was what they did. They witnessed to Christ, to the meaning of his incarnation and all his works, and his elevation to be ‘both Lord and Christ’. This meant at the least that he was the predicted Messiah and at the most that he was ‘Lord both of the dead and the living’, that all rule and judgment had been given into his hand. As such he was Saviour of the world and men and women should now repent and believe and be baptised in his name and receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit and thus join the company of the faithful.

The Power of the Holy Spirit for Witness

It was an awesome thing to witness to ‘these things’, and those who witnessed had to be filled with all the power of the Holy Spirit. It is at this point we should see what it was that had always empowered the prophets to witness. In Micah 3:8 the prophet said, ‘But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin’. Jesus had said at the commencement of his ministry:

⁴⁴ For various interpretations of the statement, ‘the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’, see my *The Revelation of St John the Divine* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1993), pp. 226–9. An appendix is attached which sets out these interpretations.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18–19),

and we take it that this anointing of the Spirit came at his baptism. In Acts 10:38 Peter rehearses Christ's ministry, '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 by the devil, for God was with him'. The witness he had to give was an awesome one.

The immersion in the Spirit at Pentecost gave all baptised in the Spirit his infilling and so power for proclamation. In Acts 4:23–33 we have the account of the church praying for the apostles after they were threatened by the Sanhedrin. They prayed, 'And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness' (v. 29). The result was that they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness and it was also said, 'And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all' (v. 33). The church had this enormous task to fulfil and could only do so by the power of the Spirit.

It is apt to say, here, that where proclamation of the gospel is not made, then the church is not being the church for it is not witnessing to Christ however impressive its social life may be. True power will be absent where and when there is not true witness. The image of God—the church—cannot be His full image where the gospel of salvation is being withheld. This is the reality by which the church must constantly be confronted. Its inner life—if we may call it that—is dependent upon its outer life, the life of proclamation.

(ii) What also God required them to do was to be witnesses of God as the corporate community which is His image

It is interesting in the passage of Acts 4:23–33 that the whole church prayed, and they and the apostles were blessed with a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In particular the apostles 'with great power . . . gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus'. This they could not have done without the Spirit's power, but also, we must say, without the church being one with them. The outgoing of the apostolic church enriched its witness, so that interior ministry and worship strengthened the church further for outgoing witness. A little later we will look at the nature of the church in its personal and moral witness to the world, but here it is enough to say that the godliness of the community was an indispensable part of its ecclesial life. In this way the church lives the community life given to it perichoretically from the life of the Triune Community. Just as the three Members love one another, honour one another, serve one another, give to, and receive from one another, so is the inner life of the church from the flow of the Godhead into it. This being the case, the church will not only proclaim the gospel of love, but give evidence that it *is* the community of love—and so on. The history of the church over some 2,000 years has too often not been according to this required, relational witness.

(iii) The third requirement of the church is that it witnesses to God's purpose in history because it is the eschatological church

In history we do not preach the church or Christianity as such but we preach Christ. He is the subject of the gospel, and he is preached for what he has always been and what

he has done and is presently doing. His work has been the saving one. As a result of his saving work he has been placed above all orders and positions which govern within creation and so he is Cosmic Lord. All history is in his hands. The church in its prophetic mode is the proclaimer of the creation's destiny, and by its proclamatory word it is, itself, taking a significant part in creation's history. It knows from the apostles and prophets what *were*—and *now* are—God's promises, and the fact that Christ is *now* the living Head of the living church, for the church is seated at his right hand and is presently reigning with him (see Eph. 1:22–23; 2:5–6; 3:10–11; Col. 3:1–3; cf. Rev. 2:26–27; 3:21; 15:2–4; 19:11–14; 20:6).

What is more, the church proclaims both the promises and the judgments of God, and it is to be heeded. It comprehends the whole plan of God and humanity. Because humanity was created by God it is innate to it to know the future of the cosmos (*kosmos*), for it cannot be at peace until it knows God's will, albeit it may not do it. The community of Christ has the true prophetic word which, itself, contains the realities of God's grace and His judgments. Because the church is *in* the eschatological action of God it can witness to that action in truth, continually offering grace and warning of judgment.

In all three elements set out above—the proclamation of the gospel; the inner, godly life of the Community; and the eschatological witness—‘until the great and terrible day of the Lord comes’—it is Christ who is the subject. He said he would be present with the ecclesia ‘until the consummation of the age’. This meant he would be the one working to cause that consummation to come. He would be present by the Holy Spirit, that other ‘self’ of him, the one who is ‘the promise of the Father’, and who works in the community the trifold witness we have indicated in this Study. This empowerment of the Spirit for these matters means he is the Spirit of both worship and service. In enabling the church to proclaim the gospel with power, to witness as the godly community, and to be the prophetic, eschatological community, he is ever alerting the world to the matter of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:7–11), convicting it of these highly significant things and bringing about the transformation of submitted lives and at the same time pointing the rebellious to coming judgment.

Let us say, then, that we have the benchmark by which we can assess the state of the community of Christ as it is in the world today. We are bound to look to these things. We are by no means setting up criteria for the church, though be those as they may, but we are looking at the story of the church, and the great indicatives spelled out in the New Testament in the matters of three elements of witness of which we have just spoken. When we mention indicatives, or even imperatives, we then wonder what are the means by which we live out the grand works of witness.

THE CHURCH AS IT IS, LIVES WHOLLY UNDER GRACE

For some time we have talked about the church living in the world and it may have appeared to a number of us that the subject has, perhaps, been somewhat overdone! How can human beings, even though they are transformed human beings, accomplish all that they are called upon to do? It is only when we see that the church is the most important working unit on the earth that we awake to a true sense of responsibility regarding the solemn and holy charge given to us by God whose church we are. Again, there are those in church membership who think the moral and spiritual demands are far too high, and in some cases quite impossible to fulfil. To a great degree the church seems to many to

be an hierarchical structure, demanding obedience to laws and patterns of worship and service. In some cases, of course, this is the way any particular church may be, or it simply may appear to be when it is not. In any case, churches differ from culture to culture, from age to age, with many factors causing different ecclesial formations. Whatever the case, some would still object that the three elements of witness set out above are too demanding, and too difficult to achieve.

God's Saving Grace

What we have to remember is that the ecclesia was always composed of sinners of all kinds; those who knew their need of salvation, heard the word of truth and converted. They recognised their own need of salvation, the requirements of faith and repentance, the love of God, and the fact of the community of Christ. Whether or not they were appraised of these elements, they became bona fide members of Christ, and began to learn the life of the community. All of this was happening by grace.⁴⁵

Of course there are many who were born within Christian families and whose entrance into the Christian community was a natural part of the culture of the family and even of the larger society. We have to remember from Revelation chapters 1 to 3 that Christ as Lord walks among the candlesticks—i.e. the churches—and he cares for the state of every church. He encourages, praises, corrects and rebukes churches and may even take away the candlestick, i.e. the light of any church, so that it is no longer true community and no longer shines 'in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation' (Phil. 2:14–16; Matt. 5:14–16; cf. Rev. 2:4–5; 3:1–3) as a light in the world. On many scores the church needs the grace of God for giving to the world the true witness to Christ its Head and its Lord. Every member of the church must come to know and then continue to remember that he or she is a sinner saved by grace. No one was ever born a saint: all are children of Adam. If we forget that, or have never come to know that, then we are not bona fide members of the church. Someone has said, 'The church was born crucified', and Paul said, 'we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died'. All are sinners, of which Paul claims he is the greatest. Notice his claim is not, 'I was', but 'I am'. None must forget that he, also, is such a sinner or he will forget to his peril.

In regard to the grace by which God redeemed us in the beginning Paul claims, 'In him [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his [God's] grace' (Eph. 1:7), and in 2:7 adds, 'that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus'. This is God's grace from beginning to end, especially as Paul continues, 'For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them' (Eph. 2:8–10).

God's grace has rightly been said to be 'God coming towards us to do us good'. Another saying is, 'God's mercy shown to us out of love in saving us from the death of sin'. The verses quoted above are particularly God's grace, i.e. the grace of the Father. Two Corinthians 8:9 and 13:14 speak of 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ'. In John 1:16–17 the writer states, 'And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.' Paul

⁴⁵ For this section of our paper see my book *Great and Glorious Grace* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1988) for the whole subject of grace.

adds, ‘For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men’, and he means ‘Christ has appeared’ (Titus 2:11f.). In Titus 3:5–7 Paul adds:

... he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

All these powerful statements tell us our sinful condition was hopeless. We could not save ourselves but:

God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. That in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace towards us in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:4–7).

Grace is God’s Power to Enable Us to Do His Will

From the last paragraph we gather that not only does God’s grace save us wholly from the judgment we deserve and the evil state from which we could not recover ourselves, but also that He has elevated us to the highest place—and state—in all creation. Grace transforms us and then enables us to do all that we have talked about in this Study regarding the matter of witness in proclamation, of godly living in the community, and of being the eschatological ecclesia. Whilst some seem to think they have accomplished their own salvation or are on the way to accomplishing it, others despair of accomplishing anything. To the first group it has to be said that they can only be saved by grace and not by works. To the second it must be said that by the grace of God all things needful can be accomplished. We need, then, to look at Man’s ability, his weakness and his strength.

By creation Man was so made that he could do the will of God, if it was his will to do that and which, before the Fall, it was. Of himself, Man was not competent to do the will of God, but being one with God in communion he was being his true self, a true man, and so lived in the will of God. Man in innocence was what a true human creature really is, i.e. wholly dependent upon God as any image is dependent upon the reality it represents. Once Man cut himself off from union with God, he found himself unable, of himself, to do the works he had done in union with Him. An innocent human being is strong, even as a creature, because of his union with God. The term ‘of itself’ or ‘of himself’ is a misnomer, because a creature is wholly dependent upon God, but if we use the term loosely then we can say a self-motivated, self-energised, self-operating creature is only the travesty of a creature, and we might as well add that to get some meaning into his life he has to devise an idol upon which he can be dependent in the place of his own Creator.

We need to say, then, that when Man was created by God he knew the supply of power in his life—by creation—and in this sense was strong. When he refuses to be what God created him to be, i.e. the image of the Creator, then he seeks energising from his god or idol and as Paul says in Ephesians 2:1–3, ‘the prince of the power of the air’ is the one who energises within ‘the sons of disobedience’. In Philippians 2:12–13 the same apostle says that God energises within the believer so that His will will be fulfilled.

When we come to Romans 7:7–25 we must grasp Paul’s point that when a human being tries to obey the law in his own strength sin proves itself to be stronger than he is.

His big discovery is that he cannot, of himself, obey the law and be stronger than sin. He knows his own weakness. On another score he discovers that he cannot defeat the spiritual pride which wells up with him on certain occasions:

And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor. 12:7–10).

Now we realise the power of grace. We recognise that when we were created our power was only of our union with God—our 'natural' relationship—and when weakened by sin our former moral power did not now exist. It was then we had to come to know the power of grace. It is a power of God by which He redeems us and restores us. It is also a power which energises us as believers so that we recognise our own innate weakness and learn to depend on the power of God in our weakness. It is not just that we can call on God in certain emergencies and He will supply the power to come through them, but it is that His grace is Him in action, confronting us, 'going towards us to do us good', first redeeming and then enabling us. As we have said, that grace is God's personal love in action. Take, for example, the important passage of Titus 2:11–14:

For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

Notice here that God simply moves in grace as He wills and grace does the work of salvation and then of defeating fleshliness in the believer, and of purifying 'a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds'. Grace does the whole of this work, but then grace is not a power of God given to us to utilise, but God Himself working for our best. Lastly, then, let us see some samples of grace in action in the church, these being found in the Book of Acts.⁴⁶

We can say that all that happened in Acts was His work of grace, such as Pentecost and the response of thousands to the word in Jerusalem, Samaria and among the Gentiles. This was saving grace. Then there was grace in the church. For example those at Antioch of Pisidia who believed Paul and Barnabas when they preached, were deeply moved. Paul and Barnabas 'urged them to continue in the grace of God' (13:43). When the two men went on to Iconium they preached and 'a great company believed'. 'So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands' (14:3). These two preachers had come from Antioch in Syria, 'when they had been commended to the grace of God' for the work of grace they were to do (14:26). Later, at the Council in Jerusalem, some opposed the Gentiles being included in the church but Peter supported Paul and Barnabas by saying, 'But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace

⁴⁶ Man was strong in creation because of his union with God. When the union was broken, then he needed the grace of God to be forgiven, reconciled and forgiven. Grace is primarily to do with the restoration of Man. That restoration is a crisis in which everything changes, but it is also a process and for that process grace is needed. It will be needed until the telos so that restoration can be wholly effected. What Man ought to have had by creation he can now have only by grace.

of the Lord Jesus, just as they [the Gentiles] will' (15:11). In 18:27 we read of Apollos, who when he arrived in Achaia, 'greatly helped those who through grace had believed'. In 20:17–25 Paul spoke to the elders of the Ephesians church saying, 'But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God' (v. 24). Later in his speech he uttered a powerful blessing, 'And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified' (20:32). In all these statements there is mention of saving grace, and the grace '*which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified*'. Indeed what amazing grace!

