

NSW Studies Group

1999

- Program of Studies for 1999
- The Church of the Living God
- The Church in its Unity
- The Church in its Holiness
- The 'Catholic' Church
- The 'Apostolic' Church
- The Church Led by the Spirit
- The Church and the Gospel
- The Church and the Gifts I
- The Church and the Gifts II
- The Four main Passages which describe the use of 'Gifts' within the Church
- The Eschatological Community

New Creation Teaching Ministry

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Dear Friends,

Warmest greetings in Christ. As 1998 passes into memory, we are again conscious that we have been richly blessed and that mercy has continued to flow to each one of us. We are not triumphalists who measure the successes of each year; rather we recognise that we remain unprofitable servants while seeing that great grace is upon the church and that the Lord has been working out his purposes of holy love in and through us—and we give humble and hearty thanks!

I want to invite you to join us where you can in the following program of studies and schools.

In 1999 we will again be having the monthly studies. This year's theme will be **The Church of the Living God**. In our day we are seeing many play the game of 'church hopping', so that allegiance to a congregation of believers, even sinful believers, is a matter of less importance than finding a group that meets my needs (as if I can determine what my needs are!). Without doubt there are churches that fail and others which do demonstrate the presence of the living God in their life and worship. These studies will open up the way the Scriptures present the matter of the church, 'warts and all' yet still the bride of Christ, for whom he gave himself and in whom he continues to work.

Many have found that a trip to the Southern Highlands is far less daunting than a trip across Sydney and that the time of worship and learning is worth any difficulty. Others have not been able to travel afar and so we have planned a second venue in Sydney, at **Auburn Church of Christ, 90a Auburn Rd, Auburn**.

Each monthly study will be presented twice, generally on the first Saturday morning (Bowral) and third Saturday evening (Auburn) of each month. A brochure has been included with the details, including a map of how to get to our home in Bowral.

On April 24th, there will be a day of teaching and worship, also held **at Auburn Church of Christ, 90a Auburn Rd, Auburn**, from 9.00am to 4.30pm. The theme for the day is **You Are My King**. This will be a special occasion when we can meet together and be refreshed in the great truth that God is indeed King and that his reign is powerful and effective. In this fallen world we need to be continually made aware of the truth of this great matter, since everything we see and hear seems to call it into question, so much so that there are many today who think that the success or failure of believers and of the church depends on us and our efforts. Then, in the light of the hymn writer's lines

Weak is the effort of my heart

And cold my warmest thought

it is small wonder that many lose the fire in their bones.

Rev Gary Dieckmann and I will be taking the studies and we would warmly urge you to come along and bring you friends for what will be a time of gentle yet rich encouragement. A brochure has also been included for this.

The third event for the year is the **1999 NSW Spring School**. Over the last twelve years we have held the Spring School and each year known the wonderful blessing of God on our

time together. This year we will again be meeting at St Paul's Anglican Church in Chatswood, on the weekend of 24th to 26th September. The topic will be **The Apostolic Gospel**, a subject of immense importance for us all.

What is the gospel which we preach? One man recently expressed the opinion that the church he was involved with was preaching 'salvation by entertainment', while others give every impression of wanting to bribe people into joining the church with promises of healing or prosperity or whatever. On the other hand, is the gospel merely information to be digested and some 'rational' decision made, or the 'fire and brimstone' of the caricatures?

Paul wrote that 'our Savior Christ Jesus abolished death and brought life and immortality to light *through the gospel*'. If this is what Christ is presently about, the gospel is hardly a topic which we can take at all lightly.

Book the dates in your diary; more information will be sent to you later in the year.

Be assured of a warm welcome (even to Bowral in the winter) to these events. As you know, there is no charge to attend any of our sessions.

In Christian love,



Jan

The Church of the Living God

When we open the New Testament, we are immediately faced with the *fact* of the Christian Church. From the call of the first disciples there is a group who ally themselves with Jesus the Messiah and, whatever their weaknesses and failings, those disciples are still an identifiable group even after his death and resurrection. Nor are they just the twelve, or the eleven after the defection and death of Judas; there were 120 gathered before Pentecost (Acts 1:15) and more than 500 people saw the risen Messiah at one time, according to 1 Corinthians 15:6.

Yet none of these groups, in themselves, prepares us for the amazing group formed following Peter's address at the festival of Pentecost. There three thousand people are described, not as responding to some appeal but as actually initiating their own appeal: 'Brothers, what should we do?' (Acts 2:37). Shortly afterwards, the number is put at 'about five thousand men'¹ (Acts 4:4). Then Acts recounts the growth of this group, from first being comprised solely of Jews to being a body of men and women from all the nations. And what is more, this multi-ethnic group was not the goal of the first disciples of Jesus. They either were initially surprised that non-Jews should become part of it or they were continuously suspicious or even hostile to the new development.

One reason for the suspicion was that 'multi-ethnic' seemed to mean 'multi-cultural'², a move which, to the Jewish group, called into question the relationship of the new groups to their Jewish matrix. Yet multi-ethnic they were, and the New Testament bears witness to the appearances of Christian groups throughout Judea and Samaria, Syria, the provinces of Asia Minor (Turkey), Greece, Italy, Illyricum (Albania, Hercegovina and Montenegro) and mentions the plan, if not its successful accomplishment, to establish the faith in Spain.

Some of the debates in the New Testament arose because of the question of the Jewish roots of the new groups. As time went by and as the Jewish nation itself declined even further in significance following the wars between Judea and Rome (AD 66-70; 132-135) the dominance of the non-Jewish members meant that Christianity was occupied with other issues. There was its continued phenomenal growth, although other religions were also experiencing similar growth, among them Mithraism and Manichaeism. But the debates and struggles had moved on from the immediate issues recorded in the New Testament and the Christian church which we know today is not merely the reproduction of New Testament

¹ The Greek is curious. It is not 500 'people', which would be ἀνθρώποι (*anthropoi*) but 'males', ἀνδρες (*andres*). Some compare this to Matt. 14:21, where the phrase is 'about five thousand men, besides women and children'. Others, prefer to see ἀνδρες as occasionally having a general sense. See J. A. Alexander, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Banner of Truth Trust, London 1963 (1857), p. 130, for a comment on this feature. Whatever, the picture is of amazing growth.

² Whether there is a linguistic relationship between 'culture' and 'cult', and there is some evidence that there is (see the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, but contrast the *Macquarie Dictionary*), there is certainly the argument that culture develops out of the worship of men and women. Our cultures develop around those elements to which we give our devotion. For instance, to use words somewhat crudely, a person with 'culture' is taken to be a person whose lifestyle is strongly influenced by his or her preference for (and ability to achieve?) particular features in the arts or music or whatever. While such preferences are not necessarily wrong in themselves, they can in fact indicate that preference does and has become worship. This is then shown by the assumption that when a person comes to faith in Christ there will be certain cultural adaptations, whereas the position ought to be, surely, that the transformation will be moral. That 'the thief no longer steals' is one thing; that he now must find his delight in (for example) certain musical styles is quite another (What is 'Christian music'?). I want to argue that the Christian church is first and foremost a multi-ethnic body, where the culture is that centred around the worship which Christ himself leads, that it, the worship of the new humanity.

faith but is the product of some two thousand years of theological reflection, reactions against heresy, responses to persecution as well as, sadly, accommodation to the surrounding cultures with their values.

To speak of the church without keeping in mind the developments in what we call church history may be a little naive. But likewise to speak of the church without returning to the New Testament description of its birth and without understanding something of the rationale of the church provided in the New Testament will leave us without a basis for evaluating the present.

I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH

In the light of the growth of the numbers of Christians described in the New Testament, and the obvious presence of many lively churches, it is perhaps surprising that in all four Gospels there are only two references to 'the church', both of them in Matthew (16:18; 18:17³). Some have argued that Jesus could not have said these particular words and that they reflect what the later church understood.⁴ But, while this almost complete failure of the Gospels to use the word 'church' cannot be easily explained, at least there is a clear reason given for the later birth of the church.

In Matthew 16, Jesus was speaking to the disciples concerning their understanding of who he was.

He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.' (Matthew 16:15-18)

The question which has often been asked is 'what is the rock on which Christ will build his church?' Two answers have commonly been given, namely that either the rock is Peter or it is his confession or faith and, of course, there are elements of truth in both. But there is another possibility, namely that underlying Peter's confession is the revelation given to him by 'my Father in heaven'. That would imply that the church will be built because of the revelation given by the Father concerning the Son and it would indicate that the church is, before all else, a 'supernatural' entity. That is why 'the gates of Hades will not prevail against it'.

But can we go further and ask why Jesus changed the word for 'rock' in verse 18? 'Peter' is *Petros* and 'rock' is *petra*. There is no *absolute* distinction in meaning between the two words⁵, but there may be a clue in that the LXX (the Greek version of the Old

³ The NRSV has added the words 'church' in Matthew 18:15 and 21 in an attempt to avoid the use of the word 'brother'.

⁴ See I. H. Marshall, 'Church' in J. B. Green *et. al.* (Eds), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, IVP, Downers Grove, 1992, p. 122.

⁵ So O. Cullmann, *petra* in TDNT, Vol. VI, p. 95; 'The fem. *petra* is predominantly used in secular Gk. for a large and solid "rock" ... The masc. *petros* is used for more isolated rocks or small stones ... Since there is such a great difference in content, the emphasis should be noted, though in practice one cannot differentiate too strictly between *petra* and *petros*"; they are often used interchangeably.' Another suggestion to the use of the two words is that they both translate a single Aramaic original but two difficulties arise here: (i) there is no documentary evidence of an Aramaic original of Matthew, all we have is the Greek text, and (ii) there is still no explanation why, when such an Aramaic original was translated into Greek, two different words were used.

Testament) uses the word *petra* on a number of occasions to refer to Mount Sinai⁶, whereas it does not use *petros* at all.⁷ All this would mean that Jesus is declaring that he will do what God had done before; he would form a church at the rock where God reveals himself. What Jesus will build can be understood in terms of Israel of old. Jesus may not have been so much anticipating the later post-Pentecost church as announcing the climax of all that God had commenced at Sinai. All that God intended when he redeemed Israel from Egypt he is now about to accomplish through his Son.

This may be borne out by the use of the word translated as ‘church’. It is the Greek *ekklesia* and comparison with the Old Testament shows that this Greek word was used to translate the Hebrew *qahal* which refers to the assembly of the people. Another Hebrew word, *edah*, is also used for the people of God; however, this is usually translated by the Greek *synagogue*.⁸

Although in practice the meanings of *edah* and *qahal* tend to overlap, there is a distinction which may be of assistance in clarifying our thinking, namely, ‘that *edah* is the unambiguous and permanent term for the covenant community as a whole [while] *qahal* is the ceremonial expression for the assembly that results from the covenant, for the Sinai community and ... for the community in its present form’.⁹ The *qahal* is a dynamic group, gathered around the mountain because God himself has effectively called them and redeemed them. This may be strengthened by the suggestion that *qahal* is related to the Hebrew word *qol* meaning voice. It has been observed that in the Old Testament “rock” is at times a personal name for God (Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30; Ps. 18:31; Isa. 44:8 etc).¹⁰ The church in the Old Testament was the assembly which met at the word of God. They were assembled around him. Israel had assembled around God at Sinai to hear his word (cf. Deut. 4:10, the LXX of which has, “on the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, on the day of the *ekklesia*, when the Lord spoke to me *Ekklesiason* the people before me and let them hear my words ...”)

Although etymology¹¹ sometimes proves little, in this case the fact that *ekklesia* means ‘called out’ (from *ek* and *kaleo*) is consistent with this. It is a word which is not necessarily a religious word, even in the New Testament (see Acts 19:32, 39, 40), and describes a gathering together of people, originally ‘the popular assembly of the competent full citizens of the *polis*, city’.¹² The problem in Ephesus (Acts 19) was that the ‘assembly’ was not legally constituted, not ‘called out’.

Stephen spoke of the *ekklesia* in the wilderness (Acts 7:38). He was referring to the great events at Sinai.

[Moses] is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living oracles to give to us.

⁶ Ex. 17:6; 33:21; Num. 20:8, 10.

⁷ Except in one version of Exodus 4:25 and in 2 Maccabees.

⁸ Cf. Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1970, p. 373.

⁹ L. Coenen, ‘Church’, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, Exeter, 1975, p. 295.

¹⁰ See D. B. Knox, *The Church, The Churches and the Denominations of the Churches*, Reformed Theological Review, Vol. XLVIII, N°1, (1989) pp. 15-25.

¹¹ The study of the derivation of words

¹² Coenen, p. 291.

Moses, at that point the subject of Stephen's address, actually received 'living oracles'; what he told Israel was nothing less than the words which God has spoken to him.¹³ Moses had reminded Israel of their amazing identity.

For ask now about former ages, long before your own, ever since the day that God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of heaven to the other: has anything so great as this ever happened or has its like ever been heard of? ³³Has any people ever heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire, as you have heard, and lived? ³⁴Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by terrifying displays of power, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? ³⁵To you it was shown so that you would acknowledge that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him. (Deut. 4:32-35).

This whole redemption was in order that Israel would 'acknowledge that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him' and that through Israel this knowledge would spread throughout the whole world. That is why Israel is called 'a kingdom of priests' (Ex. 19:6), because one day 'the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea' (Isa. 11:9 cf. Hab. 2:14). All the nations will come to know the LORD through the testimony of Israel.¹⁴

This is the point underlying Paul's declaration to the Athenians that

From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him. (Acts 17:26-27)

The purpose of God, from the beginning, was that all the nations should know him and the means was that through Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). But we would have to say that the testimony of Israel would not be the mere imparting of information about God but a testimony flowing out of an immediacy with God. An immediacy is an unmediated relationship, with no-one or no-thing intervening between the two.

A problem arose following the revelation of the 'the ten words' (Exodus 20:1-17) which are the expression of the character of the God who had redeemed and so a declaration of the way Israel was to live. Israel found the revelation (I suspect it was the *content* as well as the *form*) so fearful that they demanded that God no longer speak directly to them but that Moses should be their mediator (Ex. 20:18-21). Whatever immediacy they had known was now gone and the redemption they had experienced was seen to be, as yet, incomplete. Of course, the incomplete nature of the redemption was seen in other ways throughout Israel's history as well. There was the regular return to apostasy, to idolatry and immorality and there were the internal divisions which were a practical denial of the unity of the God they were to proclaim (cf Deut. 6:4).

While the problem was increasingly evident, there was also the ministry of the prophets who declared afresh the purpose of God. Isaiah promised the future blessing of the nations through renewed Israel.

In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. ³Many peoples shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of

¹³ The role of angels in this revelatory event is prominent; see Acts 7:30, 35, 38 and 53. Compare also Acts 7:53 with the discussion of the role of Angels in Hebrews chapter 1.

¹⁴ For a fuller discussion, see the studies given in 1997, *Jews, Gentiles and the People of God*.

Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. ⁵O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD! (Isaiah 2:2-5).

The appeal to Israel, ‘come let us walk in the light of the LORD’ was, as yet, impossible for them to obey. First there must be the transformation which could only come through cleansing from the deep guilt which gripped even Israel’s worship. This is what Isaiah himself experienced when he had that immediate confrontation with God in his holiness in the temple, described in Isaiah 6:1-8, and this is what was anticipated in the latter part of the prophecy, when the Servant (Israel, see Isa. 41:8) would again be a light to the nations (Isa. 42:1-6). Then the true nature of God will again be known and proclaimed (Isa. 42:8). But for this to take place, the Servant must bear ‘the iniquity of us all ... [and become] an offering for sin’ for only then shall ‘the will of the LORD prosper’ (Isa. 53:6, 10). However much that may have been somewhat cryptic for the pre-Christian readers,¹⁵ it did, at the very least, look forward to a great work of atonement when all sin would be dealt with. So what would be the result of such atonement? To this Jeremiah answers:

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the LORD,’ *for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest*, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Forgiveness results in the restoration or, better, the full establishment of the immediacy. Adam had known it but had chosen to operate apart from it; Israel had been brought to it but had rejected it; now it will be a rich reality. There will be a people who know the LORD and who can and will bear witness to him to all the nations.

The content of Peter’s confession of Jesus’ identity ought not be overlooked either. So often the statement, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God’ has been taken as a *Christian* confession of faith, almost, if not actually, declaring that Jesus is the Son of God ‘in a unique sense, a sense not applicable to any mortal’¹⁶ And, of course, we would agree that this is true. But what of the conjunction of ‘Son’ and ‘Messiah’ in the Old Testament? Prominent is Psalm 2, where the anointed one (Messiah, vs. 2) is declared to be the son (vs. 7) and is also the king (vs. 6), who will rule the nations with a rod of iron, bringing their rebellion to an end. The primary reference is to King David but it was later understood that the Messiah was the ‘son of’ David, meaning he would have all the characteristics of David and function in the role which David exemplified and more. So for

¹⁵ When the Servant passage of Isaiah 52:13-54:12 is examined it is obvious *to us* that it anticipates the death of Jesus and I am not suggesting that it does not do so. But it certainly was not obvious to pious Jews that it was a prediction of the Messiah’s suffering. For instance, in Acts 8, when Philip met the ‘Ethiopian eunuch’ he was meeting a man who ‘had come to Jerusalem to worship’; the man was reading Isaiah 53 and had no idea about whom the prophet Isaiah is speaking. Later Rabbis even concluded that the chastisements which they suffered brought about atonement; ‘Beloved are chastisements for just as sacrifices atone so also chastisements atone’ (*Mekilta Bahodesh*, 10).

¹⁶ William Hendriksen, *Matthew*, Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1973, p. 643.

Peter to say that Jesus was ‘the Messiah, the son of the living God’, was a declaration that Jesus was the one who would bring the nations to submission.

It is true that Peter had no idea of the implications of his announcement. The Father had revealed so much to him, but that the Messiah must suffer so horribly was not yet revealed and Peter demonstrated that he was still functioning as one in opposition to the purpose of God.

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²²And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.’ ²³But he turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.’ (Matt. 16:21-23)

Here is the full picture. Not only will Jesus create an *ekklesia* fulfilling all that God did at Sinai, but he will do so by being ‘killed, and on the third day be[ing] raised’. The implications of Isaiah 53 would only become clear when this had been accomplished. Jesus would build his church by bearing Israel’s sin so that there would be a people gathered around him, directed by his word, who would take blessing to the nations.

The church which Jesus will build will first be the climax of all that God intended for Israel, and then will encompass all the nations of the earth. Hence, having died to ‘save *his people* from their sins’ (Matt. 1:21) and been raised, Jesus came to the eleven disciples some of whom were still doubting, and said triumphantly,

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt. 28:18-20).

Here is the climax of all that Israel had anticipated. Even though the eleven were a mere remnant, nonetheless the risen Jesus was now king over his people whose sin he had borne and he was leading them out to conquer the nations, for not only had he borne the sins of his people but the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). Of course, such statements as John 3:16 show that the conquering of the nations is the outworking of the great love which God has and is (cf. 1 John 4:8, 16).

THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

Paul gave Timothy certain instructions about prayer, the relative roles of men and women and the details of what was expected of bishops and deacons (1 Tim. 2:1-3:13). His reason is,

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, ¹⁵if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth. ¹⁶Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great:

He was revealed in flesh,
vindicated in spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among Gentiles,
believed in throughout the world,

taken up in glory. (1 Tim. 3:14-16).

He described the church as (i) the household of God; (ii) the church of the living God; and (iii) the pillar and bulwark of the truth. Earlier, in 3:5, Paul had compared the church with a household, here he identifies them. 'Household' means the members of the family. The Greek word *oikos* can also be translated as 'house', meaning the building, and though both meanings occur in both the New Testament and the LXX, there is a fair amount of overlap between them. But the phrase 'the house of God', even if the building, the tabernacle or the temple, was being referred to, still carried far richer connotations than the mere material elements of the construction. The house of God is the place where the presence of God is particularly revealed. Thus Jacob was deeply moved by his dream of the angels ascending and descending on the ladder in Genesis 28.

Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!' ¹⁷And he was afraid, and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' (Gen. 28:16-17)

He was in the presence of God and God had spoken to him.

Israel later was described as the house of God and Moses as having charge over the house (Num. 12:7; cf 1 Sam. 2:35; 1 Chron. 17:14). They are the house[hold] of God. They are the people gathered around him as those intimate with him. This is the way Paul speaks of the Christians. They are the household of God, they are the church, *ekklesia*, of the living God. Hebrews, speaking of Jesus' superiority to Moses, says that Moses was faithful as a servant in God's house; Jesus was faithful as the Son over it. Furthermore, 'we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and pride that belongs to hope' (Heb. 3:6).

It is those who know Christ who are the house[hold] of God. I would suggest that this does not simply mean that Christians have joined Israel; rather it would mean that all that Israel prefigured has been accomplished. Hebrews was written to believing Jews, 1 Timothy to the 'pastor' of the church in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3); all are the house of God.¹⁷

How can this be? Simply, it is that the church which Jesus' builds has immediacy with the Father, just as he does. He told the Jews that he *knows* the father (John 8:55) and later he told the disciples that he *loves* the Father (John 14:31). Also, he made it plain that the Father loves him (John 5:20) and that they are together in the action of the Father (John 5:17), doing the works of the Father (John 5:36). He loves to do the Father's will (John 6:38) and, however we understand his agony in Gethsemane, we are privy to the moment when, 'deeply grieved, even to death', he cries, 'Abba, Father' (Mark 14:34-35). He is the beloved Son, whose action to redeem, to fulfil all righteousness, was launched with the anointing with the Spirit at his baptism (Matt. 3:15-17), but which was seen when, even as a young boy, he thought it strange that Mary and Joseph should have not understood that he would be about his Father's business, in his Father's house (Luke 2:49). To be redeemed by the Father is to be taken out of the dominion of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of 'the Son of his love' (Col. 1:13).

The Spirit who caused Jesus to be conceived in Mary's womb and by whom he would be called holy, the Son of God (Luke 1:35) has now come to 'all flesh'. The church formed at Pentecost following of Peter's address was born because Jesus had received the Spirit, as his to give, and 'poured out this which you now see and hear' (Acts 2:33 cf. John

¹⁷ The language of 'house' and 'household' is not limited to these instances. Nor is the 'imagery' limited to these words. 'Temple' and 'building' etc. are also used.

20:22). At Pentecost the risen Jesus brought into being a prophetic community. This was what had been promised by Joel (Acts 2:17-21; Joel 2:38-32). But to be a prophet was more than to be a great preacher (perhaps it has nothing particularly to do with being a great preacher); it is to be one who stands in the presence of the LORD 'so as to see and to hear his word' (Jer. 23:18). It is to be a person with the word of God on the lips and in the bones, so that Peter and John could say that they could not 'keep from speaking about what [they] have seen and heard' (Acts 4:20).

When the Spirit was poured out, all the redeeming work of Christ was given to those who received him. 'The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us', the love which is revealed in 'that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:5, 8). They were given authority to become the children of God (John 1:12) and so the Spirit was given to them, not with a view to servile submission but in order to bring the fulness of sonship to each one.

because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' (Gal. 4:6). ... For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. ... we cry, 'Abba! Father!' (Rom. 8:14-15).

The intimacy, the immediacy which Jesus had is now given to all those born of the Spirit. John wrote to remind his readers that they 'have been anointed by the Holy One and they all know' (1 John 2:20). Whether the Holy One refers to God (the Father), to Jesus or even to the Spirit,¹⁸ matters little. The point which John makes is that the believers no longer need human intermediaries.

