

## Study One: The Matter of Authority

### Introduction: The Point and Principle of Authority

The word 'authority'—along with such terms as 'ruler', 'hierarchy', 'law', 'commands'—is generally repugnant to modern ears. Perhaps it has always been repugnant to human beings who desire to be free from the leadership and lordship of others and to live their own lives in freedom from what is considered to be the domination of others. Some leaders and rulers do wrongly dominate other members of the human race, but does this misuse and abuse of authority necessarily invalidate the principle of authority? Is it possible that authority is essential to reasonable order in the affairs of humanity? If so, what is the meaning of authority?

These are some of the questions we will endeavour to answer. We will also examine the meaning and point of words quoted above which relate to authority, especially as they are linked with the idea of hierarchy. I believe that two further elements need to be examined, namely, the nature of the unique identity and destiny of each human person, especially as these two elements are set out in the Scriptures. I assert that authority, hierarchy, personal identity and personal destiny are so closely linked that examination of any one of these can only be authentic when the others are considered. I hope to show that authority—far from being a relic of a pre-egalitarian age—is a remarkable and liberating power which is essential to authentic human living and progress.

### Humans and Authority

An interesting question to ask is, 'Can there be a person who is not under authority, that is a person who can be wholly autonomous, free from any form of leadership and direction?'. The question is not merely speculative. It would be difficult to find human beings who are free of law and rulership. The Roman centurion whose servant was ill—'lying paralysed at home, in terrible distress'—said to Jesus, 'I am a man under authority' (Matt. 8:9; Luke 7:8, RSV). In fact he said, 'I also am a man under authority' (NRSV).<sup>1</sup> The 'also' is significant. The Roman officer understood Jesus to be a person who—like himself—was under authority. In essence he was saying, 'I am a man under the authority of the Roman Army and so I say to a soldier under me, "Go!", "Come!", "Do this!", "Do that!", and he does what I command. Were I to attempt to command him from myself, that is from my own authority, I could accomplish nothing. I observe that you are a man under the authority of the One who can heal my servant. If you speak from this authority then he will be healed'. We need to pause and consider whether this is not the principle by which all authority exists.

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that the *Revised Standard Version* of 1952 (Oxford University Press, London) omits the 'also' (*kai*) but the *New Revised Standard Version* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1989) includes it, as do most other translations. The text of Matthew 8:5–11 and Luke 7:1–10 yields much for the student who is researching the biblical principle of authority.

## Jesus—Wholly Under Authority and Wholly Authoritative

At this point we need to distinguish between the two principles of authority and authoritarianism. The first we understand as legitimate, as forms of authority would appear to be necessary for society to function in a useful way. The second—authoritarianism—is the use of authority to dominate others.<sup>2</sup> The first is an authority used for the sake of others; the second is the use of authority as an end in itself and as a means of dominating others.

We see that Jesus was certainly a person of authority as a person who was under the authority of God. When he finished delivering the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. chs 5–7) it was said, ‘the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes’. Here the scribes are indicted for not being authoritative in themselves, but simply being those who quoted the sayings and writings of others. In Mark 1:21–28 there is an account of Jesus casting out demons,<sup>3</sup> and the onlookers ‘were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him”’.<sup>4</sup>

### Jesus’ Authentication as One Having Authority

The matter of authority was important. One had to be authorised to do the things that John the Baptist<sup>5</sup> and Jesus said and did. In John 1:19–24 the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to test John’s authority. They also demanded of Jesus by what authority he did the things he was doing (Matt. 21:23–27; Mark 11:27–33; Luke 20:1–8). His reply was to ask them whether John the Baptist’s authorisation was from heaven or from men. This silenced the questioners, for they dared not answer one way or the other. Thus Jesus was not forced to answer their question. Even so, he was not afraid to claim that his authority was from God. He claimed he was given authority to forgive sins (Matt. 9:6; Mark 2:10) and to be Lord of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8).

In John’s Gospel it was said that the Father had delivered all things into the hands of the Son (3:35; cf. Matt. 11:27), and this included judgement (5:22–29). Jesus often indicates that he says nothing of himself, that is of his own authority (e.g. 5:30; 8:28; 14:10), but at the same time he claims that a number of things testify to him, that is, authenticate him (John 5:30–47).

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<sup>2</sup> Later we will seek to discuss the true nature of authority. Many who refuse all forms of authority leave no place for its authenticity and usefulness, insisting that authority at best is a necessary evil in a world of human depravity, and that all forms of authority are authoritarian. It may well be asked whether or not human guilt is a dynamic factor in human reaction against legitimate authority. I am assuming here that there are forms of legitimate authority, but the proof of that is yet to be given.

<sup>3</sup> It is clear that Jesus has authority in the realm of evil or unclean spirits (cf. Mark 1:22; 3:15; Luke 9:1; 10:17–19). The question as to whose authority he was under so that he could exorcise demons was taken up in Matthew 12:22–32. The Pharisees accused him of exorcising by Be-elzebul, but Jesus maintained it was by the Holy Spirit. Peter later asserted this in Acts 10:38.

<sup>4</sup> In John 7:46 the officers sent by the Pharisees to apprehend Jesus returned saying, ‘No man ever spoke like this man!’.

<sup>5</sup> The Jews required John to authenticate himself since he was speaking to the Jewish people as though it were a nation which needed to repent. He was also offering three universal elements, namely universal forgiveness of sins, universal baptism by (or, in) the Holy Spirit, and a universal kingdom, i.e. the Kingdom of God. Speaking this way he needed to have authority. In the O.T. prophets were rarely—if ever—authenticated by the ruling power. The prophet had to be the voice of God so that in the genuine ‘Thus says God’ was proper authentication. John was one of the few prophets whose coming was prophesied by other prophets. He claimed this—John 1:23 (Isa. 40:3) ‘I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, “Make straight the way of the Lord”, as the prophet Isaiah said’. Matthew quoted this (3:3) and Mark also, but Mark added Malachi 3:1 (Mark 1:2–3) and Luke further extended it (3:4–6). Jesus applied Malachi 3:1 to John—‘Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way’. All in all John the Baptist was well attested as to his authority to exhort Israel, but the innate authority of the prophet commended him to the people, if not to all the religious hierarchy.

Following the Resurrection and just prior to his Ascension Jesus said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me’ (Matt. 28:18). The apostles took up this assertion under the theme of Christ’s Lordship. In Ephesians 1:19–23 Paul speaks of:

... the immeasurable greatness of his [God’s] power ... 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 fullness of him who fills all in all.

This passage demands careful study—something we cannot do at this juncture<sup>6</sup>—but the essence of it is a cosmology (an explanatory system of creation) in which celestial creatures are said to rule the affairs of humans and nations. The risen Christ is said to be above all such powers, and as such, to rule all things. In Colossians 1:15–16 the apostle Paul says that Christ, as the Son of God, created all things, including these ‘thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities’, and so was Lord over them by virtue of his creating them. In Philippians 2:6–10 the same apostle describes the incarnation of the Son of God, and how he attained Lordship over all things as a man, and not only by virtue of his eternal Deity:

And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

That is, he won authority—as a man—by his obedience to God. By coming under Divine authority and by submitting himself to the death of the cross<sup>7</sup> he became the authority over all creatures, both heavenly and earthly, and he did this as a man.<sup>8</sup> Any person or power understanding this would have to conclude there is no other ruler or leader in all the creation—in all time and space—who is higher than Christ, given of course that such power was given to this Son by the eternal Father (cf. John 3:35; Matt. 11:27; 28:18; Eph. 1:20–22; Phil. 2:9–10; etc.). I Corinthians 15:24–28 depicts the ascended and enthroned Christ as presently putting down all the enemies of God and humankind, and being—at the same time—assisted by the Father. Certainly all rebellious elements will finally be subdued.

### A Conclusion as to Jesus Having Great Authority

We conclude, then, that Jesus—beyond all others—was and is a person of authority. He should serve then as a paradigm for other humans in the matter of sub-mission to God and the exercise of authentic authority. It is through him we should be able to understand the principles of submission and authority.

The Gospels portray him as wholly submitted to God his Father. In John’s Gospel he said some forty times that the Father had sent him, and we conclude that he wished to do the

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<sup>6</sup> When we ask, ‘What is the meaning of “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” ’?, then we are in the midst of a cosmic system. This sounds strange to modern ears which are not accustomed to thinking of a vast course of angelic powers—both good and evil—which are said in Scripture to control the persons, nations and their destinies. We will deal to some extent with this system in later sections, but see my *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 1989), *What’s All This About Angels?* (NCPI, 1982) and relevant articles in Bible and Theological Dictionaries.

<sup>7</sup> The Philippian passage does not explain how the man Jesus became head over all things through the death of the Cross. Briefly it was because Jesus fought evil celestial powers in his death, and by his moral power gained supremacy over them, as is set out in Hebrews 2:14–15 and Colossians 2:14–15. His resurrection represented victory over death.

<sup>8</sup> We give emphasis to his humanity since by his pre-incarnate deity and his creational work he was already Lord over all. A new thing had happened in history. Doubtless this was connected with the prophecy of Daniel 7 and in particular verses 13ff., where the one ‘like a son of man’ is given authority over all nations. The marvel in the NT was that Jesus the man was called ‘Lord’.

Father's will.<sup>9</sup> Because he was under the authority of the Father he was a person of authority. Even so, it was not just the relationship of a person to his—or her—master, but of the Son being glad to do the Father's will (cf. John 5:17–20; Rom. 8:14). That is, in a situation of filial–paternal love, obedience and authority have their true operation.

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<sup>9</sup> This is particularly to be so in John's Gospel. It is his food and drink to do the Father's will (John 4:34; cf. 5:30; 6:38). Paul spoke of him being obedient unto death (Phil. 2:8) and the writer of Hebrews (in quoting Psalm 40:8) showed that Jesus delighted to do the Father's will. This was also the case at the time of intercession in Gethsemane—'Father . . . not my will, but thine, be done'.

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## Study Two: The General Basis of Authority—I

### The Biblical Meaning of the Word 'Authority'

P. T. Forsyth in his great work *The Principle of Authority*<sup>10</sup> said, 'The great question is not really as to the seat of authority, but as to its nature'.

### The Biblical Meaning of the Word 'Authority'

The dictionary meanings include the ideas of 'power or right to enforce obedience; moral or legal supremacy; the right to command or give an ultimate decision; power to influence the conduct and actions of others; personal or practical influence; power over the opinions of others'. Derived from the Latin *auctoritas*, it can be linked with the word 'author' from the same root—*auctor*. Certainly one who authors or originates an idea or thing has authority in regard to it. For example, in Acts 3:15 Jesus was called 'the Author of life', and the verse implies his enemies did not have the authority to kill him.

The New Testament term for 'authority' is *exousia*, which carries the ideas of 'authority, jurisdiction, liberty, power, right and strength'. It also is extended to mean 'office', 'office-bearer', 'ruler' and—in the plural —'authorities', sometimes referring to angelic authorities and sometimes to earthly authorities. *Exousia* derives from the verb *exestin*, which has the ideas of 'to be free, unimpeded' and 'to have the right or permission', so that linked with *exousia* is the idea of having the freedom to do all within the right, as also the power to effect that right. In the Old Testament the term 'authority' is used in Proverbs 29:2 and Esther 9:29, but other words used—such as 'power'—could be rightly translated 'authority' (Num. 14:17; Job 26:12; Ps. 147:5; Isa. 50:2; Dan. 8:22). In the New Testament the terms 'authority' (*exousia*) and 'power' (*dunamis*) are linked but are not wholly synonymous, since the first is in respect to the right to rule and the second relates to the power or ability to accomplish something.

G. W. Bromiley in his article 'Authority' in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* speaks of the use of *exousia* in the LXX:

However, the LXX also made a distinctive application of the term, which from the standpoint of biblical and theological development was of almost incalculable significance. It found in *exousia* the most suitable term to express the sovereignty of God (His complete freedom from all restraints) as distinct from His might or power. The Greek word thus acquired a new sense in which it came to stand not for authorization but for the absolute divine freedom that is also the source of all authorization. Even the regular meanings, then, were brought in the last analysis into a new theological relation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority in Relation to Certainty, Sanctity and Society*, Independent Press, London, 1952, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 'Authority', *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedea*, vol. 1, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 365.

## Authority Begins With God

So much, then, for the uses of the word ‘authority’, but what of the fact and concept of authority? Is it an outdated and outmoded idea, and inapplicable to life today? Certainly the biblical view and the present egalitarian view are at odds. Forsyth’s assertion was, ‘As soon as the problem of authority lifts its head, all others fall to the rear . . . the principle of authority is ultimately the whole religious question’. He also said, ‘God is his own authority for the religious, and therefore the last for the human race; and He is the only Authority man has in the end’. H. D. McDonald in his article in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* observes:

Throughout Scripture God remains forever the object of man’s authority, not the subject of man’s contemplation. The *a priori* in man is the capacity for owning God’s authority. To say that God is the ultimate authority in the realms of morals and faith is to be committed to the conclusion, which Augustine saw so clearly, that God’s authority and God’s self-disclosure are two sides of the same reality. It is in His revelation that God’s authority is to be found: revelation is, therefore, the key to ultimate authority . . . In revelation God is seen as moral and redemptive, disclosing His authority. God’s revelation is demanding, urgent, and authoritative. God’s universal dominion over the world is His authority (cf. Exod 15:18; Pss 39:10; 93:1f.; etc.). As Lord and King of all nature and history, God has the unchangeable right to exercise authority over mankind. The Bible makes clear His sovereign right to demand obedience, and to Him all are held responsible and accountable.<sup>12</sup>

Not all agree with this sort of reasoning. There is an extra-biblical reasoning based upon present anthropological disciplines. It is reasoned on a new hermeneutic that the kind of reasoning which existed in Israel and even in the early church is no longer relevant or applicable to today’s situation. Sociological research—it is averred—has shown us that patriarchal analogy has been applied in times past in order to understand God, and it has resulted in a caricature of Him. The new equalitarian spirit has outmoded the former type of reasoning. Also, it is said, so-called ‘revelation’ can form no basis for modern thinking. Such a claim to dependable revelation is the brainchild of a certain school of theologians and is not valid.

## Are Biblical Authorities Outmoded?

This of course raises the whole question of why our present and past authorities, such as the Scriptures, the Church and tradition, are no longer considered valid? To speak of God, of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit being authoritative must be qualified, say these critics. Some might claim that subjective criteria and critical reasoning are the only authority we possess—if indeed we have a right to use the term ‘authority’ in regard to them. What most scholars would concede is that the Scriptures are a unity, an entity containing its own integrated system of truth. What many may not concede is that this system is a dependable authority. Modern research—they say—has outmoded the Bible as a useful resource for faith and practice, even though it has many valuable insights and much useful wisdom.

It has been observed by many that today’s theology is often today’s anthropology, that is we are anthropological in our studies and not Theocentric, Christo-centric and Pneumatocentric. For our purposes we will proceed with the principle in mind that the Scriptures are not outmoded, are not outpaced, surpassed or made redundant by some contemporary thinking. As Kierkegaard once said of St Paul, ‘I am not obliged to obey Paul

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<sup>12</sup> H. D. McDonald, ‘Authority’, in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1977, vol. 1, p. 420.



because he is clever, or exceptionally clever, but I must submit to Paul because he has divine authority'. For many this puts Kierkegaard also in the discard basket! What is to be questioned is the basic authority in which the new hermeneutic is based, and the value of autonomous human thinking—most of which is itself humanistic, that is, proceeds from the claim that man is authoritative within himself.<sup>13</sup>

### **Is the System of Authority Simply Necessitated by the Fall?**

Certain biblical scholars would acknowledge the fact of a *system* of authority in Scripture, but explain its existence as being necessitated by the fall of Man, and perhaps also by the celestial rebellion. Authority—according to them—is to hold together in some order these rebellious elements. No matter what revolutions take place in nations, the new leaders soon assume forms of hierarchy and government. In this sense, then, authority is not ontological but provisional—a necessity by nature of the case. We should enquire then (say the scholars) beyond the provisional to discover the ontological, and in all probability we will find an equalitarian structure of love in which there is no authority such as we understand it, since all present authority forms derive not from creation but from the Fall.

This is a large claim. It is saying that the celestial order—which is undoubtedly hierarchical—has originated from the fall of angels and of men. It assumes that the Godhead is equalitarian without functional hierarchy, or if there is functional hierarchy—as against hierarchy of nature—it is simply provisional. This has serious implications for the creation itself, for authority existed prior to the creation of Man. Genesis 1:14–18 gives an account of the creation of the sun, moon and stars in their order of rule:<sup>14</sup>

And God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth'. And it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

Undoubtedly the order (or orders) of authority does seek to hold in and control the disorder caused by human and celestial rebellion, but that does not mean this was the original purpose and ontological function of authority. The innate nature of authority may well be indicated in our quote from Genesis (above). That is, authority is intended to be functional within a functional creation. In the statement, 'And God saw everything that he had made, and behold,

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<sup>13</sup> It seems to me that many theologians who dispute the validity of the canon of Scripture, or Scripture itself, seem nevertheless to retain a 'canon within the canon', i.e. a deposit of ideas and theology which they have derived from the Scripture and which act as criteria in their minds for judging the authenticity of the theological thinking of others. Wherever ideas are agreeable to their criteria they are acceptable. Humanism is really a heresy of the Christian gospel, and—like all heresies—is curiously fundamentalistic in its ethos. It may be said, then, that liberal critics of the Scriptures judge its text and its ideas by their own hidden criteria originally obtained from them. One suspects that certain hermeneutics are not always consciously honest. Even so, the validity of what others say is constantly judged by the innate fundamentalism of the critical minds!

<sup>14</sup> Of course it could be argued that the language of Genesis is derived by the writer from a system that is authoritarian, and that he imposes this concept of authority upon the creation. However, there is no indication in the text that these orders are necessitated by some confusion or disorder. Indeed, the passage conducts us to a valuable understanding of 'ruling'. 'To rule' here is 'to serve, to effect something useful', reminding us of Paul's dictum (I Cor. 14:32–33), 'God is not a God of confusion but of peace', and we note the interesting context, i.e. 'The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets'. Psalm 148:5–6 and Jeremiah 31:35–36 refer to a 'fixed order' of creation, and this would seem to refer not to a provisional but an ontological order of creation.

it was very good', 'very good' refers not primarily to morality but to functionality. Authority seems to have its place in that.

## The Centrality of Authority to All Theological Reasoning

J. H. Elias in his article 'Authority' tackles the question put by the new theologians—'Can the Scriptures be a valid basis for theology? He says:

A factor common to all classical theological standpoints is that God himself is the *principium essendi* or first cause of theology, as of everything else. He is the foundation which underlies all theological activity; he is its beginning and its end. Similar agreement is evidenced in acceptance of the axiom that revelation is the only cognitive source of theology. Differences emerge when attempts are made to determine the *principium cognoscendi*—the place or locus of revelation . . . The revealed truth accessible by virtue of the source or sources of revelation constitutes the supreme authority in theology. Disagreement concerning sources makes it virtually impossible to agree concerning the corpus of truth and the ensuing doctrinal formulations.<sup>15</sup>

Elias also quotes P. T. Forsyth: 'As soon as the problem of authority lifts its head, all others fall to the rear . . . and the principle of authority is ultimately the whole religious question'. In our next chapter, then, we will seek to trace the biblical system of authority and authorities as it is set forth. Following this we will seek to understand more of the nature of authority.

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<sup>15</sup> J. E. Elias, 'Authority', in *New Dictionary of Theology*, eds Sinclair B. Ferguson & David F. Wright, IVP, Leicester, 1988, pp. 64–65.



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## Study Three: The General Basis of Authority—II

### The Nature of God's Authority

We suppose it is axiomatic that the Creator of the universe should rule over what He has created, especially since He continues to sustain it. Certainly the Scriptures give that status to God. The whole matter of God as King, and the Kingdom of God, establishes the principle of His authority. The ascribing of both power (*dunamis*) and authority (*exousia*) to God in Old and New Testaments is appropriate.<sup>16</sup> David's ascription to God reminds us of that in Jude and of the celestial powers (authorities) in the Book of the Revelation:

Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come from thee, and thou rulest over all. In thy hand are power and might; and in thy hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.

In the same ethos is Psalm 29. It opens with David enjoining the heavenly beings to worship:

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.  
Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;  
worship the LORD in holy array . . .  
The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;  
the LORD sits enthroned as king for ever.

Jude has it:

. . . to the only God, our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen.

Time and again in the Book of the Revelation we have worship of God for various reasons. The worshippers are anxious that the true nature of God be known (4:11):

Worthy art thou, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honour and power,  
for thou didst create all things,  
and by thy will they existed and were created.

Again, in 11:17 the twenty-four elders say:

We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty,  
who art and who wast,  
that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign.

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<sup>16</sup> In the O.T. (LXX) the use of *dunamis* is some 400 times and the use of *exousia* about 50. *Dunamis* is often ascribed to God and is almost the equivalent of *exousia*, but—as we have observed previously—*exousia* refers to God's freedom to act as He wills, and is the equivalent term for His sovereignty.

In 15:3 the conquerors of the beast sing:

“Great and wonderful are thy deeds,  
O Lord God the Almighty!  
Just and true are thy ways,  
O King of the ages!”

The simple statement of Exodus 15:18, ‘The Lord will reign for ever and ever’, is based on the fact that God is ‘a faithful Creator’ (I Pet. 4:19), and that:

It is he who made the earth by his power,  
who established the world by his wisdom,  
and by his understanding stretched out the heavens  
(Jer. 10:12; 51:15).

Being Creator must mean His entire creation must be wholly contingent upon Him. Being created in His image, which is moral, His creatures have the right to make their own choices, since this is what He does, but those choices cannot be authentic ones when they go against Him. An example of this contrary action is found in the story of Nebuchadnezzar, in Daniel chapter 4. After his obsessive pride in himself and the madness that arose from it, Nebuchadnezzar was rehabilitated as a man by God, and was pleased to testify to God:

At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured him who lives for ever;  
for his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;  
all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing;  
and he does according to his will in the host of heaven  
and among the inhabitants of the earth;  
and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What doest thou?’.