Our heading which gives this present Section its subject—'The Church as It Is, Lives Wholly under Grace'—is strongly vindicated. Yet vindication is not our point. What concerns us is that when God 'works in us both to will and to work for his good pleasure', it means we cannot plead utter weakness for we are not on our own. God is energising within us for the fulfilment of His own will. Therefore we—the community of Christ—can witness to the world in the three aspects of God's will that we discussed above. 'All is of grace' is not a cliché, a captious heading, but the very power by which the ecclesia is strong in this last age. 'We can do all things in Christ who strengthens us' might be a title worthy of our banner of witness. No wonder the New Testament Letters invoke grace and peace upon their recipients. It is the daily need of all.

THE CHURCH: THE COMMUNITY WHICH IS STRONG IN THE LORD

There ought to be no triumphalism in our notions of the church being strong. It is only 'strong in the Lord' (Eph. 6:10), i.e. to 'be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus' (2 Tim. 2:1). Triumphalism is a form of spiritual jingoism carrying a hearty contempt for the less eager and volatile brethren, and is a quite dangerous pride which the enemy will use to the fall of these over-exuberant saints.

If we think power in the church is a knock-over of the enemy in spiritual warring, then we need to think again. 'Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall' (1 Cor. 10:12) is fine advice. Paul's further advice in Philippians 2:3, 'Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves' has brought us back into the stream of self-kenosis. Humility, we have said, is seeing things as they really are, and being prepared to work along the line of God's revealed will. It has no critical spirit towards any other but indeed love towards all. It is the humility which leads us to suffer in Christ and with Christ for the others. In fact, and in deed, it is love. Status and position are not its idols. Its worship of God is its life and service to Him. If these be the true elements of Christ's community, then the ecclesia is born of the Triune God, and it is impregnable before the world. Rightly speaking it is as strong as Christ who is meek and gentle, lowly and humble. It is he whose own, present life is the life of the church as that community witnesses to God.

THE STRENGTH WHICH COMES FROM SELF-PLEROSIS

Before we get immersed in this teaching of the Scriptures, let us remind ourselves that we are always to have an eye to the world which is around us, privy to us, critical of us,

and which powerfully opposes us. In Acts 2:43–47 the early church was so filled with joy and commonality of spirit that it was said of them they were ‘praising God and having favour with all the people’. Paul had this ever in mind. In Colossians 4:5–6 he said, ‘Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer every one.’ Again, in 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12 he enjoined his readers, ‘to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we charged you; so that you may command the respect of outsiders, and be dependent on nobody’. In 1 Timothy 3:6–7 he advised regarding the choice of an elder: ‘He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil; moreover he must be well thought of by outsiders, or he may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil’.

Yes, the eyes of the world are on the church and so we have the opportunity for witness to be both seen and heard. If we are wise we will say, ‘Christ is our all and makes us to be all that we are after the likeness of his person, after him who is prophet, priest and king and makes us to be the prophetic, priestly and royal community’. Then we can say, ‘We can do all things *in* Christ’. That he expects we shall stand up and say this is evident. We cannot plead weakness to excuse ourselves from action. We are to be wise, knowing and doing the will of God (Eph. 5:15–17). We can be, and we must be, ‘more than conquerors through him who loved us’.

All of which brings us on to the subject of being strong and doing exploits in His name, i.e. doing the will of God. I have chosen the term *plerosis*, which, as such, is not found in the New Testament. I have chosen it because it seems to be a parallel of *kenosis*, or an antonym of it.⁴⁷ Whilst in Philippians 2:7—*heauton ekenosen*, ‘emptied himself’—the verb *kenoo* is used in the aorist tense—i.e. one *action* completed—yet *kenosis* refers to the *process* of emptying, and *plerosis* to the *process* of filling. In Romans 13:10 where it is said ‘love is the *fulfilment* [*pleroma nomou*] of the law’, some commentators think Paul would be better to have used *plerosis* of the law—i.e. the fulfilling of the law as a *process*—rather than the completion of it as an *act*. Probably, however, his use of *pleroma nomou* is correct. Even so we will find, I think, that *plerosis* can be applied as a principle of the human life of Christ, and so of us in our human living.

We will consider *kenosis* as an action-process of emptying which concludes in the act of having become empty, and *plerosis* the action of a filling-process which has in sight fulfilment, i.e. *pleroma*. What we do keep in mind is that we are using these two terms as acts being carried out by ‘the self’ which in the first case is Christ’s self, and in the second the person’s self or the community’s self. By speaking of the church as the kenotic and plerotic community we are saying that what Christ *was* and *did* in his person, so the church—as Christ’s gathered community—now *is* and *does*. Indeed, all believers are firstly members of his body and then members one of another, thus living out the self-kenosis and self-plerosis of the Lord who is the Head of the body. Of course the early church did not use such terms. They are theological ones which we have devised and now use for our thinking—our theological thinking. Even so, I believe they are valuable. If the church must be kenotic—i.e. has no eye to self-preservation or self-extension, to status and position, and is minding the things of others—then so, too, it

⁴⁷ Kenosis and plerosis are not, in fact, antonyms except in the matter of literal meaning. God’s infilling of Man gives him that power by which, in humility, he can be kenotic, i.e. indifferent to status and position and anything which falsely exalts him, and alive in the action of love which counts others better than himself, and causes him to be primarily concerned with their interests.

must be plerotic, i.e. is constantly being filled ‘unto all the fullness of God’ from which pleroma the ecclesia can live in genuine kenosis.

The Fullness of God and Man

The fullness of God is basic to all true thinking. It is basic to the thinking we must have within the community to be God’s witness in power, i.e. in fullness. Jeremiah 2:13 (cf. 17:13) speaks of true fullness and artificial (devised) ‘fullness’, ‘for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water’. The prophet is saying that God is Man’s supply for fullness of being, fullness of life. Man, in seeking to be independent of God, self-empties himself of God and self-fills from elsewhere, though he has no ontological source. His source has to be ‘self’ or ‘the idol’ but then these are not ontological and therefore he enters into a deadly situation. Even so, he believes himself to be filled. In famine some eat earth and know they are ‘filled’! I have memories of prisoner of war camps. The worst feature was the dreadful hunger as we starved—that indescribable feeling of emptiness. No less painful is the daily pain of emptiness in this world when one does not have His fullness.

All that God creates is by virtue of the act. ‘The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof’. A delightful saying is, ‘The river of God is full of water’! Proverbs 4:23 enjoins, ‘Keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs of life’. Some translations have ‘issues’ for ‘springs’. The issues of life flow from a heart filled by God with His issues. We may say here that no human being can make this fullness or self-supply the great issues of life. Should he desire God’s fullness and His issues then he should be open to them. There is the truth that all fullness then comes from God and there is a sense in which he is self-filling because he deliberately drinks in faith. I would like to establish self-plerosis as desiring fullness from God and then, in faith, drinking of it. We need to keep in mind that it is not by accident Man is empty of God’s fullness. He is too proud to exercise self-plerosis. As we have said, ‘He who will give, but not receive, never really gives’.

The true fullness of Man is his being dependent upon God for his needed supply. In one sense the supply happens by nature of the case. Man, sadly enough, broke the connection with God in regard to the fullness of life. Death came upon him. Proverbs 25:26 could be used as a picture of that happening: ‘Like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked’. This is to be contrasted with, ‘He who drinks of this water shall never thirst again’. Jeremiah 17:13 gives another picture: ‘O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake thee shall be put to shame; those who turn away from thee shall be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living water’. The outcome of Adam’s sin is seen in Cain’s sin, and the earth becomes filled with the evil issues of Man, behind which stands the serpent. Genesis 6:5 states the nature of Man in his own ‘fullness’: ‘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’. Verse 11 of the same chapter talks of the earth being filled with violence: ‘Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence’. Jeremiah 17:9 speaks of a heart full of mischief and sin: ‘The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?’ In Romans 1:18–32 Paul gives a history of the deadliness of Man in his evil. In verses 28–30 he speaks about the fullness of evil:

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents.

The statement, ‘They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil [etc.]’, fits our description of plerosis—‘self-plerosis is desiring fullness from God and then, in faith, drinking of it’—if we describe evil plerosis as, ‘self-plerosis is refusing fullness from God but desiring it from another source, and then, in faith, drinking of that other source’. Man as a sinner opens himself up to evil filling from immoral sources, from idols and from Satan, in the manner of Ephesians 2:1–2.

What we are about is the plerosis that is of God. Jesus, as a man, practiced self-plerosis in that he sought, by the power of God, to be truly a human creature in every possible way, i.e. to be fully a man. He was no Docetic being. Luke 2:51–52, indicates this: ‘And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man.’ In Hebrews 2:17–18 this is also indicated: ‘Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.’ To this we add, ‘For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin’ (4:15). Hebrews 5:8 also discloses his true humanity: ‘Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered’.

All these references show he was about being human in every point of his being. At the same time he was living in the fullness of God. Being conceived by the Spirit in Mary’s womb he must have been ‘all of the Spirit’ in that situation. His cousin John was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb and so no less he. In each event of his life he was aided by the Spirit and the fullness Christ received is often mentioned. In Luke 3:21–22 the Spirit descended upon Christ and 4:18 refers to that baptism in terms of Isaiah 61:1–2. In 4:1 he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, and in 4:14 returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. In Matthew 12:28 (cf. Acts 10:38) he cast out demons by the Holy Spirit. In Luke 10:21 he prayed in the Holy Spirit. All of this—and more—was a matter of self-plerosis, of God supplying the Spirit and Jesus keeping up to all the fullness of God as the gift God gives to all who ask, came to the man Jesus.

As to human plerosis, i.e. Man desiring to be filled with all the fullness of God, we see first the statement of John in his Gospel in 1:14–17 regarding the fullness which was in the Word become flesh, John saying, ‘from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace’, meaning there was Christ’s fullness and the disciples drew on it, i.e. in self-plerosis. There was the promise in John 7:37–39 by which all believers would have rivers of living water flow from them. This happened at Pentecost and has gone on happening where believers persist in self-plerosis. Sometimes it is a happening which is corporate, and sometimes a person is suddenly filled with the Spirit for a certain task of ministry.⁴⁸

What we need to see is that God has given gifts of many kinds, first at creation—in Eden—and then following creation (see Ps. 104). All energy Man needed in order to do God’s will was supplied to him. We have looked at the fullness of the heart and its fullness of life. For all fallen humanity, promises are made; of salvation, of God’s caring

⁴⁸ We do not intend to fill out the great theme of plerosis, but this is done in a small book of mine not yet published, its title being *The Emptying and the Filling: The Meaning of Kenosis and Plerosis*.

for the human race. These things are seen and known. God's gifts and blessings are covenantal and for the obedient ones, otherwise Man receives cursings and not blessings. Israel was given special gifts which are named in Romans 9:4–5. Christ came in fullness, even as a man, bearing the gifts of salvation, of his own fullness and the fullness of God, as is shown in Ephesians 3:14–19.

With the coming of the Spirit there was the gift of Christ himself, the gifts of Christ (Eph. 4:7–11) he won by redemption, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the same Spirit. Gifts and blessing abound for 'All things are yours', as Paul told the Corinthians (1 Cor. 3:21). In the life of self-plerosis he could tell the Roman church, 'I know that when I am come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ' (Rom. 15:29). It was the same for all believers. They lived by the blessings, by the gifts, by the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION: OUR SUFFICIENCY IS OF GOD AND WE CAN WITNESS

We speak of the gifts for they are that fullness which God gives His ecclesia to carry out His will, by which His plan will be fulfilled in history. We have talked about the three-fold witness the church must give to all creation, and of the difficulty of doing this. Human strength, of itself, would be pitiful, but since 'the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in Christ', and since that fullness is 'inexhaustible riches' and 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge', and since we are 'filled full in him [Christ]', so the church as God's community (Eph. 3:8; Col. 1:19; 2:3, 9–10) can be the true community, filled with love and other gifts to be enabled, everywhere, to minister as God's *am segullah* and his *laos periousios*.

Appendix on Revelation 19:10

Various Interpretations of the Text

‘FOR THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS IS THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY’⁴⁹

Because of the importance of this term, the following comments by scholars should help us to understand the various aspects of what has been written above.

Swete, H. B.. *The Apocalypse of St John*:

‘Those who have the witness of Jesus’ are those who carry on His witness in the world. (Macmillan, London, 1907, p. 249.)

Caird, G. B. A. *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*:

The testimony of Jesus is the spirit that inspires the prophets. It is the word spoken by God and attested by Jesus that the Spirit takes and puts into the mouth of the Christian prophet . . . It is the Gospel of the Cross that gives to the prophets the assurance of their mission and its ultimate success (cf. 10:7). To be a prophet in the streets of the great city is to follow in the steps of the master (11:3, 10). (Adam & Charles Black, London, 1977, p. 238.)

Wilcock, M. *I Saw Heaven Opened*:

Does it mean, ‘He who has the spirit of prophecy will witness to Jesus’, or does it mean, ‘He who has the witness of Jesus will prophesy’? The more acceptable meaning will be the one which fits in better with the general sense of the passage; and the view taken here is that the second interpretation is more likely . . . John himself has ‘the witness of Jesus’; therefore he too can prophesy, and has words to proclaim which are just as amazing [as the words of the angel]. (Inter-Varsity Press, London, 1975, p. 174.)

Eller, V. *The Most Revealing Book of the Bible*:

Paraphrases as follows: ‘I, the angel, like you, John, the prophet, have significance only in the testimony I bear to Jesus; so let’s keep our attention on that *martyria Jesu* rather than upon the bearers of it!’ (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1974, p. 173.)