As for you, the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in him. (1 John 2:27)

Plainly, John is not denying the role of human teachers — he is one of them. He is saying that when the Spirit was given (even though the language is not precise) they were all brought into the family of God:

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven on account of his name. ¹³I am writing to you, fathers, because *you know him who is from the beginning*. I am writing to you, young people, because you have conquered the evil one. ¹⁴I write to you, children, *because you know the Father*. I write to you, fathers, because *you know him who is from the beginning*. I write to you, young people, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (1 John 2:12-14)

The household of God is the adopted sons and daughters standing, with the only begotten Son, before the Father. The Father has drawn them (John 6:44) and now they have come. Jesus had said that

the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. (John 4:23)

Now the only begotten Son leads the adopted sons in rich worship of the Father. And the worship is acceptable because it is 'through Jesus Christ' (1 Pet. 2:5). The work of Christ, our great high priest, was to purify our consciences from dead works so that we might worship the living God (Heb. 9:14).

¹⁸ See Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John*, (AB, 30), Chapman, London, 1982, pp. 345-348.

THAT IS WHAT WE ARE

John wrote,

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. ³And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. (1 John 3:1-3)

The true identity of the church is still hidden. We are God's children now but we often can only see things which call that into question. Obviously this is not to excuse sin; otherwise John would not have said that those who hope for the final revelation are now occupied with purifying themselves 'just as he is pure'. But it does mean that, in the meantime, we must be gentle with the failings and weaknesses of others.

My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. ²Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal. 6:1-2)

In this we will be one with our high priest.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. ... Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (Heb. 4:15-16; 7:25).

It may be that there are many who are unsure or even ignorant of the truth of who they are in Christ. There may be pastors and teachers who do not fulfil the role which the Scriptures delineate. Error may abound and it may be that there are those who claim to be believers but are in fact living as enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. 3:18). These things bring us no joy, indeed we weep for those caught in such situations.

But we also realise that what *we* will be has not yet been revealed! The paradigm for the church is not what we do, or even what we may want to do. It is not even the early church, which we may make into an idol if we are not careful. The paradigm is that grand reality which is still hidden in God. What we must do is live in the revelation which has been given. We are God's children now. The intimacy, the immediacy has been restored, even though it is, for the present, only known in faith. That does not mean it must be uncertain or that we may not speak with confidence, for 'faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen' (Heb. 11:1 AV). 'We *believe* and so we speak' and we believe that 'great grace is upon the church', that it is 'he who began the good work who will bring it to fulfilment on the day of Jesus Christ' (2 Cor. 4:13; Acts 4:33; Phil. 1:6).

The Church in its Unity¹

The subject of 'Church Unity' has been examined and expounded often. In modern times the World Council of Churches and other similar groups have been prominent in attempting 'to confront divisive issues of doctrine, polity and practice',² and there have also been more recent attempts to express the same longing in poetic form, with such songs as 'Bind Us Together, Lord'³ and 'We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord ...and we pray that all unity may one day be restored'.

The reasons for such concerns are not hard to define. Often there has been not merely disunity but deep seated hatred between, for example, the Roman Catholic Church and some Protestant groups. Meanwhile, Protestant groups have been in competition between themselves and sometimes even those groups claiming to have the freshness of renewal upon them have seen themselves as standing over against those denominations which, to their minds, have become moribund. Even within denominations, some Evangelicals have staked their claim, not just *for* the gospel but *against* other members who do not take a similar stance.

Of course, there are sometimes significant justifications put forward for these positions; some denominations or groups really do have genuine concerns that the truth of the gospel has been compromised or even denied. Also, there are occasions when personalities have so dominated particular groups or movements that the person and place of Jesus Christ has been almost supplanted.

When the testimony of the churches is examined, it must be admitted that the unity of which the scriptures speak contrasts sadly with the divisions which are all too obvious. What is more, the minutiae of doctrinal arguments which are offered in explanation are usually regarded as utterly irrelevant to the outsider. What is more, those same minutiae are generally lost on the majority of church members too. This is even more a problem in recent times, when the biblical and theological knowledge of church members seems to be in inverse proportion to the academic qualifications of the pastors.

So what can be said? Is unity a true goal towards which we should be moving? Will it only be known when Christ returns, or is there more?

APPROACHING THE TOPIC

It should be said from the outset that the observations above about the church as divided actually contain a fundamental error. They make the assumption that what we *see* is real and that what is *not seen* is either an ideal for which we should strive or something which only lies ahead of us and which cannot be known now. Of course, this attitude is contrary

¹ Recommended in this and later studies are the documents of the 1997 New Creation Pastors' School, *Christ's Living Church Today — One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic*, two volumes. Also, see Geoffrey Bingham, *Christ's People in Today's World*, (1985) and *Christ's Living Church Today*, (1993); Hans Küng, *The Church*, Search Press, London, 1971; P. T. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments*, Independent Press, London, 1917; G. C. Berkouwer, *The Church*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids. 1976.

² See D. F. Wright, 'Ecumenical Movement', from which this phrase is taken, in Sinclair B. Ferguson & David F. Wright (Eds), *New Dictionary of Theology*, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1988, p.219f.

³ Bob Gillman, 1970, 1980 (Scripture in Song, Book One, Songs of Praise, N° 185).

to scripture (2 Cor. 4:18) and a defeatism. It even seems to excuse sin in the church, as if to say that it must be this way because relief from sin is not ours yet.

When Jesus said, 'I will build my church' and that 'the gates of Hades will not prevail against it' (Matt. 16:18) he was announcing that the climax of the purposes of God was about to be accomplished. Earlier, when faced with the Pharisees accusation that he had cast out demons by the power of Beelzebul, he had said 'Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand' (Matt. 12:25). In other words, an entity in which division is structural cannot stand. We would say that division is not ontological. So to rationalise the presence of divisions within the church would be call into question the very essence of the church as the building of God (1 Cor. 3:9) through which he calls men and women out of darkness and into his marvellous light, the gates of Hades being unable to withstand his powerful word.⁴

Sin is not a present necessity⁵. In response to the question, will we know 'unity only in the eschaton⁶?' G. C. Berkouwer says

With this understanding of "reality" and of the course of history, the eschaton can easily begin to function as consolation and reassurance in the midst of the disunity of the Church. But in the New Testament the eschaton never gives reassurance with respect to what belongs to human guilt. We do get a consoling outlook in connection with the sufferings of the present time that is not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed later (Rom. 8:18), and we are told that God will wipe away every tear (Rev. 21 4); but the eschatological outlook never weakens concrete calling and evangelical admonition. The eschaton does not leave room for any form of

⁴ Some have drawn attention to 1 Cor. 11:18-19 as a legitimisation of divisions, factions, in the church. Calvin's comment on that is wise—

Paul does not want the faithful to be disheartened by the sight of the Corinthians making heavy weather of it because of their divisions. So the apostle throws quite a different light on this thing that is a cause of offence, by saying that what is rather happening is that the Lord is putting the perseverance of His own people to the test by trials like these. What glorious comfort! Paul says: 'When what we see in the Church is not full unity but, instead, certain signs of brokenness, springing from the fact that people do not agree properly together, then there should be no question of our being disturbed or ready to give in; on the contrary, even if sects come into the open we ought to remain steadfast and constant. For in this way not only are hypocrites brought to light, but also, and on the other hand, the sincerity of the faithful is proved. For as, on the one hand, this makes plain to us the fickleness of those who have not been rooted in the Word of the Lord and the dishonesty of those who had been making a show, by pretending to be good men; so, on the other hand, it enables the good to give clearer evidence of their steadfastness and sincerity.'

But notice that Paul says *there must be*, for by using that word he means that this situation does not arise by chance, but by the reliable providence of God, because He wants to test His own people, like gold in the furnace. Now if God is satisfied with this, it means that it is something beneficial to us. Yet that must not give us grounds for entering into thorny arguments, or rather for getting confused in a labyrinth, about the question of the necessity of fate. We know that there will never be a time in which there will not be many false people. We know that they are controlled by the spirit of Satan, and that evil holds them well and truly captive. We know that Satan constantly leaves no stone unturned in order to break up the unity of the Church. That is the source of the necessity, of which Paul is speaking, not fate. We also know that in His wonderful wisdom the Lord turns the pernicious contrivances of Satan to the salvation of the faithful. So there comes about the result, which Paul describes, 'that those who are upright may be seen all the more clearly'. For it is not the case that a blessing, such as this, ought to be thought of as coming from heresies which, being bad in themselves, cannot produce anything but evil, but as coming from God, who changes the nature of things by His infinite goodness, so that the very things which Satan had devised for the destruction of the elect, turn out to be for their advantage. (*The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, John W. Fraser (Trans), Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1960, p 238f.)

⁵ I would want to draw some distinction between the sin which is expressed in divisiveness and the simple historical developments which have led to the formation of different groups in different times and places. But I suppose we should also ask if the two can ever really be totally separate.

⁶ *Eschaton* in this context means the last day, the consummation, when Christ returns.

defeatism. Rather it is a stimulus to live in this world, where the Church is called the light of the world (Matt. 5:14)—not in competition with Christ, Who is the Light of the world (John 8:12) but on account of His unique presence.

Therefore the expectation of the consummation cannot detract from present unrest and anxiety and no future splendor can take away the shadows that fall on the life of the Church. The call to unity and concord resounds in the Church's present, and the earnestness of this call entirely excludes every eschatological "alibi." In the confusion and darkness of sin Paul does not console with what will one day be reality but he calls to mind what has happened and what has been given. So also, reflection on unity is pointed not to the future but to the past.⁷

The point is that God *has done* something quite amazing. He has brought into being an entity which stands over against all that is seen in this fallen world. What is real is what God has done and there is no genuine *reason* why we should not know that reality. We may find ourselves fighting against false reasons, such as human guilt or the powers of darkness, but when we return in faith to what God says and to what he has done, the falsity of those reasons is exposed.

I BELIEVE IN ONE ... CHURCH

The four aspects of the church, 'one, [holy,⁸] Catholick and Apostolick', were first listed in what is known (somewhat inaccurately) as the Nicene Creed. This creed, probably originating about 374 AD, was universally accepted by all branches of the Christian Church (that is, Eastern/Greek and Western/Latin) from 451 AD onwards. Although it was more than three centuries after the birth of the church that all four aspects were listed together, it is quite clear that each aspect is of great significance in the Scriptures and each has been recognised throughout the history of the church.

Unity was a feature of the new-born church at Pentecost. 'All who believed were together and had all things in common', 'they spent much time together' (Acts 2:44, 46). 'The whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul' (Acts 4:33) and the story of Ananias and Sapphira indicates the extreme danger of the breach of that unity (Acts 5:1-11). So does the account in Acts 6:1-6, where the apostles took immediate action to deal with the complaints of the Hellenists who thought that fundamental unity was being denied in the matter of the distribution of food. The council of Jerusalem, described in Acts 15, is of immense significance. There was 'no small dissension and debate' between Paul and Barnabas on the one hand and 'certain individuals from Judea' on the other (verses 1-2). The need to have the matter resolved was most important. Of course, it was never a matter of unity *at all costs*. Unity apart from the truth of the gospel is no unity (see Gal. 2:5). But then neither would there be a church apart from the truth of the gospel, so unity apart from the gospel is a *non-sequitur*, it does not make sense.

Why should unity be so important?

⁷ *The Church*, p 36.

⁸ The word 'holy' was omitted from the English translations as a result of scholarly opinion at the time of the Reformation as to the original Greek text, but was almost certainly part of the original. See Charles Neil and J. M. Willoughby, *The Tutorial Prayer Book*, Church Book Room Press, London, 1963, p 306; J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, Longmans, London, 1960, p 297f. Neil and Willoughby also point out that Archbishop Cranmer took the decision to omit the word 'in' before 'one ... Church', following 'Augustine, who laid it down that "to believe in" is only properly applicable to the three Persons of the Holy Trinity' (p 306). Calvin makes the same point, *Institutes*, IV, I, 2.

ONTOLOGICAL UNITY

Unity is not an ideal. Nor is unity merely a pragmatic benefit, as if ‘divided we fall’. The picture in the scriptures is quite different. There, unity is not just desirable but of the essence, not only of the people of Israel and the church but of all things. For instance, the creation looks forward with eager longing to the time when ‘the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox’ (Isa 65:25). Isaiah then adds the comment that ‘the serpent — its food shall be dust!’ This surely thrusts us back to the story of Genesis 3, where the fragmentation of creation derives from the intrusion of the serpent into the garden. Then, the man and the woman were divided from each other and from God. Moreover, creation changed for them.

Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen. 2:9).

But now,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Gen. 3:17-19)

What follows is the expanding fragmentation, as Cain hates and then murders his brother and so on, until the tower of Babel describes the horror of the families of the earth utterly unable to experience any unity.

But this still does not explain the prior unity. For that we must understand that God is the source of unity. Creation does not stand only in distinction from God but actually derives from him: ‘... there is one God, the Father, *from whom* [ejx ou|] are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist’ (1 Cor. 8:6). Adam, is in the image of God⁹. But God himself is in unity, hence the male and the female are also created in unity, they are ‘one flesh’ (Gen 2:24).

God is in unity. Of course, it was some two hundred years after Christ before the doctrine of the Trinity was initially formulated, but the revelation of God which came in Christ opened up the truth of God which had already been declared in the Old Testament.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. (Deut 6:4)

or, as it could also be translated, ‘The LORD our God is one LORD’ or, ‘The LORD is our God, the LORD is one’. Doubtless this statement was first intended to declare that the LORD was the only God and that the gods of the nations were idols without genuine existence as gods alongside the LORD. If there are other gods, they are nothing, trifling constructs of men (Ps. 115:3-8), whereas Israel asks,

Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, doing wonders? (Ex. 15:11).

⁹ Adam is the word for ‘humankind’ in Genesis 1:26-27, in distinction from the rest of the creation, while in chapter 2 it is the word used to define the male in distinction from the female. See, Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, (WBC 1), Word, Milton Keynes, 1987, p 32f; Howard N. Wallace, ‘Adam’ in D. N. Freedman (Ed) *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* — Volume 1, p 62f.

This is the God who called Israel out of Egypt and revealed himself to the people with such power and majesty at Sinai, so that they were his people, his ‘treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed the whole earth is mine ⁶but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation (Ex. 19:5-6). This priestly, holy nation, as we have seen, is to be the focus of true worship. Israel alone has had a special revelation of God and, indeed, a revelation of awesome dimensions. The purpose was clear: Israel was to be a testimony to the God who had revealed himself in this way.

To you it was shown so that you would acknowledge that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him. (Deut. 4:35)

They are to ‘say among the nations, “The LORD is king!”’ (1 Chron 16:31) and to do so by both lip and life. Thus ‘You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD’ (Leviticus 19:18). Next to the command to love the LORD, this was the commandment which was foundational to Israel’s life (see Mark 12:28-33).

The provisional nature of the revelation given to Israel is seen when the definitive revelation is given in the incarnation of the Word. Now we see what Israel could not have seen, or even guessed; the one God who created all things and who revealed himself to Israel is Father, Son and Spirit. There is no New Testament rationalisation for this, only the revelation of it. The claim is that

the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14).

‘Lived among us’ uses the verb form of the word ‘tabernacle’, a temporary dwelling place or a tent. The implication seems to be that as God’s glory was present to old Israel in the tabernacle in the wilderness, so the glory is now seen in the tabernacle of Jesus’ flesh. The law may have come through Moses, but the grace and truth which was even in the law came through Jesus Christ (see Jn. 1:17). This full revelation of God is immense and quite staggering. So John commences his first letter:

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — ²this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us — ³we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (1 Jn 1:1-4)

This revelation was personal and was not limited to the apostolic band. John recognised that his readers also had met ‘the Father’.

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven on account of his name. ¹³I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young people, because you have conquered the evil one. ¹⁴I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young people, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (1 Jn 2:12-14).

It is out of this that John can declare that ‘God is love’. That love has been ‘manifested’ or ‘made clear’ in all that God has done (1 John 4:8-10).

Previously, in Israel, God was known by his name, Yahweh; now Yahweh is known by another name, 'Father'. And he is known as Father not because a metaphor is needed but because we meet him in the person of the Son. Perhaps familiarity with the titles 'Father' and 'Son' may be understandable but, in the light of the Jewish heritage of the new Christian Church, we should recognise the amazing nature of their new understanding. The language of the New Testament, while no doubt carefully chosen by the authors, still carries staggering connotations.

Probably reflecting the thought of Deuteronomy 4:6, Paul now says that, over against the multiplicity of idols, none of which has any genuine existence,

for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1 Cor. 8:6)

We know the Father and the Father is love. He loves his only begotten Son (John 5:20), 'the Son of his love' (Col. 1:13), his 'beloved Son' (Matt. 3:17 and parallels) and gave him glory because he loved him before the foundation of the world (John 17:24). The Son loves the Father (John 14:30) and in his prayer in John 17 is deeply conscious of

- (i) the total unity with the Father and
- (ii) his purpose that those who believe in him through the apostolic proclamation should be participants in that unity.

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word,²¹ that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ²⁴Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (Jn 17:20-24)

There is little said concerning the Spirit being loved, but Paul does appeal to the Romans 'by the love of the Spirit' (Rom. 15:30) and he recognises that we know the love of God because the Holy Spirit has brought it to us (Rom. 5:5). But when the matter of the 'unpardonable sin' is raised, Jesus made it clear that blasphemy against the Spirit would never be tolerated!

Unity is not uniformity. However much we may dislike the abuse of power which we see around us, true authority is seen within these relationships in what we call the Godhead. The word 'hierarchy', literally, 'priestly rule', is an appropriate word to use when we see the relationships of Father, Son and Spirit expressed.¹⁰ There is an order, even between the persons of the Godhead. The Father commands and the Son obeys; likewise, the Spirit is 'sent' (Jn 14:26), 'given' (Jn 14:16; Rom. 5:5) and 'poured out' (Acts 2:33). Yet in this, the Son delights to do the Father's will (Heb. 10:5-7; cf. Ps. 40:8).

For this reason we should say that hierarchy within creation is both expected and seen. Also seen is the continual tendency towards fragmentation, so that human attempts to promote unity are rarely successful for any length of time. The power which serves is often

¹⁰ It is, admittedly, not a word which occurs in the New Testament but that should not exclude its use. The same applies with the word 'Trinity'. The problem with the word 'hierarchy' arises when it is made to stand in opposition to 'service' (*diakonia*), but there is no such opposition when hierarchy and service are seen within the inner life of the Trinity. For an example of the rejection of 'hierarchy' see, Hans Küng, *Credo*, SCM, London, 1993, p 132.

corrupted into the power which controls and the refusal to submit to authority is basic to every participant in Adam.

THE RESTORATION OF UNITY

When we speak of the unity of the church we are making a bold claim. We are saying that the church stands as the body of men and women who are one, not because of their inherent ability to ‘get along’ with each other but because they are a new creation, participants in the last Adam who has restored the unity by taking us back into the unity of the Godhead. In that sense, ‘Christ is the unity, Christ is the holiness, Christ is the catholicity and apostolicity of the church’.¹¹

The beginning of the restoration of unity lay, in history, at the call of and promise to Abraham. The nations which were fragmented at Babel will be ‘blessed’ in Abraham and his ‘seed’ (Gen 12:1-3, 7). We know well that this promise led to the formation of the people of Israel through the redemption from Egypt and their establishment at Sinai. The people of Israel, however, repeatedly rebelled against their holy calling and so repeated the fragmentation of the world around them. This was especially seen at the division of the nation after the death of Solomon, although the seeds of that division were evident much earlier. Even when the northern kingdom of Israel was no more and only the little kingdom of Judah was left, God’s intention to have a people who were one was never shelved. His promise of a new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 was directed towards ‘the house of Israel and the house of Judah’ (vs. 31) and Ezekiel, following the vision of the renewed people in chapter 37:1-10, is told that ‘these bones are the whole house of Israel’ (vs. 11). Then

The word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁶Mortal, take a stick and write on it, “For Judah, and the Israelites associated with it”; then take another stick and write on it, “For Joseph (the stick of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel associated with it”; ¹⁷and join them together into one stick, so that they may become one in your hand. ¹⁸And when your people say to you, “Will you not show us what you mean by these?” ¹⁹say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am about to take the stick of Joseph (which is in the hand of Ephraim) and the tribes of Israel associated with it; and I will put the stick of Judah upon it, and make them one stick, in order that they may be one in my hand. ²⁰When the sticks on which you write are in your hand before their eyes, ²¹then say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from every quarter, and bring them to their own land. ²²I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all. Never again shall they be two nations, and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms. ²³They shall never again defile themselves with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. I will save them from all the apostasies into which they have fallen, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their GOD.

²⁴My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd (Ezek. 37:15-24).

Part of the fulfilment lay in the ‘remnant’, the continuing, though scattered, individuals in Israel (Judah) who had not bowed the knee to Baal. These were they who received the Lord’s Messiah at his birth and were with Jesus during his ministry and were among those present at Pentecost. But they were not the fulfilment; they were at best an anticipation of it. Ezekiel had promised that true unity would be the result of the great action of the spirit and

¹¹ Geoffrey Bingham, ‘The Church is One’ in 1997 NCTM Pastors’ School, Evening Sessions, p 5.

the word on the dry bones as God ‘save[s] them from the apostasies into which they have fallen, and will cleanse them’. In other words, true unity is the result of atonement and is actually effected by it.

We see the church born at Pentecost. Geoffrey Bingham asks,

then what did Pentecost contain within itself that could cause the Church? The answer is that Peter pointed to the event of the Cross and Resurrection. John 11:49-51 speaks of the death of Christ being essential to save Israel from the Romans, but unconsciously the high priest prophesies that Christ will be the one to do that. John adds that Jesus would die for the nation, ‘and not for the nation only’ but ‘that the children of God scattered abroad should be gathered together into one’. Acts 4:25-28 expounds that Jews, Romans and other Gentiles were all gathered at the Cross. In 2 Corinthians 5:14, Paul says that he judges that if one died for all then did all die, that is, on the Cross. He also says that the world was crucified at the Cross (Gal. 6:14; cf 1:4-5). The most explicit passage, however, is that of Ephesians 2:11-22 where Paul shows that Gentiles were outside the Old Testament *qahal*, but through the blood of the Cross, Christ has brought into being ‘one new man’, that is, a new people, Jew and Gentile both having access to God together, or as the one. These now constitute the new temple — which is Christ — and their intimacy is such that the ‘whole structure is joined together’, a description fitting 1 Peter 2:4-10 where all believers are built together for a holy shrine. As such they are now a new people *in one*.¹²

Whether it is recognised or not, the atonement removed the cause of the hostility between Man and God and between human beings. Old Adam, ‘the old man’, was crucified with Christ and now there is only the new man. And the church is in him. Pentecost was the great act of re-creation as the Spirit brought the church to birth by pouring the atoning love of God into the hearts of those who received him.

We may say, then, that there is a fundamental unity in the church, ‘the unity of the Spirit’. As the Father, Son and Spirit are one, so the church is brought back to the unity which was inherent in the creation. This happened because the unity of love within the Godhead is the unity of holy love which has been made known in the work of the cross and which has come to us so powerfully and effectively. Paul told the Thessalonians of the love which was now evident among them:

Now concerning love of the brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another;¹⁰ and indeed you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more, (1 Thess. 4:9-10).

John wrote simply yet profoundly,

Beloved, *let us go on loving*¹³ one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. (1 Jn 4:7-12)

¹² ‘The Church is One’, p 5.

¹³ The Greek is a present tense, which can be understood as having a continuous sense, either as meaning that the readers do indeed love and are urged to continue to do so or that they ought to do so continually from that point. Within the context of the whole letter, I think the former is more likely, but either way they know the Father and so they love and this is the obvious response to all that God has done.