### **God’s Throne—that is, His Kingdom—Shows His Authority**

The theme of God’s Kingdom is a vast one in Scripture and unmistakable even to the casual reader.<sup>17</sup> We need to collate something of the various references to the throne in Scripture, recognising that the word ‘throne’ is a synonym for ‘kingdom’ or ‘rule’ or ‘authority’.

#### **The Throne of God**

- (a) The throne of God is in the heavens (Ps. 11:4; 103:19), and the earth is therefore God’s footstool. He is King over all the earth (Ps. 47:2; cf. Zech. 14:9). Both are linked in Isaiah 66:1.
- (b) It is a throne *from* eternity (Ps. 93:2).
- (c) It is a throne *to* all eternity (Lam. 5:19).
- (d) It is founded on righteousness, justice, steadfast love and faithfulness (Ps. 9:4; 89:14; 97:2).
- (e) God’s throne is the place of action (I Kings 22:19; Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 1:22–28; Dan. 7:9–10; cf. Job 1:6; 2:1).

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<sup>17</sup> Here I would cite my *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 1989), but articles in theological and Bible dictionaries give sufficient coverage to convince us that He is the All-Supreme One.

- (f) It is a throne surrounded by the four living creatures, elders and angelic creatures, so that praise and worship are incessant in the presence of God (Rev. 4:2ff.).
- (g) Although it is in heaven (Isa. 66:1), yet God is ‘enthroned on the cherubim’ (I Sam. 4:4), which is the same as being ‘enthroned on the praises of Israel’ (Ps. 22:3).
- (h) Ultimately it will be seen in the Holy City, the river of life issuing from it (Rev. 22:1f.; Ezek. 47:1ff.). In Ezekiel 43:7 it is in the new temple. In Revelation 21:22 the new temple is God and the Lamb, yet the throne, being in the Holy City, is also in the temple of God, that is, in God Himself. Note that in Isaiah 6:1 the throne is seen in the temple.
- (i) In the Messianic age ‘Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord’ (Jer. 3:17; cf. Ezek. 43:7). Israel’s throne was really God’s (I Chron. 28:5, ‘the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel’).
- (j) God’s throne will always be ‘the throne of grace’ (Heb. 4:16), that is, from it will flow the river of life to the needy. Ultimately it will prove to be the place of rewards (Matt. 25:31–40).
- (k) By contrast, God’s throne will be the place of judgment, where punishment will be meted out to the unrighteous (Dan. 7:9–22; Matt. 25:31, 41–46; I Cor. 15:24–28; Rev. 20:11–15).
- (l) Generally known as the throne of God, it also becomes known as ‘the throne of God and of the Lamb’ (Rev. 22:1) and so as ‘the throne of Christ’, or ‘his [Christ’s] glorious throne’ (Matt. 19:28; 25:31; 26:64). There are many references to Christ’s throne, such as those linked with the Kingdom of God (Eph. 5:5; Rev. 11:15), and Psalm 110:1—‘Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool’ (see Acts 2:34f.; I Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; etc.).

### **The Throne in the Book of the Revelation**

It is worth looking at the throne of God in particular as it is found in the Book of the Revelation, although we have mentioned it above in reference to the total biblical view of the throne.

- (a) God is seated on the throne, that is, He reigns and rules (4:2, 9; 5:13; 6:16; 7:10; 7:15; 19:4; 20:11; 21:5; cf. 22:1, 3), appearing in beautiful colours (4:3). The rainbow is around the throne—a sign of peace and of covenant, and also very beautiful.
- (b) The throne has on its four sides the four living creatures, symbolising the things they are and do, representing four great elements of creation—the lion-like, ox-like, eagle-like and man-like elements. These living creatures initiate worship.
- (c) The twenty-four elders of all creation have authority and surround the throne with it, delighted to worship incessantly (4:10; 5:11).
- (d) Before the throne is the glass-like sea—pure and serene, speaking peace (4:6)—and it is mingled with fire (15:2); and also the seven spirits (the Sevenfold Spirit), who burn as torches and disseminate grace and peace along with the Father and the Son (1:4). The golden altar of incense is before the throne (8:3–4) as an agent of worship.
- (e) The throne is ever actional: from it issue ‘flashes of lightning, and voices and peals of

thunder' (4:5; 8:5; 11:19), that is, actions of judgment. In 16:17 a loud voice 'came out of the temple, from the throne', and in 16:1 a loud voice comes from the temple, so that temple and throne are closely linked.

- (f) The Lamb has much to do with the throne. In 5:1 he is seated at the right hand of God the Father. In 5:6 he is standing 'between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders'. He holds this place in 7:9–10. In 2:26–28 the Lamb is given the place of authority, which in 3:21 is both the Father's throne and 'my throne', that is, the throne of the Lamb. In 5:8–14 worship is given at the throne to both God and the Lamb. In 6:16 God is the One who sits on the throne, and the Lamb, in wrath, is linked with Him, as also in 7:10 and 7:17, where the Lamb is 'in the midst of the throne'. In 12:5 the child born of the woman is caught up to the throne of God, and he is to rule the nations. In 20:4 the martyrs reign with Christ, which must mean he is seated on a throne, and they on thrones, as perhaps, in Daniel 7:9, where God is on His throne and the saints also are on theirs. In 22:1 and 3 the throne is called 'the throne of God and of the Lamb'. Virtually, then, all that the Lamb does in regard to the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls issues from the throne.
- (g) In 22:1 the river of life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb, whereas in Ezekiel 47:1 the water was flowing 'from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar', which tends to identify the throne with the temple, and then the altar with the throne.

### **The Throne of the Kingdom of Evil**

We need to look at the 'counter-kingdom' in order to be able to understand why it is not apparent that God 'has the whole wide world in His hand'!

- (a) This throne is spoken of as Satan's throne (Rev. 2:13), and it is in this world, at the centre of human living, having a specified locality or localities (cf. Rev. 2:9, 10, 24; 3:9), being linked with 'the synagogue of Satan', which is possibly an anti-Christian Jewish synagogue practising 'the deep things of Satan', as against 'the deep things of God' (I Cor. 2:10, AV). It is suggested that Pergamum was the locale for Satanic headquarters of the East, as Rome was for the West, in that emperor worship and other pagan idol worship was intense and rife.
- (b) Just as the Kingdom of God has its throne of God and of the Lamb, so the Kingdom of darkness has its throne (Rev. 16:10; cf. Luke 11:18) which is called 'Satan's throne' (Rev. 2:13) and 'the throne of the beast' (Rev. 13:2; 16:10).
- (c) Satan claimed to have authority over the nations (Luke 4:6), and in Revelation 13:7 the beast is allowed to make war against the saints and have authority over the nations for a specified period of time (cf. Dan. 7:21). History is really the action—and account—of 'the clash of the kingdoms' as the dragon and his cohorts endeavour to subjugate man and the nations to the throne of darkness, and as God opposes Satan, finally destroying him and his powers.

### **The Necessity of Knowing the Two Thrones**

If we had collated only the matter of God's throne—His sovereignty—and ignored the fact that it is a sovereignty that has been challenged, then we would be omitting the conflict of two kingdoms as they oppose one another. We need to be realistic about this biblical view—

asking ourselves as to which kingdom we belong, and as to the future of both these kingdoms.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, our whole view of authority must be greatly determined by the specific kingdom of which we are members. If we do not believe there are two such kingdoms, then our view of authority will differ from the biblical one.<sup>19</sup>

### Conclusion as to the Nature of God's Authority

To this point we have tried to cover, generally, the biblical view of the authority of the one called 'God'. In particular we have not sought to deal with the Triune nature of the Godhead, and so we have not spoken of the authority-roles of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is also a fact that we have not sought to understand the metaphysical nature of authority—something the Scriptures do not attempt to do.

In our next study we will try to cover the biblical statements regarding authority within creation, that is, those powers or authorities called 'celestial' (heavenly), and those called 'terrestrial' (earthly).

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<sup>18</sup> Religions and some philosophies try to take into consideration the fact of 'good' and 'evil'. No such abstractions exist as *good* and *evil*, but certainly personal *good* and *evil* do seem to exist, i.e. 'God is good', 'There is none good but God', 'If you, being *evil*, know how to give *good* gifts to your children . . .' are statements which warn us against considering *good* and *evil* in the abstract. Literature in the forms of poetry, prose, forms of fiction, drama, etc. takes up the themes of good and evil, but is forced to express its *personal* nature. It seems vital to readers and viewers that *good* should triumph over the *evil*. Rarely do we find a person who allies himself or herself with *evil*.

<sup>19</sup> We must keep in mind the fact that many readers of the Scriptures do not take them for 'gospel truth', but rather as a source-book, in which case they do not feel they should acknowledge the 'system' of authority which is there, but if honest they will acknowledge that the idea of the two kingdoms is certainly found in the text of Scripture.

NCTM. Thursday a.m. Class. 3rd Term 24/8/95. 'Authority : Divine, Celestial, Human'. G. Bingham

## Study Four: The General Basis of Authority—III

### The Nature of Creational Authority

By 'the creation' we mean the heavens and the earth, and the inhabitants of both, especially those which are rational. It would seem best to commence with the heavenly creatures, and work down to humanity. It is true enough that eventually 'we are to judge angels', but this does not as yet obtain. What we must keep in mind is that creatures, heavenly and human, are all part of one functional and relational structure. We should not separate the two systems, isolating one from another. Psalms 34:7; 91:11; 103:20–21 and other Scriptures tell us that angels serve both God and humans.

### The Celestials and Authority

In I Peter 3:21–22 the writer speaks of 'Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him'. Ephesians 1:20ff. speaks of the power of God that worked 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.

I Corinthians 15:24–25 speaks in similar terms:

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.

We are faced, then, with those creatures called 'rulers', 'authorities', 'powers' and 'dominions', since the plural of these terms is used elsewhere (cf. Rom. 8:38; Eph. 3:10; 6:12).<sup>20</sup> What are such creatures?<sup>21</sup> It is not easy to define them. In the Book of the Revelation we have something like the following orders: The Four Creatures, The Twenty-Four Elders and The Angels.

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<sup>20</sup> We might as well note here that these creatures are thought to be mythical and fantastic by some scholars; that is, that they do not have factual, literal existence as personal beings, but that they are humanly devised terms for forces which seem to exist, and to rationalise events and happenings which have no other explanation. Even secular writers talk of forces which are demonic, although they often prefer to use the word 'daemonic' which seems to impersonalise these forces. Hitler's terrible actions can be described thus as daemonic; that is, they did not originate directly from him, but he was impelled by forces beyond his control. The adjective 'psychic' is sometimes used to describe such forces. It is certain, of course, that the upheavals within the human mind and person can be as terrible—if not more terrible—than that which is demonic, hence it is simple to identify the two as the one.

<sup>21</sup> For a fuller treatment see my *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 1989) or articles in theological dictionaries.

### The Four Living Creatures

The four living creatures seem to be greater than the twenty-four elders. If they are the same as the four living creatures in Ezekiel 1:4–14, then they are dynamic, expressive of the glory of God in its active forms, and have powers of rapid movement, as they have six wings. They also appear to know the will of God—being ‘full of eyes in front and behind’ (Rev. 4:6, RSV)—and to act in accordance with it. It seems they are the initiators of celestial worship. They are also connected with the movement of history, since in Revelation chapter 6 they direct the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. It may also be that the voices which come from the throne mainly belong to them.

### The Twenty-Four Elders

The twenty-four elders of the Revelation are thought by some to be human beings translated into this class of authority, representing the twelve tribes of Israel and the other nations, as twelve is a number of special use in the Book. Most scholars think they are celestial creatures, especially as they are in the proximity of the throne. Their golden crowns certainly speak of high authority, and this they are prepared to submit to God when they worship, ‘casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea’. They act in the initiative of the living creatures when it comes to worship (Rev. 4:9f.), but perhaps also on their own initiative. They also collect the prayers of the saints, and one of the elders is commentator of certain events to John the Seer. In Isaiah 24:23 the one reference to what might be celestial elders is made: ‘and before his elders he will manifest his glory’.<sup>22</sup> If these elders constitute, or are part of, the council of God, then they are indeed important creatures.

### The Angels

The angels constitute a vast subject.<sup>23</sup> It is difficult to delineate hierarchies of these. We are told they were present at creation and rejoiced in it (Job 38:7). Our intention here is not to cover the whole subject and range of angelology, but to show that angels have certain vocations. The following points may be helpful:

- (a) There are seven angels designated who stand before God (Rev. 8:2), and to whom seven trumpets are given by which certain judgments are made in creation. There are also the seven angels of the seven churches, but they are not explained as such (Rev. 1:20; 2:1). Their ministries are many.
- (b) *There is at least one archangel*—Michael—who appears to be the angel of resurrection (Jude 9; Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1–3; Rev. 12:7). It may be he who blows the trumpet (I Cor. 15:52; I Thess. 4:16), especially if there is only one archangel. However, some see Gabriel as an archangel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26). ‘I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God’ may mean he was one of the seven angels, the special ‘angel of the Lord’. In inter-testamental Jewish literature he is named as one of four archangels. An archangel, of course, is head over, and leads a course of, angels. Some see three courses of angels, with Michael, Gabriel and Lucifer as leaders of these hierarchies.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> It is surmised by some that the elders are members of the council of God, an assembly (*edah*) referred to in Job 15:8; Psalm 82; Jeremiah 23:18, 22; 49:7, the latter reference suggesting that one learns wisdom in that council.

<sup>23</sup> See articles in theological dictionaries and in H. Heppes’s *Reformed Dogmatics* (Allen and Unwin, London, 1950, pp. 201–219). There is an extensive treatment in Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1960, vol. 3, pt 3, pp. 369–418). See also my monograph *What’s All This About Angels?* (NCPI, 1982).

<sup>24</sup> This is deduced from the statement in Revelation 12:4 that the dragon drew down a third of the stars of heaven, i.e. a third of the angels. It has been supposed that he drew after him his whole course of angels.



- (c) There is *the* angel of the Lord and—it would seem—simply angels of the Lord (cf. Acts 8:26, ‘an angel of the Lord’) through whom God acts. Often when it is said that God—in a theophany—did certain things it was really the angel of the Lord doing them (cf. Gen. 16:7ff.; 21:17ff.; 22:11; 31:11; Exod. 3:1ff.; etc.). His ministry is significant in both the Old and New Testaments. Some see him as a theophany, some as the Son and some as God Himself.
- (d) *The number of angels is many*—‘myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands’ (Rev. 5:11).
- (e) *The tasks and ministries of angels* are many. In the Old Testament they are messengers sent to announce the purposes of God; sometimes they come to destroy the people of God who are rebellious, or destroy invading armies against Israel; to meet and speak with persons such as Abraham, Jacob and Balaam; to act as guardians of some of the saints, comforting prophets such as Daniel. In the New Testament they appear in the Gospels to persons such as Mary, Zechariah and Joseph, whilst in the Acts they appear in order to guide and assist the church. In the Book of the Revelation, the revelation of the Revelation is sent by an angel to John (1:1); the angels are messengers or leaders of the seven churches; angels cry and proclaim, warn and awake by the use of trumpets; hold back the winds of the earth; present the prayers of mankind to God; etc.
- (f) *The communications of angels*—especially to the human race—are varied, and angels often communicate to all creation. This is behind the ‘loud voice’ used of angels in the Revelation. In one case the voice is like that of a roaring lion (10:3). There are glorious angels; strong angels; mighty angels; angels of winds and of waters; and at least one angel who takes part in the final harvest and is part of the witness to God and His Christ.
- (g) *There are rebellious angels*. In Job 4:18 God charges His angels with folly, that is, error, according to Eliphaz the Temanite.<sup>25</sup> II Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 speak of rebellious angels, and the latter reference says they did not keep their position, which we may understand to mean they did not carry out the task allotted to them. If we understand the terms used above of rulers, powers, authorities and principalities, then we must understand them as rulership, authority and responsibility given to angelic creatures. Jesus spoke of his return in glory with angels (Matt. 25:31), showing that obedient, loyal angels will be present at the final victory; but in Matthew 25:41 he spoke of the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; and in Revelation 20 the devil will be cast into the lake of fire, and doubtless his cohorts of angels with him.
- (h) In Revelation 12:7–9 there is an account of the battle of Michael with the red dragon (Satan), and the casting down of him from heaven. This is much the same as the vision of Christ in Luke 10:18—‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven’. Evil angelic powers—such as relate to the dragon, the beast, the second beast (the false prophet)—are shown in Scripture to be about winning and subduing the nations. A study of Genesis 28:12ff.; 49:10; Psalm 2; Daniel 10:10—11:1; and John 1:51 (cf. Rom. 13:1ff.) will show that many of the angelic powers have been assigned to be creatures linked with the government, the rise and fall, the vocation and destiny, of many nations. It is important we understand the hierarchical structure of the celestial creatures. Evil angels

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<sup>25</sup> Often we are uncertain as to accepting the statement of Job’s counsellors (so-called), since God later rebukes them for what they have said. The same Eliphaz later says (15:15), ‘Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones, and the heavens are not clean in his sight’.

are seeking to manipulate nations,<sup>26</sup> and to oppose the people—the Kingdom—of God. Ultimately rebellious angels will be destroyed. At the moment principalities and powers—probably both good and evil ones—are seeking to know the outworking of the plan of God which is revealed through His working through His church (Eph. 3:10).

### A Conclusion as to Angels

So much (or, so little), then, for the matter of angels in heaven and on earth. The things we note are (i) there appears to be a definite angelic hierarchy, but then this is functional, strategic to the fulfilment of the plan of God, (ii) such an angelic host is no mere thing. In fact it is mind-boggling and heart-stimulating. If John the Seer—being a true Jew and Christian—could twice try to worship an angel (Rev. 19:10; 22:8–9; cf. Col. 2:18), then we are shown how attractive, glorious and wonderful these creatures must be.

For us who walk by faith and not by sight, not to see this other world of celestial creatures means we can pass by a whole powerful system of celestial beings of whose aid we constantly stand in need, and whose actions help to decide the destiny—and otherwise—of many nations. Their existence is awesome and affects us to the roots of our being. In our study of angels we have tended to try to grasp the facts, and have perhaps missed the rich reality of their being. Just as we can take the fact of the existence of the Triune Godhead for granted and fail to see the wonder and significance of the same for us, so we can fail to understand the mystery of the angels. This will account for the contempt we often have for authorities—a matter of which Jude speaks in his Letter (v. 8): ‘Yet in like manner these men in their dreamings defile the flesh, *reject authority, and revile the glorious ones*’ (emphasis mine). Such is the state of mind we see so much in regard to all authorities, in spite of the words of Paul:

For there is no authority except from God and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement (Rom. 13:1–2).

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<sup>26</sup> Of course good angels seek to aid the nations, bringing them to the appointed hour when such nations will bring their glory into the eternal and celestial Holy City (cf. Rev. 21:22–27).

## Study Five: Adoration of the Divine Authority

### Knowing the Fact of Authority

So much Christian writing, so much theological exposition has to be in the vein of *apologia*.<sup>27</sup> *Apologia* is often a form of plea, an attempt to show the reasonableness of the gospel, when—as Paul said (I Cor. 1:23)—the gospel is an offence or scandal (*skandalon*) to the Jew (that is, the religious person) and foolishness to the (intellectual) Gentiles. Human beings will listen to what they like, and what they like is determined by so many factors and by so much hidden agenda. Any person who speaks the gospel will know he is up against the in-built opposition of fallen human beings,<sup>28</sup> and that such beings will rationalise their opposition as natural and correct.

When it comes to the matter and subject of authority, it appears that fallen human beings may not see the wood for the trees when it comes to reasoning the theme. Authority can be a theme dealt with in the abstract, when the acceptance of authority must be the acceptance of God Himself. It is not simply that God is *the* authority and Man must accept that—come wind, come weather—but that the Being of God is so ineffable and so glorious that all objections to knowing authority must be objections to knowing God.

This sort of reasoning must not be seen merely as a *bon mot*, an attempt to force people into accepting authority on this high ground claimed for it, but rather that true theology issues out of genuine humility, without which God cannot be known and with which He then becomes the object of our adoration and worship. It has often been said that true theology is doxological: God is known in praise and worship rather than through meticulously reasoned argument. One hymn writer has it, 'How good is the God we adore'. In adoration we know Him and agree that He is *good*. It needs to be pointed out—as I seem to do endlessly—that knowing God is a relational thing, that true knowledge is in union with God. Only as He indwells us, and we Him, can we possibly understand matters such as authority. However valuable *apologia* may be in seeking to convince people of the essential reality of the truth, truth must ultimately be seen as God Himself.

### The In-built Difficulty of Understanding Authority

We have already said in this book that the idea of revelation is rejected by many who do not see it as a valid approach to the truth. It seems to them to be cheating in claiming that 'the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit', and that it is unfair to say a person must be born again before he can see the Kingdom of God. 'Why should not all truth be present and apparent to our reasoning?' they ask, and in one sense their argument is reasonable. However,

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<sup>27</sup> *Apologia* is 'the reasoned defence of' a particular claim. This is how Paul uses the word in Philippians 1:7, where he speaks of being in the work of 'the defence [*apologia*] and confirmation [*bebaiousei*] of the gospel'. Sometimes the discipline or practice of apologetics seems to be a plea for the truth to be accepted, and often modern apologetics sound more like an apology for the gospel, and this is not the true nature of the gospel, which is in fact a proclamation—an exhortation to be listened to and obeyed!

<sup>28</sup> By this we do not mean that readers or hearers of what we say do not have the ability to hear reasoned exposition, and are unable to follow an argument. They can, but they lack what Jesus called 'an ear to hear'.

*revelation* (*apokalypsis*) has to be with *mystery* (*musterion*), the first being an unveiling and the second something quite clear to the initiated but wholly unintelligible to the uninitiated. Many who listened to Christ comprehended the individual words—the *ipsissima verba*—but not the reality he taught. This is a wide subject—this refusal to hear and accede to what a person says. Communication is not something which can be forced upon hearers who really do not hear. Whilst some may merely need time to absorb what they are hearing, and so time to understand and respond, others are so set against hearing certain things that they refuse to accept it.