Beasley-Murray, G. R. *The Book of Revelation*:

. . . the . . . sentence must mean, ‘The testimony given by Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy’ . . . We should, therefore, interpret verse 10 as meaning that the testimony borne by Jesus is the concern or burden of the Spirit who inspires prophecy. (Oliphants, London, 1974, p. 276.)

Morris, L. *The Revelation of St. John*:

The *testimony of Jesus* might mean ‘the testimony which Jesus bore’ (and is now committed to His servants), or it might mean ‘the testimony borne to Jesus’. If we take the former meaning the whole will signify that the message of Jesus is the spirit, the heart of all prophecy . . . If we accept the latter meaning, then the significance is that the

⁴⁹ This is from my book *The Revelation of St John the Divine* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1993), pp. 227–9.

true prophecy always manifests itself in bearing witness to Jesus. The Old Testament prophets, New Testament prophets such as John, and the angels, all alike bear their witness to the Son of God.

Morris quotes Preston and Hanson (*Torch Bible Commentaries*, 1957), ad loc. ‘Jesus and his revelation of God, which Paul calls “the mind of Christ”, is the content of the prophet’s message as it is of what John has been told to write in his book’. (*Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1969, p. 228.*)

Hailey, H. *Revelation—An Introduction and Commentary*:

The testimony of Jesus is that truth to which He bore witness (John 18:37), which was the word given to Him from God (John 8:28; 12:47; 14:24; Rev. 1:1; et al.). This testimony borne by Him must be held faithfully by all disciples. (*Baker, Grand Rapids, 1979, p. 380.*)

Simcox, W. H. *Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges*:

. . . what is said to St. John as a prophet is in its measure true of all Christians. All in their measure are witnesses for Christ, and all are partakers of His Spirit; and therefore all are prophets in the same sense that they are all priests and kings. (*Cambridge University Press, London, 1893, p. 177.*)

Moffat, J. *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, vol. 5:

‘for the testimony or witness of (i.e., borne by) Jesus is (i.e., constitutes) the spirit of prophecy’. This prose marginal comment specifically defines the brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus as possessors of prophetic inspiration. The testimony of Jesus is practically equivalent to Jesus testifying (22:20). It is the self-revelation of Jesus (according to Rev. 1:1, due ultimately to God) which moves the Christian prophets. He forms at once the impulse and subject of their utterances (cf. *Ignat. Rom. viii.; Eph. vi.*). The motives and materials for genuine prophecy consist in readiness to allow the spirit of Jesus to bring the truth of God before the mind and conscience (cf. 3:14, 22). (*Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1951, p. 465.*)

Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*:

What the ‘testimony of Jesus’ is, the speaker states: it is ‘the spirit of prophecy’, which may be explained: By holding firmly to the testimony which Jesus made and conveyed to us, thou and I and all the brethren hold the actual spirit of the prophecy, the inner content of the divine prophecy. ‘The prophecy’ is defined like ‘the Word’, ‘the salvation.’ Some restrict this to the prophecy contained in these visions of Revelation, but there is no need for such a restriction. Because we have and hold this testimony, which is no less than here stated, we worship no one but God while we are here on earth or, like this speaker, in heaven and on the throne. (*Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1963, p. 546.*)

Trites, A. A. *The New Testament Concept of Witness*:

In other words, ‘it is the word spoken by God and attested by Jesus that the Spirit takes and puts into the mouth of the Christian prophet’. (*Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977, p. 157.*)

The Church Living in the World As Community—6

INTRODUCTION: THE MATTERS OF COMMUNITY, HUMILITY AND HIERARCHY

There can be no doubt that the world looks at the church even if it doesn't look to it for its way of life. It is often curious as to the structure of the church, since the world has its own structures and constructs. The idea of the church being an organism and a body differs from its own nature as an organisation, or organisations, having developed probably from a less sophisticated beginning than it now has, especially where a definitive culture has emerged. It is obvious that groups may wish to preserve or extend themselves, and that they use various ideas and constructs to achieve this.

It is also fairly clear that Satan has his system or aeon whereby he operates. Generally he seeks to imitate what is ontological as he seems to see it as the system which has emerged from creation and which he must better. Hence Luther's calling him 'God's ape', i.e. imitator, and hence the Devil's own attempts at making fatherhood, kingdom, trinity and the like are doomed to failure. Since Satan is not creator because he is not ingenerate but a creature, he cannot create a counter-creation to that of God's making. Satan therefore has to devise. He has to devise his own infrastructure for his own system, his own kind of relationships in his devised community. In fact disunity is a mark of evil powers. This is seen in the rivalry and cruelty of the four beasts (kingdoms) in Daniel chapter 7, and in Revelation chapter 17 where the ten kings—ten horns of the beast—come to hate the harlot, i.e. Babylon, and seek to destroy her in a terrible manner.

We have spent time on seeing the nature of the church as Community, as Flock, as Family and Vine. Community derives from God's own Triune Being. The Flock is dependent upon the Shepherd for its true being, as the Family is upon the Father, and branches upon the Vine, for their true being. The church is Christ's body of which he is Head and all his people are members of his body, as they are members of him so they are of one another. These figures denote some kind of leadership and, perhaps, hierarchy. All systems and structures in all kinds of groups, religious societies and pagan communities appear to have had infrastructure of some kind. Indeed it would be difficult for them to survive without such. Also they appear to have had some kind of hierarchy.

We need to look at these matters which pertain to community, namely social structure, infrastructure, leadership and hierarchy. It is essential that we do not approach these elements ideologically. We are not seeking to develop a perfect system but to understand the community Christ has set up—'I will build my church'—so that we can know how to go about living in the world, and be about carrying out the will of God.

THE HEADWATERS OF THE DIVINE COMMUNITY

The ecclesia of God—the church—depends on the Divine Community for its life, being and actions which we might call *ad intra* and *ad extra*. If we could think of the church being the community which has its own being, then we would consider that life with its *ad intra* works as some kind of a parallel to the Trinity when it is spoken of as ‘immanent’ or ‘ontological’ and is said to have its works, relationships and community as *opera ad intra*. When the church goes out to the world and ministers then its actions might be spoken of as *opera ad extra* and a parallel of sorts to the economic Trinity. Even so, the language is not quite correct because God is One and His works cannot be thus sectioned into *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Likewise the church in being and doing is the community which depends for its life, relationships and works on the presence, direction and enablement of the Father, the Son and the Spirit.⁵⁰ The church of God does not have to make what we called above ‘social structure, infrastructure, leadership and hierarchy’, since these are matters which are devised by societies and communities, but are in place at the inception of the church seeing it derives from the Divine Community. There is an organic union of the Community of God and the community—the ecclesia.

The Internal Being and Order of the Church

We have spoken of devised communities and societies as having on the one hand the ontological sense of true community—however faint that may be—and on the other, forming communities out of human reasoning as affected by idols and gods and the cultures arising from them. It seems almost inevitable that the idea of hierarchy helps the group-structure to hold together and become operative. This has ever been the matter of kingdoms and nations, and certainly over the centuries the church, as it faces itself, has had hierarchical structures, so that the church and the world have, rightly or wrongly, shaped up hierarchies. Our task is to discover whether hierarchy is of the *esse* of the church, of the *bene esse* of the church, or is wholly foreign to its real ethos.

To begin with we will look at what we have called ‘the internal being and order of the church’. In 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul addresses ‘the church of the Thessalonians [which is] in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’, thus showing us that the church is not an entity in itself but the community which is in the Community of God. All that it is and does is action which is dependent upon and flows from the Triune God. God and the church in this sense are one—they are organically one. Everything has the Fatherly stamp upon it, the life of the Son moving in it, and the unitary power of the Holy Spirit operating in every element of its being and doing.

The things we will now study, and also be aided by them, are: (i) the ministry; (ii) the structures and actions given gift-wise, and this will; (iii) require us to review some of the things we have said about *kenosis* and *plerosis*—in short, humility—so that we will be in a position to talk of authority in general and hierarchy in particular:⁵¹

⁵⁰ For the outworking of the nature of the church as relating to the Triune God, see my NCTM Pastors’ Study ‘The Apostolic Ministry of the Church of God—1’, September 2001.

⁵¹ All of these points are developed in my *The Beautiful City of God* (Redeemer Baptist Press, Castle Hill, 2001)—see ‘Contents’ for guidance, and the Bibliography for wider reading.

The Ministry

It is natural that we think of the church's apostolic ministry as we see it in various churches today. Mostly we will have the picture from the ministry of the church we are part of, as perhaps also its denominational affiliation and practice. What we will see is that one church has an Episcopal-type clergy—bishop, priest (presbyter) and deacon. Another will be presbyterial, ruled by a presbytery—a set of elders of which the pastor—minister is the preferred leader, though not the ruler. Then there will be a church led by a pastor who is assisted by elders and possibly deacons, and yet the pastor may be monarchical in his ruling. There are churches who work on an assembly basis—i.e. everyone is considered to be contributing to making a fully active ministry within the church and out to the world. Over the centuries, churches have espoused to so many different forms of ministry, worship and developed cultures that it is far beyond the ability of anyone to change all these matters. Nor is simply copying what is deemed to be the apostolic ministry of the church going to get us far, for innumerable reasons.

One idea is that there were grades of what are called 'offices', for 1 Timothy 3:1 reads, 'The saying is sure: If any one aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task'. The term 'the office of' is not literally in the text and since the *NRSV* translates in a footnote 'overseer' (*episcopos*) alone, we must not think of 'office' as we understand the modern term. An officer—one who has office, such as a bailiff or constable—was called *praktor*. Whilst technically the statement 'according to the custom of the priest's office' conveys the idea of an office as something the priest undertook, yet, again, the word 'office' is absent. 'Custom' is *ethos* in Luke 1:9 as in the Old Testament cultus, but the apostolic church had nothing of an office. In Acts 1:20—'His office let another take'—the *NRSV* has 'Let another take his position of overseer [*episcopov*]', but even 'position' is not in the Greek; simply 'overseer' alone is written.

The Structures and Actions Given Gift-wise

If it is asked, 'Why are we spending time on eliminating the idea of "office"?' then the answer must be: (i) all members of the Community were ministers (Eph. 4:11–12); and (ii) they were all equipped to be so by the teaching and works of special gift-ministries which were called the *domata*, i.e. the gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. These gift ministries were not offices, for if they had been that then, when one of these gift-persons died, another would need to be elected in his place. As we know, this was not the case. The gifts called *charismata* were said to be distributed by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7–11), and each member of the body would exercise one or more of these gifts as led to do so by the Spirit for the good of all the community.

It has often been said that 'gift-ministry'—i.e. *domata* and *charismata*—was given only for the apostolic period of the church, and when the church was established (*sic*) then there was little, if any need, for these gifts.⁵² There are no indications in the New Testament text for such a conclusion, though some claim there is on the basis of 1 Corinthians 13:8–13. The assumption that the New Testament has a fixed ministry of bishop⁵³, priests (*presbyteroi*) and deacons (*diakonoi*) is questionable. I have affixed a

⁵² This has been called 'The Princeton Theory' and avers that when the New Testament was written then 'that which was perfect' had come, i.e. the apostolic truth was now fixed, and the gifts were no longer needed.

⁵³ I have placed bishop (*episcopos*) in the singular, and priests and deacons in the plural, simply because that is how some see the case, i.e. that for each bishop there are many priests and even more deacons. The bishop is monarchical ('one ruler'), and under him are the priests—each priest being monarchical in his parish—whilst each church has deacons under the priest. Generally we would say there are three orders—bishops, priests and deacons.

long quote from Hans Küng's *Why Priests?*⁵⁴ and some other commentators on the early church, in an Appendix 'The Apostolic Ministry', but what I want to say here is that whereas orthodox churches which we call 'denominations' would hold to the marks of the church—'One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic'—yet it could be said in a number of cases that the ministry does not have the same shape and configurations held by the apostolic ecclesia. What, then, was the ministry exercised on that apostolic church?

My answer to this is that there were no offices, as such, in the apostolic church. We have explained the use of the term 'office' in 1 Timothy 3:1. What we see is that Christ was—and now is—the head of the church which is his body. It is called 'the church of God' ten times in the New Testament, and is also called 'the temple of God' (1 Cor. 3:16). It is spoken of as 'the household of God' (Eph. 2:19; cf. 1 Pet. 2:4–10) 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone' (Eph. 2:20), and which 'grows into a holy temple of God in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit'. That is, the ecclesia is the people called by God to be His *am segullah* ('beloved possession') and *laos periousios* ('a people of His own'). It is the Father in whom the church is and of which the Son is the head. Likewise the Holy Spirit is the one who brings unity, fellowship, love and working power to the ecclesia. The Holy Spirit is accorded the highest gift name, mainly *dorea*, which is seen to be given to the church in Acts 1:8; 2:38; 8:20; 10:45; 11:17 (cf. Rom. 5:17; Heb. 6:4). All of this gift derives from the Father and the Son by means of whom the Spirit always fills the community, guides it, and teaches it. It has leading ministries—those who we call 'the *domata*', who are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. There can be no doubt these five gifts to the church worked together, worked in tandem, and none of them had an office as such. All were gifts by which teaching was given. When it is said the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20; 3:5), then it is according high value to these two gift-ministries.

What we are seeking to show is that the church was neither an organisation or institution which, being formed at Pentecost, was then supposed to use all its efforts to enlarge and extend itself. Rather it was God's organism, Christ's body, the Community of the Holy Spirit, so that even as a fellowship it was not competent to order and run itself. It needed, as it also received, the presence of the Three Persons as the one Triune God to give it life and power to be His *am segullah* and *laos periousios*, so that if we disjoin it from union and communion with God, then it will be thought to be an organisation which endeavours in every way to maintain, sustain and organise itself as might any other secular or religious institution.