He said later, ‘We love because he first loved us’ (4:19) and that ‘God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them’ (4:16). This is not an appeal to people to bring about a new set of relationships; it is a recognition that Jesus’ prayer, recorded in John 17, *has been answered!*

For this reason, Paul urged that the Ephesians ‘make every effort to *maintain* the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ (Eph. 4:3). He continues that

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Eph. 4:4-6)

Unity is not something for which we long; it is the very essence of all that is. God is one, so that there is only one body (cf. Eph. 1:22-23). Obviously, the call to maintain the unity implies that there are factors at work to bring back the fragmentation. But those factors are to be recognised and resisted. They have learned Christ and were taught, therefore, to put away the former way of life, the old man — Adam — corrupt and deluded as he was and to be renewed in the spirit of their minds and to put on the new man — Christ. This is what it means to be a new creation (Eph. 4:20-24).

LIVING IN UNITY

We can easily say the things we have and yet not live in unity. There is the matter of denominations. While we recognise their existence and the reasons why they came into being, it is plain that generally the denominations are in competition with each other. Furthermore, they are often divided by things which are of little or no substance in the Scriptures, things such as ‘sacraments’ and ‘church government’. Alan Richardson wrote:

The Church is the Church of God in Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Thess. 2:14). It is God’s Church, not ours, something which God creates, not we. Men did not found the Church, nor can they found a new Church (cf. I Cor. 3:11). There is only one Church of God, the one of which Christ’s original apostles were the foundation members. There can be only one Church because there is only one Christ (Eph. 4:5), one body of Christ, one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:4). Christ is not divided (1 Cor. 1:13) and therefore he cannot have two or more bodies; there cannot be two or more Churches. The plural [*ecclesiai*: churches] occurs very frequently in the NT, but it is always a plural of distribution, i.e. it refers to the several local churches of Corinth, Philippi, Ephesus, etc.; it never means denominations, as in the phrase ‘World Council of Churches’. Paul recoils with horror from the news that denominations have sprung up in Corinth — a Paul-party, an Apollos- ‘church’, a Cephas (Peter)-denomination, even a Christ-party! (1 Cor. 1:12; cf. 3:5). ‘Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were ye baptized into the name of Paul?’ (1:13). If the Church of the baptized is the *persona* of Christ, it is a body with many and varied organs, but it cannot be two bodies (cf. Rom. 12:4-8; I Cor. 12:12-30). Christians were ‘called in one body’ (Col. 3:15; cf. Eph. 2:16) Whether they recognize the truth or not, they are members of Christ’s body (Eph. 5:30) and they are therefore members of one another (Eph. 4:25).¹⁴

This is the ‘sin’ spoken of above, the sin which fails to see the unity which is in Christ, by an *overriding* loyalty to one particular group among the many. We can do nothing about the things that are past and we certainly cannot go about dismantling the various ‘churches’. Nor should we stand over against them, as judges of their faults or even of their very existence. That would be, in effect, to establish another group in distinction from all the

¹⁴ Quoted in Bingham, ‘The Church is One’, p 8f.

others, another ‘no-name’ brand of denomination. No, it is before their own Lord that they stand or fall.

What, then, should we do? The answer is surely that we must ‘go on loving one another’, go on living in love and so living in God. This we will do in the groups which exist and of which we are part, since those groups are, in fact, members of Christ and so members of all the groups which are likewise in him. We will be men and women of faith who recognise the reality of the church born at Pentecost and which is sustained because God goes on supplying the Spirit and we will be those who live and minister in love to others in the church, whether or not they are conscious, yet, of their standing.

In order not to be judgmental of the attitudes and actions which maintain the divisions between the churches, we will be men and women who are constantly refreshed and renewed in his love, participating constantly in the love which has brought us mercy and forgiveness through the atonement. We will be those who live in intimacy with the Triune God and so, as far as it lies in us, we will live in unity with all men and women. We will do our utmost not to put a stumbling block in the way of those with whom we are one, preferring to imitate God.

So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. ²⁶Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and do not make room for the devil. ²⁸Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. ²⁹Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. ³¹Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, ³²and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

¹Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, ²and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph. 4:25-5:2).

The Church in its Holiness¹

Philip Hefner wrote that

The doctrinal affirmations made about the church are the product of considerable reflection and have emerged from the church's struggle to maintain itself as a community and an institution, with all that such a struggle implies about the dominant place of self-interest.²

But when we look at the subject of the church and we discover that the church is called 'holy' in the ancient creeds, we will probably be initially puzzled. In the New Testament, the church is never directly called 'holy'³ and so we may begin the process of arguing that the holiness is a description of the members of the church. Of course, we will be faced with another problem at that point, because we will, sooner or later, be forced to admit that the members often do not seem to evidence holiness in either their individual or corporate lives.

But there is another view that is somewhat common. It is that the church itself is a holy institution with all that *that* implies — holy buildings, services, 'priests', sacraments and so on. This is the view that understands holiness in terms of the aura which the church projects. Rudolf Otto, writing in 1917, described this as '*mysterium tremendum*', the mystery which inspires awe.

Let us consider the deepest and most fundamental element in all strong and sincerely felt religious emotion. Faith unto salvation, trust, love - all these are there. But over and above these is an element which may also on occasion, quite apart from them, profoundly affect us and occupy the mind with a wellnigh bewildering strength. Let us follow it up with every effort of sympathy and imaginative intuition wherever it is to be found, in the lives of those around us, in sudden, strong ebullitions of personal piety and the frames of mind such ebullitions evince, in the fixed and ordered solemnities of rites and liturgies, and again in the atmosphere that clings to old religious monuments and buildings, to temples and to churches. If we do so we shall find we are dealing with something for which there is only one appropriate expression, '*mysterium tremendum*'. The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its 'profane', non-religious mood of everyday experience. It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy. It has its wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering. It has its crude, barbaric antecedents and early manifestations, and again it may be developed into something beautiful and pure and glorious. It may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of - whom or what? In the presence of that which is a *mystery* inexpressible and above all creatures.⁴

¹ See my study of 2nd November 1996, *Christ our Sanctification*.

² 'The Being of the Church', in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jensen (Eds), *Christian Dogmatics, Volume Two*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia. 1984, p 203.

³ On four occasions only (Acts 9:31; 20:28; Eph 5:27 and Rev 3:7) do the words 'holy' and 'church' appear in the same verse, and then only in Ephesians 5:7 is the reference to the church as intended for holiness.

⁴ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, (1917), 1959, p 26f. Emil Brunner's comment was that Otto 'had important insights but the decisive Biblical message that God is the Holy One escaped him' (*The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consummation, Dogmatics Vol. III*, Lutterworth, London, 1962, p 290, n 1).

Although this may not be the attitude towards the church that it once was, certainly amongst outsiders, there is still a lingering suspicion in some quarters that, for example, the church building, as distinct from the church hall or the rented accommodation, is somehow different. And there are still others who sense that an ecstatic awareness of the presence of God is the high point of worship.

These ideas of ‘holiness’ may have some merit. Moses was told to remove his shoes ‘for the place on which you are standing is holy ground’ (Ex. 3:5). Also, Jacob, after his dream, was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven’ (Gen. 28:17). But is this what is implied when the creed asserts that the church is holy?

We must, then, define what we mean by ‘holiness’.

HOLINESS

There are a number of words in English which convey the idea of holiness; holiness, holy, hallow, sanctify, saint, consecrate and so on. Holiness is first encountered in the Scriptures at the creation, when ‘God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it’ (Gen 2:3). From then on holiness is seen in many ‘things’, holy ground, a holy people, the holy place in the tent of meeting, holy priests etc. The book of the Revelation closes with the manifestation of the holy city (21:2), though there is no sense that the church, the bride, is not holy prior to that day. On the contrary, there is the recognition that there are holy people *now*, in the instruction of Revelation 22:11

Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.

and in the closing benediction, ‘The grace of the LORD Jesus be with all the holy ones (saints)’. The conclusion to the book of the Revelation shows us that God has always intended the sanctification of all things. Evil has been purged in the lake of fire and now the holiness first declared at the creation is seen to be fully expressed.

In between these two points there is the presence of a holy people, commencing with Abel, then Seth through to Abraham and the people of Israel and after them the church with its holy apostles and prophets (Eph. 3:5).

Fundamental to all of this is the fact that God is holy. In the book of Leviticus we encounter the declaration by God, ‘I am holy’:

For I am the LORD your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming creature that moves on the earth. ⁴⁵For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy. (Lev. 11:44-45)

Again, in Isaiah 57:15, God declares

For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

The usual definition of ‘holy’ as a reference to God is that he is morally pure, totally separate from all evil. While that is undoubtedly true, it is of little help in understanding what it means to say that God is holy, since it only says what he is not. He is not touched by sin. But that says nothing about God before there was sin to be considered. Can we, then,

ask what it means to say that God is holy in himself, that is, not compared with men and women or with evil? After all, the Scriptures ask, ‘To what can we possibly compare God?’ (see Isa. 40:18).

From Isaiah 6:1-3 we may see that God’s holiness is his glory.⁵ Likewise, Moses declared that God is ‘majestic in holiness’ (Ex. 15:11) and, as noted above, Isaiah records that God’s name, that is, his whole being, is holy. These statements are presented with no explanation. All we know of God’s holiness is as it exposes the lack of moral purity of men and women. This was Isaiah’s point in 6:4-5. But we may perhaps be able to understand something of the truth of God by seeing the way holiness is described when it touches creation.

When discussing the requirements for holiness in Leviticus, in particular the questions of holiness and cleanness, Gordon Wenham refers to the work of M. Douglas. He writes

M Douglas has tried to discover the deep underlying principles that unite these concepts of holiness and cleanness. She argues that holy means more than separation to divine service. It means wholeness and completeness. ... She quotes Lev. 21:17-21, listing imperfections that bar one from acting as a priest, and summarizes: ‘In other words, he must be perfect as a man, if he is to be a priest’. ... The idea of wholeness or normality as the notion implicitly assumed to be essential to holiness and cleanness is the key determining the divisions of the animal kingdom according to Douglas.⁶

The root of the Hebrew word for holy is *vdq*, *qdsh*, meaning to cut. When applied to humans or to objects we may understand it to mean that a person or thing has been cut off and separated for God. But as applying to God himself we may understand his holiness to mean that God is complete, the word cut implying that God is not in anyway dependent upon his creatures for his being. Hence Isaiah’s description of God as the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, who dwells ‘in the high and holy place’ (57:15).

Following this, some have said that God is holy because he is ‘wholly other’, that is, he is totally distinct from all his creatures, animate and inanimate. It is not pedantry to suggest that the word ‘wholly’ is perhaps not appropriate. This is not because of some deficiency in God but because in his freedom he has chosen to be present to the creation and that the creation was formed to participate in his holiness. God is distinct from humanity but he not apart from it. Men and women are created for intimacy with the Holy One.⁷ Were he not present to the creation at every point, creation would cease to be (see Ps. 104:29-30)

In other words, the Holy One, who inhabits eternity, has chosen not to be God alone. So he has created all things and then declared them to be holy, indicating that all creation is to function as a holy sanctuary where God’s holiness is known and acknowledged. Hence he dwells ‘also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite’ (Isa 57:15). ‘Contrite’ is a word which is not appropriate before the fall, but is used here because Isaiah uses it. We only need to say that unfallen man ought to have lived in simple dependence and obedience. Contrition is required where there is sin.

The problem arises when men and women refuse to be ‘contrite and humble in spirit’; Adam refused to *be* holy, that is, to live in the holiness of creation. At that point holiness

⁵ ‘God’s glory is his holiness revealed’; David Peterson, *Possessed by God*, Apollos, Leicester, 1995, p 18.

⁶ G. J. Wenham, *Leviticus*, N.I.C.O.T., Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979, p 23ff.

⁷ Cf. Geoff Bingham, ‘The Church is Holy’, in *Christ’s Living Church Today — One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic* (Pastors’ School 1997, Evening Sessions), NCPI, Blackwood, 1997, p 12.

became a problem since it now stood in contrast and contradiction to him. Created to function within the holiness of the creation, Adam is now attempting to function over against that holiness. The presence of God is, therefore, a torment to humanity (Gen. 3:10) although he is aware of his need of it (Gen. 4:13-14). No doubt this lies behind the construction of alternative sources of holiness, the '*mysterium tremendum*', as humanity attributes holiness to *things* apart from God⁸ and attempts to find satisfaction in mystical or ecstatic experiences which do not bring us into confrontation with the Holy One.

THE HOLY NATION OF ISRAEL

Once we have established that 'holiness' does not mean 'perfection', while obviously demanding it, then it is easier for us to see that God's call of Israel was with his intention to have a holy people, united to him. His purpose, expressed in the sanctification of creation in the Sabbath, is to have a creation which is holy *in him*.

To Israel at Sinai God said,

Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, ⁶but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites. (Ex. 19:5-6).

Keeping in mind the plan to bless the nations through the offspring of Abraham, we may understand that the choice of Israel was with the restoration of the blessing of creation to the nations. Thus, Israel was redeemed from Egypt and set apart for God, purely by his choice (see Deut. 7:7-9), and as such was a 'holy' nation, that is, *cut off* from the rest of the nations, in order to accomplish the plan of God. Israel was a holy nation, not because of any intrinsic worth or merit but because God had *sanctified* them.

You yourself are to speak to the Israelites: 'You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, given in order that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.' (Ex. 31:13)

Keep my statutes, and observe them; I am the LORD; I sanctify you. (Lev. 20:8)

...and you shall treat them as holy, since they offer the food of your God; they shall be holy to you, for I the LORD, I who sanctify you, am holy. (Lev. 21:8)

You shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel: I am the LORD; I sanctify you... (Lev. 22:32)

Indeed, if a search was made for any merit in Israel, none would be found. Even when the *Torah* was being given to Moses on Sinai, the people were demonstrating that there remained a deeply rooted idolatry and ungodliness within them in the incident of the golden calf.

But Israel's holiness was assured by the fact that the one who had called them and sanctified them would keep them holy. Their sin would not be permitted to violate their

⁸ This is evident in Gen. 38:21-22 etc, where the word for 'prostitute' is *hṯ...ādEq*, meaning 'temple prostitute' but literally 'a consecrated one', based on the root *vdq*, 'holy'. It was evidently regarded as a lesser evil to go in to a temple prostitute than to a 'common' prostitute; on occasions, outside of Israel, in some Canaanite religion intercourse with a temple prostitute was regarded as a normal part of the religious activity.

position. Thus there was the provision, within the Torah, of the sacrificial system, administered by the High Priest who stood as a declaration of God's purpose.

You shall make a rosette of pure gold, and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet, 'Holy to the LORD'.³⁷ You shall fasten it on the turban with a blue cord; it shall be on the front of the turban.³⁸ It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall take on himself any guilt incurred in the holy offering that the Israelites consecrate as their sacred donations; it shall always be on his forehead, in order that they may find favor before the LORD. (Exodus 28:36-38).

The declaration of Exodus 19:6, 'you shall be *for me* a priestly kingdom and a holy nation' means that God jealously guards his own holiness in the people.

This explains the fierce opposition of God to idolatry in Israel and his consequent judgment when Israel does turn to other gods. Furthermore, when Israel is judged, by being taken into exile in Babylon, Ezekiel records the promise of God to cleanse and renew the people but stresses:

Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.²³ I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, says the Lord GOD, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes. (Ezek. 36:22-23).

On the other hand, the great protection and blessing of the people, as he leads them in paths of righteousness, is all for 'his name's sake' (Ps. 23:3). When he judges, it is with his holiness being declared through the purification of his people, with the total purification of creation in view. Isaiah had heard that God's holiness is his glory (Isa. 6:1-3) and so anticipated the great work of redemption in a new exodus.

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

³A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

⁵Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.' (Isaiah 40:1-5).

THE REVELATION OF HOLINESS

Luke 2:8-14 records that, when Jesus was born, God spoke to shepherds by his messenger (angel). As the messenger appeared, 'the glory of the Lord shone around them' and, if we understand the holiness of his glory, we can appreciate why the shepherds were terrified. But Luke continues to explain that the Lord whose glory was so powerfully present was 'born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, Christ the Lord'. Whereas previously, by God's mercy, his holiness was generally veiled lest sinful men and women be destroyed, now the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all and his glory is now seen in the person of the incarnate son.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

The momentous nature of the incarnation is seen in the fact of Jesus coming to purify Israel. For example, his miracle of changing the water into wine (John 2:1-11) is actually an enacted parable of the transformation of Israel; the water of the Jewish rites of purification is changed into the rich wine of the wedding feast.

Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, *and revealed his glory*; and his disciples believed in him. (John 2:11)

Of course, the next event, the cleansing of the temple (John 2:13-22) re-enforced this picture but, almost incidentally, anticipated the way that transformation would take place: 'Destroy this temple...he was speaking of the temple of his body...after he was raised from the dead' (vss. 19, 21, 22).

The purpose of God was expressed in many other ways. Jesus told the disciples to pray as those anticipating the restoration of all things—

Our Father in heaven, *hallowed be your name.*

¹⁰Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (Matt. 6:9-10)

and some manuscripts add the final attribution, 'For the kingdom and the power *and the glory* are yours forever'.

Jesus, when informed that some Greeks wished to see him, announced

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (John 12:23-24)

If the Son of Man is glorified, that is, *he* is glorified, it is understood from such passages as Daniel 7:14ff that Israel will be restored and the kingdom established forever. But the method is not what anyone would have anticipated. Much fruit will come only if a grain of wheat dies. So the account continues:

'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say — "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' ³⁰Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. (John 12:27-33)

The Father has glorified his name and will do so again. Hearing this, Jesus could announce that the hour of judgment had arrived. The world would be judged and the evil one driven out. Then, from his exalted position, Jesus would draw all people to himself. But that was a heavily ironic way of indicating death by crucifixion.

The interplay of the words 'holy', 'sanctify', 'glory' and 'glorify' is seen in Jesus prayer in John 17.

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, '*Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you,* ²since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴*I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.* ⁵*So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.*

⁶I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. *Holy Father*, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. ¹²While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to *protect them from the evil one*. ¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷*Sanctify them in the truth*; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹*And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.*

²⁰I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ²⁴Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, *to see my glory*, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.' (John 17:1-24).

His prayer is that he may be glorified, that the disciples may be sanctified by the Holy Father and that all who hear the disciples' word may see Jesus' glory from the position of intimacy with the Father and the Son (and the Spirit, see John 14-16).

The sanctification of the disciples and of the world flows from the Son sanctifying himself. He is the Holy One of God (see Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35), the one set apart for God, in order that God's name may be indisputably recognised as holy. For this, he must reveal the total holiness of God over against the evil of men and women and of the powers of darkness; he must therefore show the judgment that holy wrath must administer in the face of an unholy creation. Yet he does this, not simply by administering judgment but by bearing it. He who shared the wrath of the Father (see Rev. 6:16-17) as well as his love (John 3:16; 13:1), entered humanity to stand as humanity's representative, their *vicar*.

At the cross, the prayer, 'hallowed by your name' was answered. Never again can God be charged with tolerating evil or with indifference to the holiness of his great name. This is Paul's point in Romans 3:23-26.

... for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: ²⁵whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood, to show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God; ²⁶for the showing, I say, of his righteousness at this present season: that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus. (ASV)

‘Propitiation’, the removal of wrath by means of the offering of a gift,⁹ now is more often translated as ‘sacrifice of atonement’, with a recognition of the Old Testament details of the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant. Karl Barth’s comment is valuable.

Whom God set forth to be a covering of propitiation, through his faithfulness, by his blood. In the Old Testament cultus the *covering of propitiation* (EV. *mercy seat*; Hebr. *Kapporeth*; LXX *Hilasterion*) was the sheet of gold, overshadowed by the wings of the two angel-figures (cherubim), which covered and marked the place where the contents of the ark, the oracles of God, were deposited (Exod. xxv. 17-21). In I Sam. iv. 4, 2 Sam. vi. 2, Ps. lxxx. 1, it is the place above which God Himself dwells; in Exod. xxv. 22, Num. vii. 89, it is the place from which God speaks to Moses, it is pre-eminently, however, the place where, on the great day of Atonement, the people were reconciled to God by the sprinkling of blood (Lev. xvi. 14, 15).

The analogy with Jesus is especially appropriate, because the mercy seat is no more than a particular, though very significant, place. By the express counsel of God, Jesus has been appointed from eternity as the place of propitiation above which God dwells and from which He speaks; now, however, He occupies a position in time, in history, and in the presence of men. The life of Jesus is the place in history fitted by God for propitiation and fraught with eternity—*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself* (2 Cor. v. 19). At this place the Kingdom of God is come nigh: so near is it, that here His coming and His redeeming power are recognized; so near, that here God dwells with men and His communing is unmistakable; so near, that here the pressure of faith is a commanding necessity.

But, just as in the Old Testament the *Kapporeth* covered the testimonies of God as well as marked their presence among men, so here the Kingdom of God, His atoning activity, and the dawning of the day of redemption (iii. 24), are in Jesus covered as well as displayed. Jesus is presented to us unmistakably as the Christ, but His Messiahship is also presented to us as a sharply defined paradox. It is a matter for faith only. The propitiation occurs at the place of propitiation—only by blood, whereby we are solemnly reminded that God gives life only through death. Consequently, in Jesus also atonement occurs only through the faithfulness of God, *by his blood*: only, that is to say, in the inferno of His complete solidarity with all the sin and weakness and misery of the flesh; in the secret of an occurrence which seems to us wholly negative; in the extinguishing of all the lights—hero, prophet, wonder worker—which mark the brilliance of human life, a brilliance which shone also in His life, whilst He lived a man amongst men; and finally, in the absolute scandal of His death upon the Cross.

By His blood, then, Jesus is proved to be the Christ, the first and last word to men of the faithfulness of God. By His death He declares the impossible possibility of our redemption, and shows Himself as the light from light uncreated, as the Herald of the Kingdom of God. ‘In the picture of the Redeemer the dominant colour is blood’ (Ph. Fr. Hiller), because, in the way of the Cross, in the offering of His life, and in His death, the radical nature of the redemption which He brings and the utter novelty of the world which He proclaims are first brought to light. Brought to light—nay, rather, put in the shade, when once we recognize that to comprehend either the radicalism or the novelty of God’s world or the necessary transformation of the hearts of men, lies beyond our competence—*Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising up of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against—yea and a sword shall pierce through thine own soul—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed* (Luke ii. 34, 35).

The secret of redemption by the blood of Jesus is, and remains, the secret of God. Its manifestation also, which is the invisibility of God becoming visible, is always the action of God, an act of His faithfulness, or, what is the same thing, an act of faith. In so far as this occurs and His faithfulness persists, in so far as the hazard of faith is ventured, the dawn of the new world, the reality of the mercy of God and of our salvation, of our future being-clothed-upon with our habitation not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens (2 Cor. v. 1 ff.), is displayed and

⁹ See Leon Morris, ‘Propitiation’ in J. D. Douglas (Ed) *The New Bible Dictionary*, Inter-Varsity Fellowship, London, 1962, p 1046. Also his *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, for a full treatment.

announced, secured and guaranteed to us, in the blood of Jesus. We stand already, here and now, in the reflection of the things which are to come; we are perplexed, but not hopeless; smitten by God, but nevertheless, in this [judgment], under His healing power. 'Therefore we must nestle under the wings of this mother-hen, and not rashly fly away trusting in the powers of our own faith, lest the hawk speedily tear us in pieces and devour us' (Luther).¹⁰

THE CHURCH IS HOLY

'Here the pressure of faith is a commanding necessity'. God's determination to have a people who are 'holy and blameless before him' (Eph. 1:4) means that, over against the rebellion and the unholiness, God places the sanctifying work of Christ. And by pure grace we are saved out of that unholiness and made his own. What is more, our faith is a commanding necessity, it is not our own doing, not of works lest anyone should boast (Eph. 2:8-9). Such statements as John 6:37, 44 and Acts 13:48 appear an amazingly precious.

Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; ...⁴⁴No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day.

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord; and as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers.

The security of the church does not rest in any intrinsic holiness but in the choice of God, his faithfulness to his own purposes. Thus the believers are regularly called 'saints' or 'holy ones' and Hebrews speaks of them (in that case they are believing Jews) as 'sanctified by the will of God through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ one and for all' (Heb. 10:10). Peter could speak of the church, then, in the language once reserved for Israel:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, *a holy nation*, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet. 2:9-10)

Christ is our sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). He is the High Priest whose continual intercession means our continual sanctification (Heb. 7:25; cf. 10:14) as 'the blood of Jesus ... goes on cleansing us from all sin' (1 John 1:7).

To declare the church 'holy' is declare the high dignity of the church. We have been brought near through the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13), we are now the body of Christ, indeed the lordship of Christ is *for* the church for without the church his fulness is not known (Eph. 1:22). It is 'through the church [that] the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places' (Eph. 3:10).

Paul called the church 'the household of God, the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark/ground/foundation of the truth' (1 Tim. 3:15). It is 'God's temple' and as such demands that the members of the church treat the body of Christ with great respect. Factionalism or individualism will not be tolerated by the Holy One who has made us holy. Thus those who eat and drink 'without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against

¹⁰ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Oxford University Press, London, 1933, pp 104-106 (paragraphs added).

themselves' (1 Cor. 11:29). The warning against factionalism, that is, against failing to recognise and to live within the unity of the whole body, is strong.

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. (1 Cor. 3:16-17).

This is obviously not to give some *mystique* to the church so much as to recognise what God has done. This group of men and women, whom we see in their weakness and even, sadly, in their sinfulness, is God's own people. They are holy because Christ is holy and they are *in him*.

HOLINESS IN PRACTICE

The consummation of what we now know as history is seen in Revelation 21-22. There John sees the new heavens and the new earth and 'the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' (Rev. 21:2). The bride, the city 'has the glory of God' (Rev. 21:11) and 'the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars' have all been purged from creation 'in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death' (Rev. 21:8).

How, then, should the holy people live now? If we are holy, how should we live in this present time? Paul told the Corinthians

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God. (2 Cor. 7:1)

This does not mean that holiness is 'imperfect' as if it had some faults yet to be remedied. It does mean that holiness has a goal and that, recognising that goal, we will be those who participate in the holiness which has been given to us. John made a similar statement in 1 John 3:1-3.

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. ³And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

We have faults, but it is as holy people that we recognise what God has done and live in that. Thus, since we are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus, we ought not let sin reign in our mortal bodies to make us obey their passions (Rom. 6:11-12). The way Paul summarised that is by saying,

... now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is *sanctification*. The end is eternal life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:22-23).

That is, eternal life is ours as a free gift because God has given us *sanctification*. To be justified means that we are sanctified. Thus 1 Corinthians 6:11, 'You were *washed*, you were *sanctified*, you were *justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus and in the Spirit of our God'. That is why we must remember that 'wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Cor. 6:9). And Colossians 3:1-5 sets this matter in its full context:

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ³for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry) ...

These instructions must be seen in the light of the goal of God. It is his purpose to purify the creation so that the holy sabbath rest will again be the delight of all creation. So all that is unholy and polluted and unclean will be purged. That is why Israel of old experienced the judgments it did and why there must be discipline of the church; our human fathers 'disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness' (Heb. 12:10). But the Lord only chastens those whom he loves (Rev. 3:19). Because the church is holy, and because the goal of the great wedding banquet is set before us, we should hear his command to live in the intimacy which his holiness has secured.

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. (Rev. 3:20)

Knowing the goal, we are given to see the end in advance.

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. ⁷Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; ⁸to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure' — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. (Rev. 19:6-8).

That is, we are permitted to see the bride *given* the wedding garment made of the righteous deeds which pertain to the holy ones. 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10). This not the accomplishing of holiness, it is holiness having been accomplished and known in the doing of it. But is only known in the doing because it is known in Christ.

I believe one *holy* church, because I believe in Christ, whom God has made to be our sanctification.

The ‘Catholic’ Church¹

For most people today, the word ‘catholic’ describes the Roman Catholic Church. This is simply a matter of history. So when the church is called ‘catholic’ in the creeds, the general response is to replace ‘catholic’ with some vague notion of ‘universal’, as if to say ‘Oh, the church is everywhere’. Two statements from the ‘Roman Catholic’ theologian, Hans Küng are helpful.

In origin, ‘catholic church’ means quite unpolemically the whole, universal church as distinct from the local church. Even today, the *Ecclesia catholica* of the Creed does not denote any confessional church, and despite its size even the Roman Catholic Church becomes a particular confessional church by the addition ‘Roman’, which has become customary only in recent times. ‘Catholic church’ really means the whole, universal, comprehensive church. Like ‘Anglo Catholic’, ‘Roman Catholic’ is strictly speaking a contradiction in terms: particular-universal = wooden iron.²

The word ‘catholic’—the adverb is κατὰ οἴλου [*kath holou*] or the later adjective καθολικόν [*katholikos*], rendered in Latin by the loan-word ‘*catholicus*’ or ‘*universalis*’—means: referring to or directed towards the whole, general. In classical Greek the word is used above all for general statements (universals as distinct from individuals), for universal or world history, but also, for example, for dropsy which affects the whole body. In the New Testament the word is used once (Acts 4:18) as an adverb meaning ‘thoroughly’, ‘completely’, ‘totally’, but the Church is never described as ‘catholic’. This does not of course say anything against this usage of the word, but the luxuriant growth of interpretations which has grown up around this particular attribute of the Church is undoubtedly in part due to the fact that the New Testament has nothing to say on the subject.³

Simply, then, the word ‘catholic’ as a reference to the church indicates that the church is to be understood as ‘embracing the whole’.

When we examined the unity of the church, we concluded that divisions and denominations are a contradiction of the truth of the unity of the church. There is only one church. The idea that the church is ‘catholic’ is not dissimilar at that point. But why did the creeds add the extra word? And another associated question, in response to Küng, is this: is it true that the New Testament has nothing to say on the subject?

The word ‘catholic’ was in use long before the creeds started using it in the late fourth century. The earliest document we have which calls the church ‘catholic’ is the letter of Ignatius to Smyrna, where he wrote, ‘Wherever the bishop shows himself, there shall the community be, just as wherever Christ Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church’.⁴ Just as the local congregation gathers around the bishop, the overseer, and does not act independently of his leadership, so the Catholic Church gathers around Christ. Other writers used ‘catholic’ in the same way. But with the growth of heretical sects from the mid-second century onwards, a development took place, the word ‘catholic’ coming to mean the majority as distinct from the many divisive groups which were appearing. Kelly concludes that, in spite of the acknowledgment of the original meaning,

¹ Much of this paper was anticipated by the 1997 study, *Jews, Gentiles and the People of God*.

² Hans Küng, *Credo — The Apostles’ Creed Explained for Today*, SCM, London, 1992, p 137.

³ Hans Küng, *The Church*, Search Press, London, 1968, p 296f.

⁴ Quoted in J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, Longmans, London, 1960, p 384.

The insertion of CATHOLIC thus gave expression to the Church's consciousness of its uniquely authoritative position *vis-à-vis* the dissident sects.⁵

It is also a fact that the New Testament, far from having nothing to say, takes up the whole thrust of the Old Testament and presents a picture of the church as not merely 'one' but as comprehending the whole of humanity and the whole of creation. When Jesus said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Having gone, therefore, make disciples of all nations ...' (Matt. 28:18-19), he was not merely giving a missionary command but declaring that the whole purpose of God from before the creation and for the creation was now being accomplished. Likewise, Mark's long ending has it: 'Having gone into all the world, proclaim the gospel to the whole creation' (Mk. 16:15), and Acts 1:8 indicates that with the coming of the Spirit, the apostles would be witness of Jesus 'in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'. Furthermore, Paul wrote that the church is the body of Christ, the fulness of him who fills all in all (Eph. 1:22-23).

CREATION AND 'CATHOLICITY'

Creation is presented in amazing terms. God created the heavens and the earth and all that is on the earth, in the sky and the in the seas. Genesis presents this simply yet dramatically" 'And God said ...'. There is nothing which does not owe its existence to the word of God. Of course this is not scientifically verifiable, for Hebrews insists that it is only by faith we understand that this is the way creation is (11:3). We know it is by the word of God because God has told us.

The climax of the acts of creation was the creation of humanity. The Hebrew word *Adam* means mankind, humanity, although later it is also the name for the male. When God created *Adam*, we read,

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

²⁹God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. (Gen. 1:26-29).

To *Adam*, the male and the female, God gave dominion over all that he had made. They were to rule over the creation. More than that, the picture is of the man and the woman having children and so filling the whole earth. It is surely obvious that both rule and having children are not presented in terms of the problems we associate with them today. Rule did not mean destruction or exploitation and the birth of children was not a matter of overpopulation and its resulting hardship. These are serious complications which result from the sin of *Adam*, not from his creation.

Genesis 2 develops the picture. At first *Adam* is the male and later he is complete when the woman is formed from him. He is created and given the mandate of 'tilling' and 'keeping' the garden. Putting the two accounts together, as the author of Genesis obviously

⁵ *Creeeds*, p 386.

intended, we understand that the male was given a command which he could not fulfil apart from the one who was one with him, to till and to keep the garden and to fill the earth. This would mean that the labour in the garden would lead to the ‘Edenising’ of the whole earth.

Another element which is present, though not conspicuous to readers of the English Bible, is that the two words, ‘till’ and ‘keep’, while having plain agricultural meanings, are only used together in the Old Testament in one other context, namely, the priestly work in the Tabernacle of Israel.⁶ Again, it is surely likely that the author of Genesis knew that his readers were familiar with the activities in the Tabernacle and would, therefore, recognise the language used in the creation story. Adam was presented in priestly or Levitical terms. His task was not to dig out the weeds (at that point there were none!) but to exercise the role of leading the whole creation in its worship. This was the implication of the Sabbath rest which the unfallen creation was to enjoy. Keeping in mind the vivid imagery which occurs so often, we have little difficulty seeing the whole creation as structured for worship — and, indeed, now straining for it (as in Romans 8:18-23).

The Genesis story continues with the awful account of the Fall, where the man and the woman abdicated their rich role and attempted to fashion a similar one *apart* from God. Then there is the description of the way that the various nations developed. There is little attempt to present personal biography; instead there is the clear intention to identify the nations as deriving from Adam, in particular through Noah and his three sons. For example,

These are the descendants of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth; children were born to them after the flood ... ⁶The descendants of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. (Gen. 10:1, 6).

In Athens, the Apostle Paul spoke of this: he said,

From one [ancestor] he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him — though indeed he is not far from each one of us. (Acts 17:26-27).

All the nations were in Adam and God’s intention was not simply one undifferentiated race but the nations, with all their distinctions, all participating in the worship which was intrinsic to *Adam*.

The creation was thus a wondrous thing. We should understand it to have been pregnant with potential. It was set to fulfil the great purpose of God, so that out of *Adam* would come the nations, all together in their joint worship in a world which was blessed and functioning in the hallowed sabbath.

ISRAEL AND THE CATHOLIC PURPOSE

The first biblical reference to ‘the nations’ is in Genesis 10, verses 5, 20, 31 and 32, where, as we have seen, the intention is to show the nations deriving from Adam, through Noah and his sons.

⁵From these the coastland peoples spread. These are the descendants of Japheth in their lands, with their own language, by their families, in their *nations*.

²⁰These are the descendants of Ham, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their *nations*.

⁶ These words occur together again in Num. 3:7-8; 8:26; 18:5-6.

³¹These are the descendants of Shem, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their *nations*.

³²These are the families of Noah's sons, according to their genealogies, in their *nations*; and from these the *nations* spread abroad on the earth after the flood.

Verse 32 points out that the nations 'spread abroad on the earth after the flood'. As it stands this would appear to satisfy the command to 'fill the earth' but, in fact, there is a problem as the story of the Tower of Babel, which follows immediately, shows. The problem lies in the fact that the nations (although they are not called 'nations' at that point) are first unified in their determination *not* to be spread abroad on the earth (Gen. 11:4) and then they are spread abroad not for worship but as a result of judgment (Gen. 11:8-9). Far from the creation being filled with the nations at worship, the creation and the nations are under the curse of God because of human rebellion.

Abraham is the father of the nation Israel and the story of the call of Abraham is of great significance for that reason. But it is significant for another reason also, namely that through Abraham and the nation which was to come through him God intended to bless the nations, 'all the families of the earth' (Gen. 12:3⁷). As the story of Abraham's descendants is told, the underlying concern for the nations appears regularly. For example,

And the LORD said to [Rebekah], 'Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger.' (Gen. 25:23).

God said to [Israel], 'I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you'. (Gen. 35:11).

When blessing his sons, Jacob said that

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his. (Gen. 49:10).

At many points the method employed by God seems to reverse the usual cultural priorities. The older Esau would serve the younger Jacob, the eldest son of Jacob is passed over in favour of the greatest blessing being given to one of his younger brothers, Judah. Then, the source of blessing for the nations is shown as a large, pathetic group of slaves in Egypt, actually engaged in idolatry (see Josh. 24:14). Yet God chose them as his own, redeemed them and brought them to himself at Sinai, where he declared that

... if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine,⁶ but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites. (Ex. 19:5-6).

Israel was given a distinct and significant role among all the nations. The whole earth is God's, but Israel was to be his *priestly* kingdom. Fundamentally, in Israel, a priest was a minister of the covenant, who stood between the people and God, mediating God's forgiveness and his word to the people and leading the people's worship of God.⁸ Now the whole nation was given this designation. This meant that Israel was to be the nation,

⁷ cf. Gen 10:32 above, where the word 'families' is also used.

⁸ See P. C. Craigie, 'Priests and Levites' in W. Elwell (Ed), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1984, p 876f.

separated for God, that is 'holy', which was to mediate the truth of God to the nations and so, as a result, leading all the nations in worship.

Israel's whole life as this nation was lived in the context of the nations round about. There are two sides of the story of Israel in the Old Testament. First there was the way God blessed the nation, especially under David and Solomon, so that the reigns of these two men were the later paradigm for the prophetic hope of blessing. Under Solomon there was prosperity, 'Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea' (1 Kings 4:20; cf. the earlier promise to Abraham) and all lived under their vines and their fig trees (1 Kings 4:25), language later used by Micah (4:4) to describe the hope of Israel and the nations. The account in 1 Kings 10 shows the climax of Israel's blessing under God as being when the nations actually do come to Jerusalem and are amazed at the goodness of God. There was especially the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-10) but

The whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind. (1 Kings 10:24)

However, so much of the Old Testament story of Israel sadly concerns Israel's failure to mediate the truth of God to the nations. If Israel breaks covenant with God, the judgment will include being scattered among the nations:

And you I will scatter among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword against you; your land shall be a desolation, and your cities a waste. (Lev. 26:33).

The LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other; and there you shall serve other gods, of wood and stone, which neither you nor your ancestors have known.⁶⁵ Among those nations you shall find no ease, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and a languishing spirit. (Deut. 28:64-65).

Far from Israel being a blessing to the nations around about, she would be reduced to nothing greater than slaves for whom there is no buyer (Deut. 28:68). In other words, the nations, far from being attracted to Israel and so to Israel's God, would be repelled by the faithless nation which, in essence, was no different from themselves.⁹

This was the way Ezekiel understood the disaster of the exile in Babylon.

The word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁷Mortal, when the house of Israel lived on their own soil, they defiled it with their ways and their deeds; their conduct in my sight was like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual period.¹⁰ ¹⁸So I poured out my wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for the idols with which they had defiled it. ¹⁹I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries; in accordance with their conduct and their deeds I judged them. ²⁰But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that it was said of them, 'These are the people of the LORD, and yet they had to go out of his land'. (Ezek. 36:16-20).

Ezekiel also recorded God's declaration that Israel would be restored and morally transformed and that the nations would yet know that God is the LORD (36:22-36).

⁹ The parallel which may be drawn today is obvious. Let the church say what it will; if it does not live in the reality of its salvation the world will be completely uninterested in its message, if not even contemptuous.

¹⁰ That is, they were excluded from participation in the worship. This was not an attack on females since males likewise had reasons for exclusion from the worship at times. The point was that Israel may not worship God because of their sin, which was a total contradiction of their whole being and purpose.

Ezekiel was not alone in saying these things. There are many references in the prophets to the plan of God to restore not only Israel but also the nations. The prophecy of Isaiah is an example. He commences his book with a description of the sin of Israel (chapters 1-5) followed by the call of the prophet and his consequent message of judgment (chapter 6). Yet the description of Israel's sin is introduced in terms of Israel as the worshipping community (1:10-17) and Isaiah's message has as its focal point the restoration of Israel *so that the nations will be able to participate in the worship* (2:1-4).

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. ²In days to come the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. ³Many peoples shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths'. For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

This picture is of the nations coming to Israel, to Zion, in order to learn Torah, because Torah is flowing out from the renewed Israel. The result is the restoration of the nations; that is, they remain distinct groups but without the fierce divisions which have existed since the fall and since the tower of Babel.

Large portions of the prophecy are devoted to various nations: Babylon (13:1-14:23), Assyria (14:24-27), Philistia (14:28-32), Moab (15:1-16:14), Damascus (Syria) (17:1-14), Ethiopia (18:1-7), Egypt (19:1-25), Babylon again (21:1-10), Dumah (21:11-12), Arabia (21:13-17) and Tyre (23:1-18). It is the 'oracle concerning Egypt' (19:1-25) which reveals the overall goal.

²²The LORD will strike Egypt, striking and healing; they will return to the LORD, and he will listen to their supplications and heal them.

²³On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians.

²⁴On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth,

²⁵whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage'. (Isa. 19:22-25)

When the judgment is complete, Egypt, Assyria, former fierce enemies of Israel and of Israel's God, will stand alongside Israel, partners in the blessing of God.

Later, Isaiah sees Israel again functioning as the servant of the LORD (Isa 41:8) and as such bringing 'justice to the nations' (42:1) and being a 'light to the nations' (42:6). God's intention to bless that nations would stand, and another prophet, Jonah, spells out the way God would accomplish his purpose with or without the willingness of Israel. In fact, the unwillingness of Israel as a whole to fulfil its role and function meant that the prophets were really pointing to a fulfilment far beyond the mere restoration of physical Israel. Isaiah spoke of the 'servant' in ways that seemed to reach beyond the nation as a group and also saw that the promised restoration would result in the total transformation of the creation.

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. (Isa. 65:17)

ISRAEL'S CATHOLIC MESSIAH

The role of 'Messiah'¹¹ was generally understood, in New Testament times, to involve political and military salvation for Israel. But if the Old Testament had been taken as a starting point, it would have been recognised that Messiah, the anointed one, would represent Israel: what he did, Israel would have done *in* him. So, we should see that, as Messiah, Jesus is the one who fulfils all the requirements of God for his people.

There are, therefore two statements which demonstrate this. The first is Matthew 1:21.

She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

and the second is John 1:29

The next day [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'

It is not that one writer had a more limited view than the other; rather both are saying the same thing. The restoration of Israel, her salvation not from Egypt but from her real bondage to sin, will of course mean that she is again free to fulfil her task of bringing the truth of God to the nations. The removal of the sin of the world is nothing less than the purpose for Israel seen in its ultimate fulfilment.

This helps explain why Jesus generally refused to deal with the nations (Gentiles, Matt. 10:5-6) during what we call his 'earthly' ministry (he is still having an earthly ministry). His attention to Israel was 'stage one', but 'stage two' clearly recognised that the nations were still the goal. Thus he said,

... this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come. (Matt. 24:14)

As we saw in the study 'The Church in its Holiness', there was an occasion when some Greeks asked to see Jesus (John 12:20-33). When Jesus was informed of this, he responded by announcing the need for a grain of wheat to die if it was to bring forth fruit. Only when he was lifted up, a cryptic phrase apparently referring to his exaltation but really referring to his death by crucifixion, would all people be drawn to him. This meant that until he had died, the problem of sin would remain and, until he was raised, neither Israel nor the nations could know anything of new life. As he told Martha,

I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. (John 11:25-26)

That is why the Gospels conclude as they do: it was the risen Jesus who told the eleven that now all authority in heaven and earth is his. They, therefore, in going were to make disciples of all nations. He would be with them, for the task of winning the nations was primarily his.¹² Luke concluded,

¹¹ A larger examination of the role of Messiah, especially as it affects New Testament language, is in my 1998 Pastors' School study, *Jesus the Messiah: Messianic Truth*.

¹² See Psalm 2 and the extensive use made of it in the New Testament

Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24:46-47)

John's Gospel had stressed that Jesus would take away the sin of the world for it was the world which God loved (John 3:16).

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:17)

Jesus identified himself as the light of the world (John 8:12), an evident reference to Isaiah's mention of the servant 'as a light to the nations'. So when the risen Jesus appeared to the disciples he said,

'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained*'. (John 20:21-23)

The book of Acts develops what Luke began. 'Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem' and so Jesus told the apostles whom he had chosen that they, like he before them, would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them and that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The reason for this is that he has been given 'authority over the nations, to rule them with an iron rod, as when clay pots are shattered' (Rev. 2:26-28). The word 'rule' here may be also translated 'shepherd'; as the reference is back to Psalm 2, the picture is of the reign of the LORD and his anointed over the rebellious nations, but the way the book of the Revelation presents it the reign of Jesus is not only for judgment — it is certainly for that — but also for healing, as the following statements show.

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; ¹⁰you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth (Rev. 5:9-10)

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. (Rev. 7:9)

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵Its gates will never be shut by day — and there will be no night there. ²⁶People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. (Rev. 21:22-26)

On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Rev. 22:2)

At the end of this part of history, the rebellion of the nations has been fully purged. Fire has come down from heaven and consumed them and their evil leadership (Rev. 20:7-15). Yet the nations remain, purified, healed and united in worship.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

All that remains for us now, is to see the church as it is, that is, as God has made it. Yet that is for many a very difficult task. Indeed, the story in the book of Acts and some of the New Testament letters show how reluctant some of the first Christians were to move beyond their cultural security. For instance, even with the plain statement of Jesus in Acts 1:8, many were resistant to the presence of non-Jews in the new church unless they actually joined Israel as (Christian) proselytes.¹³

We can also discern the mixed feelings of the early church; they were not immediately a 'going concern', but when scattered as a result of the persecution following the death of Stephen, 'those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word' (Acts 8:4). And even Peter needed a direct 'push' by the Holy Spirit before he would willingly accompany the representatives of Cornelius (see Acts 11:12, 'The Holy Spirit told me to go with them ...'). Admittedly one of the envoys was a soldier (Acts 10:7)!

Nonetheless, the New Testament is a record of the Christian church in all its catholicity. There are believers who are Jews, there are Greeks from Achaia, Macedonians, those we would now call Turks, there are Italians and there are those from Bosnia & Herzegovina, Albania and Serbia, then called Illyricum. Quite probably there are Spanish believers too. What is more, on the day of Pentecost, there were Jews and proselytes from Iran and Iraq, Egypt and Libya all hearing the wonderful proclamation of the resurrection of Christ and the promise of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and doubtless we should understand that these were among the three thousand who were born again that day and that they returned to their homes filled with the Spirit and witnessing to Christ.