This treatise regarding *revelation* and *mystery* is given to show that a merely noetic understanding of truth is not necessarily an actual knowing of the truth. We are saying in this essay—time and again—that true knowledge of God is relational, so that a true understanding of authority must also be a *relational* matter. I agree that this sounds dogmatic, but what we are saying is a dogma: ‘this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent’. To know *about* God is not necessarily to *know* Him.

### Knowing and Worshipping: Worshipping and Knowing

On any score it must be said that Man is a worshipping creature. The multifarious religions and universal idolatry witness to this fact. We know ourselves to worship—give worth to Deity, deities, persons and things—incessantly. We well know the fascination and delight that is innate in worship, as also the pain, despair and dread that often accompanies it. Christianity more than any other religion has a treasury of worship in the forms of liturgy, litany, psalms, hymns, songs, and varied forms of literature and music which is unique to it quantitatively and—many would claim—qualitatively beyond that of other religions. Whatever the truth or otherwise of this claim, it can still be said that worship is innate in Man, intrinsic to his being and enriching to his way of life.<sup>29</sup>

When it comes to worshipping God, Christ has given the revelation that ‘God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit [Spirit] and truth’ (see John 4:19–26). This is because God is Father and He ever *seeks* such men and women to worship Him. By salvation, believing persons become the children of God (John 1:12; cf. 3:3–6; I John 3:1–3) and can be called ‘the sons of God’ (Rom. 8:14–25; Gal. 4:4–7; cf. Rev. 21:7). New birth or regeneration through the Holy Spirit is essential to seeing and entering into the Kingdom of God (John 3:3–6; cf. Titus 3:4–7), and when one enters that Kingdom one comes under the sovereignty of God: one enters into the true law-structure which is the authentic love-structure.

The necessity for repentance, faith and regeneration is because, at the Fall, Man ‘did not honour him as God’, but ‘exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator’ (Rom. 1:21, 25). In order to worship God ‘in spirit [Spirit] and truth’, Man had to reverse his attitude to God—through repentance and faith—and so come to know the truth which alone could set him free from the bondage of sin (John 8:31–36). The Spirit himself, being the very truth (I John 5:7; John 15:26; 16:13), came at Pentecost, when the new worship began as the result of his coming (cf. Phil. 3:3), since God was recognised as ‘Abba’, that is, ‘dear Father’ (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:4–6).

So, we assert, it is useless to speak of God’s sovereignty to one who exists outside the relationship of a child to the Father, unless that one is prepared to repent, believe and become a child of God. God appears as One who is not warm, loving and intimate, but as One who is Judge; who is severe, demanding, wrathful and condemnatory. Christ was sent into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:17; cf. 4:42). John supports this truth by saying, ‘And we have seen and testify that the Father has

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<sup>29</sup> See my *The Way and Wonder of Worship* (NCPI, 1990).

sent his Son as the Saviour of the world’ (I John 4:14), whilst Paul says clearly, ‘There is therefore now no condemnation [judgment] for those who are in Christ Jesus’ (Rom. 8:1). Those who understand these things see God as love—as loving Father—and turn with joy to worship Him. Only then do they know His indwelling of them, and their indwelling of Him.

## **Authority and the Law of God**

We must recognise that there is no such abstraction as ‘law’. We may well speak of a principle of law, but the Scriptures know only one law—the law of God; that is, the law which God gives to Man.<sup>30</sup> To the fallen spirit of Man, the idea of law is that it is heavy, legal and restrictive. A study of Psalms 1, 19 and 119 should tell us that the true Israelite found it—in practice—to be the opposite. He delighted in the law of God and saw it as the will of God—a will he did not wish to oppose.<sup>31</sup> He could say, ‘I delight to do thy will, O my God’ (Ps. 40:8), and also, ‘I find my delight in thy commandments, which I love’; ‘I shall walk at liberty, for I have sought thy precepts’; and ‘My soul is consumed with longing for thy ordinances at all times’ (Ps. 119:47, 45, 20).

In the New Testament the law of God may appear as judgment to the unbeliever, and ruthless in its demands for punishment in the case of those who disobey it, but the grace of God liberates from the condemnation of the law (Rom. 3:24–32; Gal. 2:19–21; cf. Rom. 5:12–21) so that the believer is freed from the law of sin and death and now is glad to fulfil its just requirements ‘in the new life of the Spirit’ (Rom. 8:1–4; 7:6). The law is then seen as ‘the law of love’ and ‘the law of Christ’, and the love of Christ constrains the person to delighted obedience (John 14:15; II Cor. 5:14).<sup>32</sup> The delight in law-keeping is love itself in action, as John points out in his First Letter (2:3–6; 5:2–3).

We can say, then, that the bogey of the law and ultimate judgment is abolished by coming into union with God. His perfect love casts out all fear of judgment (I John 4:16–18). We love Him and desire to keep His commandments.

## **The Joy and Security of the Authority of God**

In our coming study of hierarchy, we will examine my claim that no relationship truly exists outside of an hierarchical system. If this is so, then to be anti-archival and anarchical is to

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<sup>30</sup> This is a vast subject. Paul virtually writes his first eight chapters of the Epistle to the Romans to attend to every aspect of it, especially since he was unjustly accused of antinomianism. Some Roman Catholic theology has set forth ‘natural law’, but a better presentation would seem to be ‘creational law’; that is, that creation has its functionality according to its nature (Gen. 1:31; Eccl. 3:11), and such functionality is worked out in the principles which are the creational law of God. The law, as Israel was given it, surely has as its heart the creational functionality, tempered by the sanitational, sacrificial and relational requirements and guidelines which related to a people who were first nomadic and then settled in Palestine. Their law was not rigidly ontological—calling for obedience through ontological necessity—but could be later amended by Christ: ‘You have heard that it was said to the men of old . . . but I say to you . . .’ (Matt. 5:21ff.)—a statement which has to be even more as interpretative than as a set of new mandates.

<sup>31</sup> To speak of the law of God as the will of God does not simply mean God makes a demand that we should keep the law for its own sake, so that human beings must ever pursue morality. This may well be so, but God’s will is teleological, i.e. it is related to human fulfilment and destiny as it is related to God’s *telos* for His universe. Any lesser reading of the will of God is to make the law merely a standard to be reached, or a guide to morality. Doing the will of God is dynamic, as the three Psalms cited will easily show: (i) the man of Psalm 1 who delights in the law of God is fruitful; (ii) the person of Psalm 19 has his soul restored, and is given a fear which cleanses the soul; and (iii) the person of Psalm 119 has an endless variety of rich experiences which widen his horizons and bring him to rich maturation.

<sup>32</sup> ‘By love serve one another’ (Gal. 5:13) is the spirit of the law of Christ (I Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2), as is seen in Romans 13:8–10, James 1:22–25 and 2:8–13.

have an existence of broken relationships, and to live in a state that is chaotic. To accept the ontological, to live in it and to have the security of God's sovereignty (that is, all actions and happenings are under His control), is to have 'righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit'. It is to be in harmony with 'things as they really are', that is, the ontological. Given in the constant battle of personal evil against personal good, and the state of the dynamics of guilt in which the human race lives, there should yet be no overwhelming impediment to love for God, love for one's fellow creatures and for one's self.

This approach to God's authority and His law helps us to understand the constant delight in God, in worship of Him and the delight in creation and one's fellow man that is so often expressed throughout the Scriptures and especially in the Psalms and the doxologies of the New Testament. True understanding and appreciation of God's authority is most worthily and wonderfully expressed in the doxological mood and mode. Beyond the New Testament the mood and mode continues. The vast treasury of Christian obedience, action and worship all attest to the adoration of the church for the living God, and its delight in Him. As we have said, the bogey of authority is banished, and the true light now shines, more and more, unto the day of His appearing.



NCTM. Thursday a.m. Class. 3rd Term 7/9/95. 'Authority: Divine, Celestial, Human'. G. Bingham

## Study Six: Humanity and the Authority of God—I

### Authority and the Human Situation

The matter of authority in human affairs is of great importance. Our study series commenced with the testimony of the Roman centurion that he was a man under authority. He held to a principle; namely that without being under authority one cannot be authoritative, and without being authoritative one cannot proceed to true action. He seemed to take it for granted that authority was a functional necessity for the operations of the human race. By 'true action' we understand 'doing the will of God; being a true citizen of this world because one is a true citizen in the Kingdom of God',<sup>33</sup> that is, one is under God's rule by creation and redemption, and one is committed to all that the Kingdom is doing and will accomplish'. If these terms of reference seem too wide—that is, as embracing Man in creation; Man in social government; Man in familial, societal and ecclesiastical government—then the answer to such an objection must be, 'This is the ontology of authority,<sup>34</sup> both Divine and human, and is the basis of all relationships; that is, those within the Triune Godhead; those going outward from the Triune Godhead to all creation; those which are of Divine-human sociality; and those which obtain throughout the human race'. This section of the series will be an attempt to address the matter of authority in the human sphere.

We have noted before that there is a liberalism<sup>35</sup> which speaks in terms of human freedom, by which is meant freedom from any kind of restraint, the opportunity to develop human capacities along the best lines, and a supra-archival situation—that is, a non-hierarchical environment—in which humankind can enjoy unrestricted progress and amity. One hesitates to even use the term 'autonomous living' because it, too, indicates some kind of rule, and the idea of rule is abhorrent to present liberalism of the social kind. Present humanism has, as its basis, living which is autonomous from God, and the human systems of ruling which are said to 'emanate from above', that is, hierarchical systems.

What we hope to do in this study is not so much to attack present liberalism, as to present the biblical view of authority, and show that, being ontological, it cannot be outmoded,

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<sup>33</sup> Whilst the World Missionary Conference of 1910 was a remarkable ecumenical gathering, it is from that point in time that we find a decline in consequent missionary and ecumenical conference (e.g. those of the World Council of Churches) of what we might call the theology of spiritual world conquest. Missionary work was to be viewed not as a conquest of the nations to Christ, but as a movement with other religions, humbly learning from their insights, and moving with them towards a universal brotherhood or familyhood. Former views of world conquest to Christ were called 'spiritual imperialism', and certain hymns such as 'Jesus shall reign where e'er the sun', were dropped or modified. So the language of the Kingdom of God was tempered, and in the last decade or two the idea of God's Kingship and the authority of the Kingdom has been increasingly democratised.

<sup>34</sup> Reaction to totalitarian systems—to patriarchy as it has been supposed to have been oppressive, and the change in climate since and from the French Revolution, with its motto of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity'—have all contributed to a strong egalitarian drive in human society. The recent reaction to the totalitarian governments in Communist nations has brought an idealizing of the political system and policy of democracy. This democratization of leadership has found its way into the church, and is being strongly expressed through many movements. It has also had a deep impact upon biblical hermeneutics and exegesis, as well as the forms of government within the churches.

<sup>35</sup> It has been remarked by many that the last 100 years have been occupied with the endeavours of liberalism, and in its name it has proved to be the bloodiest century of all human history. In the name of the freedom of the human spirit millions of human lives have been 'liquidated' and it would appear that this will continue to be the case.



outdated and superseded by other structures and systems. History has shown man's experiments and endeavours in the systems of human rule, such as autocracy, monarchy, oligarchy, democracy, socialism and communism.<sup>36</sup>

## Human Governmental Authority

We might use the term 'civil authority', meaning forms of government outside those which are religious, but it is doubtful whether many countries are 'secular', for even communist countries virtually have communism as their religion. The fact is that most—if not all—nations are religious. Islamic countries for the most part base their politics on the tenets of Islam. Even though some Islamic countries nominate themselves as 'secular', yet in reality the moving power is Islam. In India the primary power is Hinduism, although it is technically a secular State. Western States are viewed by Third World countries as being Christian. The Indo-Chinese countries are primarily Buddhist, and Buddhism is the driving force of these States, since religion is the rallying point for much nationalism.

When we approach government from a biblical point of view,<sup>37</sup> we have to do so keeping in mind that Man is made in the image of God—that he is 'the image and glory of God', that the God in whose image he is made is Triune and that that Godhead has within it a sociality which is related to the differentiations of the Persons. This relational Godhead is a hierarchy<sup>38</sup> of Persons whilst being a Unity within Himself. This pluralist element of the Godhead must be repeated within the personhood of a human, as also the extrinsic relationships which obtain within the Trinity must be repeated with the *imago Dei*—the image of God in Man. What we must avoid doing is working back to the principle of government<sup>39</sup> from the *praxis* of early Man, the Patriarchs, and the Covenantal government of Israel as reported to us in the Scriptures.

## The Familial Government

God being Father, and—in one sense—the Godhead being familial, we ought to start at the family before we consider the tribal or 'people' situation. Both, of course, are mutually dependent, and both mutually interactive, so that it is difficult to know where to start. Also,

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<sup>36</sup> These systems are the subject matter of political history and political science, and require appropriate research. Discussing systems in the abstract or assessing them either critically or uncritically cannot conduct us to valid conclusions. We must contextualize the systems used in history and evaluate them in the widest perspective of that history. We need to evaluate them as objectively as possible—a difficult matter, given our humanity and its many hidden agendas.

<sup>37</sup> I am aware that the statement 'from a biblical point of view' seems to be an arrogant one. Is there—as such—a biblical point of view on human government? I believe there is, and although it will be called 'Judaic-Christian' by some and so be looked upon as one governmental form among many, yet I believe there is an ontology of government within the Scriptures. It is closely linked with the nature of the Triune Godhead, the order and relationships within that Godhead, and with the domestic familial system which in turn has to do with the family of nations. Today it seems to be assumed that the Judaic-Christian form of government-authority has always been patriarchal, and that this patriarchy has always been oppressive. This, in fact, may not be the case. The assertion certainly needs to be examined critically.

<sup>38</sup> We will be examining the whole matter of hierarchy, including the flow *downwards* from the Father throughout the entity. For the moment the reader should suspend presuppositions which make hierarchy *per se* a dark and dominant entity. These presuppositions relate more to the autocracy of the Father and the (presupposed) oligarchical nature of the Three Persons.

<sup>39</sup> We must take account of human sinfulness when it comes to the matter of *praxis*, even if a total ontological understanding were present. Romans 1:18–25 should tell us that Man—even Man-in-faith (cf. Heb. 11:4ff.)—effects more a provisional than an ontological *praxis*. Just as we are reluctant to place too much credence on Job's counsellors because of their faulty reasoning, so we must not confuse the *praxis* of the people of God in history with the ontological reality, i.e. we must not work back from the *praxis* to the principle. Often we may have a *de facto* situation which, of course, is not *de jure*.

making the statement that the Godhead is familial may seem confusing. To our thinking a family has a husband, a wife and children. However, the human family is not analogous of the Godhead, since God is One, and the Fatherhood and the Sonship—as also the Spirithood—do not fit with our familial analogy. Because the Persons as a familial entity do not comport with our idea of family does not put them out of court. Indeed we have to learn from the Godhead as to the true nature of familial being and relationships. We understand family as father, mother and child (children). Father is male, mother female, children are male and (or) female.

Jesus' statement in Matthew 23:9, 'And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven', shows us we should not work from human fatherhood to Divine Fatherhood. Thus, when the Scriptures use the term 'Father' for God, it must be other than human fatherhood. Also when the masculine 'He', 'Him' and 'His' are used of God, it cannot mean the same as the earthly 'he', 'him' and 'his'.<sup>40</sup> Nor does a qualitative and quantitative extension of these arrive at what God is. We are forced to use the gender terms 'Father', and 'He', 'Him' and 'His', but we must not think of Him in this way in terms of human gender. God is not human, and so He is not male in the way we understand male. He is Creator and not procreator. Man—the man-woman entity—is made in His image, so that in some sense God is male-female, but not in the human ways we know male and female or male-female.<sup>41</sup> As Creator He has no sexuality. Not by analogy but by revelation we are conducted to a different understanding of male-female. The statements, 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created *him*; male and female he created *them*', and 'Male and female he created *them*, and he blessed *them* and named *them* Man when *they* were created', must mean that a human male apart from a human female is not Man, nor is a woman apart from a man truly the image of God. Together, and as 'one-flesh', they constitute the *image* of God, but not of course His actual Being.

In order to understand the place of male and the place of female on the human level, we must see that the first Man was created as Man, but with the creation of Woman out of him, Man was now man-woman, and is so, always. When we consider the male we must always think of the woman as being 'bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh', that is, *she* is not to be thought of apart from *him*, nor *he* apart from *her*. When we seek to understand the relationship that exists between the two we must think in terms of his *prior* being and of her having her *source* and *origin* in him, and from him. Some modern New Testament scholars take the statement 'the husband is the head of the wife' (Eph. 5:23) to mean that he is the source and origin of woman. In the Triune Godhead the Father is the head of Christ the Son (I Cor. 11:3), as Christ is the head of the man (husband), who is the head of the woman (wife). To say that the head and the body are in parity cannot be true. As to their humanity—that is to being *human*—there is equality, but as to function and status the term 'equality' is irrelevant. In function the Father is prior to the Son, but as to nature, that is Deity, they are one.<sup>42</sup> Jesus

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<sup>40</sup> Statements from Isaiah—'I am God, and there is none like me', 'Who is like me? Let him proclaim it', 'To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One', 'To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?'—forbid us using analogy with the confidence that God is like the analogue. Thus to attribute to God the elements of Man in any way is to inhibit true knowledge of God, especially that which comes by revelation.

<sup>41</sup> The difficulty some writers have is trying to parallel in God the androgynous nature they say that Adam had before Eve was created from him. Their argument is that by analogy God is androgynous. Since *andros* (*aner*: man and *gune*: woman)—from which the word androgynous is derived—are both human, that means they cannot be used even analogously of God. In one sense it may appear to be correct to speak of God as Male-Female, but since we do not know what is 'Male' and what is 'Female' on the level of Deity, then it is best for us not to use the terms. On this basis all masculinist claims for God's masculinity and all feminist argument against such masculinity, or in criticism of it, are groundless.

<sup>42</sup> Notice that I avoid using the term 'equal', since the terms 'equal' and 'unequal' are terms not of quality but measurement. If we seek to measure people or creatures quantitatively and qualitatively we will not be successful because of the innate (ontological) differentiations in all persons, and no less the Persons of the Trinity. The Father cannot be as the Son. Fatherhood and sonship are differentiations, but differentiations, far from unequalising the Persons, are elements of their unity, of their true sociality.

could say that ‘the Father is greater than I’, and ‘I and the Father are one’, and in these two statements there was no contradiction. ‘Deriving’ and ‘being derived’ are not incompatible, but compatible; both are aspects of oneness. In this sense the Father has authority over the Son, and the man has authority over the woman.

Only when we see and understand this do we understand the Pauline and Petrine statements about man and woman, about husband and wife (cf. I Cor. 11:3–12; 14:33–37; Eph. 5:21–33; Col. 3:18; I Tim. 2:11–15; I Pet. 3:1–7). Neither Paul nor Peter are saying that a man is prior to a woman in regard to nature, but is prior in regard to creation—to source and origin—and so is prior to her in the hierarchical order. Thus we say that a man is prior to a woman as regards function, but not as regards nature. Both persons are human, but their functions and differentiations make them different, though not so as to make them incompatible, and not so as to make one *better* than the other. Paul is really saying that for a woman to have authority over a man is unontological, and not that it is an impossibility. Peter is saying that for a woman to submit to her husband is ontological and part of the unity of love—a principle with which Paul clearly agrees.

### **Discursus on Equality, Ordination, Subordination, Superiority and Inferiority**

I believe it is part of our fallen humanity never to admit that priority in function—that is, priority in the hierarchy—is *not* superiority. Whilst a person who is secondary to another in a hierarchy may insist on the equality of all persons within that hierarchy, yet that person will think that he or she has been placed in an inferior position and is therefore regarded as inferior.<sup>43</sup> This is a subjective evaluation. No person is greater—or lesser—in *nature* than another, though one may be prior to the other in *function*. To be superordinate does not mean that the one being superordinate is superior, and to be subordinate does not mean that the one being subordinate is inferior. Experience has taught me that what I have here set out will be utterly ignored when it comes to the situation of priority and posterity in hierarchical systems. The teaching of Christ on the last being the first, the servant being the greatest—that is, the least being the most—is a teaching which may be understood noetically but which is not honoured in the action. To be served and not to serve always seems to be the human order. If the present masculinist–feminist debates regarding equality and ability could be conducted in the light of function and not nature within hierarchical situations, then some kind of amity might be achieved. We have yet to examine the nature and operations of hierarchy, but I believe they will only confirm what we have said regarding the value and necessity of priority and posterity.

### **A Brief Discursus Regarding Hierarchy**

Because so much of my argument relates to hierarchy, I would like to tender a brief explanation of it, waiting until later to deal with it at greater length, especially when the context is more fitting. I have been using the word ‘hierarchy’ through these studies, knowing that it is disliked by many and even offensive to some. That is why some kind of rationalisation of the structure should be attempted. The term ‘hierarchy’ for many today is one of opprobrium, especially for those living in an egalitarian situation with an equalitarian

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<sup>43</sup> I believe this inability to think dispassionately on nature and function and to reject ideas of superiority and inferiority is because of the strong pressure to prove, justify and establish oneself. I believe that behind all of this is guilt, and guilt makes a person feel inferior. Existential guilt—guilt at not being a full ontological creature in a world created in perfection—is even more conducive to feeling inferior than is the guilt which accrues from wrong actions—sins of commission and omission. Competition to get to what we call ‘the top’ becomes the curse of the human race, the basis of enmity and hatred, and the continuing cause of personal, national and international conflict of every kind.

way of thinking. Seeing hierarchies in biblical perspective, I would say that each hierarchy *is a dynamic social entity of love which is purposive and functional in the will of God, so that all relationships are in unity and are essential to the true working—and outworking—of the entity and the fulfilment of God's will.* I recognise that this is not the way some hierarchies really are, and I am sure that my description will come as a surprise, and that readers will be incredulous. Without even examining the statement in depth, some will conclude that it is unreal, idealistic and utopian.