It is evident that from the day of Pentecost onwards the community of Christ—entrance to which was 'repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ' (Acts 20:21; 2:38)—that a remarkable community had suddenly come on the scene in which all were 'members one of another' (Eph. 4:25; 1 Cor. 12:12, 13), 'subject to one another' (Eph. 5:21), who forgave one another (Col. 3:13; Eph. 4:32) and who were free, in love and worship to 'admonish one another' (Col. 3:16). By the constant worship of God and honouring of one another, by serving God and the community, and by the giving and receiving gifts from God and one another, the community of God and of His people operate perichoretically. One wonders why 'offices' must exist, though

⁵⁴ Collins, London and Glasgow, English Translation 1971, pp. 37f.

one has no doubt that leadership is essential, as is the case in the human body⁵⁵ and in the living body of Christ. As the human body has its own hierarchies so does the body of Christ, for Paul uses these two bodies as parallels in 1 Corinthians 12:12–31.

The Place of Humility in the Ministry of the Church

In 1 Corinthians 4:6–13 Paul writes to folk who have become puffed up, and presumably by exalting themselves because of their gifts. The whole context shows that they are unable to have gifts and ministry without being filled with conceit:

I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brethren, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. For who sees anything different in you? What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift? Already you are filled! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things.

Here we see that humility was sadly lacking in the church in Corinth. Leaving aside the matter of church leaders (e.g. 1 Thess. 5:12–13; Heb. 13:7, 17) we need to see that as the church lives and acts organically as does any human body, so the gifts given should not puff up the recipients and exercisers of those gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12:12–31 Paul shows that what we call 'less honourable' or 'inferior parts' are in fact given the greater honour. Let us look at his argument as a whole.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those parts of the body which we think less honourable we invest with the greater honour, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak

⁵⁵ That the human body has hierarchies is well explained by Dr Siew Kiong Tham in a paper given at Monday Pastors' Study on August 5th 2001, titled 'The Body of Christ and the Human Body'. He shows that there are hierarchies and if we can talk about elements being 'higher' and 'lower' then the so-called 'lower' parts of hierarchies are essential to the life maintenance of the 'higher' parts, as they also are essential to the 'lower parts'. There is an essential humility in the whole structure of an hierarchy.

with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

We ask why Paul speaks of the honour given to other parts by some members of the body and it is clear that they are vaunting themselves over others. That is why Paul said:

I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brethren, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favour of one against another. For who sees anything different in you? What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift? (1 Cor. 4:6-7).

Everything comes to us gift-wise and the church is really a host of gifts working in God's will.

It is true that we can see something of an hierarchy of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:28, 'And God has appointed in the church *first* apostles, *second* prophets, *third* teachers, *then* workers of miracles, *then* healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues'. The first three are *domata* and those that follow are *charismata*, but Paul gives the order to make a point—one we shall later discuss—and we must understand this order in the light of a humble church, no one vaunting himself above another. What we are trying to note here is that we are nothing *of ourselves* and when God engifts us then we have not gained fame. At rock bottom nothing has changed, but an act of grace has happened by which we become true servants of God and of one another. In what can we boast but in the Cross of Christ? Only the humble are of true service. Milton said 'Fame is the spur' but that was not the case. 'Love is the spur', is the best we can say, and love that is not humble is not true love. The Community of God—His own Triune Being—is the Community of love and, as we have seen, the perichoresis of love flows into the new ecclesia, making it the unique human community.

We took the third point 'The Place of Humility in the Ministry of the Church' to show that being redeemed we can nevertheless become proud, and being given gifts we can become proud, haughty and even arrogant. We can exalt ourselves above others. Forgetting our own sinful origins we can become 'haughty, boastful' and be domineering over others (1 Pet. 5:3), and even think ourselves above Paul as certain persons at Corinth thought they were. All this heady, high view of ourselves is the very essence of sin, even to falling 'into the condemnation of the devil' (1 Tim. 3:6-7).

The Matter of Humility

If we are looking to live richly in the community of love then we must understand and practice humility. If members of the body can despise other members, can seek to lord it over them, fail to honour all men (1 Pet. 5:1-7), then the Cross has failed to humble sinful people. To undertake here a full study of humility is not my intention, though it is certainly my desire. Even so, we can take Scriptures from here and there, and set them together, making a genuine presentation of humility.

The presentation of humility is found *par excellence* in Philippians 2:1-11. Put into the context of the whole Letter, the Philippian church has need—at least in part—of humility. In verse 1, Paul speaks of the sources of humility and then proceeds to exhort them: (i) to count others better than themselves; and (ii) to look primarily to the interests of others. In place of 'selfishness and conceit' he places humility as the power to live selflessly. He takes the incarnation of Christ to be the epitome of humility, so that if we have the mind of Christ then we know and live in humility ourselves. Sometimes his

incarnation is called ‘the divine humiliation’. This is quite untrue. He did not humble himself to become human. He did humble himself to submit to the death of the Cross—so vile and horrible it was in the face of his love and purity—but self-humbling was the fruit of the humility which was already part of his being.

On the whole do we lack humility? Everyone must present himself or herself before God to know what is the case. Do we have ‘the mind of Christ’, ‘the meekness and gentleness of Christ’ (Matt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1), ‘the fruit of the Spirit’ (Gal. 5:22–23), ‘all lowliness and meekness, with patience’ (Eph. 4:2), are we ‘kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another’ (Eph. 4:32), do we have ‘compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience’ (Col. 3:12–13)? Are we in fact like the Corinthians who, having had very humble beginnings, became ‘something’ in their own sight through the receiving of gifts.

I think we need to examine with new eyes the humility of Christ, and his mind. Wesley sang, ‘Mild he laid his glory by’, whilst John wrote, ‘we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father’, i.e. it was his glory to become a man in the way which Paul speaks in Philippians 2:1–5. Thomas Kelly the hymn writer wrote, ‘Humbled for a season, to receive a name’ and that is undoubtedly correct, provided we realise that he did not humble himself to become human. To the contrary, he was humble, ever, and incarnation simply attested to that humility. As we have said, the work of the Cross was no little thing: he was called to be sin for us, to be the curse, to bear the sins of the whole world, and to be forsaken by God *for* sinful humanity, *as* sinful humanity.

Much, much more could be written on this score. Our next Study will have to do with the community of love, but let us here see what is the essence of humility. We will find it first in Abel as against Cain. Humility is the refusal to seek one’s own things and is the acceptance of God as He is, and His plan as He has it for His creation. It is thus refusing all kinds of self-pride and self-exaltation, and the placing of one’s person before that of others. It is exemplified in 2 Corinthians 8:9, ‘For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich’. The ‘poverty’ was what we see as poverty, but his glory was that he voluntarily came to this state. The verse quoted really catches up all that is in Philippians 2:1–11.

In 1 Corinthians 1:26–29 Paul was reminding the folk of their pre-conversion states in life. Now they were—some thought—of high status. Humility has no regard for status, place and position as a thing to be sought, coveted, obtained. This was what Jesus taught regarding humility. Paul told the Corinthians ‘that no human being might boast in the presence of God’. In my case I have been greatly helped to read Ezekiel 36:16–32. Here the Lord speaks of the good He will do Israel in the face of their having profaned His holy name. He will recall them from all nations wherever they may be and vindicate His holiness before the nations:

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. 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. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. You shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses; and I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations (Ezek. 36:25–30).

Having given them all these blessings, God then prophesies what will happen with Israel:

Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good; and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominable deeds. It is not for your sake that I will act, says the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel (Ezek. 36:31–32).

Whether Israel had repented or not, they needed to be blessed with all fullness by God and enjoy His ministry of healing by grace and love in accordance with Exodus 34:6–7—where God is the LORD (Yahweh), and ‘is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin’. The beautiful new state to which God brings Israel reveals to them how evil they have been. Not one drop of humility in them! They are convicted of past evil of heart, sinful arrogance, doing iniquities and abominable deeds, as the Book of Ezekiel so often portrays them. Then comes devastating self-loathing. Conviction of sin has had to await this revelation of human evil committed.

How easy it is for us to forget Man’s evil and his chronic depravity and degeneration which began in Eden. How little are these things pressed on us today, for much of humanistic self-applause has dimmed the evil nature of fallen Man. How much has the self-righteous spirit reasserted following forgiveness and justification. For some of us the recollection of our sins has been most painful, exceeding painful, and what self-loathing there has been as sins from the past come to mind and we have sweated under the memories. It would have been well for the smug Corinthians who must have forgotten their previous state until grace came to them via the Pauline team of preachers and teachers. It takes such memories to set our humility afresh. This renewal of memory has come to me from time to time and always I have been not humiliated—for that would be but regret for past sin, and anger at not being perfect—but brought to tears for the sinner I have been. Like Paul I realise afresh that I am the greatest of sinners.

The other way to keep in true humility is to see, time again, the truly wonderful humility of him who, being God, became Man, and having become Man humbled himself to the death of the Cross. When he was reviled he reviled not again but committed himself to Him who judges righteously. Again, it is to grow like Paul who could claim he had been ‘serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which befell [him]’ (Acts 20:19). It is to remember all the humble saints from Abel until now and to emulate them in clothing one’s self in humility. Only by humility, say both James and Peter, can one defeat the Devil, he who has been infamous for his arrogance and pride (James 4:16; 1 Pet. 5:6). If we are to be the community, which like the Community of God Himself is the community of humility, meekness and tenderness, and if we are to be that community living in the world, then we must humble ourselves under the almighty hand of God and be clothed with humility. In what other way can we receive gifts and remain unspoiled by them, and be given places in both church and Kingdom and not become proud? Had he not appeared from heaven, then we would never know, in essence, that all heaven’s creatures and the ingenerate God Himself are humble and loving. This is all the more reason why we should live in humility in a proud and cruel world.

We have kept in mind that God’s ultimate intention for His people is that they shall be His special possession and as such will all be conformed to the image of His Son. By being members of Christ’s body now, they will grow up into his image—to the

measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ—and so will be as him, i.e. humble, fulfilling the will of His Father, all the time drawing us into his own humility and love, so that we may be true brethren living in a hostile world now, but in His own new heaven and new earth, then.

I purposed with this Study to give an historical survey of the church from Pentecost to the *telos* but find I must let others tell that. They will show how human power and human ambition and human pride have broken into the church. Paul once said, ‘But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity’ (2 Tim. 2:19). What I have included in the following Appendix is not pejorative but simply an account of much that is a departure from the apostolic *ethos* should anyone ask, ‘Where has all the humility gone?’ To be sure, in two thousand years we have seen much—ever so much—of true humility also.

AN APPENDIX ON THE MATTERS OF COMMUNITY, HUMILITY AND HIERARCHY

This Appendix is written for contemplation and careful reading. It gives us a picture of the early church and how a change took place which went against the true way of life and ministry of that community. We should all be alerted to the changes that have taken place and how these should be regarded by us today.

Quote from *The Beautiful City of God* pages 80–1, including quotes from Ernst Käsemann:

In his article ‘The Ministry and Community in the New Testament’,⁵⁶ Ernst Käsemann notes three principles by which the community lives and which are important in the life of the community: (i) ‘To each his own’; (ii) ‘For one another’; and (iii) ‘Submit yourselves to each other in the fear of Christ’.

In speaking firstly of ‘To each his own’ and quoting Romans 12:3; 1 Corinthians 3:5; 7:7; 12:7; Ephesians 4:7, then speaking from 1 Corinthians 7:7—‘Everyone has his charisma from God’—Käsemann has the following to say:

Ecclesiastical egalitarianism is thus ruled out of court. God does not repeat himself when he acts, and there can be no mass production of grace. There is differentiation in the divine generosity, whether in the order of Creation or redemption. Equality is not for Paul a principle of Church order . . . No one, according to 1 Corinthians 12:21 may say to his brother ‘I have no need of you . . .’ No one goes away empty, but no one has too much. But as gift and task, grace and ministry coincide, so do freedom and order.

In his second point—‘For one another’ (1 Cor. 12:7, 23, 25; 8:9; cf. 1 Pet. 4:10)—the writer says:

The pagan can use his talent as equipment in the general struggle for existence. The Christian is compelled, as a steward of the manifold grace of God (1 Peter 4:10) to serve his neighbour in the mode and according to the measure of the charisma he has received. His particular gift frees him from men, from the things they worry about and the tyranny they exercise, and binds him solely to the Lord. But it also frees him from his own self, the tyranny it exercises and the worry it engenders, so that he can become in love the servant of all. 1 Corinthians 8:9 impresses upon him

⁵⁶ The article is in his book *Essays on New Testament Themes* (SCM, London, 1964), pp. 76–78.

that he has power over everything except his brother's conscience, foolish and misguided as that conscience may be.

Of course 'for one another' covers a much wider field. It shows that one does not live for oneself (2 Cor. 5:15; Rom. 14: 7) but for the other and the others.

The third point that Käsemann makes is to be found in Romans 12:10, Philippians 2:3, 1 Peter 5:5, and especially in Ephesians 5:21—'Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ' (KJV). Käsemann comments:

The fear of Christ is no empty rhetorical phrase here. The word *hupotassesthai* (being subject) signifies that particular shade of obedience which is due from a subordinate *tagma* (order) . . . in the face of *praesentia Christi* (presence of Christ) even when—indeed, precisely when—I encounter this presence embodied in the person of my brother who also has his charisma. This means that authority and charisma go together in the community, and, as charisma is only manifested as genuine in the act of ministry, so only he who ministers can have authority and that only in the actual exercise of his ministry.