Certainly the accounts of the spread of the gospel after the New Testament period bears that out. But even more, there is the simple fact of the church today embracing all nations. While there are many who have not heard the gospel yet, it is still true that the liberating word of Christ has penetrated to most of the world. Of course we tend to see the resistance to the gospel as so strong, but in the face of that opposition is the wonder: 'The word of the Lord grows mightily and prevails' (see Acts 19:20)!

In this light, the questions must be asked: How can we sit back, so apparently settled and secure in our own cultures, when the word of God is so powerfully at work in the world? How can we not be those who are 'going', when the new creation has caught us up into its action? How can we 'but speak of the things we have seen and heard'?

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¹³ There is a large amount of space in the New Testament devoted to this topic. The whole matter of 'Justification by grace alone' and not by 'works of law' is immensely important as even a cursory reading of Paul's letters will show. Of course, the form of the issue then is different to the form which it takes now, but the content is the same. Passages like Gal. 2; Eph. 2; Acts 15 etc. are essential reading. However, discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this study. I have dealt with it in the study *Jews, Gentiles and the People of God* mentioned above.

The 'Apostolic' Church¹

The fourth description of the church, 'apostolic', is one which has its roots most obviously in the New Testament. Over and over again there are appeals to apostolic authority or arguments which establish it. Perhaps one reason for these appeals or arguments is that, then as now, there were those who rejected that authority. Certainly it is not difficult nowadays to find highly respected scholars who simply dismiss the apostles, Paul in particular, as irrelevant or mistaken. Others prefer to broaden the title 'apostle' to include many modern day church leaders.²

What is significant is that the early church (I am referring to the period of the 2nd to the 5th centuries), when asking questions concerning the documents which form our New Testament, was insistent that a document was recognised if it was clearly apostolic, either being directly written by an apostle or coming from an apostle through his immediate associate(s). This was the means by which Mark's and Luke's Gospels were recognised. It may surprise some of us to know that seven of the twenty seven books in our New Testament did not receive universal recognition because their apostolic authorship was questioned. Those books are Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation. The other twenty books were universally accepted as the canon, the rule by which the church measured its proclamation. Donald Robinson's summary is this.

Within the canon resided the panoply of apostolic authority. Not all the books had the same form or function, but *together* they represented the apostolic witness, the witness of those who had seen with their eyes and heard with their ears, and whose hands had handled the word of life (1 John 1:1).³

Some of what follows may seem to be a circular argument: 'this is the nature of apostolic authority because this is what the New Testament teaches, but I accept what the New Testament teaches because it has apostolic authority'. However, I must suggest that there is another factor which conditions my approach. It is this: the word of the apostles is the word of the risen Christ but the word of the risen Christ is still spoken by him to us. Jesus Christ has spoken to me and so it is his personal intervention which makes my acceptance of the authority of the scriptures more than some mental game. Furthermore, this is the reason why the church has always claimed to be 'apostolic'. The first believers did not believe the apostles, they believed Christ who had spoken to them through the apostles. What this means we will now examine, but its importance must be stressed. We are not worshipping the apostles, *nor their writings* — we are not *bibliolaters*, worshippers of the book.

¹ In this paper I have also drawn from my study at the 1998 Pastors' School, *The Way in which Apostolic Truth was Taught*.

² I have in my possession a book written, according to the 'blurb', by 'an ordained 'Apostle and Teacher'. The book, incidentally, is full of godly wisdom.

³ Donald Robinson, *Faith's Framework*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1996, p 16f.

PREACHING THE APOSTOLIC GOSPEL

On any level, we would have to say that there would be no ‘apostolic church’ unless the gospel had been preached. Furthermore, it is almost axiomatic that the obligation to preach the gospel lies on each and every Christian, so it is worth asking questions about the way the church comes into being.

Perhaps we could begin at ‘the great commission’.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’ (Matt. 28:16-20).

Since William Carey in 1792, it has been generally assumed that this was a commission laid on the whole church. But the passage does not say so. It says that the command to make disciples of the nations was given to ‘the eleven disciples’. The word ‘disciple’ is one with which we are probably familiar, so that its use here is not questioned. But it should be examined. ‘Disciple’ is the word used throughout Matthew’s Gospel for those who followed Jesus, but the word means more than follower. It means a ‘learner’ or a ‘pupil’. The Greek word for disciple, *mathetes* comes from the verb *manthano* which means ‘to learn’. In general usage, a disciple was something like an apprentice, a person who gave himself fully to his teacher, often called *Rabbi*, with a view to being a teacher himself one day.

In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus’ ministry commences with his baptism which was then followed by his temptations (3:13-4:11). Then, after John’s arrest Jesus concentrated his activities in Galilee, making his home in Capernaum, the city near the North western corner of the lake, and ‘began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near”’ (Matt. 4:17). He very soon called four men to join him, Peter and Andrew, James and John. They were fishermen and possibly relatively prosperous, for Mark’s Gospel indicates that James and John were working in the family business and that there were also hired men working along with them (Mark 1:20). John’s Gospel also says that Andrew had been a ‘disciple’ of John the Baptist (Jn. 1:35-40). What is conspicuous in both Matthew’s and Mark’s account is that when Jesus called them, they came ‘immediately’.

This notion of Jesus calling and others responding is one of the main features of discipleship in the Gospels.

The initiative lay with Jesus alone; apart from his call, there is no recognizable motive for one to become a disciple and follow Jesus. The synoptic tradition contains instances when the would-be disciple takes the initiative, but all of these attempts fail, and there is no evidence that discipleship would have resulted.⁴

Now, with these four men, Jesus went through Galilee, teaching in synagogues, proclaiming the kingdom and healing. The result was that great crowds flocked to see him wherever he went. Whatever the common ideas, the Sermon on the Mount was not, evidently, given

⁴ Hans Weeder, ‘Disciple, Discipleship’ in David Noel Freedman (Ed), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 2* Doubleday, New York, 1992, p 207.

directly to a large crowd of people. Indeed, the impression is clearly given that when Jesus saw the crowds he went away from them ‘up the mountain’ and there he sat with his disciples (the first use of the word in Matthew’s Gospel) and taught them.⁵ So far there are only four ‘disciples’. Possibly the range widens when a ‘would-be’ disciple (or is it one of the band called by Jesus?), ‘another of his disciples’ (the second use of the word), asks if he might postpone his involvement with Jesus, but the answer is a clear ‘No!’ (Matt. 8:21-22).

Whatever the process may have been, by Matthew chapter ten there are now ‘his twelve disciples’ (10:1). The only other person specifically ‘called’ and responding like the earlier four men is Matthew himself (9:9). However, Matthew is careful to identify twelve disciples and says that Jesus summoned them

and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. (Matt.10:1)

Mark notes that Jesus appointed them ‘to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message’ (Mark 3:14) and adds that Jesus named them ‘apostles’. Matthew simply says that ‘these are the names of the twelve apostles ...’. This is the only occasion when Matthew uses the word ‘apostle’ and Mark only uses it on one other occasion, at Mark 6:30, where the twelve, having been sent, return and report to ‘him all that they had done and taught’.

The reason why they are called ‘apostles’ at these points lies in the meaning of the word ‘apostle’. It is a transliteration of the Greek word *apostolos*, which means ‘a sent one’. The associated verb is *apostello*, ‘I send’. Some centuries earlier, *apostolos* had been used of a naval expedition, ships sent on a mission, or of the commanders of those missions. We might say it was used of those with a special ‘commission’. Now Jesus sent out the twelve with a commission. When he did, he gave express instructions as to what the twelve should and should not do. They should not go to the Gentiles (Matt. 12:5), they should not charge for their services (Matt. 12:8b), they should proclaim the same message that he was preaching (Matt. 12:7) and do what he had been doing (Matt. 12:8a). The significance is that they are his envoys; those who receive them as his apostles are actually receiving him (Matt. 10:40). In other words, they are called ‘apostles’ here because that is the role they are fulfilling. Jesus has called the twelve disciples and trained them in order that they may be his apostles. So when Mark records their return, as we have seen, he describes them as ‘apostles’.

The radical nature of the discipleship of the twelve is shown in Matthew 12:46-50.

While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him.⁴⁷ Someone told him, ‘Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.’⁴⁸ But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’⁴⁹ And *pointing to his disciples*, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers!’⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’ (Matt. 12:46-50)

They are those who are with him in doing the will of his Father in heaven. In the Gospels, Jesus’ disciples are the specific group, the twelve, and stand in distinction from the crowds, the Pharisees and the ‘disciples’ of John the Baptist (see Matt. 9:14; John 3:22,

⁵ Though cf. Matt. 7:28-29 where it may be possible to understand the crowds also being present.

25). As we saw, Andrew was once a disciple of John but was now a disciple of Jesus. Once they were students, apprentices, of John; now they learn from Jesus.

It is more than mere knowledge that the twelve are gaining. They not only gaining information from him, they are functioning with him. This is shown in Mark 10:17-31. On the one hand there is the 'man', the 'rich young ruler', who is devoted to his riches even though Jesus had told him to sell his possessions and follow him. On the other hand there are the twelve, for whom Peter speaks: 'Look, we have left everything and followed you' (Mark 10:28).

Of course, the implications of following Jesus were not always happily received by the disciples, as the events of Caesarea Philippi demonstrate (Matt. 16:13-28; Mark 8:27-9:1; Luke 9:18-27). When he asked the disciples who they understood him to be, Peter replied, again no doubt on their behalf, that Jesus is 'the Messiah, the Son of the Living God' (Matt. 16:16). To this Jesus replied that this was not a matter of *human* knowledge. Peter was a blessed man because the Father in heaven had actually given him a revelation of who Jesus really was. However, although they now knew him to be the Messiah, 'he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah' (Matt. 16:20). Why should they say nothing of this? The answer is soon quite plain, as Jesus proceeded to explain that he must suffer and die, to which Peter, again, responded with a rebuke. Now, whatever else, a disciple ought never 'rebuke' his master! Yet Peter does it and receives in return the stinging comment that he is as 'Satan', the adversary, and a stumbling block to Jesus, not doing the will of the Father at all.

Peter must, as they all must, realise that the disciples must follow the master, denying themselves and taking up their cross to do so. To take up the cross was a clear matter. They had doubtless seen many crucifixions in Galilee, so they would have been aware that the condemned man carried the cross-beam of his own gallows to the place of execution. So if the disciples wanted to save their own lives they would ultimately lose them. Only those who became as 'dead men walking' could hope to find their lives. They must be totally devoted to him. Mark records Jesus telling the disciples of his impending death three times (8:31; 9:31; 10:33). But Jesus also spoke of his resurrection, at the same time telling the disciples that they should not say anything of what they have seen until that takes place (see Matt. 17:9 etc). The reason is simple, until he is raised from the dead they will not truly know what it is that he has been teaching them. They could, of course, reproduce the information he had given, such as the Sermon on the Mount, but it would lack *the* vital ingredient. They would only be giving ethical instruction, while he was intent on them giving a gospel! Without his death and resurrection there would be no gospel to preach.

All their times of instruction, their participation in the ministry of preaching and healing and so on was not so that they might copy it but was so that they might finally recognise the purpose of God in him. Hence Matthew began with the announcement that Jesus would 'save his people from their sins', not that he would give guidelines on good living. That is why, at Pentecost, Peter announced the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). P. T. Forsyth has pointed out that, to that extent, Jesus could not have preached the gospel. There had been no cross and resurrection. Indeed, he adds that Jesus did not come to preach the gospel, he came to *be* the gospel!⁶

So then when Jesus was raised from the dead he confronted the (now) eleven disciples in Galilee and said

⁶ This is the thrust of Forsyth's *The Preaching of Jesus and the Gospel of Christ*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1987.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt. 28:18-20).

This was the purpose of God, the salvation of the nations (see Gen. 12:1-3 and Matt. 24:14 etc), but it could not be announced until after Jesus had finished his work as the Jewish Messiah. Now that he had, and had received the everlasting kingdom and a dominion that shall not pass away (Dan 7:14), he could move out and receive the nations as his inheritance and the ends of the earth as his possession (Ps. 2:8ff). So his command to the eleven, to make disciples of all nations is indeed a 'great commission', but it is first a great *co*-mission. When he said 'I am with always, to the end of the age' he was saying that things are as they have been. The eleven are going *with* him to do what he is doing.

Now, when the account of their ministry continues in the book of Acts, it commences with the eleven being given instruction by Jesus prior to his ascension. Luke, however, now designates them differently.

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ²until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit *to the apostles whom he had chosen*. (Acts 1:1-2).

The reason for this soon becomes clear. The *apostles* along with a number of others who believe in Jesus are soon filled with the Holy Spirit and begin to speak! And how they speak! They tell out the mighty works of God (see Acts 2:11). Not so long before, the two on the road to Emmaus had hardly regarded the crucifixion as a mighty work of God, but now that the group are filled with the Spirit, they are filled with the resurrected Jesus himself and so they speak.

When the crowd heard them, they assumed that they were drunk, but it fell to Peter, one of the apostles, one of the twelve, to declare the truth of what had taken place. The one hundred and twenty had been filled but there was no proclamation of the truth of what had happened until Peter spoke. Then, when he did, even though he simply declared that God had raised Jesus from the dead, to which the crowd responded with a sense of doom, he declared that there was forgiveness for Israel (Acts 2:22) in the name of Jesus the Messiah (Acts 2:38). Three thousand were forgiven that day. This was not the repetition of the information which Jesus had given, although it was by no means apart from it, but was the result of all that Jesus had come to do and to be. He had prayed on the cross, 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do'; now he was applying to his people that salvation from their sins which he accomplished.

How could anyone know, that is, understand, what Jesus had done? Obviously at Pentecost there was a great work of God. In fact it was also a great work of Jesus for it was the risen Jesus who had poured out the Spirit on the one hundred and twenty and on the three thousand. Acts was, after all, an account of all that Jesus continued to do and to teach (see 1:1). But to have an explanation of the meaning of what had taken place, the crowd had to come to the apostles. So 'they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching' (Acts 2:42). This was the fruit of the discipleship of the twelve. The only way the world would know of Jesus and his ministry was through the apostles, his authorised witnesses. That is why Jesus prayed as he did in John 17. He said,

I ask not only on behalf of these (the eleven) but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through *their* word... (John 17:20)

To speak of ‘the apostolic gospel’ is to speak of the gospel which comes through the apostles, that designated body of men who had spent time with Jesus from the beginning and who had been eyewitnesses of his resurrection (Acts 1:21-22).⁷

THE CHURCH IS APOSTOLIC

When writing to the Ephesians, Paul said that the church was ‘built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets’ (2:20). How could Paul write that, when he knew that it was the work of Christ which had brought the church into being?

The phrase ‘apostles and prophets’ refers, I believe, to the New Testament context. Although the Old Testament prophets (including such people as Moses (Deut. 18:18) and King David (see Acts 2:30) did provide the basis for all that God would do in Christ (see 1 Cor. 15:3-4) Ephesians continues to fill out what is meant by ‘apostles and prophets’. Speaking of ‘the mystery of Christ’, Paul says,

In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: (Eph. 3:5).

Only a few lines after speaking of them as ‘the foundation’ Paul identifies apostles and prophets as those who have ‘now’ had the mystery of Christ revealed to them. Apostles and prophets are the first two gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 and prophecy is the first mentioned in Romans 12:6-8. It is in 1 Corinthians 12-14 that Paul insists that the greatest gift in the church is hardly tongues, good as that gift is, but prophecy. The prophet is essential if the church is to be ‘built up’. The reason for this would seem to be as follows: Jesus has been raised from the dead and he continues to receive the nations as his heritage. He does so by means of the preaching of the gospel, but when the gospel is proclaimed it is effective because it is Christ himself speaking in it — ‘Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of *Christ*’ (Rom. 10:17). But the gospel which he speaks is the gospel he gave to the apostles.⁸ However, Christ continues to speak to the church, as Revelation chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate, correcting, guiding, directing and so on, all the action of his love for his bride (Rev. 3:19). Now the picture in the Bible is that that speaking by God and by Christ comes through prophets. So perhaps we could summarise this by saying that the apostles are the *definitive* word of the risen Christ and the prophets are the *living* word of the risen Christ. This is seen in the instruction to ‘test the ... prophets’ (1 John 4:1; 1 Thess. 5:20-21). In the fuller description of a gathering of the church in 1 Corinthians 14, Paul sets out the priorities.

What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. ²⁷If anyone

⁷ I suggest that the ‘great commission’ was actually given to the eleven who fulfilled it and are fulfilling it, not through their personal presence but through the gospel of Christ which they alone were authorised to present. The spread of the gospel to the nations was initially, at least, the result of men and women hearing and being gripped by the apostolic gospel and, consequently, being unable to contain it. Carey’s concern was stimulated by a church that had apparently succeeded in suppressing the dynamic of the apostolic testimony.

⁸ It should be noted that ‘gospel’ is not limited to a few facts which are the basis for people understanding salvation; it actually took Paul a very long time to preach his gospel, two years and three months in Ephesus alone (Acts 19:8-10).

speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret.²⁸ But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God.²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.³⁰ If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent.³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.³² And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets,³³ for God is a God not of disorder but of peace.

...³⁷ Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord.³⁸ Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized.³⁹ So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; 40 but all things should be done decently and in order. (1 Cor. 14:26-32, 37-40).

All comes under the authority of the apostle. The prophet is not infallible and what is said ought to be carefully weighed, against the definitive apostolic testimony. Probably the role of the teacher relates to this.⁹

How does the authority of the apostle impose itself on the church today, since the apostles are now dead? The answer is that the apostolic testimony was not only preached but written. Of course, not all the apostles left written material, but those who did have set out the details of their gospel as that gospel effected and affected the churches. Hence what was said earlier about the canon of the New Testament being determined by the apostolic status of the writers.

THE 13th APOSTLE

Luke records the gathering of the eleven after Jesus' ascension, 'together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers' (Acts 1:14). Luke even gives the names of the eleven (vs. 13). The eleven had already been called 'apostles' (Acts 1:2) and Peter and the other 'brothers' (Acts 1:15), now about 120 in total, determine that the vacancy among the twelve, created by Judas' suicide, must be filled. Matthias was chosen, by 'lot' (ie. God was asked to control what was, effectively, the throw of the dice), 'and he was added to the eleven apostles' (Acts 1:26).¹⁰

For some reason, the number twelve was significant. Possibly it was seen as a parallel to the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Rev. 21:12, 14), though that number soon became more true in form than in content, yet nonetheless the symbolic use of twelve was strong in Israel. Twelve was certainly the number chosen by Jesus himself so, if nothing else, it would have been regarded as significant because he had treated it that way. Besides Acts 1, on two occasions only the twelve as a distinct body of men are mentioned; the first is Acts 6:2, where the twelve insist that they must not give up the word of God to do the administrative work. In 1 Corinthians 15:5, Paul says that the risen Jesus appeared to 'the twelve'. However, we should not see the twelve as being the leaders of the church. They were men with a particular role and soon the leadership in Jerusalem is seen to fall on James the brother of Jesus, whom some have called 'the presiding elder' (see Acts 15:2, 6, 13, 19, 22). The apostles themselves were the authoritative witnesses to Christ, not the leaders of the church.

⁹ The subject of 'the Church and the gifts' will be examined in a later study.

¹⁰ The question has been raised whether the group ought to have acted this way, especially in light of the subsequent call of Paul as an apostle. It was suggested that the use of lots to indicate the choice of God would never have been made after the gift of the Holy Spirit had been given, but the choice of Matthias over Joseph is presented as a having been done with godly care (Acts 1:23-25).

The qualifications for apostleship were understood to be

- (i) that the man must have been part of the band of followers from the beginning of Jesus' ministry through to his ascension, and
- (ii) that he was an eyewitness of the resurrection. The reason for this latter requirement would shortly become plain, when it is shown that the subject of their proclamation was 'Jesus and the resurrection' (Acts 2:32; 4:33; also 17:18).

For reasons related to the purpose behind the writing of Acts, the records of the early church which we have tell us almost nothing of this apostolic band. We know their names (from Acts 1:13, 26) but, apart from some of the activities of Peter and John (and all we know of John is that he was Peter's partner in Acts 3-4 and 8), we know very little detail of what they did. We know that they were all arrested at one point and that they were miraculously released (Acts 5:18-42), though no details are given, unlike the later story of Peter's release in Acts 12:3-19. We also know that they declined to be involved in the administrative matter described in Acts 6:1ff. and that they did not leave Jerusalem when the persecution broke out after the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1). The eleven apostles were still in Jerusalem when Peter spoke to Cornelius (Acts 11:1) and we know that James was executed by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1-2). The apostles are in Jerusalem in Acts 15:2, 6 when Paul arrived to discuss the matter of Gentiles being justified by grace alone. After that event the apostles are not mentioned again; when Paul returned to Jerusalem (Acts 21) he was met by 'the brothers' and then spoke to 'James and all the elders' (Acts 21:17-18).

Instead most attention is given, first to Peter and especially his role in the initial outpouring of the Spirit upon the Jews (Acts 2) the Samaritans (Acts 8) and the Gentiles (Acts 10). However, on *three* occasions the story of the conversion and call of Paul is presented and Acts devotes itself to the account of Paul's largely Gentile mission. In Acts 14:4, 6 and 14 Paul and Barnabas are called 'the apostles'.

At this point I should record that Barnabas is included under the heading 'apostle' but in Acts, other than these three references to Paul and Barnabas, the term is restricted to the members of the twelve. This is also true in Luke's Gospel, except on one occasion where Jesus castigated the scribes, quoting 'the Wisdom of God' [which] said, "I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute ..." (Luke 11:49).

It is Paul who provides us with some more puzzling statements. The first is Romans 16:7.

Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

This could mean that these two, and scholars are divided on whether 'Junia' ought to be 'Junias' (a man's name), were highly regarded *by the apostles* or that they were considered to be apostles themselves. Douglas Moo¹¹ refers to 2 Corinthians 8:3 and Philippians 2:25 in support of the claim that 'Paul often uses the title "apostle" in a "looser" sense: sometimes simply to denote a "messenger" or "emissary"...' While Paul does use the word in these references, it is notable that he does not do so to indicate 'apostles of Christ'. 2

¹¹ *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1996, p 924. Note his references to other literature on the matter.

Corinthians 8:23 speaks of ‘apostles of the churches’ and in Philippians 2:25 Epaphroditus is ‘your apostle’, that is, he is the representative of the Philippian church. But the reference to Andronicus and Junia as apostles is not certain.

More problematical is 1 Corinthians 15:7, where Paul seems to make a distinction between ‘the twelve’ (verse 5) and ‘all the apostles’. Whether such a distinction is being made is a matter to be examined. Gordon Fee¹², lists three possible solutions concluding that there was possibly a wider group, including James and the twelve plus others, known as ‘apostles’ who also saw the risen Jesus. This seems likely. However, in the context, Paul is primarily arguing that the risen Jesus appeared to him; that is, that he is an eye witness of the resurrection and that what he preaches is the same as the testimony of all the others. We are really left to speculate on the identity of ‘all the apostles’, but Paul’s own apostleship loses none of its significance either way.

Given the virtual disappearance of most of the twelve from the details of Acts and the other letters, we are left to conclude that it is the place of Paul and the authority of his teaching with which the early church had to deal. Donald Robinson has observed that prior to the name ‘New Testament’ being used, the designation for the documents was ‘gospel’ and ‘apostle’, ‘gospel’ referring to the record of what Jesus said and did and ‘apostle’ to the writings of Paul.¹³ There can be little doubt that it was Paul and his ministry which set the direction of the Christian faith.