I do not believe this to be the case. I believe that true hierarchy is at the one time both relational and purposive, and, that this being so, it provides the motive and the drive for accomplishing its goal. Far from being a static entity imposed from above and oppressive by nature, I believe it is one of the most liberating and creative entities that we can know, and I hope to show this as we proceed in our study. One of the keys to understanding hierarchy is to see that the most prior within its order is the person who takes the highest responsibility and who must serve the most. Another key is the fact that each member of the hierarchy is in another. For example, in John 14:11 the Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father. The Son is in the husband, and the husband in him. The husband is in the wife and the wife in the husband, and in fact every member of the hierarchy is in every other member. This inter-dwelling of the members ensures unity, and works against the principle of oppression.

If we can understand both hierarchy and the fact that superordination does not mean superiority, then we should be able to examine familial and civil governments.

NCTM. Thursday a.m. Class. 3rd Term 7/9/95. 'Authority: Divine, Celestial, Human'. G. Bingham

## Study Seven: Humanity and the Authority of God—II

### The Human Family—Especially Under Covenant<sup>44</sup>

The human family in patriarchal times and in Israel was not simply what we call 'the nuclear family', that is, the parents and children, but it was understood to be all living: from grandparents (and even great-grandparents) down to the last grandchild or great-grandchild; not only parents, brothers and sisters, but also embracing aunts and uncles, cousins and in-laws. Families were hierarchies, and if we understand the principle of functionality, then we will see that the primary authority in the family was—and is now—the father.<sup>45</sup> With him — because they are 'one flesh' (Gen. 2:24) and she is his helpmate (Gen. 2:18)—stands the wife. Together they are to fulfil the mandate of Genesis 1:28 to be fruitful, to multiply and fill up the earth, to subdue that earth and accomplish dominion over it. That is, marriage is not simply coming together for 'the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other', but it is for procreation of children, and this is part of the wider mandate. In other words, marriage is a vocation. Being husband and wife is vocational. It is with a view to fulfilling the will of God, whatever the personal vocations of the couple may be.

If we would understand the earthly human family, we must understand the Divine family. We must understand first the true nature of woman—the female —and man—the male—and then the functional nature of their union in marriage.<sup>46</sup> As we suggested in Study 6, we need to understand the human father by first understanding the Divine Father. Likewise, in order to understand a husband, we must first understand the true Husband, Christ. As also we must understand the human bride via the ontological brideship of the Bride, the Church. Biblical anthropology differs from scientific anthropology in that it has a revelational disclosure of God and Man,<sup>47</sup> and so of all Divine and human as also Divine–human relationships. Only in

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<sup>44</sup> The systems of authority that we are studying are mainly covenantal; that is, God is the hierarchical Head of the people. We recognise that today's world does not generally live under covenant. Even so, the Christian community is a people under the New Covenant, and it is reasonable to research what obtained under the covenant with Israel. It may well be that much of the structure in the former covenant is closest to what we call 'ontological', and in any case constitutes a good point of reference without being a binding legalistic pattern.

<sup>45</sup> We are talking here of what was a patriarchal society. In history there have been matriarchal societies, societies which were polygamous and polyandrous. If we take Romans 1:18–25 seriously this should not surprise us, since the human race—apart from people of faith—rebelled against the creational order as given by God (e.g. Gen. 1:28; cf. 2:18–24). Patriarchal society is often condemned out of hand by some sociologists, and we need to do serious research to see whether such condemnation is justified. It might even be that such patriarchy—given that it may have been abused and misused by males within it—is in fact the ontological society *par excellence*! Such research would need to include knowing the true nature of the male *qua* male and the female *qua* female.

<sup>46</sup> For my understanding of these and other human relationships see my *God's Glory, Man's Sexuality* (NCPI, 1988) and *The Heavenly Vision* (NCPI, 1987).

<sup>47</sup> Science is the gathering of knowledge of things as they are, and applied science is the using of that knowledge for practical purposes. The essential nature of things—especially of God and humanity—is the realm of theology and theological anthropology. To speak, for example, of patriarchy is to report on the system, its benefits, losses, advantages and harmful effects, but science cannot penetrate to the essential nature of that hierarchy. Patriarchy cannot be said to have been an absolute rule by the father—or men—because of the union of the wife with the husband. Nor was it an oligarchy of man and wife ruling the children, since their relational situation—especially under covenant—was for the family hierarchy to begin with God and descend to the youngest child in a course of relationships. This gives meaning to, as well as draws meaning from, the local context, and especially the relational and governmental system of covenant.

the light of these can we come to know the essential family.<sup>48</sup>

The children are to honour the parents, and there appear to be descending orders of priority in the children as brothers and sisters.<sup>49</sup> The stories of first and second sons, such as Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, show us the priority of the elder brother, only changed by sovereign grace in some cases. Our intention here is not to cover the laws regarding priority and inheritance, but simply to show the hierarchical nature of the family. It is to be seen that the modern idea of individualistic independence of children from their parents and one another was not in the patriarchal order. The father was the head of the family, and the parents together were to be honoured.<sup>50</sup> Children could never be ‘homeless’ as in our modern setting, for they just did not leave home. Marriage partners were chosen by the parents, and young men and women did not live away from the family. The father trusted the new husband at marriage, giving over his daughter to him. Covenantal patriarchy was protective of women and children.

Families did not exist as separate and individualistic entities. This is shown by judgments wrought upon families rather than persons, as in the case of Achan and his family (Josh. 7). Deuteronomy 21:18–21 stated, ‘If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son, who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they chastise him, will not give heed to them’, then the parents are to report this to the elders of the city, and ‘Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall purge the evil from your midst; and all Israel shall hear, and fear’. Families, then, were closely knit within the covenant community.

## The Community and Its Elders

Eldership is an ancient authority structure existing long before the creation of Israel. It was assumed—fairly reasonably—that the older men were those who had gathered wisdom, so that from them were selected the wisest. If we can talk about archetypal elders then they would be the twenty-four elders of the Book of the Revelation. We know that the seventy elders have a history of selection during the forty years in the wilderness. Each of the tribes of Israel had its elders, and the seventy were drawn from them. They were the leaders in taking the initiative of judgment and execution of judgment, such as stoning the rebellious child, the breaker of the Sabbath, the false prophet who led the people into idolatry—and so on. They were to lead the people in wisdom.<sup>51</sup> If we read the Pauline criteria for elders (presbyters, overseers, bishops) in the New Testament, then it is probably the criteria which have always obtained. By the same reasoning Paul’s injunctions (criteria for) the ‘elder women’ in Titus 2:3–5 were the same in Israel. The familial injunctions in I Timothy 5:1–6 and in Titus 2:1–

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<sup>48</sup> We emphasise again that we are not demanding the perfection of the true—ontological—family. This pressure of ontological necessity is a fearful demand to fulfil. We are simply saying that this is how families are, and that we can comprehend the Divine family and so know how to set about true familyhood, even if we do not succeed, as succeed we will not in a fallen world, no matter how dynamic grace may be.

<sup>49</sup> In saying ‘there appear to be’ we mean primarily in the patriarchal and Judaic-Christian cultures, although there is evidence that this is generally so in many societies and cultures.

<sup>50</sup> Honouring is a relational pattern that is dynamic for human living. Romans 1:21 shows that failure to honour God was linked with man’s rebellion against Him. Likewise failure to ‘honour all men’, to ‘honour the king’, to ‘honour the wife’, to ‘honour the genuine widow’ virtually means failure to honour God by failing to honour those created in His image (cf. Prov. 14:31, ‘He who oppresses a poor man insults his Maker’). To honour parents does not simply mean to obey them—though this may well be involved. Honouring the parents is a relational matter of the deepest order.

<sup>51</sup> Whilst the term ‘wisdom’ is not much used in regard to the elders, it is surely assumed. Proverbs 11:14 says, ‘Where there is no guidance, a people falls; but in an abundance of counsellors there is safety’. Doubtless the thought of elders is present here. It is also useful to notice that wisdom was the key to such counselling, hence Solomon’s request to God for wisdom.



10 would be those which had obtained under the former covenant.

The community of Israel was one people, but it also had a vocation; that is, to be the priest nation among—and for—all nations (Exod. 19:5–6). It was a theocracy and so a Divine hierarchy, or a hierarchy which commenced from God, its monarchy being one delegated by God the King, and its people a nation under monarchical government in consultation with the elders who, in turn, represented the families of the whole community. I Peter 2:9, 10 equates the church with the holy people of Israel, so that in the New Covenant the church is the priest–people among, and for, all other peoples. It is in the light of these parallels that we ought to understand the matter of authority in the church, that is ecclesial authority.

## Ecclesial Authority

Our treatment of familial structures and relationships in the covenant under which Israel lived—including the government of Israel as a theocracy, beginning with the monarch and proceeding to the elders and heads of families, parents, children and slaves—should prepare us for our study of ecclesial authority.

The primary point we have to note is that whilst Israel had a covenantal polity in which God was regarded as Covenant-Father,<sup>52</sup> the church has an altogether new revelation of God as Father. Certainly the polity of the first covenant flows on to the second, but not without changes. There appear to be two forms of external authority;<sup>53</sup> that is, firstly Christ as Lord, and secondly the elders as those who rule and lead in the church. Linked with both are two more elements, namely the *domata*<sup>54</sup> and the *charismata*, that is, the gifts of ministry (*domata*) and the charismatic gifts. Probably we cannot distinguish between the two. In any case they are not only the gifts *from* Christ, but the gifts which *are* Christ. In Romans 6:23 the gift (*charisma*) of God is eternal life, yet this eternal life is Christ himself (cf. I John 5:12). In Christ are all the gifts, constituting the ‘fullness’ which Christ gives to his church (Eph. 1:23; cf. Col. 1:19; 2:3, 9, 10), so that the gifts are personally given, in which case Christ the Lord is the giver of them, as the Holy Spirit is the distributor and guide of their use. All, then, is under Christ—the Lord.

A question we may ask is whether the *domata* of Ephesians 4:8ff. are in themselves a hierarchy of gifts. That is, are the gifts dependent on one another in hierarchical order: the apostle being the primary gift, the prophet being next and so on, but then the prophet somehow being subject to the apostle, and the evangelist subject to both of them, etc.? Certainly in I Corinthians 12:28–29 there is some sort of an order given. In both the Acts and the Epistles, the apostle is the leading figure, and it is possible—if not even probable—that in some way the prophet and the others were linked, for the outworking of their ministries, to the apostle. In Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5 the apostle and prophet are linked together in that order. If we could know that the gifts (*domata*) are hierarchical, it would help us to understand

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<sup>52</sup> The term ‘Covenant-Father’ does not appear in the O.T., but the concept does. Just about all references to God as Father have to do with covenant. This is seen as we study each reference, even to those which seem to speak of Him as Creator (Isa. 64:8; Mal. 2:10). The ideas of ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’, and ‘our God and Father’ are not explicitly present in the O.T. This means that there is a great difference in the understanding and practice of authority in the two Testaments.

<sup>53</sup> By ‘external authority’ we mean that as in Israel God was King, so in the New Covenant Christ is Lord of the church; as in the first covenant there was an eldership, so also there is an eldership in the New Covenant people.

<sup>54</sup> In Ephesians 4:8 the gifts—which are sometimes called ministerial gifts—are given by Christ and are called *domata*. Some scholars see the word *domata* as a grade above *charismata*. In I Corinthians 12:4ff. the gifts called *charismata* are associated with the Spirit who *distributes* rather than gives. In I Corinthians 12:28–30 Paul speaks of God appointing those whose ministries correspond to the *domata*—apostles, prophets, teachers—and then others whose actions are those of the *charismatic* donations.



something of their outworking; that is, that gifts were not used in an *ad hoc* manner, but alongside other gifts and so in a definite order as they operated within the entity of the hierarchy.

Some support seems to be given to my theory advanced here in the statement in Hebrews that Christ is the ‘apostle and high priest of our confession’.<sup>55</sup> As the church looked to the apostle as the one alone whose revelation of the truth was primary, so, here, the church with Christ. In I Peter 5:1–3, Peter speaks about himself being a fellow elder with the elders to whom he writes, and then includes them as being fellow shepherds (the true meaning of elder), but sees them, with himself, as being under the leadership of the ‘chief Shepherd’, Christ.

## The Leadership of the Elders

The elders are the key to the outworking of ministry within the church, as also to its external ministry. As we have observed, there would be nothing new or strange if elders followed the criteria of selection and the operations of elders in Israel. Certainly the elders of the church and those of the synagogue seem to be similar. It appears that in ‘old Israel’ and the new community women were not elders. This would be explained by the primary place of a man in the human part of the hierarchy of God, Christ, the man and the wife—to which we might add the children. It is clear that both men and women had ministry (Eph. 4:12), so the ministry of women is not in question. Their leadership as elders is in question.

On any score it must be recognised that the church was not an egalitarian group, any more than we could say the Trinity is an egalitarian entity. Since the Son and the Spirit derive from the Father,<sup>56</sup> and the Three Persons together constitute the Divine hierarchy, so the man and the woman constitute the human part of the hierarchy of I Corinthians 11:3. In marriage this is the case, as is clear from Ephesians 5:22f. The modern humanistic and egalitarian climate dissolves all such hierarchies, being scandalised by them. I have noted personally that those opposing hierarchies are often the most hierarchical when given positions of authority—the very authority which they profess, in principle, to deny! It is noticeable that academics often form their hierarchy so that the best equipped academically take precedence over lesser persons in their disciplines.

The eligibility of elders,<sup>57</sup> that is, their criteria for election, as also their functions, are set out in passages such as Acts 20:17–32; I Timothy 3:1–7; 5:17–20; Titus 1:5–9; I Peter 5:1–4, to which we may add all references to the twenty-four elders in the Book of the Revelation. A close study of the qualifications for elders will indicate not only the qualities required, but also the abilities the elders need in order to carry out their pastoral work. In particular we have references in I Thessalonians 5:12–13 and Hebrews 13:7 and 17, which are now set out in order:

But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

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<sup>55</sup> I have not seen the idea presented elsewhere; that is, that the *domata* constitute a hierarchy. Rather, there seems to be the curious idea that anyone could independently exercise such gifts. As the elders are not *said* to control the use of gifts, one wonders who administered their use as, for example, set out in I Corinthians 14. If they operated within a hierarchical discipline then that would explain their true use. I Corinthians 14:32—‘the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets’—speaks of a mutuality of control within the order of the prophets but does not refer to the other *domata*. Even so, this does not invalidate my theory.

<sup>56</sup> The Creeds speak of the Son and the Spirit proceeding from the Father, and the Spirit proceeding—in that order—from the Son. This *filioque* clause caused a split between the Western and Eastern (Orthodox) churches.

<sup>57</sup> I am dealing quite thinly with the qualifications and ministry of elders but an expansion of these elements can be found in studies on eldership. I cite my own monograph *Shepherds of the Flock* (NCPI, 1985).

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith.

Obeys your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account. Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Our view of the early church is often conditioned by seeing some of the polities which have formed themselves in various churches—particularly denominations—over the centuries. Unfortunately we tend to read some of the less acceptable features back into the polity and actions of the apostolic church. It is clear that the former covenant authority structure had influence on the new community of Christ. If we forget the fact that Christ's Lordship was a prime element in the understanding of the church, and if we neglect the matter of the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit, then we do not understand the life of the community in unity, love and caring which—given in its faults and failures—presented an entirely new community to the world. The church was a remarkable miracle, and—for that matter—still is. As in all cases where practical authority exists, that authority has its vitality, operations and fruits in the onward-going action of the entity. The church on mission is scarcely aware of its authority structure, since such a structure is intended to be functional. On the move everything has its rightful expression: being static, the structure becomes burdensome, tending to seem oppressive, and its demands appear legal.

A good study for us is that of the first council at Jerusalem (Acts 15). The cause of the council was the demand of some Pharisees that Gentile converts be circumcised. Paul and Barnabas had recounted 'all that God had done with them' on the first missionary journey. The apostles and the elders gathered together to consider the matter. The assembly heard the evaluation of the missionary journey by the apostles and elders. James—*not* one of the apostles, but the leading elder of the church of Jerusalem—drew in scriptural evidence to show that the Gentiles should be included. He then gave his judgment, at which point the apostles and other elders, agreeing with James, gave their conclusion as to what ought to be done. They drew up a letter, which was sent from 'the apostles and the elders, with the whole church'. The structure was both functional and dynamic.

### **Conclusion to Familial, Ecclesial Authorities**

Whilst many readers may be interested in the authority structures which obtained for families and society in covenant-Israel and for the apostolic church as the New Covenant community, they may nevertheless wonder why this has been explained, and ask what relevance it has for today. Our answer to this is that what is given to a covenant society may well be changeless, even though adaptive. It may be the closest we can know to that which is ontological, and so may well be relevant for today and essential for true living.

Today we have certain values, certain anthropological understandings which lead us to change our mores—our cultural patterns of living—and to think in what we call 'more enlightened ways', but these may not necessarily be the ways we should go about our operations for living and for moulding our society. It would be easy for us to be critical of the changes in society, just as it might be simple enough to rationalise them as good. Even so we are faced, pragmatically, with what has happened in these years: the vast breakdown in the family (should we abandon the family?); the breakdown in marriage (should we abandon the system of marriage?); the vast increase of homeless children in the streets (should we abandon the principle of having homes?); the rapid increase in drug taking and the consequent rise in the crime rate (should we legalise drug taking and pacify the anger of a younger

generation at the seeming failure of present Government?).

We can no longer take for granted our easy humanism, the abandoning of sexual principles of morality, the outlawing of all forms of discrimination, when so many of them, anyway, are not discrimination, although this is how they are named. I, with many others, believe that we have not been conservative enough; that is, we have not conserved that which is good, giving way as we have to the radical liberators who in many cases have landed us into a more oppressive bondage than the ones we knew.

## Study Eight: The Question of Authority

### Man and Authority

What authority may Man look to? Under what authority should he live and act? These are questions which are often asked by human beings. The life of autonomy is not an easy one to live. A life lived outside any authority is a life lived under one's own authority, that is, an existence of autonomy. Whether this is, in fact, possible, or whether one can take a wholly existential approach, is in question. In the biblical system of authority Man is not Man unless he is wholly under the authority of God the King and so is a member of the Kingdom of God and His Christ.

Strong have been the debates as to the supreme authority in human experience, that is, whether God is to be acknowledged as the supreme authority, and if so, then how does He communicate that authority. Another question is that of the authority of Man; that is, is Man's reason the dependable authority under which he can—and ought to—live? Can the human race discover and exercise the powers which would thus make it authoritative in its world? Again, can it be claimed—as it has been claimed—that the church is *the* authority for faith and practice, and, if so, how does it hold and exercise such authority? These are questions which have exercised the human race from time to time. Authority as the unrestricted power to accomplish what the will desires is a true description of God's authority. For Man this description is a fascinating thought and a dynamic motive for achievement of such freedom. Whether or not Man can achieve it is another matter.

### Approaching the Matter of Authority

Where do we start in our quest to understand true authority, and along what lines may we proceed? P. T. Forsyth gives a valuable insight—even a direction—in regard to the knowledge of authority. Writing in the prologue to his book *The Principle of Authority*, he points out that it is only in the experience of a relationship with God that the matter of authority comes through to us, to a person. This would certainly be true wherever we wish to know and understand authority. For this reason it would be helpful for us to read Forsyth's book, much of which sounds quite strange to us in a liberal age. It may be more true to say his words act as a cold douche on us where our view of God's greatness and His holiness has been foreshortened, where it lacks humility and in so doing would lessen the dignity of God:

The conviction in these pages is that the principle of authority is ultimately the whole religious question, that an authority of any practical kind draws its meaning and its right only from the soul's relation to its God, that this is so not only for religion strictly so called, nor for a Church, but for public life, social life, and the whole history and career of Humanity. Society cannot be founded on sympathy alone, but upon right. No amount of fraternity will preserve it; but fraternity itself rests on due and true authority, brotherhood on fatherhood. The doctrine of the divine right of kings was wrong only in the form of kingship. Society does mean sovereignty, even if it be the sovereignty of the people (however the people may be defined). And sovereignty draws its right to claim obedience only from the Sovereignty of God, conceived concretely, as He reveals His will in history that it should be conceived. All the authority

essential to an ordered society or state has its right in proportion to its proximity to, or charter from, the last authority of all. And that is an authority to be appreciated and ordered only by the soul. The religious authority at last settles all things. All questions run up into moral questions; and all moral questions centre in the religious, in man's attitude to the supreme ethic, which is the action of the Holy One. We must all start with something given, something imposed. We create neither truth nor right. Is the Giver a blind power inferior in dignity to our rational will? Or is it the Holy One bestowing, from the least gift to the greatest, His own holiness, and establishing His own righteousness, in a love whose true response is not merely our reciprocity but our obedience?<sup>58</sup>

Having established the point that we come to authority through the soul, and when we do we find God is the first and the last authority, and that authority is a thing given and received, Forsyth has stinging words for those of us who imagine we create or dissolve authority and authorities:

There is no social future without authority. Yet we have come to a pitch when liberty threatens to go to pieces of its own momentum, like a racing fly-wheel where they have shot the engineer. And there is no authority without a religion—none for Humanity without the religion of Humanity. And the religion of Humanity is not a mood of the widest fraternity, nor a cult in which mankind worships itself. It means a God, and a God not of benevolence but of holiness, who treats the unholy with the right, the judgement, and the grace which are after all our commanding ideals, and which are making the new humanity in Jesus Christ. The one practical authority for human society is the God who in Christ comes in such judging and redeeming action that we are no more our own at all. If we will be as thorough as the soul or its God, that is the only authority which at bottom sanctions a social order even about drains, justifies a fellow creature's committal to jail for twenty-four hours, mulcts him of a shilling, or which at its height provides him with a throne and a loyalty that make public order a spiritual hierarchy, liberty a sacred passion, patriotism noble, sacrifice divine and obedience a pride.<sup>59</sup>

Forsyth is saying that we can only understand authority when we understand God, when we see Him as establishing authority in the soul through the saving act that works upon it. There is, then, no secular authority, since all authority stems from God, and all human action is significant and authentic under that authority. When we would examine the authorities or the forms of authority we have asked questions about (above), then it must be in that spirit—that is, of humility, of being under God's authority—that we must do our research. We will now look afresh at the authority of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and God as the Triune God), of the church, and the authority of Man, especially in regard to his place in the universe and the value of his reasoning.