Quote from Loren Mead's *The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier*:⁵⁷

Clergy are a critical part of our problem. Many of them are uncomfortably aware of that fact, but believe someone else is responsible for their pain. During a thousand years of Christendom the churches built a power system controlled by the clergy—a clericalism that now distorts power relationships. In the beginning I am sure that was not the intent; the intent was to use talented people to strengthen the church's life. The call for ordained leaders to shape and guide the institution was needed and was remarkably effective.

The power system that nevertheless developed continues to be in place, but it has less and less to do with the church's sense of its mission. A layman once told me how it feels to him: 'I didn't know the church existed as an employment system for clergy'.

In the Church of Christendom, the clergy were assumed to play the primary role in mission and ministry. In the emerging church, the laity are the primary ones to cross the missionary frontier and undertake the missionary task. Many clergy feel displaced and have difficulty accepting the new lay authority. What is more, they do not have a sense of what new role they should bear.

Thus, no one faces a greater change in the future church than clergy. In the past four decades they have already experienced more change than they expected. From being a high-status/low-stress profession the clergy has become a low-status/high-stress profession. The number of congregations who can afford to pay their pastor a living wage has declined.

Quote from Edward Schillebeeck, *The Language of Faith: Essays on Jesus, Theology and the Church*:⁵⁸

It is clear from the pre-Nicene literature especially that the early Church found it difficult to call its leaders 'priestly.' According to the New Testament, only Christ and the Christian community were priestly. The leaders were in the service of Christ and the priestly people of God, but they were never called priestly themselves. Cyprian was one of the first Christians to show a clear preference for the Old Testament terminology of the sacrificial priesthood and compared this with the Christian Eucharist.

In this way, there was a gradual sacerdotalization of the vocabulary of the Church's office, although this was initially used in the allegorical sense. Cyprian was also the first to say that the *sacerdos*, that is, the bishop as the leader of the community and therefore also in the Eucharist, acted

⁵⁷ *The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier*, The Alban Institute, Washington, 1991, p. 53.

⁵⁸ *The Language of Faith: Essays on Jesus, Theology, and the Church*, Orbis Bopoks, Maryknoll, 1995, pp. 137–8.

in this capacity *vice Christi*, that is, in the place of Jesus. Augustine, on the other hand, refused to call bishops and presbyters ‘priests’ in the sense of mediators between Christ and the community.⁵⁹

Cyril Eastwood comments:

In the writings of the Early Fathers the doctrine of the universal priesthood has a central place. It is directly connected with the High Priesthood of Christ (Polycarp and Origen); with the layman’s ordinances (Clement of Rome); with the Eucharist (Clement of Rome and Justin Martyr); with the unity of the Church (Clement of Alexandria); with questions of Church discipline (Tertullian); with free access to the presence of the Father (Origen); with the Church’s missionary task (Polycarp and Origen); with the conception of the Church as a High Priestly Race, and with the offering of spiritual sacrifices. The last two are mentioned in the writings of all the Fathers. The significance of this lies in the fact that the transition which took place under Cyprian was directly connected with these two ideas. As a difference in the idea of priesthood emerged, so also a difference in the idea of sacrifice followed. A new note was sounded by Cyprian, it was the authority of the priest. So the High Priestly Race gave place to a High Priestly Class, and the spiritual sacrifices gave place to a priestly sacrifice offered to God in the Eucharist. All authority was given unto the Bishop who unquestionably controlled the Church’s teaching, worship, discipline, and ministry, and in an ill-defined and mystical sense he controlled also that most sacred treasure of Gospel—the offer of divine grace. This sort of teaching persisted in the Church without any serious and decisive opposition until the appearance of Martin Luther in the sixteenth century.⁶⁰

We will be looking at the reasons for the changes in the doctrine of priesthood—those changes which have happened in history—for they are of major importance, since the bloodless sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving has been changed to a propitiatory, piacular sacrifice which requires a sacerdotal priest to celebrate it. First, however, we will see what was the nature of leadership in the early church and whether it was priestly in the sacerdotal sense. In this matter Ernst Käsemann can be helpful to us. He tells us in his *Essays on New Testament Themes* that we will be baffled at the beginning of our search in the New Testament church for what we now call ‘offices’ in the early church. After his introductory words here below, he presses the point that the word *charisma* is the key to understanding what we might call ‘apostolic church order’:

As soon as we begin to investigate our subject, we encounter a contradiction. We make the remarkable discovery that the New Testament has no technical definition of what we are accustomed to call ecclesiastical office, although it speaks without inhibition of the office and the functions of the secular power and of the Old Testament priesthood, and indeed refers by name to a multiplicity of ecclesiastical offices and functions. From time to time the word ‘Amt’ (‘ministry’) appears in Luther’s translation of the Bible: when it does, we find that the word in the original is usually *diakonia*. This is symptomatic. For the New Testament seems of set purpose to have avoided the technical conception of office which could have been expressed by such words as *leitourgia* (ministry, ministration), *timē* (honour) and *arche* (ruler); the use of these would have implied the presupposition and recognition of an authoritarian relationship which has no place in the ordering of the Church and which indeed is the precise target of the polemic found in such passages as Matt. 20.25f.; 23.11; I Cor. 3.5 and I Peter 5.3 against claims to domination and to positions of power.⁶¹

Paul Stevens in his book *The Abolition of the Laity*⁶² gives us a quote from Luther: ‘Of

⁵⁹ *The Language of Faith: Essays on Jesus, Theology, and the Church* (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1995), pp. 137–8.

⁶⁰ *The Priesthood of All Believers: An Examination of the Doctrine from the Reformation to the Present Day* by Cyril Eastwood (Epworth Press, London, 1960), pp. xi–xii.

⁶¹ Published by SCM Press, London, 1964, p. 63.

⁶² Paternoster Press, Cumbria, UK, 1999, p. 30, where he quotes M. Warkentin, as saying this in his *Ordination: A Biblical Historical View* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1982, p. 272.

this sacrament the church of Christ knows nothing: it is an invention of the church and of the pope'. The full quote continues:

Not only is there nowhere any promise of grace attached to it, but there is not a single word said about it in the New Testament. Now it is ridiculous to put forth as a sacrament of God something which cannot be proved to have been instituted by God. I do not hold that this rite which has been observed for so many centuries, should be condemned; but in sacred things I am opposed to the invention of human fictions.

Cyril Eastwood further quotes Luther on the score of ordination within the church:

For all Christians whatsoever really and truly belong to the religious class, and there is no difference among them except in so far as they do different work. That is St. Paul's meaning in 1 Corinthians 12, when he says. 'We are all one body, yet each member hath his own work for saving others', especially verse 12.

This applies to us all, because we have one Baptism, One Gospel, one faith, and are equally Christian. For Baptism, Gospel and faith alone make men religious and create a Christian people . . . The fact is that our Baptism consecrates us all without exception, and makes us all priests.

A shoemaker, a smith, a farmer, each has his manual occupation and work; and yet, at the same time all are eligible to act as priests and bishops. Every one of them in his occupation or handicraft ought to be useful to his fellows and serve them in such a way that the various trades are all directed to the best advantage of the community and promote the well-being of body and soul, just as the organs of the body serve one another.⁶³

Markus Barth in his commentary on Ephesians⁶⁴ and the passage of 4:7–13, has a special Comment titled 'The Church without Laymen and Priests':

The meaning of 4:12 is entirely different when the nouns preceded by different prepositions describe one and the same purpose of the ministries mentioned in vs. 11, and when no comma is placed between the first two parts of v.12. Then the ministries of vs. 11 are given to the church in order that 'the saints' become 'equipped' to carry out 'the work of service,' even 'the building.' Earlier and later passages in Ephesians show that the 'good works' to be done by the church and her members can be summed up in this way: this community makes known or lets shine the light of God's goodness, wisdom, gospel to the powers of this world. Eph 4:12 may indeed underline the fact that the 'saints' are not a part of the church but all her members, without excluding any one of them. All the saints (and among them, each saint) are enabled by the four or five types of servants enumerated in 4:11 to fulfil the ministry given to them, so that the whole church is taken into Christ's service and given missionary substance, purpose, and structure. This interpretation challenges both the aristocratic-clerical and the triumphalistic-ecclesiastical exposition of 4:11–12. It unmask them as arbitrary distortions of the text. Are, therefore, the existence and function of a clergy simply dispensable? Indeed, the traditional distinction between clergy and laity does not belong in the church. Rather, the whole church, the community of all the saints together, is the clergy appointed by God for a ministry to and for the world. This way two widespread opinions are refuted: the assumption that the bulk of the church members are reduced to the rank of mere consumers of spiritual gifts, and the notion that the church as a whole must strive primarily for a 'build-up' which benefits only herself. As an alternative the following message is conveyed: the dignity and usefulness of the special ministries given to the church are as great or as small as their effectiveness in making every church member, including the smallest and most despised, an evangelist in his own home and environment.⁶⁵

⁶³ Taken from *Reformation Writings of Martin Luther*, vol 1, *The Basis of the Protestant Reformation*, trans. Bertram Lee Woolf, Lutterworth Press, London, 1952, pp. 113, 116.

⁶⁴ Markus Barth in the Anchor Bible on *Ephesians*, 2 vols, Doubleday, New York, 1974. See vol. 2, pp. 447–84.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 479f.

CONCLUSION: ANOTHER LOOK AT THE PEOPLE OF GOD

The amount of theological material available on the matter of the order of ministry of the early church seems to tell us that something in the church changed radically in its history. The term we have long used of ‘holy orders’ distinguishes what we call ‘clergy’ and ‘laity’, a concept unknown to the early church. At this point we simply remind ourselves that the early church was essentially a charismatic one, and all members constituted the people of God. Whilst we recognise the fact of leadership the motivation for obedience lay in the fact: (i) that all leadership was servant ministry; (ii) all persons were given charisms and were led by the Spirit; (iii) that all were under the Lordship of Christ as Head of the body; (iv) all were covenant people; and (v) that leaders were themselves among all members and not over them as a higher class of people, for they ministered as servants, one to another.

We need painstakingly to cover the Scriptures quoted in previous chapters in regard to the *am segullah* (special, chosen possession), *laos tou theou* (the people of God), *laos periousios* (chosen people, people of my possession), and all terms which speak of the congregation of Israel—the *qahal*—and the *ekklesia* or church in the NT.⁶⁶ So in Acts 15:14 James says, ‘how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name’, which is close to Titus 2:14, ‘that he might purify for himself a people’ for his own possession (*laos periousios*). The theme of ‘the people’ or ‘the people of God’ is also emphasised in Hebrews 2:17, 4:9, 7:27, and 13:12, where Israel is in mind as in the Old Testament, but also—and even more—the people of God, the covenant people of the New Testament.

It can be argued that this people of God can well be a people over whom God places clergy, but the main point is that *laos* (people) includes all who are in Christ. We can speak of ‘the people’ which includes all, but we cannot say ‘the clergy *and* the people’. Of course there are many other things to be said but it might be apt to close this study with a statement of Karl Barth quoted by Paul Stevens in his *The Abolition of the Laity*, page 24.⁶⁷

Theology is not a private reserve of theologians. It’s not a private affair for professors . . . Nor is it a private affair for pastors . . . Theology is a matter for the church. It does not go well without professors and pastors. But its problem, the purity of the church’s service is put to the whole church. The term ‘laity’ is one of the worst in the vocabulary of religion and ought to be banished from Christian conversation.

⁶⁶ See Isaiah 43:20, ‘my chosen people’, and Isaiah 43:21, ‘the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise’. See also Hosea chapter 1 where there is an interplay between ‘not my people’ and ‘my people’, repeated again in 2:23.

⁶⁷ A *Karl Barth Reader*, eds R. J. Erlner & R. Marquard, trans. G. W. Bromiley, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1986, pp. 8–9.

The Church Living in the World As Community—7

INTRODUCTION: THE LOVE COMMUNITY

From the day of Pentecost the church was seen to be a love community and, in fact, *the* love community. The first eleven chapters of Acts tell the life of the community from which we can detect its love, although it does not mention the word. The first act of 'those who believed' was to institute the daily distribution to the widows, orphans, and the poor. In the life of Israel, God had given prescriptions for these people, including the aliens, and the new *ecclesia* may have had such injunctions at the back of its mind, but their actions seemed spontaneous and most earnest. The healing of the sick and relief given to demon-possessed folk was part of their 'gospel of the Kingdom'. The great relief and cause of joy was the release from the bondage of sin, and their love to God and one another flourished from clear consciences (Heb. 9:14) issuing in rich worship. They were certainly the community of love. Acts 2:42 shows that fellowship (*koinonia*) was present, in which case love must certainly have been present.

The apostles taught the church well in the matter of love. John taught of Jesus' love in his Gospel, telling of the Father's love for him as the Son (3:35; 10:17; 15:9; 17:24, 26), the Son's love for the Father and for us as first being those of the creation (John 3:16), and then as those who followed His Son (14:23). He showed them his love for them (13:1, 34; 15:9), spoke of their love for him (John 13:35; 14:21, 23), and taught that they should love one another (13:34; 15:12, 17). This love is not mere sentiment or soft emotion, but vital union one with the other, fellowship with God and Man and obedience to God and His law.