The role of Paul is without doubt most important in the Scriptures. Yet Paul is a puzzle. He was not a member of the twelve disciples, indeed he was an avowed enemy of the first Christians. He refers to this in Galatians 1:13 and 23, Philippians 3:6 and 1 Timothy 1:13 and the story in Acts mentions it briefly yet powerfully, in Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2, 13-14; 22:3-5; 26:9-12.

It is the accounts of Paul’s conversion in Acts which tell us what God’s intention for him was.

... he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; (Acts 9:15)

Then he said, ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; ¹⁵for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard. ...’ ²¹Then he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ (Acts 22:14-15; 21).

But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. ¹⁷I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles — to whom I am sending you ¹⁸to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to

¹² *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1987, p 731f. Since this is not intended as a scholarly review of the literature available, those wishing to pursue the topic should explore the commentaries and dictionaries which deal with the subject in detail. Mention should be made of the more recent articles by P. W. Barnett (‘Apostle’, in Hawthorne, Martin and Reid (Eds), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 1993, pp 45-51) and C. G. Kruse (‘Apostle, Apostleship’ in Martin and Davids (Eds), *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 1997, pp 76-82).

¹³ *Faith’s Framework*, p 15.

God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' (Acts 26:16-18)

Paul's commission was to take the gospel of Christ, the Jewish Messiah, to the nations. For whatever reason, Acts and the letters does not clearly record the other apostles doing this. (Later traditions do suggest, for example, that Thomas went to India and Peter's first letter was probably written to Gentiles, although the address, 'to the exiles of the dispersion' could very well indicate a Jewish readership.)

It is Paul's Gentile mission which is so prominent in the latter section of Acts and it is also a problem there, as the Jewish believers in Jerusalem are obviously threatened by him. Thus there is Acts 21:17-26, where the leaders of the Jerusalem church insist that Paul must be seen to be fully Jewish when he meets the 'thousands of believers ... among the Jews'. Yet it must be said that, although he agreed to do so, he probably was less than enthusiastic about it. His point in Acts 26:18 was that Gentiles stand on equal ground with Jews. In Ephesians chapter 2 he argued that the previous divisive distinctions (as distinct from merely *ethnic* distinctions) were all abolished in the cross; in their place there is a new humanity, with Gentiles and Jews standing together in worship. Furthermore, In Romans 14 and 15 he speaks of those who are 'weak in faith', while in 1 Corinthians 8:7ff he describes those whose consciences are weak. Both of these are, almost certainly, references to Jewish believers who have not understood the full dimensions of the liberty that there is in Christ.¹⁴

In Galatians, Paul goes so far as to recount his strong disagreement with Peter on the matter of the freedom of Jews to eat with Gentiles (2:11-14). He also details the visit he and Barnabas made to Jerusalem, when the pressure was exerted to make Gentiles conform to Jewish regulations (the particular instance was the attempt to compel Titus 'to be circumcised, though he was a Greek', 2:3). Paul resisted this pressure, because the issue was 'the freedom we have in Christ Jesus; (2:4), 'the truth of the gospel' (2:5).

So why does Paul 'pull rank' in his letters? He always calls himself 'an apostle' and in Galatians his fuller description is strong:

Paul an apostle — sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead... (Gal. 1:1)

He argues with the Corinthians that he is an apostle and that he has 'seen Jesus our Lord' (1 Cor. 9:1), that 'the signs of a true apostle were performed among [them] with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works' (2 Cor. 12:12). In matters of church order, he claims to stand over those who claim to be prophets but who will not acknowledge his authority as coming from the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37-38).

The reason for this insistence on his authority is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11:23. '*I received from the Lord* what I also handed on to you...' Christ has commissioned him and so he speaks. This is the ultimate issue in Galatians.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel —⁷not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be

¹⁴ Again, we ought to note the possibility that James in his letter may be attempting to retain something of the Jewish high regard for the Law of *Moses* over against what could be seen as Paul's apparent disregard for the *Mosaic* requirements of circumcision, Sabbath observance and dietary restrictions.

accursed! ⁹As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!

¹⁰Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ. ¹¹For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; ¹²for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (Gal. 1:6-12).

The issue is the apostolic gospel. It makes no difference who modifies it (and there are those who are doing it); even if it is Paul himself or an angel from heaven such a person is to be accursed. The apostolic gospel is sacrosanct. It may not and must not be modified, since it comes from Christ himself. For the Jews the problem was their devotion to their Jewish heritage, which they failed to recognise as having been fulfilled in their Messiah; for the Gentiles it was their former way of life, characterised by its idolatry and so on. But the apostolic gospel had cut through all that and brought liberty to men and women. ¹⁵ So they must stand firm in the freedom for which Christ had set them free. And the point was that this gospel of liberty was the gospel affirmed by the very people with whom Paul now found it necessary to disagree. Thus Galatians 2:7-9.

On the contrary, when [the acknowledged leaders in Jerusalem] saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised ⁸(for he who worked through Peter making him an apostle to the circumcised also worked through me in sending me to the Gentiles), ⁹and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

There is only one gospel; Paul and Barnabas will proclaim it to the Gentiles while James, Cephas and John proclaim it to Jews. This was the same conclusion reached at the Council of Jerusalem and enunciated by Peter.

The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter. ⁷After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, 'My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. ⁸And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; ⁹and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. ¹⁰Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.' (Acts 15:6-11)

The apostolic church is a secure church, in so far as it remains in the apostolic gospel. That means the church must constantly examine its proclamation against the truth of Christ, since it is all too easy to give our priorities and preferences a status which they may not have. How many of the divisions and disputes which have affected the church throughout history have begun this way, as human preferences, even valid ones, become elevated to the status of divine truth. Thus Paul wrote to Timothy,

¹⁵ The gospel needs to be preached to the various cultures, but it must never be enculturated, that is, restated or reformulated in the terms of a particular culture. Always the gospel stands *over* culture. This is so because it is a transcendent word, the eternal gospel.

Whoever teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness, ⁴is conceited, understanding nothing, and has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words. From these come envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions, ⁵and wrangling among those who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, ... (1 Tim. 6:3-5).

The apostles themselves are nothing, merely 'your slaves for Jesus' sake' (2 Cor. 4:5); the gospel they preach, the gospel of Christ, that is everything. The church is 'apostolic', not because it can trace its pedigree back to any particular person, but because it lives through the gospel of Christ, a gospel known only through his authorised witnesses, his apostles. The apostles' word is the word of Christ himself, 'the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands', 'the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life', 'the words of him who has the sharp, two edged sword', 'the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness' (Rev. 2:1, 8, 12:3:14).

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The Church Led by the Spirit

The Apostle Paul wrote: ‘If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit’ (Gal. 5:25). To be guided does not mean ‘to take suggestions’ from the Spirit but to keep in line, to keep in step with the Spirit.¹ Earlier Paul had spoken of the Galatians beginning with the Spirit but attempting to reach the goal by the flesh (Gal. 3:3), whereas he was insisting, in the strongest terms, that the goal can only be reached by men and women as the action of the Spirit is known by faith, not only at the commencement of the Christian life but at every point.

It must be said at the outset that God is in action; he is on the move towards the goal which he himself has set.² With that in mind, then, being led by the Spirit could hardly be an option for those wishing to be ‘more committed’. On the contrary, coming as it does in the context of Paul’s references to the fruit of the Spirit and their contrast to the works of the flesh, his exhortation to be guided by the Spirit speaks deeply to the lives of individual believers and to the life of the church as a whole.

What is more, the question, ‘Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?’ (Gal. 3:2), or even Paul’s question to those who were called ‘disciples’, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ (Acts 19:2), must imply that being led by the Spirit is, to some extent, a matter of which we should be aware. It is a matter involving our choices, conscious decisions to listen to what ‘the Spirit is saying to the churches’ and to respond in obedience (see Revelation 2-3). This is what we see in the life of the church in Acts. The church leaders in Antioch heard the Holy Spirit’s instruction to set apart Barnabas and Saul for a new ministry, James knew the decision of the council in Jerusalem was pleasing to the Holy Spirit and later Paul and Silas were directed by the Holy Spirit as to the places they were to go to preach the word³ (see Acts 13:2; 15:28; 16:6-7).

If this is so, then we are speaking of the reality of being led by the Spirit now.⁴ Are we, in *fact*, being consciously sensitive to Holy Spirit in our own lives? And what of our churches? Are the local congregations of which we are members coming under the supervision of the Holy Spirit, being unwilling to set out unless the pillar of fire moves before us and being fearful of standing still lest we be left in the wilderness? Are our gatherings times when we are reverently insistent that we will not leave until we are blessed or are they times when we will not stay longer than absolutely necessary?

Of course, it is, perhaps, sometimes difficult for some people not to feel intimidated by talk about the Holy Spirit; the range of experiences which are presented as ‘Spirit-led’ or ‘Spirit-filled’ or whatever has often led outsiders to retreat to positions of apparent safety. People with a genuine faith in Christ have sometimes found the behaviour of ‘the Holy Spirit people’ to be excessive or even obsessive. However, a more likely problem is that

¹ See J. I Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit*, IVP, Leicester, 1984, p. 11.

² This will be the topic of a later study.

³ It seems reasonable to assume this was a conscious matter for Paul and Silas and not merely a reflection on the way things turned out, since the choice to preach the gospel in Macedonia was clearly occasioned by Paul’s vision.

⁴ This has absolutely nothing to do with the notion of receiving revelations which take us beyond the scriptures; it has everything to do with being in communion with God, the communion which is defined within the Scriptures.

being led by the Spirit is too morally confronting. Instinctively we sense the demands such obedience involves.

Then, too, there is the problem of our church (sometimes it is ‘denominational’) structures. Whatever the form those structures may take, to what extent are they so rigidly controlled that we may be more sensitive to traditions (even very new traditions) than to the ministry of the Holy Spirit? By asking these questions I am not suggesting that there is anything amiss with doing things in an orderly fashion. To disregard our history may be to disregard a very rich heritage, a testimony to the faithfulness of God over the years.

A final question at this point concerns the possibility that we may lay claim to the leading of the Holy Spirit when in fact we are simply ‘doing our own thing’ in his name.

THE ONTOLOGICAL NECESSITY

An ‘ontological necessity’ means that this is the way things must be because this is the way things really are. So, then, to speak of the church being led by the Spirit is not so surprising, considering the true nature of God and of his people. And, what is more, given that we have the revelation of God’s nature and purpose so clearly in Christ, how can we not see them? But so often we do not see them. The passage 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 is very important.

Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. ⁷But we speak God’s wisdom, *in a mystery*, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹But, as it is written,

‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’ —

¹⁰these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

¹¹For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. ¹³And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

¹⁴Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else’s scrutiny.

¹⁶For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?

But we have the mind of Christ.

If we say that there is an ontological necessity about being led by the Spirit, then there is the very real danger that we will treat that statement as if it was axiomatic. That is, we may just say ‘Of course’ and leave it there. But Paul’s emphasis to the Corinthians is far beyond that. He is saying that there is a mystery⁵ and that only when we are led by the Spirit is the revelation of the mystery clear. To be led by the Spirit, in that context to be ‘spiritual’, is to be mature and so to receive the wisdom of God. He is not saying, in verse 14, that the *unconverted* person finds the things of the Spirit of God to be foolishness. That is true, but

⁵ Verse 7 is usually translated as something like ‘we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden ...’, but literally it is as printed, ‘we speak god’s wisdom *in a mystery*’ — ejn musthrivw/.

here he is speaking to those who have received Christ; they are the ones to whom it may all be foolishness.

There are things which ‘no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’, but they are all for us now, for God revealed⁶ them through the Spirit, because ‘the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God’. To have received the Spirit is to have received the revelation of the deep things of God. This revelation is of far more than just some secret things for the initiated, or for those wishing to go deeper. The Spirit is showing us those things which pertain to who we are and to what we will be, for they relate to the decree of God from before the ages for our glory (verse 7).

WHAT IS ONTOLOGICAL?⁷

‘In him we live and move and have our being’, Paul’s comment to the Athenians (Acts 17:28⁸), describes the way in which all humanity lives ‘in God’. Moses put it that ‘Man does not live by bread alone but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of the LORD’ (Deut. 8:3) and the psalmist that ‘when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust’ (Ps. 104:29). There is nothing optional about any of this. Humanity is simply dust (Ps. 103:14) made alive and personal by God and completely dependent on him at every point for everything. Any thought of independence from God is absurd, a contradiction of reality.

The story of the creation of Man/*Adam*, in Genesis 2 fills this out: Man is only dust until he is animated by the breath⁹ of the LORD God (verse 7). Preceding this record is the description of the formation of ‘the heavens and the earth’, where the spirit¹⁰ of God is ‘blowing’ over the created waters. After the sin of the primal couple there is the second reference to the spirit, albeit hidden under the translations of Genesis 3:8.

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

‘The evening breeze’ or ‘the cool of the day’ is a translation of ‘spirit’. With hindsight, recognising that this is the Holy Spirit, we may say that the Spirit who was active at

⁶ The word used is *ajpekavluyen*, the Aorist tense, implying a single action in the past.

⁷ One of the most thorough books on the Holy Spirit is Geoffrey Bingham’s *The Day of the Spirit*. A full explanation of much of this paper will be found there, as also in his *Spirit Baptism: Spirit Living*.

⁸ The phrase is attributed to Epimenides (c. 600 B.C.) and speaks of Zeus:

They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one—
The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies!
But thou art not dead; thou livest and abidest for ever,
For in thee we live and move and have our being.

(Quoted in Richard N Longenecker, *Acts (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary)*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1995, p. 272.)

⁹ The word used here is not the word usually used for breath, wind or spirit in the Old Testament, *jæWr/ruach*, though elsewhere that word is used to describe this event, as in Ps. 104:30 and Job 27:3.

¹⁰ Most translations use a capital ‘s’ here, but I prefer not to do so because I would argue that the personal nature of the Holy Spirit is not revealed until the incarnation of the Word and Pentecost. There is no question that this is the Holy Spirit who is active; my question is simply whether this is what the original authors of the Old Testament intended.

creation, indeed without whom the creation would not have come to its completion (any more than the creation could have been complete with out the Word—‘and God said’) is still present and active. In other words, the truth of creation has not changed. Mankind could not live without the Spirit before there was sin; neither can they live without the Spirit afterwards.

The dilemma of humanity is that of having to suppress the truth. Romans 1:18ff makes the point that the truth of God is constantly plain but humanity chooses to exchange the truth of God for a lie (1:25) and to form images instead of knowing the glory of God (1:23). The problem is that Man is the image of God but the moral consequences of that are unbearable so there must be a replacement god in order for Man to have some sort of relief from the awareness of the contradictory nature of his rebellion. He really does not want to think about it, so God gives him up to his debased mind (Rom. 1:28).

Far from being consciously and willingly led by the Spirit, humanity makes the foolish claim that ‘I did it my way!’. That was never and can never be the case; ‘the way of human beings is not in their control, ... mortals as they walk cannot direct their steps’ (Jer. 10:23).

RETURN TO THE ONTOLOGICAL

Creation being as it is, we understand that the action of God in history is the restoration of creation to its true role. The contradiction is not merely a problem for humanity but, left unresolved, would be a problem for God. Not to be redeemer of creation would involve God in denial of his own being (see, e.g. Isa. 63:16). Thus I would suggest that the promise of Genesis 3:15, concerning the crushing of the serpent’s head etc., is to be understood as being present and applicable the moment evil seems to assert itself.

‘God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth’ (John 4:24). Whatever the precise meaning of Genesis 6:3 in its context, still God declared that ‘my spirit will not abide in man forever, for he is flesh’. Humanity no longer functions in the realm of spirit and as a consequence the life which the Spirit supplies, the breath of life, is withdrawn. This is similar to the exclusion from the garden and from the tree of life: ‘lest he live forever’ (Gen. 3:23-24).

However, alongside this death is the presence, among Adam’s offspring, of a body of people who ‘invoke the name of the LORD’ (Gen. 4:26). In the light of the promise of ‘the seed of the woman’ crushing the serpent’s head, it is hardly surprising to see the serpent’s apparent success being called into question.

While the language of being ‘led by the Spirit’ may be uncommon, the Old Testament presents us with a chronicle of men and women who are indeed led by the Spirit. We can say this because we know that God is Spirit. Also, the revelation of God as Trinity which burst out with the birth of Jesus and the later apostolic recognition of all that was involved was not as some have said, merely ‘economic’, meaning that God did not become Trinity at that point but was always Trinity. That being so, the God who relates to humanity ‘spirit to spirit’ is always Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thus we understand that the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, were all in communion with God who led them by his Spirit. Paul describes Isaac as ‘born according to the Spirit’ in Galatians 4:29. Joseph was a man ‘in whom is the spirit of God’ (Gen. 41:38). And there were men and women of the Spirit

in Israel even later, such as Elizabeth (Luke 1:41), Zechariah (Luke 1:67) and Simeon (Luke 2:26-27).

Some may think it 'odd of God to choose the Jews', but he did, nonetheless. His promise to Abraham to remove the curse from creation (to bless the nations) means the choice to form a people from Abraham who would be the instrument of his action in history. So Israel, with all its faults, is described as functioning in the action of the Spirit. God led them, personally, and the administration of the people was dependent on Moses and later the elders of Israel, receiving the Spirit (Num. 11:16-29). Joshua was a man of the Spirit (Num. 27:18; Deut. 34:9). Of the time of Israel's awful sin at Sinai it was said:

Even when they had cast an image of a calf for themselves and said, 'This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,' and had committed great blasphemies, ¹⁹you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness; the pillar of cloud that led them in the way did not leave them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night that gave them light on the way by which they should go. ²⁰You gave your good spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and gave them water for their thirst. (Nehemiah 9:18-20)

Prominent in Israel's history were the prophets. These were people through whom God spoke to the people he had chosen. The word of God never functions apart from the Spirit so the prophets were 'filled with power, with the spirit of the LORD' (Mic. 3:8). As such they were dynamic, commissioned to speak a word through which and because of which God would act. Even of foolish Abraham it was said, 'he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live'.

A couple of things must be observed here. First is the fact that Israel generally failed its commission. Far from heeding the prophets, Jerusalem was 'the city that kills the prophets' (Matt. 23:37). When Jesus cast out demons 'by the Spirit of God' he was accused of doing it 'by Beelzebul' (Matt. 12:24, 28). Whatever else, then, the salvation which was intended to come through Israel was, at best, only partially known.

The revelation of a people 'led by the Spirit' was there in Israel, but that revelation was only provisional. That means that Israel's sin was not, in fact, a hindrance to the plan of God. God had *always* intended that the full redemption of creation would be through Israel's Messiah (see Eph. 1:3-4). What is more, the prophets of Israel, in various ways, predicted this. Prophetic declarations of the restoration of Israel were accompanied by declarations of the full transformation of creation *and* the outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh.

But Moses said to him, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!' (Numbers 11:29)

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. ²The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. (Isaiah 11:1-2)

For the palace will be forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and the watchtower will become dens forever, the joy of wild asses, a pasture for flocks; ¹⁵until a spirit from on high is poured out on us, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest. (Isaiah 32:14-15)

I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷I

will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

Along with this promise in Ezekiel is the dramatic representation of the word of God and the Spirit of God renewing Israel, in the vision of the valley of dry bones in chapter 37. Of immense significance for history was the promise in Joel 2:28, where God announced his intention to pour out his spirit on all flesh.

If this all relates to the restoration of creation, then it must relate to the renewal of humanity. Given that humanity is *Adam*, then we are looking at the promise of Adam restored, Adam the head of a race which is led by the Spirit.

ADAM AT LAST

In two significant passages (Rom. 5:12-21 and 1 Cor. 15) Paul contrasted the first Adam and Jesus, whom he called ‘the second man’ (1 Cor. 15:47) and ‘the last Adam’ (1 Cor. 15:45). The ramifications of this for justification are spelled out in Romans 5 and for our hope in 1 Corinthians 15, but if the recognition is valid, then we would expect to see Jesus as the man led by the Spirit. And this is precisely what we do see.

Jesus is conceived by the Spirit (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35), anointed by the Spirit (Luke 3:22; cf Acts 10:38), ‘full of the Spirit’ and ‘led by the Spirit’ (Luke 4:1). He lived ‘in the power of the Spirit’ (Luke 4:14), he cast out demons by the Spirit¹¹ (Matt. 12:28), he died by the Spirit (Heb. 9:14) and was raised by the Spirit (1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 3:18¹²). But while he is *a* man of the Spirit, when he is identified as the one who ‘will immerse you in¹³ the Holy Spirit’ (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33), the significance is surely that the whole goal of creation is about to be restored in him. Here at last is Man and those who are *in* him, as once we were *in Adam*, will *of necessity* know the restoration of the Spirit. It is simply inconceivable that any person could be in Christ and not immersed in the Spirit.

The events on the day of Pentecost were not just dramatic, they were obvious. Given all that God had promised, how could they be otherwise? Jesus was not only *a* man of the Spirit, he was *the* man of the Spirit. The explanation of the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the one hundred and twenty lay in the resurrection and ascension of the man Jesus.

This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. ³³Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. (Acts 2:32-33)

Jesus was Adam at last. Now there was a man who did not pass death on to his progeny; instead he became ‘a life-giving spirit’, because he is the one through whom the Holy Spirit is restored. And what is more, it is not only Israel, albeit cleansed and renewed in

¹¹ Interestingly, Luke uses the title ‘the finger of God’ (Luke 11:20), as if the suggestion is that when God touches someone or something it is by his finger which is his Spirit.

¹² Translations differ in these verses, although I suggest that it is possible to translate them both as referring to Jesus being made alive ‘by the Spirit’.

¹³ Although the translations usually have ‘with’ the Greek preposition is *ejn*. It should be noted that attempts to force a single English meaning ‘in’ onto this preposition are mistaken. The word is capable of a wide range of meanings.

their Messiah, who receive the Spirit, but Samaritans (Acts 8:14-16) and even Gentiles, the nations (Acts 10:44-45).

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PENTECOST

Acts commences with Jesus 'speaking about the kingdom of God' (Acts 1:3) and the brief conversation which is reported follows that topic. The question in Acts 1:6, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' is the apostles' response to his promise that they will be 'immersed in the Holy Spirit not many days from now' (vs. 5). They understand that receiving the Spirit is directly related to the restoration of the Kingdom. Geoffrey Bingham summarised this as follows:

(i) Jesus and his disciples discussed the Kingdom of God throughout the forty days he was with them following the Resurrection

(ii) Jesus demanded that they should remain in Jerusalem pending the coming of 'the promise of the Father', i.e. the gift of the Holy Spirit. He talked about them baptised in the Spirit.

(iii) The apostles obviously saw the Kingdom of God and baptism in the Holy Spirit as being linked integrally. The reason for this lies in the fact that *in every place in the Old Testament where there is a promise of the outpouring of the Spirit, there is, in that same context, explicitly or inferred, the promise of the restoration (or, renewal) of the Kingdom.*

(iv) The apostles, seeing this link, were moved to ask whether the Kingdom was to be restored to *Israel* at that point of time, i.e. at the outpouring of the Spirit. Their question was an extremely intelligent one in the light of the prophecies.

(v) Jesus' reply must be seen in the light of the four points above. His words were, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth'.

Jesus was saying that the time of the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel was not for them to know — not anyway, at that stage. That knowledge and happening belongs to the Father. Their part was to receive the Spirit and so receive power, by which they would be *witnesses to Christ*. This witness had to be to the Jews (Jerusalem and all Judea), the Samaritans (Samaria) and the nations, i.e. the Gentiles (to the end of the earth). To witness to Christ should be understood as proclaiming the Gospel in all the world, but then proclaiming it in truth, which—as we will see—includes his Lordship, and the offer of forgiveness, justification and the gift of the Spirit.¹⁴

To witness to Jesus is to preach the gospel, the gospel of the kingdom. What is more, to receive the Spirit is to be brought into the sphere and action of the kingdom in order that we might proclaim it.