### Knowing the Authorities

When we say that we know authority, not as an abstraction or a system but as *God*, and when we say that we know it in the soul—that is, we are subject to that Authority for all of life and action—we are not saying that our knowledge of God, and so of Him as authority, is only a subjective one. It may well be that our *response* to the revelation of God will be subjective, but that subjective response is not itself the measure of the reality of God or of His authority. Experience of God and authority neither validates nor invalidates that which in itself is objective. The Roman centurion lived in the authority of the Roman army and knew its reality without being concerned with the metaphysics of authority. He certainly knew the principle of authority; that is, that when one is subject to authority and moves in the line of authority then that functional authority will honour that obedience and effect the commands of the one subject to it.

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<sup>58</sup> Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, pp. 2–3.

<sup>59</sup> Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, pp. 3–4.

## The Authority of the Triune God

We have already said that God's authority lies within Himself, that it is expressed in creation<sup>60</sup> and expressed as part of His Kingdom.<sup>61</sup> The Father, the Son and the Spirit were present and active in creation—active together. We have noted in chapter 1 the authority of the man Jesus. Without going into the theology of his being 'Son of Man', 'Immanuel', 'God with us', the 'second' or 'last Adam' (cf. Rom. 5:12–21; I Cor. 15:21, 22, 45–50)<sup>62</sup>, we know that through the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension he was not only 'declared to be the Son of God with power', but also acclaimed as Lord. We saw he was authoritative—uniquely authoritative—in his earthly life, having been given authority to forgive sins, having authority over the elements such as the wind and the waves, over all demonic forces—even Satan himself—and was Lord of the Sabbath. He had authority to lay down his life and to take it again. He spoke with authority—'No man ever spoke like this man'—and yet in all this he was under the authority of the Father. He was also under the authority of the Holy Spirit, being conceived of the Spirit, led of the Spirit and empowered by the Spirit. We have also seen that in his ascension he was raised above every power and made to be Lord of all, Lord over all—a fact which delineates him not only as Messiah, but as the one who wins the nations (Ps. 2:5ff.; Rev. 19:15ff.). As the Lamb of God he shares the throne with the Father.<sup>63</sup>

The Lordship of the Father and the Son in the Kingdom of God (cf. Eph. 5:5; Rev. 11:15; I Cor. 15:24–28) is also linked with the Lordship of the Spirit (II Cor. 3:17–18), who is the Spirit of life. As the Father is Judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25), and yet has committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:22–29; Acts 10:42; 17:31; cf. II Cor. 5:10), so the Spirit is the Spirit of burning and judgment (Isa. 4:4; 11:4; II Thess. 2:8).

## Opposition to the Authority of the Triune God

It can scarcely be missed—in history—that celestial and terrestrial creatures seek to escape from their places in the creational hierarchy—as also the creational sub-hierarchies—and endeavour to set up their own kingdoms. Satan—a son of God and nominated as Lucifer—would, as with the king of Babylon, 'set his throne above the stars of God', or like the king of Tyre be perfect in all his ways until corruption—the corruption of vanity and heady ambition—was to be found in him. Created Man, too, desired to be *as* God; that is, to take a step beyond being *like* God so that he would be *as* God, that is, become a god. The day of the fall of man was the birthday of humanism—a system which became explicit in such individualists as Cain, Lamech, Nimrod, Nebuchadnezzar and others, and a corporate autonomous system separating itself from dependence upon God. Ideologies and polities have sought to evade the supreme authority—God—and set up their own surrogate authorities,

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<sup>60</sup> 'He commanded and they were created' (Ps. 148:5), 'For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it [creation] stood forth' (Ps. 33:9). His word in Genesis 1 is what brings all into being. The Son is creator, as is seen in John 1:1ff.; Colossians 1:16; I Corinthians 8:5; Hebrews 1:1–2. Psalm 104:30 says, 'When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created', and the Spirit was present, moving across the deep in Genesis 1. Creation, like all other elements of the Kingdom of God, is Trinitarian.

<sup>61</sup> God's Kingdom is simply His reign and rule. Our ideas of a kingdom having location and perimeters is not that of the Kingdom of God. God's rule is dynamic, effecting His will, and it is over all things. We cannot talk of 'extending God's Kingdom', since it is over all, but we can talk of rational creatures, who have rebelled against His Kingdom, repenting and submitting to Him.

<sup>62</sup> Our purpose here is not to set forth a full Christology, but simply to point to those terms or offices which designate him in the position of authority.

<sup>63</sup> In Revelation chapter 5, verse 12, he is the only one in all heaven and earth who is qualified and competent to open the seven-sealed book. Because of this he receives universal worship and adoration and receives that worship which is accorded elsewhere only to God, for 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!' (cf. 4:11).



often in the name of ‘no authority’. This is particularly noticeable in humanistic systems which give out that they are for the freedom of the human spirit, as though there can be no freedom when under the authority of God. So we have ‘revolutions’ which ‘liberate’ us from ‘ruling juntas’—whether they be political, familial or ecclesial—and bring us into free living. We have liberty from oppressive puritanical sexual bondage<sup>64</sup> and, indeed, any kind of restriction that irks the modern spirit. History has a way not only of having the moral pendulum swing again towards moralism, but the liberating forces generally become excessively tyrannical as they substitute for God in the government of the ‘liberated’ peoples.

It is interesting to note that—to quote Lord Acton—‘Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely’. Evil is generally a facsimile of that which is good. The kingdom of Satan has its own evil trinity, its own evil authorities, imitating God’s plan for history as it seeks to capture the nations, and has its own ‘holy city’, that is, Babylon ‘the unholy city’. It demeans those it takes captive and sets out to convince the human race that the human body is obscene, that creation is a thing to be feared and that God is *the* Tyrant of the universe. Promising absolute liberty, Satan finishes up as the tyrant beyond all tyrants, as well as the father of them all!

The usefulness of this kind of digression is not to alarm but to show that we can eat and drink deceit and not be aware of the fact. We will not admit that we want to escape from God, and yet we convince ourselves that only apart from Him is there a wonderful kingdom, an exhilarating freedom, a glorious liberty. That is the lie that has left many desolate and wretched. It stands in stark and terrible contrast with the servant of God who cries to God out of conviction and experience, ‘I delight to do thy will, O my God!’

## **The Authority of the Scriptures**

Perhaps we should first have discussed the authority of Man, for whenever humans write literature of any kind, or produce art, sculpture and music, they tend to think that the mind that produced it is special and perhaps, even, infallible. There is often great trust in human reason and human inspiration.<sup>65</sup> That is how some would see the Bible—as a special and inspired work of art, but then there are degrees of difference in thinking in regard to the authority of the Scriptures. A good starting point for discussion of biblical authority is to begin with the apostolate of the early church, and examine the authority of the apostles.

### **The Authority of the Apostles**

In Mark 3:13–14 we read that Jesus ‘called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach’. They needed to be with him in order to be taught, to learn by his words and actions, so that finally they could be sent out when the time was right. In Luke chapter 9 we see the twelve disciples sent out to preach the gospel of the Kingdom in the same way that Jesus preached it. They did so by way of delegated authority. Again, in Luke chapter 10, a further seventy disciples were

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<sup>64</sup> It appears that the Puritans enjoyed most pleasures of life, and sex was looked upon generally as a beautiful gift of God which they enjoyed. They all also enjoyed alcoholic drinks, the *Mayflower* being said to have carried an abundant supply of excellent beer! Jonathan Edwards and his wife both enjoyed smoking their pipes and reading the latest novels from Europe! The new—secular—puritanism is a fearful thing. Scarcely anything in this world may now be enjoyed, according to these new ‘warners’. They outdo the Puritans in doom and gloom, although in fact it was not true of the Puritans that they brought doom and gloom.

<sup>65</sup> This is a curious fact: poets, songwriters, writers of fact and fiction—unless they are mature persons and artists—tend to dislike editing or any thought that their work needs correction or refining!



similarly commissioned. This was in order that Jesus should cover Palestinian Israel with the message of the Kingdom.<sup>66</sup> The commission to the twelve disciples<sup>67</sup>—now called ‘apostles’—was not given until after the Resurrection. In the closing sections of the four Gospels and in Acts 1:1–8 that commission is set out. One of the criteria of apostleship was that the person had seen the Lord—indeed had companied with him. Paul—so to speak—got in by the skin of his teeth. He had certainly seen the Lord<sup>68</sup>—on the road to Damascus. He tells the Galatians that he received the gospel ‘through a revelation of Jesus Christ’ and recounts how God had ‘revealed his Son *in me*’. He spoke of himself as ‘an apostle by the will of God’.

No one but God has authority in himself. All authorities are delegated by God. Any authority which goes beyond the delegated commission is reprehensible and must ultimately face the judgment of God. Apostolic authority, then, did not reside in the apostles themselves, but in the commission given to them. The work of an apostle was to interpret the events of Christ in the light of the Old Testament and the Old Testament in the light of the events of Christ, thus producing a new third creation—the gospel of Christ, the true good news of God.

Jesus had promised the disciples that they would be taught by the Spirit, who would also bring to their remembrance what he—Jesus—had previously taught them. The Spirit would glorify Christ by revealing the things of the Father and the Son. This happened to the eleven disciples at Pentecost, and to Paul on the road to Damascus and in the time when he was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17; cf. I John 2:20f.). The apostles, then, had that truth—often called the apostolic truth—and this was authoritative. This had nothing to do with personal infallibility—such as in the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope—for their ministry was to witness to Christ, and not to be infallible theologians. Their ministry had to do with both faith and practice.<sup>69</sup> This is shown by the fact that Peter rebuked Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1ff.)—even to their death—but was later rebuked by the apostle Paul for his failure to eat with the (Christian) Gentiles (Gal. 2:11ff.).

Adolf Harnack has an interesting statement regarding the apostles and the inspiration of their writings:

The Holy Spirit and the Apostles became correlative conceptions, with the consequence that the Scriptures of the New Testament were indifferently regarded as composed by the Holy Spirit or the Apostles.<sup>70</sup>

In II Peter 3:14–16 the author of the Letter includes Paul’s writings amongst the Scriptures. It is not our purpose here to try to prove the truth of the apostolic writings and their innate canonicity—such as exists with the Old Testament canon. If we concede the unique authority of the apostles, then we must also concede that their preaching and writings are in the same stream as the authority of the prophets who spoke from God (Heb. 1:1).

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<sup>66</sup> Jesus did not seek to cover all Israel by himself. Doubtless there was an element of training in the cases of the twelve and of the seventy, but the prime aim was to ensure that all heard the gospel—whatever their response might be.

<sup>67</sup> In fact Judas is not named among the twelve, the eleven apostles having elected Matthias to fill the empty position. It is clear that the number 12 was significant. Scholars have puzzled over a thirteenth apostle, that is, Paul, some suggesting that the selection of Matthias was out of place. There can be no conclusive result of such an argument.

<sup>68</sup> In Acts 26:16–18 Paul tells of his commission by Christ to be an apostle, for he was ‘to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you’.

<sup>69</sup> Sometimes it appears that Paul is in a quandary as to making a decision related to Christian practice. For example, in I Corinthians 7:12 he says, ‘To the rest I say, not the Lord...’. He is simply saying there was no command or elucidation given by Christ, but as Christ’s apostle he now speaks for Christ, that is, Christ is giving the command through him. Thus his statements in this case were fully authoritative.

<sup>70</sup> The reference is to *The Origin of the NT* (ETh, 1925, p. 49).

## The Nature of God's Word

This is a subject which needs close attention.<sup>71</sup> If we separate the word from the Speaker, then it ceases to be the word—as such.<sup>72</sup> God's word is itself dynamic, but then only because it issues from Him (Isa. 55:8–11; Heb. 4:12–13). The *time* of God's utterance has nothing to do with its continuing power. What God has spoken *He* has spoken, and so its dynamism does not fade away with time. The word which comes from Him cannot be separated from Him. It can never return to Him void. Humans may transmogrify the word, in which case it will no longer be the word. The word is nothing if not revelatory, but this is only in the presence of, and by the power of, the Holy Spirit. In Galatians 1:11–12 Paul says:

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

If this principle is extended to all Scripture, then it must mean that we are dependent upon God's revelation to know the truth. The word being the truth means that it is authoritative—not of itself, but because of God Who has spoken it, and continues to speak it. We must keep in mind the fact that God and the word of God are one—there can be no separation of the two. Our primary contact with God is through His word. To believe the word and to give emphasis to it is not to be an idolater, but a worshipper of God. Not to hear His word and obey it is to defy God in the interests of our own autonomy—our so-called freedom.

## The Authority of the Church

It used to be said that the church gave the Bible to the world, but rather it is God who gave His word to His church. The argument was that the church was the monitor and arbitrator of the word; but that cannot be. The word is prior to the church having brought it into being, and, as God has said:

But this is the man to whom I will look,  
he that is humble and contrite in spirit,  
and trembles at my word.

The church is the body of Christ, and derives its life from him. In that sense Christ is prior to the church. He is its head, its hierarchical head, but then only as he is under the Father.<sup>73</sup> Christ has given the truth to the church, but the truth is not apart from him, so that authority derives from Christ, the word and the Spirit. This is the authority the church knows. Only as it clings to the word and obeys its Lord and is led by the Spirit does it exercise true authority.

The authority of the apostles was one which could not be questioned—even given in their imperfect humanity. The post-apostolic period represents a problem to us who stand and live in time apart from the object; that is, given in that the apostles had authority, does that authority pass on to succeeding persons chosen to be apostles? The answer is, 'No! The

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<sup>71</sup> There are numerous publications and articles on the matter of the authority of the Bible. Moslems go very close to making a hypostasis of the Koran, and some Christians have a similar view regarding the Bible. In such cases there is a tendency to separate God from His word and words, the Scriptures become an entity in themselves, an authority in themselves, and harm can only result from such a view.

<sup>72</sup> I suggest reading articles in my *For Pastors and the People* (NCPI, 1989). The section 'The Doctrine of the Word of God' should prove helpful.

<sup>73</sup> From time to time the church seems to arrogate to itself the authority which alone belongs to Christ its head. As we keep saying, the church must refer always to Christ. With him as its head the church is authoritative.

apostolic truth has been stated in the New Testament Scriptures and is sufficient. It was not the truth of the apostles, but the truth given to the apostles'. Whilst there may be apostles of a secondary order in post-apostolic times, they are not as the original apostles. When James the apostle was killed by Herod, he was not replaced by another apostle.<sup>74</sup> So there was no problem regarding authority in the post-apostolic age. The church adhered to, and proclaimed, the apostolic truth. The Lord, the Holy Spirit and the word have always been present in the church. Thus authority has always been present.

In our next study we will be using an essay to illustrate this whole matter.

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<sup>74</sup> We will have occasion to discuss the theory of 'Apostolic succession' and the matter of clerical hierarchy. This will be when we discuss the principle of hierarchy.

NCTM. Thursday a.m. Class. 3rd Term 14/9/95. 'Authority: Divine, Celestial, Human'. G. Bingham

## Study Nine: An Essay on Toby and Authority

### A Story about Authority

When I knew Toby as a boy, I liked him because of his careless and casual approach to life. Because I was being brought up in a home where there was a stern righteous father who demanded the utter truth, and because we were never allowed excesses in anything—food, clothing, entertainment, talk, laughter, sport, hobbies and the like—I admired him with some envy for the fact that he could do what he liked, and he had no conscience about the matter. Well, he had no conscience about the matters I have just mentioned.

He did, in fact, have a conscience, and this is about conscience—his conscience anyway. He would never go against his conscience. In those days I knew nothing about William Temple's famous essay in *Essays and Reviews*. The essence of the essay was that no matter how much you have been informed ethically and morally by the Bible, and by Bible teachers, when your conscience and your private interpretation of anything clash, then always make conscience the supreme interpreter. Follow your conscience. Having—since the days of my boyhood—done a fair bit of research concerning conscience, I wonder how William Temple could have said anything so asinine.

As I say, my friend, whom I here call 'Toby Crawley'—since he is still alive and may not like my mentioning his true name—was a person you might even call 'amoral', for to me he never seemed to see wrong in the things I was taught were wrong. Take, for example, eating. Instead of calling him Toby, I could well nickname him 'Tubby'. He ate what he liked, when he liked, and although I would never call him a glutton, I considered him excessive in what he ate. Take cream cakes or cream buns, for example. I would buy one with my pocket money about every four months, but he had them weekly and sometimes even daily.

I guess my parents today would be called pretty legalistic, even tyrannous, but I never saw them that way. We were all a pretty healthy lot—the whole nine children. Any sickness would be looked upon either as a sham—to get out of going to school—or it had resulted from doing something we ought not to have done. My mother also had a way of minimising her sickness. Secretly I wished that I could get sick. I had a yearning to be noticed among the nine, being in the middle of the bunch. One day my primary school teacher told me that I had the mumps: I had better go home, and not infect the other children. Mother said it was 'swollen glands'. I felt greatly cheated, especially as the teacher had to accept her word for it—my mother's word, she who knew nothing about sickness.

So much for my interruption in this story. Toby could have headaches whenever he liked them, especially when he had not done his homework, or cheated off mine. He could laze about at home, and his conscience never worried him. Well, as I was saying, Toby was quite obedient to his conscience. What I did not know then is something I now know. Toby trained his conscience to be his interpreter in the way he wanted things interpreted. Take, for example, lying. Even now, when I remember back, I am amazed at how he could lie without a quiver of conscience. In this respect he was a natural Jesuit—without prejudice to the order of Ignatius of Loyola. Their principle was 'The end justifies the means'.

Well, Toby was fully versed in that principle. I think that for the most part I was free of lying; or, if not free, then I knew it was wrong to lie. My conscience would trouble me if I

lied. Rather than trouble my conscience, which always then troubled me, I kept from lying. What is more, I was always troubled—even embarrassed—in the presence of someone lying. Toby caused me much pain in this respect. In films which portray private detectives—or others—breaking into a house, reading files (usually in the dead of night), I become embarrassed lest the owner of the files turn up at that moment. It was that same embarrassment I would feel in the presence of Toby's lying.

In a different way I was troubled by Toby's utter indifference to suffering, to terrible and painful events which others experienced. Early on I had a conscience about starving children, people caught in famines, plagues and earthquakes. I was horrified when the R100 airship met with a disaster, people being burned to death and others being killed as they fell to earth. None of these things meant anything to Toby.

Cheating at cricket or football was another thing. I don't think Toby even thought it was cheating. Since we did our own umpiring, and had a code of fair play, most of us owned up when something went wrong. Not so Toby. He was quite calm about everything. He never cheated, never made mistakes, never did anything wrong.

In these later years, when one chews the cud of memory quite a bit, I try to analyse or discern the case of Toby, my closest companion. I cannot say that he was truly my friend, for he bewildered me by his ways, but at the same time I liked being with him. I suppose he was a kind of role-case for me. Unconsciously I was trying to learn how others lived. How he lived always amazed me.

I think, now, that I have partly solved the enigma of Toby Crawley. I think I understand him. I believe—indeed am sure—that he never came to terms with authority. Strangely enough he used the weapons of conscience and authority quite a bit. If we were in some kind of mischief and he was at the centre of it, then we were not doing anything wrong. If, however, he was not at the heart of the mischief, suddenly he became powerfully censorious. He would castigate us for the crime we were committing. Moments before he spoke we thought we were just having mischievous fun. When he felt left out he had the power to turn our reasonably innocent fun into a pretty dreadful sin or crime.

Not that he was much moved by what we did. It was simply a way of getting us into his power and of spreading about a bit of misery. I can see now that he knew how to speak at the conscience. I have learned that one should never speak *at* a conscience, but—if necessary—*to* that conscience. *At* stirs guilt and brings remorse as unpalatable as dry ice, whilst *to* may move us to be genuinely sorry and escape to peace via repentance. I simply mention this to show that I have learned since that Toby was a manipulator of persons. He could manipulate his persons, and especially his plump old Grandpa, who doted on him, and who saw only sin in us, and only pristine innocence in the grandson—that apple of his eye!

I have learned how human beings manipulate one another through inducing feelings of guilt where there has been no guilty action. I have learned that all humans have existential guilt: they feel guilty for not being perfect. It was this guilt into which Toby tapped. I see it all now and marvel that in those days I was so dumb. I have learned that there is a human technique of guilt-transference, but we will not go into that. What concerns me is Toby's power to get us all under his authority. The curious thing was that he simply ignored authority in all its forms. Of course he could toe the line in situations which demanded an outward form of obedience, but I do not believe that he ever obeyed anyone in his life.

He carefully avoided anything which had even the touch of religion. He never entered a church, although he was happy to attend the church boys' club. You were nothing in our district unless you belonged to that! He never listened to anything our leaders said along the line of spiritual information or advice. He kept strictly away from Sunday School and church services. His family was what you might call 'pagan', but then pagans have their own deities

by which they exist.

Not so Toby. Outwardly he was respectful of all things. Inwardly—well, I do not know for sure. I simply know he never obeyed anyone, made no act of submission to anyone, and did just what he liked to do. I can see now that he understood the matter of conscience and that he knew how to handle it—even use it. He desired applause from his conscience—not rebuke or judgment—and for the most part, it seemed, he got it.

What happened to Toby Crawley? I really don't know. I reckon he married a fine young woman of his own social ilk, and had a good family wedding, and has—by this time—brought up his children, and if so they would probably be married by now. I imagine that he would still seem to his friends and family and neighbours to be a good sort of a stick. Perhaps he would puzzle some, but on the whole he would have got away with it, in life. This by contrast with many rebellious people whom I counsel. Many of these are into drugs, alcohol, deviant forms of sexual behaviour, gambling and the like. Without exception these are angry people. Like Toby they have never done anything wrong. They have reasons for being angry, for life—they say—has treated them badly. They have had difficult parents, awkward schoolteachers, pestering employers and interfering bureaucrats. They never really 'got their break'. Circumstances, heredity and environment seem almost always to have been against them. They are the victims of many things. That is why they are justifiably angry, resentful, suspicious and cynical.