John went on in his Epistles to speak about the importance of community love to God, to one another and to those outside the love community. If a man who 'has this world's goods' does not share them with a needy person then the love of God does not dwell in him. Only when we love one another does God's love come to perfection in us (1 John 4:12). In regard to community he speaks much of brotherly love though without using the term *philadelphia*. Paul (Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 4:9), Peter (1 Pet. 1:22), and the writer of Hebrews (13:1), use this warm term. Loving the brethren is a passion with John. He states that the one who says he loves God and hates his brother is a self-evident liar. The dreadful fact is that he who hates his brother walks in darkness and does not know where he is going. Without love from God, love to God and love to the brethren, this universe can be a frightening place.

Paul's injunction is, 'Let all that you do be done in love'. In Colossians 3:15 he speaks similarly, 'And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.' This covers the whole of love in those who have been loved and have had this love disclosed to them at the Cross, so that they love God and Christ in return, and as we have said, all others. Paul firstly speaks of God's love being poured into our hearts and shows how this love worked out at the Cross (Rom. 5:6–11). As we saw immediately above, this is precisely John's point in John 3:16 and 1 John 4:9–10, i.e. that God's love is always shown in His acts. Paul

would agree with that, and his superb hymn on love—1 Corinthians 13:4–8—describes that very love in action. As in John, so in Paul: the love is *agape* and demands no returns for love given.

Peter also teaches these Pauline and Johannine principles. Of their love for Christ he says, 'Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy' (1 Pet. 1:8). As for love to others he says, 'Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart' (1 Pet. 1:22), and adds, 'Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins' (1 Pet. 4:8).

The writer of Hebrews is also apostolic when he speaks of their love: 'For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love which you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do' (6:10), and urges them to 'stir up one another to love and good works' (10:24). In James the writer speaks twice of 'those who love him', and we know that we love Him because He first loved us, bringing our response of true love (1 John 4:19).

Jude is the only NT writer who invokes the blessing of love on his readers in salutation, 'May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you' (v. 2). He is also the one writer who enjoins them to 'keep yourselves in the love of God' (v. 21).

In the Book of the Revelation there is an ascription to Christ, the Living One, 'To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins', and it is good to know that 'loves' is in the present tense. This contrasts with Romans 8:37, Galatians 2:20, and Ephesians 5:2, where Christ is spoken of as having 'loved' us, i.e. an act in the past. In Romans 8:39 the love of God is 'in Christ Jesus'. It is the same risen Christ who rebukes the church at Ephesus for abandoning the love which it had 'had at first'. Unless a change were to take place the church at Ephesus was in danger of losing its golden candlestick, i.e. it would no more shed light into the darkness of the world. That shows how highly love is rated. Of course this is because God Himself is love, and to be loved by Him is to love Him, and our neighbour. Indeed, like God the Father, we are called to love the whole of humanity.

UNIVERSAL LOVE: UNIVERSAL COMMUNITY

Having had a general look at the matter of Divine and human love, it would appear to us that the community of love is the universal community of love and that it was—and is—God's intention to make it so. It seems certain that when Man was made in the image of God and was commissioned into being steward of the whole earth, the configurations of his being were those of love. God, who created Man, we know to be essentially love, and as Alpha and Omega is, first to last, working His love in the creation. His *telos* for our time and for its ultimate conclusion is also love. Knowing that principle, we must conclude that what God is as love must be the basic virtue on which the whole creation is founded, and by which it works. God is essentially love, so that His love is not simply a virtue but His essential being, His entire being, His complete property. It is right to speak of a person or persons who love as having the virtue of love, for in created beings it is derived from the Godhead.

Because God is not monadic but is social, i.e. is *koinonia* its very self, then for a human being or a society to be filled with love is to reflect God as the community of love. To some degree we have seen the mutuality of love in the Godhead, by the inter-dwelling, inter-serving, inter-honouring, inter-giving and inter-receiving. We have

claimed that Man by creation was to reflect this Community of love by receiving the gift of the life and law⁶⁸ of the Godhead and living out these as the action of genuine love. Man reflects on the human level what God is and does as Divine. The life of *plerosis*—the fullness of God—in the Divine Community, flows out into the human community, effecting its fullness and its actions of love.

This thrilling reality of love is that it is not an abstraction, but the living reality of God Himself, and God's community moving out into all creation in the deeds, actions and attitudes of love. In this there are no conscious actions of self-display or selfish ambition of fame and recognition. It is quite true that every human being who has come to recognise the love of God and then joined in His community has to battle every day with what the NT calls 'the flesh' or 'the old man', for which the modern term is 'the self-centred human ego'. We would then expect that the church which is the community of redeemed sinners would never appear perfect, i.e. *of itself* attain perfection in morals, ethics and appropriate behaviour, yet is the holy community. It lives by the power of the Cross and the power of Christ's Resurrection. One is not offering an apologetic for errant behaviour of people in churches over its 2000 years of life, but one is offering something of an explanation. The battle for the soul of the church—if we may call it that—is unending.

The Historical Changes in Church Polity and Practice

As I have studied early church developments, it appears that significant changes have taken place and are much as I have presented them in the comments of both past and contemporary commentators in the second part of our last Study. For some three hundred years or more, Christians were aware that the cultus of Israel had been superseded by the new ecclesia. Their worship had no place for sacrifices of a propitiatory nature, for they had no material altar and certainly had no buildings which could be called temples based on the Jewish house of worship. Sacrifices were those of praise and thanksgiving, the new temple being the church constituted of members of Christ's body making 'a spiritual house'—'living stones' on the Living Stone. All the people constituted a 'holy priesthood' and their sacrifices were offered to God *through* Jesus Christ. True worship arose from the people of purified consciences, those who had experienced the mercies of God and had become living sacrifices by the offering of their bodies in service to God.⁶⁹

We know that the way Christians worshipped without idols and idol sanctuaries caused them to be called 'atheists' by some. It appears generally that all human beings are religious, i.e. that they must have a deity to worship, and that self worship is achieved by the forming of an idol or idols, deities which are 'a representation by the art and imagination of man' and for the making of which God now 'commands all men everywhere to repent' (Acts 17:29–30). This means that the pure worship of God through Jesus Christ the worship leader (*leitourgos*) in the true sanctuary of God (Heb. 8:2), will always be contested by the universal spirit of idolatry. It is a powerful thrust in 'the natural man' to have his surrogate god firmly established in the place of the true God—'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. For this reason his worship will

⁶⁸ The life of God, rightly understood, is lived out in the law of God. The two are the one and are always inseparable. If a person lives in God then he obeys the law of God as his natural way of life. We will later look at the fact that to obey God's law is to live and act in love. At this point we might well ponder John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:7, 10ff.; 17:4; Matthew 28:19–20; 1 John 2:3–6; 5:2–3.

⁶⁹ For all elements of this paragraph see 1 Peter 2:4–10; Ephesians 2:11–22; Hebrews 12:28–29; 13:15–16; Romans 12:1–2.

always be inviolable, strengthened about by the culture rising from his particular worship cultus, fiercely opposing any attempt to change that culture—order.

What, then, are the waves of attack on the Trinity, the Christian God who requires no local sanctuary, other than the church which is 'a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same'?⁷⁰ The local community is of the true 'sanctuary and the true tent' (Heb. 8:2), and must not be idolised into a local sanctuary 'made by hands'. The building in which it meets is simply incidental for its gathering. Wherever the ecclesia meets, it itself is the sanctuary of God. Thus one of the greatest continuing attacks is to develop buildings or places of meeting into forms of temples. With this is the elevation of persons to the so-called 'office' of a priest, for the temple must have an altar and the priest be of mediatorial nature since 'the people' need to approach God through the priest.⁷¹ Sacrifices that are mediatorial are then required for this priestly order of 'clergy and people' and tend to become sacerdotal, i.e. the 'priest' offers a sacrifice which is salvific, so that what was eucharistic, i.e. simply of praise and thanksgiving, now becomes the sacrifice of the bloody cross which is 're-presented' by virtue of a change in the substance of the elements of the Lord's Supper. Thus the power to extend grace to the worshippers lies in the hands of a priesthood which is not that 'holy priesthood' and that 'royal priesthood' of 1 Peter 2:5, 9, but is a reversion to the sacerdotalism of Israel's cultus itself which was only 'a shadow of the good things to come' (Heb. 10:1).

When, then, a hierarchy is introduced into the ecclesia, there is also the danger of power structures arising, and this is in fact what has happened in history. Bishops are given powers and oversight which are not found in the New Testament, albeit some see such prelacy foreshadowed in the Pastoral Epistles. Old presbyter becomes 'new priest writ small'—to quote Hooker in reverse—and the church has congregations which are ruled by clergy who are as monarchical in their oversight as bishops have become in theirs. I have tried to set forth much of this discussion in *The Beautiful City of God* in chapters 12 to 14 and Appendix 2, and have drawn on a vast body of literature, some of which is included in the Bibliography of this volume and which I hope the reader will peruse.

For the historical changes in church polity and practice we need to study church history. It has long been claimed that the Emperor Constantine did much damage to the church by making it a legal religion, and then, at a later point in time, made it virtually *the* religion of the State. The church itself changed essentially as it became a power in the Holy Roman Empire and then, virtually, *the* power of that empire. In all these circumstances the church of Rome built for herself a powerful system of hierarchy. The holding of Councils, the break between Rome and Constantinople, the times of incursion, of pagan powers and the power play of nations and cultures, all affected the church deeply in the politicising of it. The Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Reformation, the Anabapist Movement, and the break of churches with Rome, along with consequent movements such as Pietism, the Evangelical Revival, the Oxford Movement, and the Holiness and Pentecostal Movements have all contributed to the changes in the church from its Apostolic character and practice.

⁷⁰ Article 19, titled 'Of the Church' in 'Articles of Religion' of 1662, in *An Australian Prayer Book* (The Standing Committee of the General Synod of the Church of England in Australia, Sydney, 1978), p. 631.

⁷¹ See 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 4:15–16; 7:23–25; 10:21–22; Romans 8:31–34.

The Community Living in Simplicity—the Apostolic Way

All these changes bring us back to the nature and practice of the Apostolic church and our enquiry into what Paul called 'the simplicity that is in Christ' (2 Cor. 11:2–3, AV). The NRSV translation of these verses is, 'I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.' If we take this simplicity to mean 'Christ in all our parts' as the Wesleys used often to say, then what we desire is the church—and so the churches—of our day to live in simplicity of love for Christ and so in obedience to his word 'in all our parts'. We desire his life in the church—his beloved bride and flock—to draw us out from pomp and circumstance, from power play, from priestly craft, from pride of status or position, from lording it over the flock, and all forms of vain glory, envy, hatred and malice and all uncharitableness and all political strategies and other deities of the world, the flesh and the devil. How apt for today is the 1662 Litany so many of us have known from childhood. It is this we pray personally as we seek to see true spiritual reformation and revival coming to Christ's community of love where such is needed. We are aware that quite strange and beautiful experiences of 'a sincere and pure devotion to Christ' *are* taking place throughout the world as they have been in many places through the centuries. Many have lived in 'the patient endurance' of the saints because they have 'looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God'. So they endure in the light of the hope they have. Paul shares the modes of his suffering and the endurance required in a strong passage of words:

We put no obstacle in any one's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything (2 Cor. 6:3–10).

The Matters of Leadership and Hierarchy

It is required that we look afresh at these two elements which figure in the life of the community as it witnesses to the world. If the ecclesia is simply operating on a set structure of leaders, and if these leaders be an hierarchy as we understand the term, then the world will see no special difference from the way it, i.e. the world, works to the way the church works. Even if we suggest that love makes all the difference to leadership and hierarchy, that will not be received as significant, since the world knows a love that is very changeable and in which fame and other self-goals can still figure largely.

To begin with, the word 'hierarchy' is not a word we can easily use to impress human beings. Most see hierarchy in the light of an ascending and ranking order of authority. Authority itself is not a favourite word of many, since fallen Man dislikes authority when he does not have it, although he uses it strongly when he does, and if not himself subject to a yet higher authority in an hierarchy, then he does not know how to

use it appropriately. The idea of authority is not easily received, although the idea of thoughtful leadership might receive acceptance.

When the word 'love' (*agape*) is brought into the discussion, then human understanding of the principles of hierarchy and authority must change. It is doubtful, however, that these two elements are much seen in the light of love. If they are not seen as the workings of love, then they appear to be authoritarian, discriminating and dominating.⁷² C. K. Barrett in commenting on 1 Corinthians 3:23 has the following to say:

We should avoid a difficulty if we stopped at this point, and thought of Christ's belonging to God as something that refers **only** to his earthly life and humanity (so, e.g., Calvin, and most earlier commentators), in which he practised sacrificial obedience, as the Corinthians also must. We are however forbidden to do this not only by Paul's thought in general, but by the explicit statement of xv. 28 (*When all things shall have been subjected to him, then the Son himself also shall be subjected to him who subjected all things to him, that God may be all in all*). **There is eternally a relation of superordination and subordination between the Father and the Son.** This does not however mean (if we may use language that did not rise till many years after Paul's time—though Lightfoot notes that to take this phrase with reference to the divine nature of Christ 'is necessary for the proper understanding of the Nicene Creed') that the Son is not of one substance with the Father, and belongs to a different order of being; it means rather that the Son, being of one substance with the Father, is differentiated from him precisely in this, that **he renders the obedience of perfect love to the perfectly loving will of the Father.** This language is indeed much too formal for Paul, whose thought moves in **terms of function rather than essence.** For him, Jesus is the willing agent of God (emphases are mine).⁷³

This principle of love must be understood wherever we meet what some claim to be hierarchy. Above, C. K. Barrett has claimed in commenting on 1 Corinthians 15:28 that Jesus 'renders the obedience of perfect love to the perfectly loving will of the Father', and thereby defines hierarchy and obedience as being of love, or from love. This enables us to look more objectively at the uses of the verb *hupotasso* which is the one Paul uses of Christ's self-subjection to the Father in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28. We have done this in the Appendix to this Study titled 'Hierarchy and Authority'. The Appendix ought, then, to be read, because if we reject the idea of hierarchy we may be close to anarchy and at best we may opt for a kind of ecclesiastical democracy, but hierarchy is the working of the community in love for the fulfilling of the will of God and His people. If we do think that hierarchy is a good thing and work that way—as we ought—then the possible danger of human pride will always be present. It will surely be present if we espouse an ecclesiastical hierarchy which is not a hierarchy of love.