What does it mean to proclaim the kingdom? Paul told the Ephesian elders that he had 'gone about proclaiming the kingdom' (Acts 20:25). He had also reminded them of two other elements of his preaching:

I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus.... [and] testify to the good news of God's grace. (Acts 20:21,24)

The action of God's grace leading to repentance and faith are elements of the kingdom.

¹⁴ *The Day of the Spirit*, p 75.

The significant point is that it is faith 'toward or Lord Jesus'. At Pentecost Peter declared that Jesus is Lord (Acts 2:36) and Paul told the Corinthians that 'No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 12:3). To proclaim the kingdom is to declare that Jesus is Lord because now the Spirit has brought that reality into sparkling clarity. If Jesus has been raised from the dead then he must be Lord of all things; sin which leads to death did not touch him so death has been rendered powerless. If, as we observed, Jesus is more than just an isolated individual but is rather the head of a new humanity, then those 'in him' are 'a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father' (Rev. 1:6; cf. 5:10).

Peter put it that we

are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Pet. 2:9)

There is nothing triumphalist about this. There is a profound recognition that we were in fearful darkness, under 'the authority of darkness', and now we are the people who adore God and who express that adoration (a royal *priesthood*) and who cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

Any notion of the Kingdom being an ethical concept (i.e. to do with 'correct' living — of course it has everything to do with correct living but not merely as a system of 'Do's' and 'Don't's') is quickly dispelled when we see how the kingdom comes to us. Jesus told Nicodemus that in order to see the kingdom a person must be born anew, by the Spirit's sovereign action (John 3:3-8). He then related this to the action of his crucifixion, the Son of man being lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness (John 3:14-15). The Spirit relates us to the work of the Cross. This was Paul's point in Romans 5:5-8. The Holy Spirit has brought all the love of God manifest at the cross into our hearts.

The power which the Spirit brought at Pentecost was not superhuman ability but the power of a liberated conscience, the power which flows from a man or woman who understands the immense victory of the cross and the resurrection. As witnesses to Jews, Samaritans and to the ends of the earth, we have the recognition that the kingdom of God is universal and that the proclamation of the kingdom transcends times and cultures. Of course, 'this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us' (2 Cor. 4:7); we remain clay jars.

KNOWING THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD

Being 'clay jars' is almost where we came in. Paul's meaning in 2 Corinthians relates to our weakness in the face of hostility and rejection (see 2 Cor. 4:8-12), but it is still true that our humanity depends at every point on the power of God. As people of the kingdom, the church is the body of Christ and so re-created to function as Jesus functions, namely by being 'led by the Spirit'. It is this which makes sense of the sevenfold instruction in Revelation 2-3, 'Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches'.

We saw from 1 Corinthians 2 that understanding the wisdom of God depends on us being 'led by the Spirit'. A mature person is one who has received the Spirit and now lives in conscious and deliberate dependence upon him. The wisdom of God, which is known by

living in the Spirit, is 'in a mystery' and that mystery is the cross (see 1 Cor. 2:1-2). The Spirit never leads us beyond the cross, for the depths of God are revealed there.

Of course there are ethical issues which arise from this. It would be a contradiction to claim to have received the Spirit while rejecting his fruit in our lives. 'Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires' because they were in Christ when he put Adam to death. That being so, 'the works of the flesh' that is, works done without the Spirit, are not to be countenanced (see Gal. 5:19-21 etc).

When Paul said 'Live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh' (Gal. 5:16) he was not suggesting that there is an easy method to living in holiness. He continued:

For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. (Gal. 5:17-18)

There is a constant struggle as our old man, Adam, tries to reassert his hold. Who has not known the battle *and* known what it is to fail? But the point is not that we are incapable of sin but that we 'are not subject to the law'. The Spirit leads us up to and into the cross of Christ where the condemnation of the law was finished, so that sin's condemning hook can never catch us again. We live, not by our own new abilities, but by the Spirit, so 'let us also be guided by the Spirit'.

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The Church and the Gospel

It is usually taken as a given today, at least among evangelical churches, that the church must be engaged with the proclamation of the gospel. Emil Brunner said ‘that the matter of greatest significance in the Church is the proclamation of the Gospel’¹ and, without doubt, any church which does not take the gospel seriously² is an irrelevance in the world. Geoff Bingham put it:

When the church is not in the work of proclaiming Christ to the nations, turning them into disciples, and teaching them what Christ had told the apostles to teach, then the church will not truly be the church. It is *in the going* that the church is really the church. Christ gave the fullness of himself to the church that it might fulfil the will of God for creation—via the gospel.³

It may be vigorous in its planning, in its programmes, in its groups which meet for various activities—even Bible study—yet unless it is essentially a *going* church, it will not truly be a ‘going’ concern.⁴

It is equally true that many churches are uncertain of the gospel. As someone put it, the churches seem more interested in ‘in-drag’ than ‘out-reach’, often accompanied with a sense that people who do ‘make a decision’, ‘make a commitment’, pray the prayer’ or whatever may find the church and its forms of worship to be a bit daunting. It may sound cynical, but in fact some denominations have been perplexed enough to propose a Christian form of ‘half-way houses’ to ease prospective converts into mainstream church life.

This is not meant to be critical; indeed, we should rejoice that the concern to see men and women won to Christ is still alive and well. Such movements as ‘Alpha’, ‘Evangelism Explosion’ and the Australian ‘Christianity Explained’ among others are evidence that Christians are aware of the need for the world to hear the gospel and to respond to the claims of Christ. Sometimes, criticism of the evangelistic efforts of others, under the guise of theological superiority or whatever, is only a cover for our own fundamental failure. Again, someone (else) has said: “I prefer the evangelism you do badly to the evangelism which I don’t do at all”.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Supposing we start with the New Testament. We encounter a movement called ‘the church’ and we find that it was born because people brought an announcement and that, when that announcement was given, the hearers were powerfully affected. For example, in Acts there is the account of the first ‘sermon’; there was no appeal as we have known them, no-one was ‘challenged’ to do anything, yet there was a general response as the crowd was moved to cry out ‘Brothers, what should we do?’. Three thousand people responded that way! Not long afterwards, the number of those who ‘heard the word’ was put at ‘five thousand men’ (i.e. males; Acts 4:4).

¹ Emil Brunner, *Our Faith*, SCM, London, 1949, p 100.

² Every pun intended!

³ Geoffrey Bingham, *Christ’s Living Church—Today*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1993, p 24.

⁴ *Christ’s Living Church—Today*, p 33.

I have already examined the ‘apostolic’ nature of the church.⁵ It was argued that the proclamation was that which was initially brought by the apostles and no deviation from that original message was considered even vaguely valid. But that does not explain why the proclamation had the effect that it did. ‘One thing is certain — [people] could not remain neutral. Wherever the apostolic *kerygma* was proclaimed there was either a “revival or a riot”’.⁶ That may be something of an overstatement; there were times when there was, evidently, quiet (?) reflection on what was said, as in the case of the Bereans in Acts 17:11-12. Still even that was followed by a riot of sorts (Acts 17:13). But, nonetheless, many believed, ‘including not a few Greek women and men of high standing’.

The word ‘gospel’ is something of a cliché today. I have usually used the word without an initial capital letter to indicate the message that is preached and the word ‘Gospel’ with the capital letter for written documents (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John etc). This was not a distinction which was required in the New Testament.⁷ But what was the message which was so powerful?

A brief comment about the words used in the New Testament may be in order. First, the word ‘gospel’ is a translation of the Greek word *eujaggevlion* (*euangelion*). The associated verb, ‘to preach the gospel’ is *eujaggelivzomai* (*euangelizomai*). Sadly, most English versions of the Bible *seem* inconsistent in the way they translate these words,⁸ making it very difficult for those wanting to use English concordances. Second is the word group ‘proclaim’ and ‘proclamation’. These are translations of the Greek *khruvssw* (*kerusso*) *khvrugma* (*kerugma*)⁹. Third is the use of ‘the word’ as the content of the preaching and also as the active element.

Obviously the first believers were not hindered by these various words, so how can we draw these factors together? There are a couple of points which would have been obvious to those first believers. The word ‘gospel’ was a word which was possibly well known to those outside Palestine. It was used for imperial proclamations and for announcements of victory.¹⁰ As an imperial proclamation, it hardly mattered whether the recipients found the news to be good or bad; what mattered was that the ruler had issued his decree and all the inhabitants must treat it seriously. The speaker must not consider modifying it to make it palatable and the hearers dare not ignore it.¹¹

Then there was the *kerugma*. This word was related to the word *kh\$ruv* (*kerux*), which means a herald. So *kerugma* is the substance of the herald’s announcement. Again, the

⁵ In *The ‘Apostolic’ Church*, June 1999 Study paper.

⁶ Robert H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1960, p 58.

⁷ See A. Casarella, ‘Gospel’, in Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Eds), *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, IVP, Downers Grove, 1997, p 433.

⁸ For example, in the *NRSV* of Acts the verb is translated as ‘proclaim’, ‘preach’, with or without the words ‘good news’, and ‘bring good news’ and ‘tell good news’. There may be a pattern but it is not immediately obvious. The noun is used twice in Acts, both times the *NRSV* has ‘good news’. In Romans, however, the noun occurs nine times in the Greek. On seven occasions the word is translated as ‘gospel’ and only twice as ‘good news’.

⁹ These transliterations from Greek to English sometimes undergo further changes. *Euangelion* developed into *evangelion*, from which we get the English words ‘Evangelism’, ‘Evangelical’ and so on, while *kerugma* is often put in the form ‘*kerygma*’.

¹⁰ The verb was used in the Greek Old Testament in precisely this way. It was this which highlighted the aspect of the news being ‘good’.

¹¹ A fuller discussion of the New Testament use of ‘gospel’ may be found in my *Power in the Church*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1997, p 48ff. Some of the academic background is detailed there.

herald's task is give his announcement. He may meet with a hostile reaction, in which case he will suffer in the service of the one who sent him; he may find his audience delighted and be rewarded for his service to them. But the overriding consideration is that he has been entrusted with a commission and woe to him if he does not bring his message.

Jesus preached 'the gospel'. In this he was taking up the theme of the preaching of John the Baptist, namely, that 'the Kingdom of God is at hand' and, in the light of that, men and women should repent (Mark 1:14-15). There is, of course, some similarity in this 'gospel' with the later gospel preached by Paul and the other Christians, but is it the same? Repentance is there, and the word 'believe', though it is interesting that in the Gospel stories 'faith' in Jesus is not expressed in terms of a person believing in him as the Saviour of sinners. Where 'faith' is used concerning Jesus it generally refers to people's allegiance to him as a miracle worker.¹² The same thing is observed with words like 'justify' and 'righteous'; nowhere in the Gospels are they used in the way they are used, say, in Romans.

Quite simply, the gospel preached by the early church was different from that preached by Jesus. What Jesus preached, he preached to Israel, in terms of them being the covenant people of God. In doing so, he was also confronting their failure to be what God intended them to be, confronting their abandonment of the commandments of God in favour of human traditions (Mark 7:8). The stories Jesus told spoke to Israel's failure to honour God by fulfilling their responsibilities under the covenant. For example, the parable of the bridesmaids (Matt. 25:1-13): Israel ought to be prepared for the climax of the kingdom, but was not. Then, in the parable of the talents (Matt, 25:14-46), Israel ought to be producing the fruit of their blessings, but did not. This was most clearly demonstrated in Mark 11:11-20. There Jesus entered the temple and saw the way the court of the Gentiles was filled with the sacrificial animals and the money changers while it ought to have been the place where Gentiles could come to learn Torah and to worship. So he 'cleansed the temple' saying

Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers. (Mark 11:17)

Jesus was putting together two statements from the Old Testament; Isaiah 56:7, which comes in the context of foreigners joining themselves to the Lord, to love and serve him, and Jeremiah 7:11, where Jeremiah, standing in the temple, sees people trusting in the building (Jer. 7:4) while being corrupt ('a den of robbers'). Surprisingly, perhaps, the prophecy of Jeremiah is so arranged that immediately after this section, called by some the 'temple sermon' (7:1-8:3), the prophet continues his scathing observations concerning Israel's ungodliness by quoting God's complaint:

When I wanted to gather them, says the LORD, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them. (Jer. 8:13).

Now the mind of the Gospel writers becomes plain. Jesus cleansed the temple on the basis of Jeremiah's description and he cursed the fig tree (described by Mark in two parts, straddling the cleansing of the temple) also on the basis of the prophet's description.

The parable of the tenants of the vineyard in Mark 12:1-12 goes further. Not only is Israel not giving God his due, they are actively hostile to those God sends to them to

¹² See, for example, Matt. 8:10, 13, 26; 9:2, 22, 28f. 'Faith' is also used in terms of trusting God for one's daily needs (Matt. 6:30) or in the simple trust in the God of the Old Testament as in Matt. 23:23.

remind them of their responsibilities. When God at last sends his Son, the heir, Israel determines to kill him and actually claim the inheritance for themselves.

Jesus' gospel, then, was his proclamation of the kingdom of God to God's recalcitrant people. Judgment was coming on them, so they ought to repent. But instead they killed the messenger. In their rebellion they had refused to see Jesus as God in the flesh or as the Messiah; but when he was raised, that was God's declaration that Jesus was, indeed Lord (Yahweh) and Messiah (Acts 2:36).

The difference between the gospel which Jesus preached and that of the apostles becomes obvious at this point. Jesus could not have preached the apostolic gospel because he needed to die and be raised before there could be an apostolic gospel.¹³ By killing their Messiah, Israel had perversely contributed to the salvation of the whole world. The curse of the broken covenant which they were so eloquently expressing was being borne by him. Their sin was being focussed on him and he was bearing their hatred of God as their representative. But if that was so, and he was saving his people from their sin, he was thereby fulfilling all righteousness (Matt. 3:15) and so as the righteous Man he was also dealing with the sins of the world (John 1:29).

Now there is a gospel for the whole world. That is why Paul declared that he would not move one inch from the startling reality that in the death of the Messiah the sins of all humanity had been dealt with. He would not be distracted, 'lest the cross of the Messiah be emptied'; he 'decided to know nothing ... except Jesus the Messiah, and him crucified' (1 Cor. 1:18; 2:2). He will glory only in the cross, because only there is he delivered from the hideous grip of the world (Gal. 6:14). What is more, when that gospel is preached, 'that the Messiah died for our sins, that he was buried and raised on the third day' (1 Cor. 15:3-4), then the power of God is active to save. The apostolic gospel was not information to be understood and 'appropriated' in order to be effective. It was first the declaration by the risen Jesus himself, though the preachers, of his triumph over sin and death. As a declaration it had more similarity to the story of the creation than to a well worked lecture. At creation God spoke and creation came into being. So now when the gospel is preached a new creation springs to life.

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

¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Cor. 4:5-6; 5:17).

It comes as no surprise to see men and women transformed when that gospel is preached and to see the church formed. But can we now ask an associated question: why did the early church preach the gospel? By looking at them as they are described in the New Testament, can we understand something of the essential nature of these communities which sprang to life and of the reason why they 'could not but speak'?

¹³ This ought to warn us, for example, about taking statements made by Jesus prior to his death and resurrection and applying them, without careful consideration, to a post-Pentecost situation. Post-Pentecost Christians stand in an entirely different relationship to the Mosaic law than did the nation of Israel prior to the gift of the Spirit. According to Acts 15 and Galatians etc, so did Israel, whether they would admit to it or not (see Rom. 10:4).

WHY THE GOSPEL WAS PREACHED¹⁴

On the day of Pentecost the gift of the Holy Spirit to the crowd resulted in them all being filled with the Spirit and speaking in other languages ‘as the Spirit gave them ability’. Luke defines their speaking as concerning the great things, the magnificence (ta; megalei\$*ta megaleia*) of God. When giving his *apologia* for their speaking, Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32a (with the addition of ‘in the last days, says the Lord’); he says that

- (i) this experience is the fulfilment of Joel’s promise of the Spirit,
- (ii) Joel’s promise was to do with the formation a transformed *people* (‘all flesh’ as distinct from isolated individuals in Israel) who now prophesy and
- (iii) this formation of a prophetic community is related to the shaking of the creation before the climactic judgment. With reference to ‘all flesh’, Joel was referring to Judah and Jerusalem (Joel 3:1), which may go some way to explain why there was such surprise when ‘the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles’. The evidence was the same as that at Pentecost: ‘speaking in tongues and extolling God’, indicating to Peter that they had ‘received the Holy Spirit just as we have’ (Acts 10:45-47).

I would suggest that this quotation from Joel has more significance than just explanation of the events. By specifying prophecy as the result of the gift of the Spirit, the agenda for the book of Acts, and indeed for the whole church, is established.

Prophecy and Humanity

Definitions of prophecy are lacking in the Scriptures, though descriptions are not. Closest to a definition may be Jeremiah 23:9-32. The contrast is between those who ‘speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord’ (vs. 16) and those (Jeremiah alone at that point) who ‘stood in the council of the LORD so as to see and to hear his word’ (vs. 18). The genuine prophet stands in intimacy with the LORD, hears his voice and speaks what he hears.

The significance of this should not be overlooked when understanding the nature of humanity. Adam heard God’s voice (l/q/qol)¹⁵ in the garden (Gen 3:8 ASV, AV). Is the implication that Adam heard the voice of God without fear prior to his sin? Jesus identified Abel as the beginning of the line of prophets who were killed because of their role (Matt. 23:34-35; Lu. 11:49-51); may we not understand that Abel was as much a restoration of that which Adam had lost in the Fall? If so, then to say that Adam was created in prophetic intimacy with the LORD would be reflected in the nature of the primal rebellion. Instead of Adam listening to God and so bringing that word to his wife and then to the whole creation, the whole structure is reversed. The serpent speaks to the woman and Adam listens to the

¹⁴ What follows is taken from one of my studies for the 1999 Pastors’ School, *The Spirit and the Prophetic Community*.

¹⁵ The usual modern translation here is ‘sound’, but in the light of the obvious ‘voice’ in 3:17, ‘Because you have listened to the *voice* (l/q) of your wife ...’ is there a necessary reason to abandon the older translation? For a contrary view, see J Skinner, *Genesis ICC*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1930, p 77.

voice of his wife. He dies because ‘one does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’ (Deut. 8:3).

Prophecy and Israel

Israel the nation was formed by the word of God. Moses reminded them that, unlike all the other nations, they had ‘heard the voice’ of God (Deut. 4:12, 33, 36) and were to obey him (Deut. 4:30, lit. ‘heed his *voice*’). If there was a fundamental problem in Israel, it related to the repeat of the response of Adam, as shown in the reaction at Sinai (Deut. 5:22-27), where immediately after hearing the character of God declared in the ‘words the LORD spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain’ (vs. 22), the entire congregation chose to avoid direct contact with ‘the voice’, preferring that Moses should hear on their behalf (vss. 25-27).

Israel’s role as ‘a priestly kingdom and a holy nation’ was compromised at that point, since they chose not to stand in the presence of God. Their mediation of Torah to the nations was violated. (Cf. the prophecy of Isaiah 2:2-4.)

All that we know of Israel, however, comes from the prophetic Scriptures. Moses was a prophet (Deut. 18:15-18) as was David (Acts 2:30) and of course the ‘historical books were recognised as ‘the former prophets’. While unwilling to hear the word, Israel could not and may not escape the word. The word of God (God speaking) was a continual reality in Israel and the presence of God (the spirit¹⁶) was always at work to lead and instruct (see Neh. 9:20). Israel could not escape the spirit, the presence of God (Ps. 139:7-12; Isa 63:9-10).

It was the spirit who came upon the individual prophets in Israel. Micah declared himself to be a man ‘filled with power, with the spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin’ (Mic. 3:8); also Ezekiel identified himself as under the action of the word of the LORD, the hand of the LORD and the spirit (Ezek. 3:12, 16, 22). These prophets were the men and women who ‘stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear his word’. Equally, they suffered the fate of those who spoke out of that intimacy.

Yet from earliest times in Israel, there was the deep desire for the restoration of the full prophetic status of the whole nation. The account of Moses and the elders in Numbers 11:16-17, 24-30 highlights the situation: ‘Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put his spirit on them’ (vs. 29).

The Promise of the Spirit

While there may not be any reference to personal resurrection within the Old Testament, the restoration of the lost life and prophetic intimacy was anticipated with the promise of the spirit. Within the New Testament revelation, the spirit was later understood to be a person within the unity of God (and so we would use ‘Spirit’¹⁷), but the promise was nonetheless significant. When the spirit is restored, Israel will once again be nationally restored and Eden regained. Thus Ezekiel 36:37, ‘I will put my spirit within you’ and verse

¹⁶ See my study, ‘The Triune God in Israel’ in the 1994 Pastors’ School Notes.

¹⁷ This is a stylistic nicety not available to the original authors of either Testament.

35, ‘They will say, “This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden”’, and the following pictorial description of that in chapter 37:1-14.

In Isaiah, the spirit will once again be on ‘the servant’ (42:1) and Zion will be comforted and ‘I will make her wildernesses like Eden’ (51:5). Israel’s judgment will continue until ‘a spirit from on high is poured out on us’ (32:15) with the consequent renewal of creation (see 65:17). The word and the spirit of the LORD are the means by which this restoration will take place (34:16).

The promise of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 is especially noticeable. Although the ‘spirit’ is not mentioned in this context, the restoration of Israel and Judah will mean the restoration of the intimacy, the law written on the hearts and ‘they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest ...’. Is this similar to standing in the council of the LORD? Forgiveness and access to the presence (the spirit) are of a one (cf. Eph. 2:13, 18).

The Restoration of Prophecy in Israel

Malachi’s promise of the appearance of Elijah before the great and terrible day came (Mal. 4:5-6) was fulfilled in John the Baptist, who was ‘a prophet, ... and more than a prophet’ (Matt. 11:9). As ‘the voice of one crying in the wilderness’, John was the messenger coming ahead of the Lord in anticipation of the day when Judah and Jerusalem would once again offer righteous sacrifices’.

Even John the Baptist was not certain of the *form* of the fulfilment (Matt. 11:2-3), but the apostles came to understand that the supreme intimacy with God was known by Jesus. He not only heard the word, he was the Word become flesh (John 1:1, 14). All the prophets in Israel were fulfilled in the word of God through the Son (Heb. 1:1-2; see also 2 Cor. 1:20). Even if their understanding was wrong or inadequate at that point, the people saw him as the fulfilment of Israel’s hopes, ‘the prophet who is to come into the world’ (Jn 6:14; Matt. 21:11), ‘a prophet mighty in deed *and word*’ (Luke 24:19). Of course, as a prophet, he was ‘not without honour, except in his own country and his own house’ (Matt. 13:57; Mark 6:4; John 4:44) and consequently, when recognised as the heir, was killed as were the previous prophets in Israel (Matt. 21:38).

The Spirit and the Prophetic Community

The death of Jesus, intended to silence the voice, was actually the means by which the voice of God is heard in all the world. His death secured the forgiveness of sins for Israel and for the whole world (Matt. 1:21; John 1:29). His resurrection ensured the restoration of life and the ascension of this last Adam meant that he was the one to pour out the Spirit (Acts 2:33). If the intimacy is now his as the risen humanity, then he pours out the Spirit on those in him.