I can easily understand these people. Like Toby they have never obeyed anyone. They are impervious to authority. They wiggle away from it; they toe the line and laugh at their own deceit; they often become violent against it; and they accept no blame for any of their actions. What then is the difference between Toby and them? I think that in many ways there is no difference: both ignore the supreme authority—God—and all familial and governmental authorities. Long ago they have rationalised all these as faulty and unworthy of their obedience. At the same time they lack the security that comes from being under some authority, and this seems to compound their dislike of authority. I think that—unlike Toby—they cannot seem to train their consciences to let them off the hook at every turn, move and event of life. If you are a thoughtful person you will probably say that no person can so train his—or her—conscience in that way. I myself wonder at my conclusion regarding Toby. This must be the sin called 'unpardonable' and 'beyond redemption'. One does not look for forgiveness when that one thinks he—or she—has done no wrong!

As the years have passed, I have realised that all of us have a bit of Toby in us. We, too, make provision for our consciences. That is why I cannot agree with William Temple. I am grateful for my conscience, but am wary of letting it either tyrannise me, or let me off the hook. I am grateful for—and to—my parents who were pre-remissive society citizens in this world. Their reasonable honesty kept me reasonably true to reasonable values. Better still, I caught some of their concern for humanity in its suffering and misery. I suppose I learned from them the changes of sorrow and joy, suffering and wellbeing. As things have fallen out, I suppose I have suffered quite a bit, but I greatly enjoy my fellow human beings. I love life, and I like the gifts of teaching and of writing. I have also learned that I can deceive myself and others—that some of the Toby-disease flows in my veins, but, when cut down to size, I first feel greatly hurt and then wonderfully liberated.

I don't think I ever really envied Toby. In retrospect I think I actually pitied him—and this without patronage or condescension. I know he missed the keen edge of sorrow, but he also missed the keen edge of joy and phenomenal happiness when one discovers some new truth, when one comes suddenly upon a rich and lovely phase of life. So much there is to enjoy, and pain and suffering seem to give a piquant flavour to it all.

Of course Toby might have had a terrifying experience of self-revelation. Tragedy sometimes breaks up and fragments the protective walls we build around ourselves. Perhaps the death of a much-loved child, or his wife, might have caused a stark unmasking of his being. I do not know. I hope so, and if so, then I hope that he will have survived the event, and learned from the episode. The trouble with our Tobies is that they do not have great love for spouses or children, however much they may be proud of them. Yet does it not happen with Tobies as well as it does with others, that somehow—beneath all conditioning of conscience—something of genuine humanity—the image of God—is still present, eventually disturbing and unseating the self-trained conscience and causing reality to enter that life?

What I say now—in conclusion—you must believe is not said with any element of self-righteousness. Times happen when we testify to the greatness and goodness, holiness and love of God. This is not only good to do, but is essential for our continued wellbeing as true humans. I love worship. I have a great sense of dread of God, but it is not a frightening dread. It is not a slavish fear. It is a good fear, cleansing out the detritus that accumulates in a person who is not perfect. I have a great respect and a genuine gratitude for authority. I am glad God has ordained the powers that be, and that every authority—no matter its quality—is delegated by God. I am glad for parents—their memory is very strong and rich, though I know, like me, they were often faulty. I am grateful for my teachers, though some of them terrified me. I am glad of church-leaders, leaders in civilian society. I think policemen are fine, though some of them fall into corruption. I am glad of our parliamentary leaders. I have great delight when I sit in a court of law and see the respect that is still given to these delegated magistrates and judges. I am aware that there are faulty advocates and that judges have their prejudices and strange whims, yet I am glad for every form of authority. I am also aware of the whims and prejudices of those of us who vote our leaders into parliament and who say we uphold authority. I believe I have worked my way through most of these things, but it has taken much time and labour to do so.

I love authority. I love the authority that demands and enables my worship. I love to think of God, and His greatness. I have been caught up into God for many years and now I know Him—at least in part. I am not tolerant of frivolity in worship, I dislike irreverence and I know I am mostly conservative in my choice of liturgy and forms of worship. I think I understand that other human spirits wish to express their joy in ways that are not native to me, so I accept these differentiations, and in some cases admire them.

Without snobbery, I am grateful for not being as Toby. I recognise that he is, with me, equally human, but I have pity—and even fear—for the liberal ones who scorn authority, who train their consciences to withhold rebuke and judgment. I know I am no less—or more—a sinner than the Toby I knew, but I think that though I am not better than he, I am better off! Liberty does not appeal to me if it is only liberty from God and law and true morality. Equality has always seemed to me to be an unnecessary attempt to measure and homogenise. I like the differentiations both within the God-head, within man, and in all creation. I reject the ideas of equality and inequality as irrelevant and unreal. As for fraternity—I like the idea of the theologian (P. T. Forsyth) who pointed out that fraternity presupposes fatherhood, and true brotherhood comes only through the true Fatherhood. I do not think that the French Revolution achieved any of these goals, but rather disturbed us and diverted us from the true goal of integrity: ultimate peace, unity, serenity and a glorious destiny.

Thank you, Toby, for having stimulated me to write thus. My conscience tells me that there is much in this essay which is faulty and imperfect, but Divine grace marvellously assures me that the Father rather applauds it and sends me intimations of His love!



NCTM. Thursday a.m. Class. 4th Term 19/10/95. 'Authority: Divine, Celestial, Human'. G. Bingham

## Study Ten: The Matter of Hierarchy— Functional and Relational

### Introduction: The Need to Understand Hierarchy

The meanings of words may be found in a dictionary, but, as someone has said, 'A dictionary is a series of guesses'. Words are vitalistic and change their meanings according to usage. There is generally a subjective impression given by words, and, according to the mood or temper of the writer or reader, images are formed from words. Early in this study we noted that the fallenness of man brings a dislike of the words 'law', 'commands', 'authority', 'subjection' and 'obedience'. The word 'hierarchy' appears to be one which is in disfavour, especially to the egalitarian mind. There seems to be no way of obliterating the connotations of these words, unless some radical change in understanding takes place. I believe that relationships are what matter in life, and because of this, when relationships do not succeed—as, say, in families—then certain attitudes towards authority figures persist throughout life. Only some unusual happening can change the tenor of them.<sup>75</sup> *Revelation* and not merely *explanation* is needed to bring this transformation of true understanding. When it comes, then theological, familial, governmental and ecclesial hierarchies<sup>76</sup> take on a new look, and, we might say, a lovable appearance.<sup>77</sup>

### The Trinity: the Source, the Paradigm and the Power

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<sup>75</sup> For example, children have certain images of parents and other authority figures. The word 'father' to many children carries the connotation of authority, law, demand, judgement and similar 'heavy' impressions. Is this necessarily the fault of the father, or is it the result of the imperfection of fallen humanity, i.e. the fallenness of the parent and of the child? Certainly the childhood impressions fix an image which can be heavily authoritarian and so block off a wonderful view of God as the true—archetypal—loving Father. See my *I Love the Father* (NCPI, 1990) and *Oh, Father! Our Father!* (NCPI, 1985), where the matter of the formation of such images is expanded.

<sup>76</sup> By 'ecclesial hierarchies' we do not mean necessarily those which have developed in the history of the church, as given in the note following. We are talking simply about the ecclesial authority in the apostolic church. The following note is taken from *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Reprinted 1977, vol. 5, p. 275):

**HIERARCHY** (from Gk. *hieros*, 'sacred,' and *archia*, 'rule'): The rule of sacred things; then a body of rulers organized for such rule. The Roman Church probably presents the most perfect example of a hierarchy organised monarchically, the whole power centering in the pope, and most minutely graded, both with respect to orders—bishops, priests, deacons (the *ordines juris divini*), and subdeacons, acolytes, exorcists, lectors, doorkeepers, etc. (the *ordines juris ecclesiastici*), and with respect to jurisdiction—archbishops, metropolitans, exarchs, patriarchs, deans, vicars, cardinals, legates, etc. In the Greek Church the hierarchical organization is oligarchical: above the several patriarchs there is no pope. In the Evangelical Churches, where the State rules the Church, more or less of the hierarchical apparatus may be retained, as in the Church of England and the Prussian Church; while, when the Church is established on the principle of universal priesthood, and the congregation rules itself, as in the American churches and many free churches in Europe, all hierarchy disappears.

The persistence of a desire to rule, or to use priesthood as a form of domination, is seen in Hooker's statement regarding the abolition of the term 'priest' for the biblical term 'presbyter'. He said, 'New presbyter is old priest writ large'! Pastors can be little popes, whilst the often-maligned Pope can be a gracious pastor.

<sup>77</sup> I refer to the fact that true authority is a delegated gift. Authority is to be used lovingly, for purposes of serving those in its jurisdiction. Christ as Lord is not dominating or domineering, but he is the Servant—*par excellence*—to his people. We are not speaking of mere benevolence which can arise out of a natural disposition, but of the dedicated serving which arises out of love and its sense of total responsibility to those under its ministry.

## for all Human Relationships

We have seen that the relationships between the Three Persons, and their Unity as One God, would be unknowable for us were it not for the revelation God has given us, and especially in and by His Son and through His Spirit. It is an extraordinary thing that human beings are permitted, let alone are moved personally by God, to view these relationships. It is even more extraordinary that through the gift of adoption—following the liberating action of the atonement—human beings are reconciled fully by God to Himself, made one with Him since their lives are hidden with Christ in Him: thus the powerful truth of the Triune God dwelling in the persons of His people, and they dwelling in the Triune Godhead. Via the *imago Dei* resultant relationships must emerge, for regeneration brings persons back to their creational state in God, and what they experience are the only true relationships human beings can know, since they derive from, and comport with, the law of Christ—the true law of God. Of course the reality of Divine love (*agape*) is the great power by which true relationships obtain (I John 4:11, 12, 19).

What we must keep in mind is that these relationships do not come as prescriptions. They are not legal requirements or even specified roles, although they often appear to be. They issue from the archetype of the Godhead. They are also linked with the principle of hierarchy. Speaking of the *imago Dei*, Thielicke says:

It is characteristic that the various references to the divine likeness in Genesis (1:26; 5:1; 9:6; cf. also Wis. 2:23; Sir. 17:3) do not give us statements of ontological content but restrict themselves to these hierarchical relations, to the position of man in the total cosmos. This is true even of a verse like Genesis 5:1, where the concept of the divine likeness is, as it were, a preamble to the first genealogy in the Bible, the one that ends with Noah (5:32).<sup>78</sup>

## The Matter of all Human Relationships

There can be no question that human relationships commence with creation, with Man made in the image of God, and with the man and the woman. Whilst there is some disclosure of the Godhead, all is not disclosed. Likewise, whilst we can understand the *imago Dei*, there must be much of it which is not disclosed. Only what is disclosed of the Trinity can help us understand Man. We have argued that as the likeness and reflection of God, Man—that is, the human race—has not only the paradigm for relationships in the Godhead, but the relationships of the Persons are the only way in which true human relationships can obtain. It is essential, then, to know whether relationships within the Godhead are hierarchical. We cannot deny the hierarchies in which we presently live, but we ask whether they are of the Divine order, and not an order which comes from human fallenness.

## The Matter of Hierarchy

Biblically Man is hierarchical in relation to the creation; that is, he is above it and rules over it—that is, he has hierarchical placement and responsibility to rule over all other creatures—yet he is under God, who not only calls him to lordship over it, but also exercises Lordship over him. He prohibits him from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The mandate of Genesis 1:28 is presumably not beyond Man's capacity, nor is it in any way

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<sup>78</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics. Volume 1: Foundations*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979, p. 155.

inhibitive for Man *qua* Man, any more than the prohibition to eat of the tree is essentially inhibitive. The question arises whether in the Triune Godhead and the relation of the Persons there is an hierarchy. For example, is the Father as *fons divinitatis* in hierarchical relationship to the Son, since the Son proceeds from Him? Likewise, is the Spirit in an hierarchical order?

These questions are asked because they have great bearing on our whole thesis regarding authority. If there is an hierarchical order within the Godhead, then there can be no questioning of it in the human order, that is, in the functioning of the *imago Dei*. It is without question that as a result of the Fall, part of God's judgment on the fallen couple was to declare the hierarchical rule of the man over the woman: 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you'. Whilst accepting this self-evident fact that following the Fall there is an hierarchical order in marriage, some scholars speak of it being the *result* of the Fall but deny it is a true ontological—that is, creational—order. As we have noted before, the same argument is sometimes used of the whole principle of law and authority; that is, that had there been no Fall there would not have been law and authority, since it is only man's sinfulness which calls for them.

There are two ways to go about researching whether hierarchy is part of the order of creation, the first being to examine the biblical accounts of creation, and the second to find some situation in which there is an unquestionable hierarchical order and examine it.

### The Creation of Man

The materials of Genesis 1:26–31 show that Man's creation is purely in the context of vocation. The *imago Dei* must not be viewed in any way which separates Man from the responsibility and task of ruling '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'. God as Creator rules over all things, but Man is delegated this position. 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.' Genesis 5:1f. adds, 'When God created man, he made *him* in the likeness of God. Male and female he created *them*, and he blessed *them* and named *them* Man'. There can be no question that the man and the woman together are Man; that is, in union they constitute Man. *Man is a unitive male–female entity, dynamical in relationship with God, serving Him in the mandate and one with Him in His purposes.* It is as one that they undertake the fulfilling of the Divine mandate. If—following Thielicke—we see the *imago Dei* as relational and teleological in the fulfilling of the mandate, then we can see that the relationship between the man and the woman is one which subsists within the action, rather than in some prescribed relational category, as such. Questions of the man looking at the woman, and the woman at the man, that is, living *vis-à-vis* instead of being one entity facing the creation as God's dynamic image, should not be raised. The account of the man—as Man—naming the creatures confirms his place in the hierarchy, but the woman is missing.<sup>79</sup> She comes as a helpmeet, and she is a special creation of God, but not as the Man was created is she created from him. Thus she is 'bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh'. She is integrally part of him. Now they are together Man and cannot be thought of as apart in being Human, that is, Man, but we must see them as functionally, teleologically, vocationally active. Does this then constitute any form of hierarchy? If by hierarchy we mean a course of members graduated in descending order of subordination from one who is superordinate, and if we understand

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<sup>79</sup> We have pointed out before that some would say woman was inherent in the Man and so the Man was androgynous. The woman was made out of the Man, and he was prior to her. She has a special creation given to her, even though she was 'bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh'.

elements of superiority and inferiority according to the places of the members, then the answer must be, ‘No!’. If, however, we mean ‘A course of members functionally moving together for the fulfilment of a task, in which the hierarchical order is required’, then the answer is, ‘Yes!’.

We constantly face the psychological and emotional difficulties that come from being under another person, in having to take directions from that one. The deeper issue of how we relate to God in His authority and ‘superordination’, and so consequently relate to others who have authority over us, is really the basic matter. Any enquiry into the matters of law, authority and hierarchy should take this into consideration.

### Ontological Hierarchy

When we talk about ontological hierarchy we must keep in mind that the division of the Trinity into two categories—ontological and economic—is not wholly satisfactory. God is not subsistent without being *actusus*, that is, being in action. We must keep in mind the corresponding actional nature of the *imago Dei*. We now take one or two hierarchies that came into being at creation. In Genesis 1:14–18 we see the hierarchy of sun and moon, and Man’s rule over creation. As man was to rule over all living creatures, so each of these was to rule—the sun by day and the moon by night. What was the place and effect of these hierarchs? The answer is: they had a task to perform—a vocational task of goodness—to give light, and to mark out days and nights. There is also the sense that they were to keep creation within the prescribed boundaries of their rule. If the creation of man and woman in hierarchical order were such, then the order would have been purely with a view to ruling creation for its own good, and, presumably, for God’s glory (cf. Ps. 8:3ff.; 19:1ff.). It is difficult to escape this principle as we read the text. Linked with this is the whole matter of the creation being subjected to futility through the fall of man and—in particular—the curse upon the earth. The rehabilitation of the sons of God into ‘the liberty of the glory’ will also rehabilitate the creation: hence man’s hierarchical authority must have been meant only for good (Gen. 1:31).

If there is a Divine hierarchy, and there is a human hierarchy, then each can be considered, but—as we have previously seen—we do have a hierarchy that involves both God and man in I Corinthians 11:3, and this should be helpful in establishing the principle of hierarchy: ‘But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God’. The order is interesting. It starts with Christ and ends with God. It is not stated as a descending order, even though it can be seen that way. Why is it set out in this way? Because Paul is talking of the order of a man and his wife. The man does not stand alone as superordinate to the wife. He stands under Christ, and this alters matters considerably. If he were standing alone in his headship then the wife would be immediately and only subject to him, and his approach would be conditioned by his autonomous headship. As Christ is his head, his effective headship is of his Lord. Likewise Christ is not standing outside the Father in exercising his Lordship of the man. The wife is not outside her husband, since Man is man and woman—a unitive entity—face-to-face. Both are standing together in the *imago Dei* and as the *imago Dei*—as active in vocation fulfilling the will of God, being—as one—purposive.

There is more to it than even that. There is the *perichoresis-circumincessio*<sup>80</sup> that obtains

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<sup>80</sup> Historical theology shows us that the term *circumincessio* was used by St Bonaventure to translate the *perichoresis* of John of Damascus. The Council of Florence had chosen to use the term *circuminsession*, and later than John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas preferred *circumincessio*. The differences in meaning of the words need not occupy us here. See *The Christian Trinity in History* by B. de Margeria (St Bede’s Petersham, Massachusetts, 1982, pp. 178–186), and Jurgen Moltmann’s *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (SCM, London, 1981, pp. 174–176). The doctrine of *perichoresis* or

throughout the hierarchy. Christ is *in* God, the husband *in* Christ, the woman *in* the husband—the relational hierarchy. God is *in* Christ, Christ is *in* the man, the man is *in* the woman—still the relational hierarchy. All are mutually inter-dwelling one another and all others. This is the relational unity which is Trinitarian and which is extended to man—given in the gift of the *imago Dei*. All questions of domination, superiority–inferiority dissolve. All are one: all share the liberty of the Godhead —subsistent in the Three Persons; extended in creation; damaged in the Fall; and rehabilitated in redemption.

We must face the fact that we cannot get back to the primal union with its innocence and bliss of the first couple. Even with redemption and the presence of the Godhead, we cannot fully know what utter unity is—that is, the unity of the man and the woman in full relationship—but we certainly have a sense of it. Its perfect experience does not take place in this penultimate age. Such unity is fiercely contested by the world, the flesh and the devil. Fallen man has opted for humanistic egalitarianism, trusting that this is the way to, and of, true unity.

I believe egalitarianism is not only an insistence upon human autonomy, but it is also a cry for unity—for interrelational oneness—and rightly so. In I Corinthians 11:3–12 Paul insists that the husband is the image and glory of God and the wife is the glory of her husband<sup>81</sup> and that the man was not created for the woman but the woman for the man, yet ‘nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman’. That is, their hierarchical relationship does not prevent unity, but rather endorses it. In Matthew 23:8 Jesus tells his listeners, ‘But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren’, that is, it is not for a teacher to *demand* he be called ‘rabbi’, for the disciples relate primarily to God as their Teacher, and so together, that is, as one, that is, in unity. In II Corinthians 1:24 Paul says, ‘Not that we lord it over your faith; we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith’. That is, ‘We do not press you about in regard to your faith: you are handling that quite well, yourselves. No one must lord it over anyone’.

So important is the matter of hierarchy, especially in the face of the present feminist–masculist debate, that we need to pursue it fully. If indeed there is a hierarchy within the Triune Godhead, then it will figure significantly for the whole matter of human relationships. For this reason I have written an Appendix, ‘Superordination and Subordination’,<sup>82</sup> which is quite long and contains material that is pertinent to the line we are pursuing, namely, whether law, authority and hierarchy are ontological or not, and, if so, then what changes have come about in relationships because of the Fall and the consequent curse, and how do we go about them? The short précis of the Appendix which I set out below is asserted but not defended here, but see the actual Appendix where I have attempted its justification. Following the material of the précis, we will resume our discussion of human relationships, commencing with the primal

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*circumincessio* is vital for our understanding of the Trinity, and so for human relationships. The two terms generally cover the idea of the co-inherence of the Three Persons, that is, ‘the Persons do not only subsist in the common divine substance; they also exist in their relations to the other Persons’ (Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, p. 174). The *perichoresis* of John of Damascus spoke not only of the interpenetration of the members of the Godhead, but of a circulatory giving–receiving movement. As Persons they are discrete (provided, of course, that the use of ‘discrete’ here does not suggest three centres of consciousness—tritheism—instead of one centre—personal monotheism), and have their own personal characteristics, but as the Triune God they are One, yet in the circulation of the Divine life they give to one another so that their unity is out of the differentiations and not in spite of them. It means that whilst they retain their own discreteness they cannot be other than One together, and so the Spirit must be as much in the Father and the Son as each of them in him—the Spirit.

<sup>81</sup> If the wife is the glory of the husband and he is the glory and image of God, then she stands in relationship to him, as he does to God. Just as God’s glory is not seen apart from the man, so the man’s glory is not seen apart from the woman. Without her he is without glory: with her both together are the glory and image of God. It is not envisaged that the man apart from the woman is the glory and image of God.

<sup>82</sup> See my soon to be published book *All Things Are Yours*.



couple.

### ***Summary of Appendix: Superordination and Subordination***

Commencing with the observation that no one comes to discussion without some bias, and that that bias can only be checked by living in the dynamics of justification, it was also suggested that because of the Fall, man cannot be impartial to the idea of authority and law. We must see, then, whether within the Godhead—that is, amongst the Persons—there is a superordination–subordination. If this were so, the matter of human superordination–subordination hierarchies would be reasonably established.

Because of the inter-dwelling of the three Persons, the usual view of hierarchy—were hierarchy to exist in the Godhead—would have to change. The truth is that there has ever been the interdwelling and the *perichoresis–circumincissio* of the persons of the Godhead. Thus mutuality spells authentic sociality (ontological), and since all is in the context of economic–revelation activity, that which is ontological is not static but dynamic, that is, in interpersonal relationships.