When we come to the church order of the apostolic community it is very simple. We have spoken of the order of the ministry of the gifts we call *domata*—apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. We need to see these gifts are from Christ himself since he is *the* Apostle, *the* Prophet, *the* Evangelist, *the* Pastor and *the* Teacher, so that the gifts working are Christ himself working through the people. He is the Head of the church, its Leader, Shepherd, Elder Brother, Prophet, Priest and King. All being in him will work out the gifts of his life in ministry to others. Within the charisma of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:23) are all the *charismata*, and as these are shared it is the very life of the Son in the midst of the community. We have seen in 1 Corinthians 12:4–30 that the community are members of Christ's Body and members one of another, and so the ecclesia is able to live in love, peace, joy and other such virtues, provided all have humility. Paul does point to some kind of order of the gifts, but in verses 28–30 it is evident that no one should give place to pride since all are 'members one of another'. In other words, in the life of humility there are people

⁷² It is a strange matter that authority should be regarded as authoritarianism. Authority is for order and well-being, whereas authoritarianism is an individualistic exercise of the human ego for one's domination of others. Those discussing these matters should be exhorted to define their terms.

⁷³ C. K. Barrett *A Commentary on the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Adam and Charles Black, London, 1978), pp. 97–98.

living in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5:3–11, so that their hearts are simple and tender and sensitive to others. The fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23 tells the way the people of the Holy Spirit live and act. Tender-heartedness, meekness, giving and forgiving, warm affection and the like pervade the community which is under God's grace. This is the *am segullah* preparing for the age to come. It is of that age to come we need to speak.

The Coming Age of Peace

Those who read the Scriptures know of the beautiful age of peace as written by the prophets and as promised by God. Just to read these is to fill us with hope which looks forward lovingly to the age to come. True hope arises from true promises believed by simple faith. So when we read Isaiah chapter 11 we are deeply moved as we see what will be. We need to read the whole chapter. In verses 1 to 10 the picture is beautiful and evocative of joy and peace:

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

In Isaiah 25:6–8 we have words which must have prompted the writer of the Revelation in 21:1–4:

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'.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away (Rev. 21:1–4).

In Isaiah 2:1–4 (cf. Micah 4:1–3) we have another beautiful scene of the revival of the creation:

The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 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, 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. 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.

Another passage in this prophecy—Isaiah 57:6–8—speaks of there being one house of prayer for all nations (Mark 11:17) which will be a remarkable happening if we look at the wide range and variety of worship systems today:

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.

When we add the beautiful passages in the revelation of the Holy City coming out of heaven, the descriptions of the Holy City, of God and the Lamb being the temple, and the lovely description of the New Eden, then too we are surely deeply moved:

Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.' And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its breadth; and he measured the city with his rod, twelve thousand stadia; its length and breadth and height are equal. He also measured its wall, a hundred and forty-four cubits by a man's measure, that is, an angel's. The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass. And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of

lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever (Rev. 21:9 – 22:5).

All of these predictions come to us as promises also. They are the foundation of our faith, the expectations of our hope. Without them we would wonder how His community would ever live in the perfection of love. They prepare us for what is to come, the age of peace and joy as we all dwell together in love. Even more, they motivate us in this present time to prepare for the future as 1 John 3:1–3 tells us in principle: 'And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure'. At this point we might wonder whether Paul, when he was lifted to the third heaven, saw the community of love, whether celestial or terrestrial, whether in the present or the future—it matters not—and knew beyond all doubt the ultimate transformation of the ecclesia into the beautiful Bride of Christ, the flock following its Shepherd by rivers of living water, and the whole universe praising the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit, who is himself the Spirit of worship. This idea of Paul having seen all the beauties of the future by being caught up into heaven may be quite fanciful, but it is undoubted that somehow or another the apostle was so aware of the glories beyond that he would gladly, at any moment, have departed this life to be with Christ which he considered was very much 'far better' (Phil. 1:23).

In his beautiful, and at times very sad Philippian Epistle, Paul sought to bring the eschatological joy to his readers in that town. There were folk who proclaimed Christ 'out of partisanship, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment'. There was the sad division between the two women—Euodia and Syntyche—who were once two fine fellow-workers with Paul. There were also those about whom Paul wept as he described them, who were enemies of the cross of Christ for their end was destruction, their god their belly, for they gloried in their shame with minds set on earthly things. For all such, Paul wrote the powerful words in the second chapter in verses 1 to 11, enjoining the mind and humility of Christ. With all these things in mind he would send Timothy soon to them, so deep were they in his heart, for where he was in prison 'they all look after their own interests, not those [interests] of Jesus Christ'. He enjoined them:

Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me (Phil. 2:14–18).

If Paul was so urgent with hope for the glorious Body of Christ in its ultimate perfection, then no less the saints described to us in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. With the eyes of faith they saw the reality of the *telos*. With Abraham who had seen the glory of God they 'looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God'. They made it clear that they were seeking a homeland. Moses, it was said, 'considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward'. He 'endured as seeing him who is invisible', and it must have been with that kind of faith's hope-sight that they suffered for the glory that was to come:

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received

their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect (Heb. 11:32–40).

CONCLUSION: FUTURE PERFECTION BRINGS GLORY IN THE CHURCH BY CHRIST JESUS—NOW!

God would have us be like Him and live and act like Him. In the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul speaks about the fullness of God. Primarily he appears to be talking about a fullness of Christ (1:22–23; cf. 4:10, 13), but it is He who as Father of us all 'is above all, and through all and in all', i.e. we live in His fullness. It is He who has put all things under Christ's feet and has made him to be head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. The Son then gives his fullness to the ecclesia that, with and through and by the church, he may fill all things. His aim is 'to fill all things' from the depths to the ultimate height of the universe. His ascension gifts are those of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher, 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ'. Such fullness—as is God's fullness—is a moral fullness. As we have said, God would have us be like Him, especially as he verbalises His glory in Exodus 34:6–7 and reveals it in the very person and works of His Son.

What matters to God is not what we would call 'great works', but works of simple faith, trust in God, humility, lowliness, meekness, patience, compassion, mercy, gentleness, kindness, long-suffering, goodness, bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things, putting others before oneself, looking primarily to the interests of others, being other-persons centred, laying down one's life for others, covering the multitude of sins of another, and always forgiving as one has been forgiven. It is also spurning arrogance and pride, putting off immorality, anger, wrath, malice, slander, impurity, passion, gossip, malignity, heartlessness, ruthlessness, deceit, envy, murder, foolishness and faithlessness. It is to mourn the evil of oneself and others, to know poverty of spirit as the mind of humility, to hunger and thirst after righteousness, to be reviled and not revile, to be persecuted and not fight in return, to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

All these elements reflect the very nature of God. This is how He would have us be and do. Not only do we reflect Him by being His image, but also the very ecclesia itself is the image of the Divine Community—the Godhead. All we have in the last paragraph are not criteria for us to accomplish, but the present life we live in response to His salvation and His ever-acting love. We have all these things in the fullness of God and His Christ. Christ's fullness is assuredly in the power of the Father (Eph. 1:19–22), and the 'unsearchable riches of Christ' and 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' which are his.

So Paul prays that through the Spirit and Christ we may come to the point of being filled unto all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:14–19). It is in and by that fullness that we become like God and live as we have described above. It is not 'great deeds' which we must accomplish as 'fame is the spur', but the genuinely humble things when love is the true spur. We may be sad that all is not wholly so now, in our conduct and ministry, but

Paul tells us to '[go on being] filled with the Spirit' (Eph. 5:18f.), which means, 'by means of the Holy Spirit go on being filled unto all the fullness of God'.

That is the fullness we will know in the eschaton and telos. That will be when the church as the Holy Bride will be one forever with the Holy Bridegroom, the union that will bring fruit for eternity. We do well not to despair at the seeming flaws and failures of the present community. Christ is ever working in it, ever walking among the candlesticks, and through rebuke, correction, and encouragement he will bring his Beloved to its ultimate perfection and goal. This is the hope we have as we believe the promises of God, and are sure that the church, along with all creation, will worship and serve God for ever. This is what we mean by 'The Community of Love'.

Appendix to December Study

HIERARCHY AND AUTHORITY: THE OUTWORKING OF LOVE IN LEADING AND SUBMISSION

This Appendix is based on the premise that if the order of the Trinity as the Divine Community is an hierarchy, then so is the order of the ecclesia—the community of Love—also an hierarchy. We seek now to see whether we can establish this as a fact by looking at the matter of authority, and so of hierarchy.

One way of doing this is to examine the verb *hupotasso* which in its various forms—active, middle, passive, aorist, etc.—means ‘to place, put, or arrange under’, ‘to subordinate’, ‘to bring under influence’, ‘to be subordinated’, ‘to submit oneself’, ‘to render obedience’, ‘to be submissive’, with the nouns ‘subordination’ and ‘submissiveness’ (*hupotage*). This will help us to see: (i) ontological and/or functional categories of authority which should be obeyed; and (ii) categories given by God in a sinful world and which, though temporary, are nevertheless binding and conducive to good order, harmony and conduct. The verb is used of Jesus submitting himself to his parents (Luke 2:51), of the Son being subjected to the Father (1 Cor. 15:28), of the demons being subjected to the apostles (Luke 10:17–20), of principalities, powers and ‘all things’ to Christ (Eph. 1:21–22; 1 Pet. 3:22; 1 Cor. 15:24–27; cf. Ps. 8:6), of the spirits of the prophets to the prophets (1 Cor. 14:32), servants to masters (1 Pet. 2:18), and slaves to masters (Titus 2:9). The creation was subjected to vanity (Rom. 8:20) and sin (negatively) to the law (Rom. 8:7).

The noun is used of: women as ‘learn[ing] in silence with all submissiveness’ (1 Tim. 2:11), of children as submissive (1 Tim. 3:4), ‘obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ’ (2 Cor. 9:13), and non-yielding where the Gospel is in peril (Gal. 2:5). Also related to subjection and submission is obedience. In Titus 2:9 slaves are to be subject to their masters. In Colossians 3:22 they are to obey (vb: *hupakouo*) their masters. In this case, if we bring these two references together, subjection calls for obedience. In Hebrews 13:17 (cf. 13:7), obedience (vb: *peitharcho*) and submission (vb: *hupеiko*, ‘to yield, give way, be submissive’) are linked. In this case the church is to obey its rulers (elders?),⁷⁴ and be submitted to them. Children are to obey (*hupakouo*) their parents, Ephesians 6:1 and Colossians 3:20 (cf. Luke 2:51), and in the first case submission is directly enjoined (Eph. 5:21), whilst in the second case, the children cannot be unsubmitted if the wife is called to be submitted (Col. 3:18). In 1 Peter 3:5–6 the apostle describes ‘holy women who hoped in God’ as being submissive (vb: *hupotasso*) to their husbands, and says ‘Sarah obeyed [vb: *hupakouo*] Abraham, calling him lord’. Submission and obedience are here joined. These references referring to subjection, submission and obedience are set forth as objectively as possible to show that there is a divinely appointed order and a demanded obedience. All of this is, of course, in the context of mutual love. Certainly they must never be interpreted in a

⁷⁴ It is not at all certain that the only leaders in authority were elders. It may well be that the five gifts of Ephesians 4:11, and others like Timothy, Titus and Epaphras who could be classed as ‘apostolic delegates’, were regarded as qualified leaders. In 1 Corinthians 16:16 Paul said, ‘I urge you to be subject to such men and to every fellow worker and labourer’, which is a significant statement in regard to understanding the verb *hupotasso*.

legalistic sense, nor is subjection according to any criteria of superior–inferior relationships or personal status.⁷⁵

Before we leave this matter of hierarchy we should examine the meaning of the word and its relationship to authority. The word for priest in Greek is *hiereus*. The term *arche* is 'ruler' so that *archiereus* is chief priest or high priest. The temple is *hieron*. The term *hierarchia* had to do with temples, priests and religion. It is virtually so today in the Roman church which has two hierarchies, one of *order* and the other of *function*. The term *hierarchy*, of course, is not used, as such, in the order of the NT, where no person of the ecclesia is named as *hiereus*. All in the church constitute a *hieratuma* or 'priesthood' (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). In Greece the priest was called a hierophant and dealt with and expounded mysteries or revelations, these being known as hierophanies. This indicates that something passed down from above in a hierarchy, such as idol to priest and the priest as a hierophant passed it on down the line, probably through sub-hierophants, even it would seem, to acolytes. In Malachi 2:1–9 God speaks to the priests. The passage shows how responsible was the priest in Israel as a hierophant:

And now, O priests, this command is for you. If you will not listen, if you will not lay it to heart to give glory to my name, says the LORD of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings; indeed I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart. Behold, I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung upon your faces, the dung of your offerings, and I will put you out of my presence. So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may hold, says the LORD of hosts. My covenant with him was a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him, that he might fear; and he feared me, he stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by your instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts, and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you have not kept my ways but have shown partiality in your instruction.