The texts in John’s Gospel of 14:28; 1:1 (esp. *pros ton theon*<sup>83</sup>); 5:18 and 10:29 needed to be dealt with in order to comprehend the Son’s statements regarding the Father—‘The Father is greater than I’, ‘I and the Father are one’. This led on to discussion of the ascended Christ’s position in the cosmos, and in this aeon. This was actuated by the idea of some theologians (cf. the *Quicumque vult*) that the Son was equal to God as touching his deity, but inferior as touching his humanity. In order to preserve the equality of the Son, the work of incarnation and redemption (*opere ad extra*) was put on an inferior level to the ontological subsistence of Triune Godhead (*opere ad intra*). It was then argued that there is an order of superordination and subordination within the Triune Godhead, but it must be understood in the light of relationship, the counsel of God as seen in salvation history and the co-operating of all Persons in this work—the economic-revelation work relating to the *telos* of God.

The whole matter of Christ’s incarnation as humiliation was discussed and the idea negated in favour of its being a Servant work, and therefore not humiliating, but indeed the highest work of all, if we can rightly speak of ‘levels’ in the Trinitarian action. Exegetically Christ’s ‘humbling’ of himself—not to be mistaken for humiliation—was not in relation to incarnation but to crucifixion, so that work amongst mankind cannot be denoted as inferior to what might be called ‘celestial’ work.

The whole matter of superordination–ordination was then discussed and the ontological joy both of authority and submission, command and obedience was examined. It was claimed that understanding subordination-serving must be as much a revelation as any other truth of God. Contemporary views of the matter were discussed, especially because the claim was made that subordination-serving is the highest form of personal being, including Moltmann’s view—linked with contemporary process-theology of God’s patri-compassionism, that is, not the heretical patripassianism, but total identification with Man and his suffering, serving Man in some way through this shared suffering.

### **The Outworking of Hierarchy in Submission and Obedience**

A current thinking is that headship is related only to source or origin; for example, the source of the Son is the Father, the source of woman is man (see Gen. 2:18–24), so that headship is benign and in no way involves ruling or the giving of commands. This claim that headship (whether of the Father, the Son, or the husband) does not involve ruling or commands cannot be substantiated. This can be seen from the following:

#### ***The Father’s Superordination in Regard to the Son***

- (a) The Father commanded the Son to come into the world. Over forty times in John’s Gospel Jesus uses the verb for being sent—by the Father.
- (b) Jesus spoke of the Father giving him commands (John 10:18; 12:49; 14:31), and said, ‘. . . I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love’. In John 12:50 he said, ‘I know that his commandment is eternal life’.

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<sup>83</sup> That is, ‘face to face’. The Son is face to face with the Father, so that he can be no less in Deity than the Father, but primarily this text tells us he was one with the Father relationally as also he was functionally—in the work of creation.

- (c) The Father took the initiative in the Incarnation and the Atonement (Rom. 3:24–25; II Cor. 5:21; I John 4:9–10, 14). The Son was commanded to do these things.

***Christ's Willing Subordination in Regard to the Father***

- (a) Christ was under the Father's authority (see above, and also John 5:19–20; 8:28; 14:10).
- (b) The Father gave the Son authority (Matt. 11:27; 28:18; John 3:35; 5:22ff.; 10:27–30; see also Matt. 3:17; Ps. 2:6–7; Isa. 42:1; Rev. 2:27; 3:21f.).
- (c) The Son learned obedience (Heb. 5:8–10; cf. 2:10) and was obedient (John 9:4; 10:17; 14:30–31; Phil. 2:8).
- (d) He rejoiced in the Father's will (Matt. 11:25–26; Heb. 10:7; Ps. 40:8; John 4:34).
- (e) He said many times that he had kept the Father's will. See John 15:10: 'I have kept my Father's commandments'.

*Note:* Jesus could say, 'The Father is greater than I' (John 14:28), and, 'I and the Father are one' (John 10:30).

***Christ Gave Commands to His Followers***

- (a) Matthew 7:24: 'Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them'.
- (b) Luke 6:46: 'Why do you call me "Lord, Lord," and not do what I tell you?'.
- (c) John 13:34 (cf. 15:12): 'A new commandment I give to you'.
- (d) John 14:15: 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments'. John 14:21: 'He who has my commandments and keeps them'.
- (e) John 15:10: 'If you keep my commandments'; cf. John 8:51: 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death'.
- (f) Matthew 28:20: 'all that I have commanded you'.
- (g) Acts 1:2: 'after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles'; cf. Acts 10:42: 'he commanded us to preach to the people'.
- (h) See Christ's commands to Paul (Acts 9, 22, 26).
- (i) Notice that the Gospel is a command. To believe it is to obey this command and come to 'the obedience of faith' (see Acts 6:7; 17:30; Rom. 10:16ff.; I Thess. 1:9; II Thess. 1:7–8; cf. Rom. 1:5; 15:18; 16:26).

We can sum up these statements by concluding that the headship of the Father is one in which, and by which, He gives commands to His Son, and His Son likewise in his headship gives commands to his followers. What, then, is unacceptable in the giving of commands? Was not the essence of the Law (*Torah*) instruction, and not legislation? Is the Law not 'the Way' rather than 'the Legislation'? Would not we be without direction if there were no law? Is not the Law 'the outshining of God's nature'? Is it not holy, and spiritual and good (Rom. 7:12)?

The question arises: 'Do his followers in any way give commands to others within the church? Do elders, for example, give commands, and in any sense at all do husbands—heads of their wives—ever give commands? If such are given, are they only "domineering over



those in your charge”, or are they protective directions by those appointed “overseers of the flock”?’ The answer to the former question must be, ‘No!’, and the latter question, ‘Yes!’, but we need to check this reply.<sup>84</sup>

### ***Submission, Subjection, and Submissiveness***

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 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);  
 The demons being subjected to the apostles (Luke 10:17–20);  
 Principalities, powers and ‘all things’ to Christ (Eph. 1:21–22; I Pet. 3:22; I Cor. 15:24–27 (cf. Ps. 8:5; 110:1); Heb. 2:5–8 (cf. Heb. 1:3; 10:13);  
 Christians to authorities (Rom. 13:1–7; I Pet. 2:13f.; Titus 3:1);  
 Wives to husbands (Col. 3:18; Eph. 5:22–24; I Pet. 3:1; Titus 2:5);  
 Children of God to ‘the Father of spirits’ (Heb. 12:9);  
 Members of the body to each other (Eph. 5:21);  
 The younger men to the elders (I Pet. 5:5);  
 Members to ‘good men’, fellow workers and labourers (I Cor. 16:16);  
 The church to Christ (Eph. 5:24);  
 Spirits of the prophets to prophets (I Cor. 14:32);  
 Servants to masters (I Pet. 2:18);  
 Slaves to masters (Titus 2:9);  
 The creation to vanity (Rom. 8:20);  
 Sin (negatively) to the law (Rom. 8:7).

The *noun* is used of:

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<sup>84</sup> When referring to ‘leaders’ in the church, i.e. ‘overseers’ (*episkopoi*) and ‘rulers’ (*hegoumenoi*), i.e. ‘those over you’ (*proistamenous*), these terms would appear to be interchangeable for the words ‘elders’ (*presbuteroi*) or ‘bishops’ (*episkopoi*), and, perhaps, ‘pastors’ (*poimenas*), i.e. ‘shepherds’ (see Acts 14:23; 15:6; 20:17, 28; Eph. 4:11; I Thess. 5:12; I Tim. 3:1ff.; 5:17f.; Titus 1:5ff.; Heb. 13:7, 17; I Pet. 5:1ff.; cf. Rev. 4:4 and the many other references in Revelation). There is also a sense in which younger men are under older men (I Tim. 5:1, and perhaps I Pet. 5:5), as also younger women are under older women (Titus 2:3f.). When we remember that Christ under the headship of his Father not only drew his origin from Him but obeyed His commands, and that Christ, the head of the husband, constituted not only the man’s source and origin but that he also gives him commands, and as head of the church gives it commands, then there can be no doubt that the elders represent Christ’s government of the church, i.e. are his headship in practical fact and action, and therefore have a most responsible leadership and rulership role, as well as the role of shepherding the flock and feeding it. This seems to tie in with the fact that Christ chose men to be apostles, and lead the church. In this sense Peter calls himself an elder (I Pet. 5:1). One of the tasks of the elders and/or the bishops is to teach. I Timothy 3:2, ‘an apt teacher’; 5:17, ‘who labour in preaching and teaching’; Titus 1:9, ‘he must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it’; Hebrews 13:7 (assuming the leaders are elders), ‘who spoke to you the word of God’; whilst I Peter 5:2, ‘shepherd [*poimante*] the flock of God’ must mean ‘feed them’, i.e. with the bread of life. If ‘pastors and teachers’ (Eph. 4:11) are the one, as many exegetes think, and they are the elders (as this present writer feels forced to conclude), then Paul’s talk to the elders at Ephesus (Acts 20:17ff.) appears to make pastoring the flock (amongst other things) a matter of teaching. If, then, we take ourselves back to I Timothy 2:8–12 where a woman is not permitted to teach, it would appear that teaching is primarily a directing by the ‘head’ of the ‘body’, since teaching is not merely the right impartation of information but the dynamic revelation of ‘the whole counsel’ of God and has as much to do with life and its practice as with faith, since exhortation is part of the teaching ministry. It requires the ‘head’ to impart to the ‘body’ that which it needs. This is not to say that within the body (member to member) there is not any teaching, for there is, but it is not the kind that the elders-overseers-leaders-shepherds-rulers give, particularly in the context of worship.

Women as subordinate (I Tim. 2:11);  
 Children as submissive (I Tim. 3:4);  
 ‘obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ’ (II Cor. 9:13);  
 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 (v. *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 (v. *peitharcho*) and submission (v. *hupaikeo*, ‘to yield, give way, be submissive’) are linked. In this case the church is to obey its rulers (elders?), and be submitted to them. Children are to obey (*hupakouo*) their parents (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20; cf. Luke 2:51), and in the first case submission is enjoined (Eph. 5:21), whilst in the second case the children cannot be unsubmitted if the wife is called to be (Col. 3:18). In I Peter 3:5–6 the apostle describes ‘holy women who hoped in God’ as being submissive (v. *hupotasso*) to their husbands, and says, ‘Sarah obeyed [v. *hupakouo*] Abraham, calling him lord’. Submission and obedience are here joined.

These references concerning subjection, submission and obedience are set forth as objectively as possible, to show that there is a divinely appointed order, and a demanded obedience. We will discuss the principles of subjection and obedience below, for they may well be different from what they seem as most of us view them. Certainly they must never be interpreted in a legalistic sense.

### **The Total Environment of Hierarchy, Commands, Submission and Obedience**

Often, in seeking what is ontological so that we may press ourselves to conformity with it, we forget two sets of factors. *The first set is to do with communion*; that is, the communion within the Triune Godhead which is the relational situation of true being, as well as the true source for true human being and living. If we forget this then our research into the ontological can be—and generally is—harsh, cold, unrelational and even legalistic. It is often metaphysical to the loss of personal, existential and relational categories of experience. We are trying to discover and apply a ‘norm’ of relationships without necessarily understanding and living in the communion which is trinitarian, and which is shared by the Godhead with elect man. When this understanding and experience of the Divine communion with Man comes to him, it issues from the overwhelming love of God for him, love which is poured into the heart, and love which becomes the living environment for his life and fellowship. Partaking in the Divine nature not only dissolves the ancient enmity against God, authority and law, but it builds a rich new love for it. When we keep in mind the fact that such love does not only come to him personally and singly—‘the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’—but that it comes corporately, that is, in the body of Christ, in the full fellowship of the brethren, then we know that the corporate personal environment is that of love—a theme which Paul, John and Peter pursue with vigour.

*The second set of factors is the varied environment in which we love.* All men—whether they wish it or not—‘live and move and have our being’ in God, but they dislike this Presence and the knowledge of God (Rom. 1:28) so they suppress it (Rom. 1:18). They are antagonists of God (Rom. 1:30) and side with evil powers that likewise are at enmity with God (cf. Eph. 2:1–3). It is in the context of this world with its ‘flesh’ and ‘devil’ that all have to live (cf. I Cor. 7:31; I John 2:14–15). Thus Paul says we are those ‘upon whom the end of the ages [aeons] has come’ (I Cor. 10:11). If we add to this the presence of the curse on the earth, and existential flux of human existence, then we can see the difficulty of discovering, applying

and maintaining what we might call ‘ontological norms’. That is why we have to recognise that there is a ‘battle for relationships’. The first set of factors assists in overcoming the second set of factors, but there are always ‘provisional’ as against ‘ontological’ solutions in this penultimate age. These must not be seen as lessening the nature of God’s will, but they have to do with law. In regard to God’s will there can never be a change, but with regard to the principle of given law there can be. Thieliicke sees what he calls the refraction of God’s law; that is, that in the light of man’s sinfulness and elements of amelioration, he says:

The doctrine of the Law must always be viewed against the background of the fall. The dark foil of this fallen aeon, which flees from God and blatantly defies him but is nonetheless called back by him, must be considered at every point when we speak of the Law of God. Whatever we say theologically concerning the nature of the Law must take its bearings from the Pauline statement that the Law was ‘added because of transgressions’ (Gal. 3:19).

From this it follows that one cannot understand the Law simply as ‘the’ will of God. The Law is rather God’s will as it pertains to us [*quoad nos*]. It is his will as it appears in the refracted light of our particular situation. Perhaps one might even say that it is the will of God as altered by the fallen world.<sup>85</sup>

Thieliicke goes on to describe the amelioration of the law for certain conditions, but our purpose in taking his point is to show that any legalism in regard to what is ontological needs the tempering of grace—not in order to change the law, but to have a right approach to it, so that we do not see it as a piece of inflexible and timeless legislation but the law as it comes from the nature of God, within whom there has ever been both Law and Gospel at the one time. Linked with this, and something to be kept in mind, is the proneness we have to self-justification, so that we always have to fight the tendency to go back on grace. The pride of the religious ego directs us to self-effort, and all forms of evil have a hand in encouraging this. In this climate relationships are prejudiced, since self-justification puts us at odds with all persons.

Another strong element in the environment of hierarchy for submission or otherwise is that of the word which we hear. We can say that we are always hearing one word or another—of God or man, of self or others—and the word we hear determines the strength or fragility of our relationships. The primal woman heard God’s voice in regard to eating of the tree, but she unheeded the word He had spoken when she listened to the word of the serpent. The man listened to the voice of his wife—unhearing God. The proverb in Israel, ‘Where there is no prophecy the people cast off restraint’, is also translatable as ‘Where there is no vision the people perish’; that is, prophecy (vision) is the word of God through the prophet, and when it comes to hearers they act upon it. If they have no word, they do not know how to act. We can rightly talk about the canonical word, but the measure of the canonical is not that it is received by the canonists but that it is already the word of God which is recognised as innately canonical.

Every day we must hear the word, whether it be the inscripturated word (the Bible) or whether it comes to us through other means. We may study the Bible without it speaking to us, and the fault lies not in it but in us. We do not know where to go and what to do, what to say and how to act, apart from the word. This is not to say that God denies us the word, but that it is in His presence that we hear it. Thus the communion of which we speak above is the environment of the word, and the two are inseparable. Where the word is heard, relationships have their true environment. In the company of the Persons, we know the love of God and we hear the will of God in order to do it.

So, then, in the context of the communion with God, with our fellow creatures, in the living of life *vis-à-vis* the fallen world, the curse and the dynamical outcome of human guilt,

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<sup>85</sup> Thieliicke, p. 147.

we can know true relationships, and more so when we keep hearing the word of God to us. There is a responsibility on our part to remain in, and use, this environment.

### **The Alternatives to Non-Hierarchical Relationality, Sociality and Differentiation**

It is the heart of this thesis of authority that what is ontological and economic for the Godhead is the same for Man, though for Man on his own level of humanhood, that is, that in the *imago Dei*, he reflects the being and acts of the Godhead. If our reasoning is that the Fall demanded law and authority—*vis-a-vis* the sinfulness of man—then we have to come to terms that that is the way things will have to be. That is, we must still live in the curse on the earth, the woman must have pain in childbirth and have her husband rule over her, and the soil must bring problems to man as he tills it. In the wider issue we must live with law and authority. The most sensible thing to do—on this score—would be to approach the whole matter with joy and acceptance, and utilise it properly. The cherubim and the flaming turning sword seems to say, ‘Make the most of what you have out there. You cannot get into what is here’. History abounds in invented alternatives to God’s schema for fallen man and creation. When it comes to relationships, those who think law and authority a necessary and unavoidable expedient will have to be realistic and adapt at every point.

If, however, law and authority are not expedients devised to meet the contingency of the Fall, and of fallen celestial powers pitting themselves against God; that is, if law and authority come down from the Godhead and are a gift to man—both creationally (ontologically) and soteriologically—then we must face the whole matter of law, authority and relationships on an entirely different basis. Thielicke rightly warns against seeing the law as a static timeless entity. He says:

It would be quite erroneous to try to understand this Law in terms of the ‘abstract truth’ it contains or to ascribe to it the kind of ‘timeless validity’ expressed, for example, in the categorical imperative. The moment we do this the Decalogue becomes ‘natural’ law and the axis of a corresponding system of ‘natural’ law. It becomes a moral idea which moves in the void and is no longer rooted in history. The existence of a system of natural law always indicates a crisis in the concept of history. Behind the historical phenomenon, behind the positive law which changes, there is sought a constant factor, a timeless Platonic idea of law, an abstract norm of the moral. To be sure, this negative judgement is not the only criticism which theology has to make of natural law; if that were the case it would imply a thoroughgoing committal of theology to positivism. Nevertheless, behind every attempt to interpret the Law of God simply as natural law there is this attack on history. History becomes mere illustration or mythical adornment of that which is timelessly valid.<sup>86</sup>

Thielicke says that the law must always be viewed against the background of the Fall: ‘The dark foil of this fallen aeon, which flees from God and blatantly defies him but is nonetheless called back by Him, must be considered at every point when we speak of the Law of God’. We must take into consideration, he says, the fact that the law ‘was added because of transgressions’ (Gal. 3:19), and it would seem from this that Thielicke is saying the law only came because of sins, so that his view is the first one nominated above. That is not true of Thielicke. He sees the law as the will of God, but then not as simply that will. ‘The Law is rather God’s will as it pertains to us [*quoad nos*].’<sup>87</sup>

Law, in any treatment, must be seen as beneficial. It is a strange thing that the punishment/curse as meted out to the woman and the man in Genesis 3 has been looked upon

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<sup>86</sup> Thielicke, pp. 149–150.

<sup>87</sup> Thielicke, p. 147.

as a burden and a problem. Rarely does it seem to be viewed as an immense blessing. Law and authority are inseparably linked. Few would deny the authority of God and the delegated authority to the sun and the moon and man. The view of authority and law which fallen man takes, makes them unacceptable as ontological, but rightly they are the means of blessing for the human being of faith. Because we as sinful beings have sinful views of law and authority, does not mean that both these things are deficient. The view in Israel of God's authority and His law come as a revelation. The resources of the Old Testament bear rich witness to the beauty and wonder both of authority and God's law. This is surely part of the case for both authority and law.

NCTM Thursday a.m. Class. 4th Term 26/10/95. 'Authority: Divine, Celestial, Human.' G. Bingham.

## Study Eleven: 'All Things Are Yours in the Present Time'

### Possessing One's Possessions<sup>88</sup>

In the Pentateuch the people of the covenant—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—are given promises, time and again, regarding the land of Canaan. God tells the patriarchs He will give them this land 'for your possession'. Theirs are the true 'land-rights'. We know the Canaanites were to be dispossessed because of their iniquity, especially their idolatry. What matters for our present essay is that whilst they were promised possession they had to effect it. This was to be a matter of obedience and faith. In the early stages of their journey they failed to go up and take the land because the obstacles seemed too large and frightening. Faith and obedience were missing. When chastised because of this, the heady ones decided to go and take the land anyway. They failed because they sought victory in their own strength. It took some forty years to train Israel to go up and possess its possessions. The words 'possess' and 'possession' are used some 140 times in the first six books (Genesis to Joshua). The idea of being given possessions and then possessing those possessions was certainly dinned into the people of God—Israel.

We have seen that, in the New Covenant mediated by Christ, certain promises are made, and certain gifts are given, but these must all be appropriated by obedience and faith. Christ comes as Messiah in the Gospels, and his hearers not only have the right to believe he will effect good things such as healing, signs and miracles, but in fact they are also supposed to understand these 'good things'. Many do. Here and there there is unbelief, but Christ is able to say to some, 'Go in peace. Your faith has saved you', or, 'Go in peace, your faith has healed you'. In these special cases faith—belief in Jesus—brought healing to them. They were 'possessing their possessions' in Christ. In John's Gospel to believe in Jesus is to receive eternal life. The Acts evidence the gifts of God being worked through His servants, and in the Epistles the church is informed—time and again—of the many gifts of God.<sup>89</sup> Faith is demanded for believing God's goodness in giving, and for conscious appropriation of the gifts—the possessing of the possessions.

What is so thrilling to the Christian is that he—or she—has been given gifts, and such gifts both quantitatively and qualitatively, so that the receiver has more than is required for true living, and for useful ministry. We have made much in this book of the fact that there is a great treasure or inheritance stored up for us, and it may be that in rightly setting our sights upon it we may nevertheless neglect and underestimate the gifts we already possess. Faith is no less required in seeing and possessing these in the present life than it is in being 'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (Heb. 11:1).

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<sup>88</sup> This present study is Chapter Sixteen of the book *All Things Are Yours*. We have by-passed chapters 11 to 15. The titles of these are 'Human Identity in Divine Relationships', 'The Matter of Human Vocation', 'The Matter of Human Destiny', 'Inheritance', 'Essay on Consummation'. The previous chapters on Authority need to be seen in the light of the five chapters omitted

<sup>89</sup> See my 'The Giver: the Gifts: the Giving', which is No. 3 of the *Living Faith Studies* (NCPI, 1979, vol. I).

## **‘Thanks be to God For His Inexpressible Gift!’**

This is one of the appreciative cries of the human heart which has had grace lavished upon it by the loving Triune God (II Cor. 9:15).<sup>90</sup> In this case it is the Father’s gift of His Son. As Paul tells us elsewhere, ‘He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all’ is the One who will ‘give us all things with him’. General statements like ‘God . . . richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy’, ‘everything created by God is good’, ‘the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food’ indicate that creation is filled with the beautiful riches of God. Genesis 1:31 confirms this: ‘And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good’. Many of the Psalms (cf. Ps. 104) are filled with praise for God’s goodness in creation, in preservation of His people and the world, as also for His strong covenantal love.

We know that deep trouble came to Man and creation when Man refused to be grateful and to honour God for all that He was, and all He had done (Rom. 1:21). Many Scriptures exhort God’s people to give praise and thanksgiving to God for who He is and what He has done, and does. Idolatry is Man’s substitute for God, as the devotee ascribes all glory and power to that object. There will never be thanksgiving to God whilst Man insists he receives nothing from God. Human egotism and idolatry go hand in hand. Certainly if Man will not acknowledge the gifts of God in creation, he will not acknowledge them in redemption.<sup>91</sup>

For the moment we will not consider this terrible rejection of God by Man, and the lie of worship which is idolatrous. We will concentrate on the wonder of covenant as first it came to Noah; then to the patriarchs; and in power to the people of Israel. Much as that is a great wonder in itself, the coming of the New Covenant confronts us now in our present age with the immeasurable giving of God. Such covenant contains God’s ‘inexpressible gift’. In fact our present book has sought to reveal the rich grace of God in all His creating and saving acts. Nothing can transcend Paul’s statement of II 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’.

If we were tempted to think that God in His greatness finds giving a mere trifle, and no drain upon His resources, then the gift of His Son at the Cross must tell us of the costliness of giving. Even so, this is a poor way of considering God’s giving. It is the glory of Himself that He gives—without conditions—and it should be the glory of Man that he receives without quibbling and without taking all for granted.

### **The Fact of the Present Gifts in the Church**

Much of the Epistles is given over to the matter of gifts. It is not our intention to cover all these, but rather to indicate the reality and significance of them. The gifts seem to be of two kinds: the first being those of grace, such as the elements which are linked with redemption: faith, repentance, the forgiveness of sins, new birth, new (eternal) life, justification, sanctifi-

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<sup>90</sup> Matthew 5:43–48 makes it clear that God pours out His gifts lavishly upon all human creatures—whether they do good or evil. In our case we are speaking of one who recognises the grace of God and receives it with gratitude. In II Corinthians 6:1 Paul warns his readers against accepting the grace of God in vain, that is, ‘in an empty way’. Paul’s Letter to the Galatians extrapolates this point.

<sup>91</sup> We know that fallen Man cannot afford to see the goodness of God in creation, thus he does not first see God’s goodness in creation. The act of the Gospel and the Spirit in redemption brings a person to see that God is love, so that knowing this he then sees God’s gifts in redemption and creation. In both Acts 14 and 17 Paul endeavours to show the pagans the active goodness in creation, but is more an *apologia* than a *kerugma* in itself.



cation, adoption (sonship), the Holy Spirit, and proleptic glorification.<sup>92</sup> All of these gifts are found and operate in the context of faith, hope, and love. In Ephesians 1:3 we have the positive statement that the heavenly Father ‘has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places’, and these blessings are nominated as those of holiness and sonship which come through redemption via the forgiveness of sins. Not all the blessings are nominated, but the sense of the passage is that there is no blessing (gift) which has been withheld. We have *all* gifts.

The second set of gifts (in Eph. 4:7ff.) are those which we might call ‘churchly’ or ecclesial, such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. In I Corinthians 12:4–31 (cf. I Cor. 14:1ff.) there are gifts which become known as ‘the charismata’. In I Peter 4:10f. it would seem that the gifts of Ephesians 4 and I Corinthians 12 are much in mind. These ecclesial gifts appear to have two functions:

- (i) to be of use within the church to strengthen and enrich it; and
- (ii) to be of value in the proclamation of the gospel.

Romans 12:3–13 is a fine commentary on the facts and uses of these gifts. It is clear from Ephesians 4:7–15 that all members of the community are involved in ministry, that is, in being servants one of another, and that gifts are a great help in this service.

It is clear that all gifts are of grace, and even of mercy (Rom. 12:3, 6; I Cor. 15:10; II Cor. 4:1; Gal. 1:15–16; Eph. 3:7–9; I Tim. 1:16; I Pet. 4:10–11), and their power lies in the fact that they are directly given by God to His children. As in Romans 6:23 the gift of God is eternal life ‘in Christ Jesus’, so the gifts of Christ *are* Christ (Eph. 4:7f.) and are the gifts of the Spirit inasmuch as the Spirit distributes them sovereignly (I Cor. 12:7, 11).

### **The Essence of True Giving**

James 1:17–18 (with 1:5 and 3:17) tells us that there is no good giving and no perfect gift which does not come from the Father. He is the true Giver. All human giving is flawed. We—being evil—may know how to give good gifts to our children, but even there we do not do it perfectly. Giving is perhaps the most difficult exercise of all human action.

At the same time, for the believer *not* to give is a stultifying exercise. He—or she—is, by redemption, an hilarious giver (II Cor. 9:7). The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost shows the new giving. Love was shown in giving, for this is the principle of love—to give. ‘God so loved . . . that he gave . . .’ is the song of the New Testament, but is the song also of the Old Testament. Israel knew it should care for the poor, for widows, orphans and the indigent. Such giving followed the paradigm of the Covenant-Father who saved Israel and gave her the Promised Land. Such giving was to be found in the sacrifices, for these were given by God (Lev. 17:11).

In the light of what we have spoken about hierarchies of love, and of the *perichoresis*, that is, the internal circulatory movement of the Divine Hierarchy, it was natural that when the Spirit came he brought the love of God into the hearts of all (Rom. 5:5), and so true giving of perfect gifts<sup>93</sup> suddenly became operative. The Acts and the Epistles inform us of this perpetual action.

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<sup>92</sup> By ‘proleptic glorification’ we mean that spoken of in Romans 8:30. Whilst we are being glorified (II Cor. 3:18; cf. 4:16–18) yet God has accepted the outcome as applying to us now. This assured glorification is a gift.

<sup>93</sup> We mean by this what John means in I John 3:10–22. There the *needed* gift is the *perfect* gift; that is, the giving of the Son for forgiveness (v. 16) and the giving of the gift to meet the need of the brother (vv. 17–18). We mean nothing more or less than the gift which meets the need when we have the wherewithal to supply it.

## Giving and Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving throughout the Scripture is something which—like love—is commanded. Most sacrificial offerings are made in thanksgiving, even if many of them are propitiatory, since it is God who gives the sacrifice (Lev. 17:11) which initiates and sustains faith in the offerer who is grateful for grace (cf. Luke 18:13–14; Rom. 3:24–25; I John 4:9–10). Romans 9:4–5 speaks of the gifts which were given to Israel—‘the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises’—and these, of course, were also given to the people of the New Covenant. Psalm 136 bases the response of thanksgiving on the steadfast love of the Lord which endures for ever. Human beings ought always to be grateful, especially for the gifts which give life and sustain it. In the New Testament there are many injunctions to give thanks to God—especially to God the Father—for the gift of eternal life in Christ, for food, for clothing, and indeed for *all things* and in *all circumstances*.

When we say thanksgiving is commanded, we do not mean that it is a difficult exercise. Seeing all the nature of God, thanksgiving is something which emerges from us in an involuntary way. This is more so because we are ever receiving from God: the natural response is to be grateful. Paul says, ‘What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?’, and that shows we are those who continually receive from God.

## Receiving, Thanksgiving and Giving

The apostles kept in mind the saying of Jesus, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’. Jesus taught much on this score, but the main point is that we are not simply to be receivers. We are to be receivers in order to give. This is so clearly expounded in II Corinthians chapters 8 and 9. The joy of giving is high, but the cost of retaining all things for ourselves is the loss of the richest of joy. What we are trying to say in this closing essay is that when the Divine *perichoresis* enters into the human scene by God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—indwelling Man and Man indwelling Them, then the giving–receiving–giving circulatory movement has its most glorious operation in both Man and God. Man gives out to the whole human community the gifts of God, and their benefits. Whilst these may be rejected in stony silence by the ingrates, and even in rage by those who see grace as horribly humiliating, yet others will respond gratefully as the glory of God breaks through to them. The witness of the early church was impressive to those who viewed it. They could scarcely comprehend the receiving–giving love that was continually manifested before their eyes.

The true *perichoresis* is the most practical of all things that operates in this world. Sinful Man is never so dead that he does not exercise elements of it on strange and wonderful occasions. History is filled with glorious examples of Man giving himself for others. Indeed far more is being given than our small and cynical minds ever notice. To live is to give: to give is to live. To save ourselves for ourselves is to die in ourselves. When the glory of giving breaks through, the community is changed. The story *Miracle on the River Kwai* is a glimpse into such a community, but it was not the first time this scene was played in history.

## The Things We Own and the Things We Give

Covering all these gifts would demand much time and space. We have seen the gifts of saving

grace, the gifts for living life, the gifts for the operations of the church and its edification, and we have seen the gifts which work out towards the world in proclamation of saving grace. Such gifts are not only utilitarian: they are also personal gifts which sustain, support and build us up. Since God's gifts are without recall they are always present. They are to be enjoyed.

A passage I would like to take, and indeed a passage which is much of the reason for this final essay, is the third chapter of I Corinthians. I have no desire to give a lengthy explanation or exegesis of it. I need to give some overall picture of the chapter, but it is on verses 18–23 I wish to concentrate:

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks 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.' So let no one boast of men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

This passage speaks of some of the gifts that are ours. They are different from other lists given. In fact the list is so vast and comprised of such new factors that we wonder at it all. Yet in the whole chapter it makes excellent sense. At the beginning of the chapter Paul has had to chide some Corinthian believers for their spiritual immaturity. The sense of the chapter goes something like this: the believers are immature because they have divided into parties, claiming as their leaders Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas (Peter). By lining up behind one or other of these they are saying their teacher or apostle is primary, that prior wisdom comes from him and therefore they have appropriate wisdom. Paul shows that these men—fine as they may be—are simply servants of Christ, and whilst their work may differ, for example, planting and watering, yet the actual growth of a plant comes not from the sower, the planter or the waterer, but from God. Paul claims all he has done has been by the grace of God (cf. I Cor. 15:10), and the day of its testing will prove what was the value of his, Apollos's and Cephas's work. The following which each has will have nothing to do with that outcome, for nothing of that sort justifies anyone's ministry.

Paul (v. 16) then switches to another figure, namely, that of the temple of God. All believers constitute that holy temple (cf. Eph. 2:18–22; I Pet. 2:4–10), for the Holy Spirit dwells in them all. Whilst the temple cannot be destroyed, yet there can be those in it who bring harm to it, as indeed these believers in their carnal state<sup>94</sup> may be doing. Those who do harm will be judged by God. This should halt the foolish carnal Christians in their tracks!

In the verses we have printed above, Paul comes to the crux of the matter. The problem of the party-members is that they are still thinking in terms of human brilliance, that is, wisdom. Paul says that if anyone thinks he is wise in this age (aeon) then he had better think again. Let him lose the wisdom of this world that he might become wise in God, in Christ, in the Cross, for it is just this Paul has stressed in I Corinthians 1:17–31. There the religious wisdom of the Jew and the intellectual wisdom of the Greek have been shown to be threadbare and shabby against Christ crucified, 'the power of God and the wisdom of God'. Paul has shown them that the Cross is God's wisdom. Few, if any, of the Corinthians were wise, powerful and something by nature. This had given them a good head start on the wise, powerful and clever by nature. Christ had been made their 'wisdom . . . righteousness and sanctification and redemption', so that if they wished in any way to boast it would have to be in him, 'Christ crucified . . . the power of God and the wisdom of God'.

So, then, in 3:18–20 Paul is saying—quoting freely from the Old Testament (Job 5:13; Ps. 94:11, LXX)—that the self-opinionated, 'wise' man is always caught out in his so-called

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<sup>94</sup> It is clear from verse 3 that the fleshliness of the believers is shown in their 'jealousy and strife'—something which does harm to the temple of God.

wisdom. God regards his sort with a steely eye. So let the foolish Corinthians get back to godly wisdom. It is clear that their view of the teachers was that this one or that one was the wisest, so that they adhered to him. Paraphrased, Paul is saying: ‘Why! In the wisdom of God there is nothing held back from you: everything is yours! You do not follow one or other of these teachers. They are yours! You are not their followers: they have no dominion over you. You are not to admire them as being away and above you. They belong to you. *They are your servants*, appointed by God to *serve* you. And with them the other gifts are yours, that is, the world, life, death, the present and the future. You belong to Christ and are in him, and he belongs to God and is in Him’.

In regard to Paul, Apollos and Cephas, the party-minded had been cutting themselves off from all the riches the other teachers could bring them, but in fact they were cutting themselves off from the riches of the leader to whom they devoted themselves. Thinking they were getting the best—that is, the brilliant—to build up their egos, they were missing the heart of the gospel which is always the wisdom of God. What wisdom they were not hearing and not knowing! To hearken back to our theme of *perichoresis*—what riches they were not sharing with others! Even the differentiations of the teachers was one of the richest gifts they could receive, and share.

### The Special Gifts for Having and Sharing

As we have suggested above, this list of gifts is special. It becomes even more than that when we look at Romans 8:36–39, where Paul pictures the believers in an unending—though victorious—battle against strong enemies and odds. Common to both passages are *death, life, things present and things to come*. None of these things in Romans 8:38–39 will separate God’s people from His love in Christ. In the Corinthians passage the *world*—that is, the *kosmos* and not the *aeon* (v. 22)—is added. What does Paul mean by saying in Romans 8 that these things are our enemies, trying to separate us from the love of God in Christ, whilst here he is saying that these very things *belong* to us?

The answer must lie in the fact of ‘all things’ (v. 21). In one way Paul is saying that there is nothing in all creation which is not ours, and in another there is nothing that we cannot control. Perhaps the thoughts of Romans 8:36–39 and I Corinthians 3:21–23 are very close in meaning. In fact those things in Romans 8:36–39 which are at enmity with Man and seek to overcome him cannot do so. To the contrary: *in* all these things the believers are more than conquerors.<sup>95</sup> I Corinthians 3:21–23 is implying the reason is that Man-in-Christ has overcome *them*. ‘You are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s’ is the key to man having ‘all things’ *now*. Because Christ reigns over all things *now*, so do believers *in him*. This is evident from Romans 5:17 and Ephesians 2:5–6. Whilst these two references may have some eschatological significance, they have primary reference to the present (cf. Rev. 2:26–27; 3:21). Undoubtedly II Timothy 2:12, I Corinthians 6:3 and Revelation 5:10<sup>96</sup> have primary eschatological reference, but the continuity of Christ’s triumph from the point of the Resurrection, and the triumph of his people from that point onwards in history, is a truth greatly neglected, and yet is of immense *present* importance. Doubtless it was because the spiritually stunted Corinthians did not know all these things were theirs that they pursued the pathetic hunt for so-called wisdom. They believed this would make them to be something. How wrongly they

<sup>95</sup> Hence ‘he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world’, and ‘I can do all things in him who strengthens me’.

<sup>96</sup> In regard to the present reigning of Christ and so the reigning of his people, I believe Revelation 20:1–4 deserves a lot more attention than it has received. I have worked something of this out in my *The Matter of the Millennium* (NCPI, 1991).

had read Paul, Apollos and Cephas!

### The Gift of the World

What would it be if we possessed the world, that is, it did not possess us? The world is defined in various ways, such as the created world which we know belongs wholly to God, and Satan has no part in it: ‘For the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it’ (I Cor. 10:26; Ps. 24:1; 50:12; I Tim. 4:4). There have always been erroneous ideas that somehow the Devil has wrested something of this from God. The Christian is to see the world as his, but then he is not to love anything of it above God, since such is idolatry (cf. I John 2:15–17; I Cor. 7:31). With the idea of the created world is also the idea of an evil system<sup>97</sup> which Satan has devised and developed (John 12:31; 14:30–31; 16:11; II Cor. 4:4). This world’s leader is Satan.<sup>98</sup> Fallen man is—perforce—under his rule (II Tim. 2:26; Eph. 2:1–3; cf. John 8:38, 44; cf. I John 3:10ff.). This world has its own wisdom, as we have seen in both the first and third chapters of the First Letter to the Corinthians.

That believers possess the world is often taken to mean they possess only the created world, but surely Paul is saying they are also above the world which is led by Satan, and is called ‘this present evil age’. John in his First Letter makes the point that Christ in believers is greater than Satan in the world, and he says that believers have overcome the spirit of Antichrist. He tells the young men that they have overcome the evil one, and says the victory that overcomes the world is faith. In Revelation 12:9–11 the believers have conquered ‘that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan’, by ‘the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony’. Both Peter and James insist that humble believers can resist Satan and he will be overcome, even fleeing from them. This is how things are: believers have been rescued ‘up out of’ this present corrupt world (Gal. 1:4), and they have been crucified to the world and the world has been crucified to them (Gal. 6:14), and one day they shall judge the world.

When the small-minded believers at Corinth realise that not only is the created world theirs, but also that they are over the world of evil—that is, it cannot defeat them—there will be a new spirit of confident faith and of quiet triumph in life. This is a wonderful gift to share.

### The Gifts of Life and Death

Life that is lived in the fear of death (Heb. 2:14–15) is no life. Perfect love casts out fear, for fear relates to torment, and he who fears is not made perfect in love. This message of John and its context (I John 4:7–20) tells us that fear of judgment is a constant torment and takes away the joy of life. Paul’s statement regarding Jesus that he ‘abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel’, as also his grand exposition in I Corinthians 15 of the defeat of death through the Cross and Resurrection shows us there is no sting to death. The prospect of immortality is that which makes this life so wonderful. Jesus’ own statement, ‘whoever lives and believes in me shall never die’, is enough to encourage us that we shall never see death. It is true enough that others will see our death, but we will not. Already in eternal life (John 3:16; 5:24; I John 5:12), we will not actually experience death as death.

This means, then, that *death belongs to us*. It cannot frighten us, for we love not our lives unto death. What others call ‘death’ cannot separate us from the love of God which is in

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<sup>97</sup> It is notable that Paul uses both terms *aeon* and *kosmos* interchangeably when he wishes. This is seen in I Corinthians 1:20. The term *aeon* used for the evil world in Galatians 1:4 (cf. 6:14, *kosmos*) can be translated *age*, and in Ephesians 1:21 Christ is the head of this age (cf. Gal. 1:4) and the age to come.

<sup>98</sup> For a more extensive study of these matters see my *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 1989).



Christ Jesus. We are constantly in the life of God, and the life of God is in us. So, then, to live is Christ; the life we live, we live by faith in the Son of God. Living life to the full is living in God and living out all in God. The dimensions of such experience are limitless. Nothing can reduce the steady joy and love and peace and creative fruitfulness of life, since no fear of death hangs over it. This is lordship over life and lordship over death. The two belong to us. *What a wonderful truth to share with others!*

### **The Gift of the Present and the Future**

It is axiomatic that he who has no past—whatever it may have been—has no full present and future. The present—like the world, and life, and death—does not belong to Satan and his evil powers. It belongs to those in Christ. The believer has a past which has been purified (Isa. 1:18; I Cor. 6:11; II Cor. 5:17; Heb. 9:14), and that is why his present is so rich and free. It is not only free *of* the past, but it is also free to use the past as it wills. Justification is the great liberator of the conscience and of the spirit. The continuity of past, present and future is assured by justification.

The future of the believer has been assured by the promises and realities which we have seen in previous passages, of the coming revelation of personal identity, resurrection into the fullness of life, glorification, the treasures of inheritance, and vocation of the royal priesthood. Whilst there is no need for us to dwell upon these here, it is for us to keep living in the hope of them. The future assures the present, as the present assures the past of its value and its reality with present and future.

To know that we possess life, and that death cannot damage us, but is rather something never to be feared, we can see something of the glory of these two gifts. *How rich a thing to share them with others!*

### **The Living Context of All the Gifts**

We now come to the point of this study. None of these gifts is a commodity given by God to any believer, to be possessed by that one and utilised as thought fit. When we are Christ's and Christ is God's, then our context is dwelling in God and having God dwell in us. Hence the operations of the gifts are a present dynamic reality. The immature believers at Corinth had believed themselves inferior, requiring status derived from the particular leader they followed, and seeking to discover some special 'wisdom' which would give them standing as humans and a place in their community—a special place.

Paul shattered those miserable ideas, but brought them out into a larger place. As in another Letter, he prayed his readers would be 'filled unto all the fullness of God', and in another said that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge were hid in Christ, and that from them they were 'filled full', so now he shows that being in Christ, and Christ being in God, all these gifts are dynamic and operative realities.

### **The Temporal and Eternal *Perichoresis***

This essay has been long, but by no means wholly comprehensive. Enough has been said to show that the gifts Paul nominates in I Corinthians 3:21–23 are of such a nature that if the believer is not aware of them, then he is far from the wisdom of God. All we have said in previous studies now comes into practical view in the *perichoresis* of these gifts as it is enacted in today's church and society. It brings a rich understanding that Christ's victory is

complete, that his action is now, and that we do not have to wait until glory for the circulatory movement of the gifts to begin, but that these can now be shared—that is, gifts creational, gifts ministerial, gifts ecclesial, gifts charismatic, and the strange but wonderful gifts of teachers, of the world, of life and death, of the present and the future. Of course they are all in Christ and Christ is in God, but this means that the Divine *perichoresis* is not limited to the relationships within the Godhead, but that it flows to Man and then from Man to all humanity.

Rightly understood, this explains the dynamics of true temporal and eternal living. It is the key to all history, as it is true history itself.