There are hierarchies in the Scriptures. The sun and the moon in Genesis 1:16–18 are a hierarchy for they rule over the day and the night, and likewise Man in Genesis 1:28 is to rule the earth. The man and the woman at creation have an hierarchical order, she being derived from him so that by her creation from him he has a *prius* in the order and thus forever they fulfil what is the hierarchical order, he thus having a *prius*—i.e. that which takes precedence—and a *principium*, that which is first in time and order. Families are hierarchical throughout. Communities choose to appoint elders and hierarchy becomes active. If we receive the principle that the Father is *fons divinitatis*—i.e. that the Son is eternally generated from the Father and the Holy Spirit is ever proceeding from the Son and the Father—then the Trinity is a hierarchy. The Father has a *prius* and a *principium*. Theologians are nervous of the idea of hierarchy, especially as egalitarian and humanistic influences are pressing for theological political correctness. The community of God has never been essentially egalitarian, nor legally democratic. It requires priesthood in order to be theocratic, and this has been the case, especially since the pronouncement of Exodus 19:5–6 to the Jewish nation, and its follow-on to the NT ecclesia described in 1 Peter 2:4–10. Of course Christ is the true High Priest who makes the church theocratic.

⁷⁵ The last two paragraphs have been taken in essence from a Pastors' Study titled 'The Matter of Hierarchy—Functional and Relational' by G. Bingham (NCTM, Blackwood, 1990), pp. 6–7.

What we must be careful not to do in seeking to understand the trinitarian hierarchy is to take human hierarchy as an analogy of the Divine order, for no analogy can communicate the Father as the only wise God, the Supreme Hierophant, so to speak. General human sentiment does not much admire human hierarchies, especially those hierarchies that do not derive from love (*agape*). These are naturally not acceptable to human thinking⁷⁶ except where that thinking is selfishly pragmatic, so that it can utilise the benefits of such an order.

We must, then, define the nature of a hierarchy. To begin with the usual view is that it is a chain of those who give command to those below it in the graded order. *The Macquarie Dictionary* says:

1. any system or persons or things in a graded order, etc.
2. *Science.* a series of successive terms of different rank. The terms *phylum, class, order, family, genus* and *species* constitute a hierarchy in zoology.
3. government by ecclesiastical rulers.
4. the power or dominion of a hierarch.
5. an organised body of ecclesiastical officials in successive ranks or orders: *The Roman Catholic hierarchy*.
6. One of the three divisions of angels, each made up of three orders, conceived as constituting a graded body.
7. the collective body of angels (**celestial hierarchy**).⁷⁷

I think the text of 1 Corinthians 11:1–15 gives us the nature of hierarchy. Some contemporary scholars insist there is no hierarchy here because of the term 'head' (*kephale*) which they understand as 'source' such as a head of a river, or 'origin' as giving being to something or someone. The irregular statement—'the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God'—is supposed to show that a hierarchical order is not to be contemplated in our passage. It is surely legitimate and sensible to show it as a hierarchy of God, Christ, the man and the woman. The subject is not hierarchy but the cultural order of man and woman.

While it is acceptable to speak of 'head' as 'originator' and/or 'source', yet it is also of: (i) responsibility for the relationship the head has for the member over which it is head. Christ, for example, is not only head of the man but he is also 'head over all things' in a cosmic manner and all powers and authorities are dependent on him not only for covering, sustenance etc.; but also (ii) for the doing of the commands of that hierophant for the hierarchy has its operation in a work: in this case doing the whole will of God so that His plan—'the counsel of His will'—may be completed.

The point came up at times in Jesus' ministry when on the one hand he said, 'The Father is greater than I', and on the other hand, 'I and the Father are one'. His answer was the interdwelling of both Father and Son for this comprehended both hierarchy and relationship. In our text we must see that Christ is in God the Father and the Father is in the Son, the Son is in the man and the man in him, and the woman is in the man and the man in her. This is true hierarchy for it is relational and it is functional. There is not one

⁷⁶ I do not mean that hierarchies which proceed from love (*agape*) are necessarily acceptable to egalitarian thinking, for the very idea of hierarchy is repugnant to equalitarian reasoning. I was simply saying that perversions of true hierarchy enlarge the objections of modern humanism.

⁷⁷ *The Macquarie Dictionary*, The Macquarie Library Pty. Ltd., Macquarie University, NSW, 1992, p. 830.

whit of authoritarianism, domination or superiority–inferiority in this true hierarchy. The Father generated the Son, hence His relationship with the Son as the Son with Him, and then his relationships with man—and so on.

There is no reason to reject the principle of hierarchy because human hierarchies are often so faulty, and even cruel in their distributive domination. True hierarchy should not be an abomination to us because of the superior–inferior foolishness of others. In a hierarchy none is superior or inferior to any other. The spectre of authority makes some to mistake authority for authoritarianism, but we must settle for the functional need of law and commands within the hierarchy. We must recognise that all God's creation is the result of His creating it in love. All things are essentially of His love. Man's fallenness makes things of love to be discredited by their refusal to walk in the will of God. Being in a hierarchy gives some the opportunity to think they are superior to others, and so to be harsh with them. It is not so in God's hierarchy.

I would thus describe an hierarchy as a group of members who are functional in doing what is personally required of them by God, with His goal as theirs. All are inter-related, inter-dwelling, inter-serving, inter-honouring, mutually giving and receiving, as they proceed with the task that is theirs. None is socially above another or below another. Qualitatively all use the gifts appropriately allotted to them in the interests of love. Thus understood, we should not oppose the principle of hierarchy, but recognise how essential it is for all. This being so, we should see that in 1 Corinthians 11:1–9 there is no talk of domination, but the entire hierarchy lives and acts in love, even down to the scruples of culture.

The full understanding of hierarchy comes where there is the background of God's covenant and His gifts. It comes where we see that humanity has been created by God to do His will and be covenant-partner with Him and His beloved people in the Divine purpose—the full counsel (will) of God. We repeat some of C. K. Barrett's words from above:

There is eternally a relation of superordination and subordination between the Father and the Son. This does not however mean . . . that the Son is not of one substance with the Father, and belongs to a different order of being; it means rather that the Son, being of one substance with the Father, is differentiated from him precisely in this, that **he renders the obedience of perfect love to the perfectly loving will of the Father.**⁷⁸

In regard to 1 Corinthians 15:24–28, the words—*When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all*—tell us that God was working with the Son to enable him to subject all things to himself, after which the Son, who has been working with and for the Father, gives the Kingdom to the Father, i.e. 'he renders the obedience of perfect love to the perfectly loving will of the Father'. This is true hierarchy, for in the work of Christ there is also the work of all members of Christ to aid him in his will.

Who, then, can object to such hierarchy as this? It is the proof and manifestation of pure *agape*, pure love. It requires all hierarchies to fill all God's purposes for time and eternity.

⁷⁸ C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, A. & C. Black, London, 1973. pp. 97f.

Postscript to Studies March to December: The Apostolic Power

I have finished preparing the Ministry Studies for this year. They now form a book which is titled *The Beloved Community of God*. I have formed it into three Sections. For the first Section under the heading of 'The Community of the Word of God'—i.e. the Word of God *to, for* and *through* the Community, I have placed my three Studies from the Ministry School 2002. Then I have taken the monthly Ministry Studies from March to May under the title of 'The Battle of the Two Communities'—i.e. the Community of God, and the Community of Satan. Thirdly, I have taken the Studies from June to December under the title 'The Community Living in the World as a Witness as the Full Community of God'. All of this follows much of the material we studied last year, and from which I wrote *The Beautiful City of God* so that there has been quite a close survey of the church from its apostolic beginnings up to today.

Having finished all these Studies, I have had some time to consider the matter of Christ's Community as a whole, and I found myself growing strongly discontented. When I had somehow dealt with the usual disappointment with myself as a writer and presenter of these Studies, it struck me that my main discontent is with the present situation of the Church and the churches. I asked myself regarding them, 'Is this the apostolic power we are seeing?' I seek, these days, to avoid criticising the church because of its various failures and faults because I recognise it has had these almost from its inception at Pentecost. I am keenly aware that whatever such shortcomings and wrongdoings may have been over 2000 years, the church has accomplished much, so much indeed as to name it miraculous. I am aware that at this time the church is undergoing persecution and martyrdom throughout the world, and even more ruthless and cruel persecution is in sight. I know the church has always lived under grace.

In our era the Community of God is knowing the apostolic power as it knew it at Pentecost and the years following. I believe that Christ is ever walking amongst the golden candlesticks rebuking those whom he loves, judging and chastising those who need such treatment, and encouraging those who are obeying his word. I do not have an icon of ecclesial perfection, nor am I frustrated at the nature of the elements of ecclesial living which I see around us in this land and other parts of what once used to be called 'the West'.

What is in my mind, and what grieves me and many such as I am, is that in the life and action of the Church—i.e. the churches—of our land, there is the lack of genuine apostolic power. There is quite an amount of sincere endeavour, and no little planning and action in order to gain the attention of the human community. Even so, much of it seems to lack the power the apostles knew. Where do we see the power of the word of God, the power of the gospel—the word of the Cross, the power of his resurrection, the power of the Spirit, the power of love, unity and fellowship? Much of what we can see is explainable as natural living.

As I have spent much time in study, some of it in prayer, and have contemplated and pondered the whole matter of the people of God, one thing has struck me so forcibly. It has been that the church when living in power following its inception, had the clearly discernible marks of three virtues—those of faith, hope and love. The more one examines these, the more one is convinced that in a perfunctory kind of way all in the church acknowledge that these three virtues ought to be present, but their concern for them being largely absent is just as perfunctory. I believe that most think these virtues are present in sufficient form, quality and action. We can be very offhand about such matters, but we think we are not.

For myself I have felt very deeply the need to know more of these marks and to live strongly in them. I trust that my inner mourning is as in the beatitude, and not just human weariness as life in this world draws to its end. I have looked into the life of the church,

asking myself whether we realise the responsibility of being the Community of the Father, Son and Spirit in the age in which we live. The last century passed in an horrific way, and this century is hastening in the pace of its evil. Much as one delights in the mystery of Christ's church and her glorious future when she shall be a kingdom of priests unto God and the new creation—the new heaven and the new earth—it is the present inertia in hope which is damaging. Faith, hope and love so much depend on each other and cannot be operative when they are separated. There is either faith, hope and love as a trifold presence and action, or all these are lacking.

The other matter which has troubled me for the past few years is that the early Community was not composed of localised churches which were monadic, i.e. individualistic in notion, concerned each for its own local unit, and not much aware of other like communities scattered over continents. I think we have reason to believe that the apostles saw the areas in which they had worked to be their continuing responsibility. Where churches sprang up out of the word they proclaimed, then there were communities which had yet other churches in mind, continually. It is quite a large study to see the nature of the mobile ministries of apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers—if not pastors—and to realise that the formed churches needed them no less than the gifted ministries innate to their formation.

It seems to me that the present situation in our own churches calls for a more sensitive awareness of one another—as churches. Faith, hope and love spring from the salvation God gives us personally and by which He gathers us into His Community. Faith, hope and love naturally draw us beyond individualistic self-concern. It is true that we have—each and all of us—personal concern, but a passage like Philippians 2:1–4 teaches us to place others before ourselves and to have their interests primarily in sight. In this way the Community becomes a city set on a hill, a light of the world, salt to bring the savour of life to the bitter, disillusioned, weary and cynical. It is the true proclamation of God's love and a powerful witness to it.

Discernment is a gift to be used, but with it should also come prophetic wisdom. It is one thing to show the shortcomings of the Church at large, and of our many churches in particular, but yet be without wisdom in regard to what may be done, and indeed should be done. Others have spoken more largely than I have on the condition of the churches today, especially the churches in what we call 'the West', yet they have not always spoken prophetically into our situation. The past few years in which my heart has been involved in the ecclesial life of the Trinity and its out-flowing life and action in the communion into which it has drawn the Body of Christ, it has come to me that there are no solutions, no methodologies which can be recommended, but only that we should start where we are. We should enlarge the actions of our love, the opening of ourselves to others, the giving of ourselves to others and the receiving of them into our enlarged hearts. It goes without saying that the dynamic of such love-actions is born of God's love to us in Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of love, fellowship and unity. He causes us to forgive all things, humbly to receive forgiveness, to be kind, gentle, tender hearted, compassionate, placing others before ourselves, always having the interests of others in mind. All things of pride, conceit and selfish ambition should give way to the honouring of others, as well as giving place to them. If all of this should seem to be a pious action, a continuing 'soft' endeavour, and that more business-like actions should be undertaken, then let us consider how practical the things we have said are the fruits of faith, hope and love. They were, and are, the fruits of Christ, the harvest of the Spirit, the family manner of life received from the Father. They are the life of the Sermon on the Mount, the ways of the powerful Kingdom of God. With them go prayer to the Father, the intercession of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. They are the life of the Community and the way of its revival.

G. C. Bingham, Kingswood, 2/9/02