This is Pentecost. Now the believers, receiving the Spirit, have received the forgiveness of their sins and so now know and speak out of the intimacy which has been given (restored!). They declare the great things of God! They have seen them and heard them and cannot but speak (Acts 4:20). Hence Joel’s anticipation of the Spirit and a new prophetic community have been fulfilled.

The picture of the church in Acts is of the answer to Moses' prayer that all God's people were prophets and that he would give them his Spirit. Now, being the community of the new covenant, they all know him, from the least of them to the greatest (cf. 1 John 2:12-14, 20, 27). As a result, they all speak. Even though they are persecuted, they refuse to be silent, indeed they cannot.

The language in Acts is significant. While the book recounts all that Jesus continues to do and to teach (See Acts 1:1), the story describes the church as gripped by 'the word'.¹⁸ Here is the community which speaks the word of God (see also 1 Thess. 2:13). Believers are those who welcome the word (2:41), hear it (4:4; 10:44), accept it (8:4; 11:1) and praise it (13:48). Then, filled with the Spirit, they speak it with boldness (4:31), proclaim it (15:35), serve it (6:4) and, in the face of fierce opposition, they 'gospel' it (8:4).

When the news of Christ was widely known, it was because 'the word of the Lord spread' (6:7; 13:49) and when there was a great response in Ephesus, it was as 'the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed' (19:20). The word was a fire in their bones and they could not keep it in.

Of course, with the true word there is always the false word and the church suffers from it. False prophets and false apostles will arise within the church. In Acts 20:28-32, Paul warns of the danger, while being content to commend the church to God and to the word of his grace. There are Balaams within the churches and Jezebels who call themselves prophets' (Rev. 2:14, 20) and there is pressure from without to cease keeping the 'word of patient endurance' (Rev. 3:10). What is more, the prophetic community is made to suffer terribly because of 'their testimony to Jesus and ...the word of God' (Rev. 20:4). They give their word under the protection of God, but when they have finished their testimony they sometimes suffer the vicious hatred of those to whom they have been a torment (Rev. 11:3-10).

The temptation to move out of the prophetic intimacy is great. There is apparent safety and security when the prophet's mantle is removed,¹⁹ but without the living and active word of the risen Christ the church quickly becomes moribund and sin just something we must live with. But we cannot live without the word and so must 'wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death' (Rev. 3:2). The nations must have the gospel of the kingdom and so the prophetic community must abide in the word, even if, and especially *as*, it pierces 'until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow. [judging] the thoughts and intentions of the heart' (Heb. 4:12).

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9).

These 'excellencies' can only be proclaimed as they known, and they may only be known as we continue to stand in the council of the Lord, in prophetic intimacy with the Spirit of the Father and the Son.

¹⁸ I suggest that this is language of prophecy and not a cryptic way of referring to Jesus. Jesus is called 'the Word' in John, not in Luke, even though the conclusions drawn may be the same.

¹⁹ Perhaps the temptation for some of us is to replace it with the gown of academic respectability? Could it also be that our delight in the written word may, at times, come to *replace* our intimacy with the Living Word? Greek and Hebrew may be mysterious, but they are hardly the language of the heavenly places.

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The Church and the Gifts — I

A discussion of ‘the gifts’ for the church is usually difficult from the outset. Given the various positions taken by the different groups around today, it is probable that audiences are already committed in some way to a particular view of ‘the gifts’, with their view largely conditioned by the experiences they have had.

Such divergent views usually focus on what are called the ‘charismata’, the so-called gifts of the Spirit, in particular those mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12, but in what follows I hope to demonstrate the far bigger picture of the gifts which the church may know. I put it that way because the knowledge of the gifts is a matter of faith. For instance, were we to concentrate on the list of 1 Corinthians 12 we could quickly establish that most if not all these ‘gifts’ are also present in contexts far removed from Christianity. The mere presence of certain experiences would not validate them as gifts of God. So to concentrate on these features may lead us to miss the fact that there is nothing in all creation which does not come to us as a gift. God is the giver of all things and men and women are essentially receivers, created to live in joyful gratitude. Hence the church, the community of faith, is the arena where the true nature of all things is to be recognised and so announced to all creation.

GOD IS THE GIVER

Paul, in Romans 1:18ff, indicates that fallen men and women ‘by their wickedness suppress the truth’. His point is that the truth *of God* is continually and inescapably present to them because God himself has shown it to them. Indeed, ‘his eternal power and divine nature’ are not mere facets of his being but are the encapsulation of all that God is. So, God himself is continually present to his creation; hence the psalmist’s question, ‘where can I flee from your presence?’ But when sinful humanity encounters *this* truth it suppresses it, refuses to have God in their knowledge (Rom. 1:28), refusing to honor him as God *or give thanks to him*. This failure to live in gratitude is related to the fact that the truth of God has been plain ‘since the creation of the world’.

Put positively, the letter of James says that

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. (James 1:17).

If we see, as we do, acts of generosity by men and women, we understand that these derive from God. Of themselves, men and women cannot initiate any good act of giving. This would be another way of saying that men and women are created in the image of God and that while they may refuse to acknowledge that and continue to suppress that in acts of unrighteousness, the reality of humanity has not been erased. God is the giver and humanity stands in the flow of that giving and so ought to be grateful.

Furthermore, there has been no change in God; he remains the generous giver to the whole creation. For example;

You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, ¹¹giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst. ¹²By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. ¹³From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

¹⁴You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, ¹⁵and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart. ¹⁶The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. ¹⁷In them the birds build their nests; the stork has its home in the fir trees. ¹⁸The high mountains are for the wild goats; the rocks are a refuge for the coney.

¹⁹You have made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting. ²⁰You make darkness, and it is night, when all the animals of the forest come creeping out. ²¹The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food *from God*. ²²When the sun rises, they withdraw and lie down in their dens. ²³People go out to their work and to their labor until the evening.

²⁴O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. ²⁵Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. ²⁶There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it. ²⁷*These all look to you to give them their food in due season;* ²⁸when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. ²⁹When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. ³⁰When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground. (Psalm 104:10-30).

There is far more than survival described here. The generosity of God extends to the provision of ‘wine to gladden the heart’ and ‘oil to make the face shine’ (verse 15). The *enjoyment* of wine and the *cosmetic* use of oil are all part of the rich giving of God. Furthermore, the renewal of the creation (verse 30) depends on that continuous giving.

How foolish it is to assume, then, that we have obtained anything simply out of our own resources. Moses reminded Israel that, in the land promised to them, they would eat their fill, build fine houses and live in them, have abundance of herds and flocks and silver and gold because God’s intention was to do them good (Deut. 8:16). So

Do not say to yourself, ‘My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.’

¹⁸But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today. (Deut. 8:17-18)

This is repeated, in essence, in 1 Timothy 6:17.

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

When we understand the triune being of God, then we see that each person of the Trinity is aptly described as participating in the giving. The generosity is not simply of one person with the co-operation of the others. For instance, John 3:16 speaks of God loving the world in this way: he gave his only begotten Son. Plainly this is the action of God *the Father*, and it has rightly been observed that wherever the word ‘god’ is used in the New Testament, unless the context makes it impossible, the reference is to the Father. But we should also observe that God is not *only* Father and the giving of the Son by the Father is also the self-giving of the Son (Galatians 2:20); likewise the Spirit is intimately involved in this by his total engagement with every aspect of the ministry of the incarnate Son, from his conception to his present reign.

But, of course, the giving of God is seen in all that he does, from the creation to the consummation of this stage of history (that is, at the establishment of the new heavens and new earth). Indeed, it would not be wrong to see (it would be wrong *not to* see) that the giving which we observe is the overflow of the giving which is part of the essential being of God. What we see in the man Jesus and his relationship with the Father is the revelation of the love that always flows between the persons of the Godhead (see John 17:5, 24).

UNDERSTANDING CREATION

We saw in the previous study¹ that Man was created to live by every word uttered by God. As such a being, Man is continually dependent upon God for every moment of his life. That is his being. Apart from his communion with God, he has no true being at all. The relationship which Man has to the elements within creation is never one of direct dependence. Take Elijah as an example. When there was a severe famine, there was always the supply needed, even when that supply seemed to defy logic. The birds brought him bread and meat, morning and evening, and the widow, who together with her son should supposedly have died of starvation, had been *commanded* by God to feed the prophet (1 Kings 17:1-16). Elijah's survival was dependent upon the command of God. This is the way it is for all that is created: 'By faith we understand that the ages were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible' (Heb. 11:3). Or, as the psalmist put it, 'when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust' (Ps. 104:29).

The creation comes to Man, not as the source of his life but as the gift of God.

God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'²⁹ God said, 'See, I have *given* you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have *given* every green plant for food.' And it was so.³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Gen. 1:28-31).

The 'very goodness' of creation involves it being the gift of God, with 'gift' being an essential element within the creation. Even the non-human creation lives by the gift of God (verse 30; Ps. 104).

The sin of Adam lay, as we have seen, in his rejection of the order of creation. The word of God which created and sustains was to come to Adam and through him to his partner in life and then to the creation. We may again compare Elijah in this respect.

Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the LORD the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by *my* word'. (1 Kings 17:1)

When the order of creation was perverted (it could not be reversed), Adam's relationship to the creation was fearful. Unable to live by the word of God he could no longer live in harmony with the creation. Hence the curse:

¹ *The Church and the Gospel*, August 1999.

And to the man [the LORD God] said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, "You shall not eat of it", cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.' (Gen. 3:17-19).

But since the true order of creation could not be reversed, Jesus statements to the disciples about the kingdom of God make simple sense.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' ³²For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matt. 6:25-33).

The problem lies in detaching the gift from the giver. Nothing is then seen as gift and so nothing can be freely received. As a consequence, nothing can be freely given, since 'every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above'. But when sending the twelve disciples out in ministry, Jesus sent them with this frame of reference. Freely they received so freely they should give. What is more, issues of finance, clothing and accommodation were not their responsibility (Matt. 10:8-10).

The distinction between covenant and contract is significant here. Where covenant is seen as contract, men and women, and churches, will be conscious of being in debt to God, under obligation to justify his giving. Hence the mindset which seems to hear God say, 'All this I did for thee, what hast thou done for me?' or which thinks that having an abundance is a problem and that we ought to be enduring 'good missionary training' for the day when the supply runs out.

God's covenant, on the other hand, is his free purpose to do good to his creation (see Deut. 8:16 above; 1 Pet. 4:19). That there is blessing and cursing *within* covenant is not being denied, but the judgments, when received in faith, will be seen as part of the good giving of God, that we might share his holiness. But to live as if the blessings were in fact a curse is hardly of faith. Thus Paul happily knew what it was 'to have little, and ... to have plenty', knowing that his 'God will fully satisfy every need ... according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 4:12, 19). His point was that it is all gift; 'I can do all things through him who strengthens me' (Phil. 4:13).

UNDERSTANDING REDEMPTION

Everything comes to us as ‘gift’. That creational principle is the principle which applies to redemption. All the elements of redemption, from faith and repentance, through to our perseverance to the end are the result of God’s giving. Thus,

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the *gift*² of God —⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2:8-9).

When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, ‘Then God has *given*³ even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.’ (Acts 11:18)

Neither faith nor repentance are the cause of salvation; they are the gift of God who acts in grace towards us. Grace is one translation of the Greek *cavri* (*charis*) which is a word having a wide range of uses.⁴ It is the context which determines the precise meaning of the word but, in this case, it is the context provided by the whole schema of Biblical revelation.

Grace is not to be simply defined as ‘unmerited favour’ since the implication that there is such a thing as ‘merited favour’ has already been shown to be quite beyond the range of possibilities if everything comes to us as gift.⁵ But the effect of grace is that, whereas once men and women ‘did not honour God as God or give thanks to him’, now

grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. (2 Cor. 4:15)

Grace has restored humanity to the position lost in the sin of Adam. All comes to humanity as gift, but guilt fractured the relationship between humanity and the giver, with deadly consequences. Grace is the word to describe the ‘extra’ gift which accomplishes the restoration, namely, God giving *himself*. The issues we saw above, that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, highlight the amazing nature of this giving. The incarnation of the eternal Son is the revelation of that love which is totally ‘other-centred’, since the incarnation was always with a view to the atonement.

For you know the generous act (*grace*) of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. (2 Cor. 8:9)

As we saw that giving is triune, so grace is ‘the grace of God’, ‘the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ’ and the Holy Spirit is ‘the Spirit of grace’ (Heb. 10:29). What is more, this action of grace in atonement was always in mind, though it was only revealed with the appearing of Christ.

² to; dw\$ron

³ e[dwken; see also 2 Tim. 2:25; Acts 5:31.

⁴ It is also translated as ‘reason’ as in Eph. 3:1, 14 etc — *Touvtou cavrin*, and ‘thanks’ in 1 Cor. 15:57; 2 Cor. 2:14; 8:16; and 9:15; ‘credit’ in 1 Pet. 2:19, and the *NRSV* with, I think, some insight translates it as ‘generous act’ in 2 Cor. 8:9. The *AV* offers nine different translations.

⁵ For more detail and from a different approach, see *Living in Grace*, the study for February 1998.

God,⁹ who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,¹⁰ but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus ... (2 Tim. 1:8-10)

Grace was *given* before the ages. Not only was the creation not abandoned at the fall, it could not be abandoned since the goal of God for the creation lay behind the first creating word. God is, then, 'a faithful creator' (1 Pet. 4:19), ever in action in grace to see the whole world to the goal. This is Peter's observation in 1 Peter 1. We are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready (because completed) to be revealed in the last time (verse 5). The prophets of Israel prophesied of the coming grace when they spoke of the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory, and so we ought also to set our minds on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring when he is revealed (verse 13).

That God is continually acting in grace is seen in the gifts which grace gives to those in Christ; '...the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 6:23). 'Free gift' is *cavrisma* (*charisma*) the gift, or the effect,⁶ of *cavri* (*charis*), grace. This eternal life is all gift, flowing out of the eternal generosity of God and coming through the action of immense grace. That it comes as the overwhelming reversal of the evil of Adam is spelled out in Romans 5:15-21.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many.¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification.¹⁷ If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.¹⁸ Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.¹⁹ For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.²⁰ But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,²¹ so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

There is no question that grace has dealt with our dilemma; the free gift, the *cavrisma* (*charisma*), is quite unlike the trespass (verse 15), indeed, the *cavrisma* (*charisma*) following many trespasses leads to justification (verse 16). Associated with this 'free gift' is another word, also translated as gift, *dwrea*; (*dorea*) verses 15, 17). It is not impossible that this word is used here with particular reference to the gift of the Holy Spirit, as it is in Acts 2:38.⁷ There the immediate benefit of the resurrection is the gift of the Holy Spirit, the intimate presence of God with humanity understood as the restoration of Eden (see Ezekiel 36:27, 35). Redemption cannot be understood apart from the *dwrea*; (*dorea*) of the Spirit any more than it can be understood apart from the *cavrisma* (*charisma*) of eternal life.

It must be concluded that redemption is quite overwhelming. 'The grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus' (1 Tim. 1:14); that 'love of God ... flooded into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that has been given to us' (Rom. 5:5); the 'gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with

⁶ See James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Bible Commentary 38a, Word, Dallas, 1988, p 279.

⁷ James D. G. Dunn, 'Dwreav as the Gift of the Holy Spirit', in *Christ and the Spirit, Volume 2, Pneumatology*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1988, pp 207-209. Cf Rom. 5:5.

full conviction'. The Spirit comes so that 'we might receive adoption' (Gal. 4:4-6), his cry within us evoking our response, 'Abba, Father!' (Rom. 8:15).

Nor is this limited to the present; on the contrary, the giving of God in Christ is the assurance of his continued giving until the end.

He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? (Rom. 8:32)

Small wonder Paul said that others were praying for the Corinthians 'because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you' adding 'Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!'⁸ (2 Corinthians 9:14-15).

CONCERNING 'THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT'

This is the way Paul commences 1 Corinthians chapter 12. It is possible that 'things of the Spirit' could be 'people of the Spirit'⁹ and the early chapters of 1 Corinthians seem to support this.

Paul had preached 'with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power' (1 Cor. 2:4), and the Corinthians consequently lacked no 'spiritual gift' (*carivsmati*, *charismati*) as they waited the revealing of Christ (1:7). The problem facing Paul was a factionalism within the Corinthian church which denied gospel which had been preached with the result that what Paul was saying was not understood by them.

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand *the gifts* bestowed on us by God.¹³ And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things (*pneumatika*; *pneumatika*) to those who are spiritual (*pneumatikoi*§", *pneumatikois*).

¹⁴Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.¹⁵ Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny.¹⁶ 'For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ.

¹And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people (*pneumatikoi*§", *pneumatikois*), but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. (1 Cor. 2:12-3:1)

Even allowing for the difficulties arising from the Greek words, which are hard to translate,¹⁰ the problem is plain. The knowledge of 'the things with which God has graced us' (verse 12) is not dependent on mere experiences. The factionalism of chapters 1-4 was evidently being reproduced in the life and worship of the congregation as they failed to see the gifts, the *charismata*, in their true light. Here were men and women who had received the Holy Spirit and the evidences of grace, but they were living as men and women for whom the purpose of grace was nothing. As a result, the gifts as they being used in the church were, in effect, a mark of their unbelief (see 1 Cor. 14:22). Truly knowing the gifts is dependent on living in communion with the giver, whereas the Corinthians had abstracted the gifts from that and claimed them as their own.

⁸ dwrea;

⁹ The word *pneumatikw*§n could be either masculine or neuter.

¹⁰ The difficulties can be seen in the comments in the footnotes provided in some versions.

This is what they had done with the various people whom God had given them. The church was divided and so the purpose of God foreign to them.

What I mean is that each of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ.' (1 Cor. 1:12)

However we understand the final boast, 'I belong to Christ', the matter is one of great consequence. Paul, Apollos and Cephas (Peter) are nothing more than servants, each with a different function perhaps (1 Cor. 3:5ff), but servants nonetheless. Later Paul told the same church that

we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. (2 Cor. 4:5)

Far from holding on to a particular leader and boasting, they ought to see that in Christ

For all things are yours,²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future — all belong to you,²³ and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God. (1 Cor 3:21-23)

The giving of God is not miserly. God has given *all* things to those *in* Christ because God has given all things *to* Christ. So neither servant nor served should boast.

I have applied all this to Apollos and myself for your benefit, brothers and sisters, so that you may learn through us the meaning of the saying, 'Nothing beyond what is written', so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of one against another.⁷ For who sees anything different in you? *What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?* (1 Cor. 4:6-7)

There is nothing which does not come to us as 'gift'! In the next study we will examine some of the individual gifts mentioned in the New Testament, but the point from which we must begin that study, the point we have reached here, is that not one gift can ever be identified as 'mine' or even 'ours'. This is as much true of the heritage which we have as denominations (a matter which we have already confronted¹¹) as it is of the various 'charismata', since the heritage without the living presence of God, the giver of all things, may be no more than the scaffolding around the Christian museum. And, likewise, all our 'gifts' may not even be discernibly Christian, in spite of our claims, if not exercised in the truth of the giver and his purpose.

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¹¹ See the March 1999 study, *the Church in its Unity*.

The Church and the Gifts — 2

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In the previous study we concluded that there is nothing in creation which does not come to us as ‘gift’. Human beings do not have any claim on God; while we may rightly expect that God will be faithful as Creator, providing all things needed, discipline and judgment included, it would be presumptuous to do anything other than live in gratitude for all things.

However, what must now occupy our attention are those things which are known as ‘gifts’ within the church. We have seen that redemption has come to us by means of the gifts of faith and repentance, bringing the gift (*cavrisma charisma*) of eternal life and the gift (*dwrea; dorea*) of the Holy Spirit. But through these gifts *the church* was born. The New Testament is insistent that it is impossible for any person to experience redemption apart from the whole body of believers. The reason for this is quite simple; the purpose of God has always been the existence of a redeemed humanity, which is the bride prepared for the eternal Son. The gift of the Spirit relates specifically to this:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

So whatever we may understand of the gifts *within* the church, we must say first that they are gifts *to* and *for the church*. On the three occasions when the Apostle Paul wrote concerning the various gifts, in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12-14 and Ephesians 4, he specifically discusses them in relation to ‘the body’ (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:4, 11-16). Likewise, in 1 Peter 4:8-11, the purpose of the gifts is service of one another (vs. 10). It is probably quite unnecessary to state it, but the gifts are never ‘mine’. While there is obviously a sense in which we can identify a function which God has given us to do and which we may do repeatedly, it is still true that unless there is a continuous ‘giving’, the activity does not benefit the church.

An illustration of this is found in Ephesians 6:17 and 19. In the face of the struggle against the ‘rulers ... authorities ... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places’ (verse 12), the believers are urged to clothe themselves with armour from God. The only weapon they have ‘at their disposal’ I would suggest is not really at *their* disposal at all; it is ‘the sword of the Spirit, which is the word (*rJh\$ma rhema*) of God’. They *take* the sword, but the effectiveness comes from the Spirit; it is *God’s* utterance which is powerful. With that as the principle, Paul asks the readers to pray for him, ‘that a word (*lovgo" logos*) may be given to [him]’ when he opens his mouth, ‘in boldness to make known the mystery of the gospel’. Paul’s boldness will not derive even from his awareness of his apostolic ‘status’ but solely from the action of God at every point. So it is with all the gifts. Peter’s instruction, ‘Whoever speaks must do so as one who utters the very words of God (*lovgia qeou\$ logia theou*)’ (1 Pet. 4:11) carries the same thrust; as with the prophets of old, those who speak dare not presume to speak anything from their own minds. And as we will see again, a ‘gift’ is not primarily an activity of men and women but a ‘manifestation of the Spirit’ (1 Cor. 12:7).

Given that there are many churches today which claim to ‘function in the gifts’ (thus they call themselves ‘charismatic’) and others who either reject or are unaware of such things, approaching a discussion of various gifts may be to invite criticism from at least one side in the discussion. So let me say that what follows will be limited, as far as possible, to what the Scriptures have to say (and *all* would claim that!). But it does

mean that where they do not provide definitions we will have to plead ignorance. Whatever experiences we or others may have had, we must try to avoid reading those back into the Scriptures. That is not to call those experiences into question, except where there is strong evidence that the overall thrust of the Scriptures is being contradicted; rather it is to urge us to gentleness where we have no clear statement defining the experience and to cause us to re-evaluate the language that is used in the life of the church.

THE GIFTS IN THEIR CONTEXT

The Textual Context

We can begin by looking at the way the literary context may be of assistance in defining what is meant. In this case, the list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 begins with two items, ‘a word of wisdom’ and ‘a word of knowledge’.¹ On the technical level, we observe that the *NRSV* and *RSV* translate them as ‘the utterance of ...’ while the *NIV* has ‘the message of ...’ Two questions may be raised. The first concerns what is meant by ‘utterance’, ‘message’ and ‘word’ and the second the presence or absence of the definite article (‘the’). Here Paul uses the word *lovgo* (*logos*).

Regarding the first question, I take the two words (mentioned above in Ephesians 6:17 and 19) *rJh\$ma* (*rhema*) and *lovgo* (*logos*) to be virtually synonymous.² Perhaps the simplest way of putting it would be to say that *rJh\$ma* is a constituent part of *lovgo*³, with *rJh\$ma* being used for the non-durative aspect, the utterance itself, and *lovgo* for the larger element, the speaking and the overall content of what is said. Hence Paul’s meaning is that a person is given to speak ‘wisdom’ or ‘knowledge’ to the church. The utterance (*NRSV*) and (I think, less likely) what is said (*NIV*) is the gift to the church at a particular point.

The second question, that of the presence or absence of the definite article (‘the’), is simply a matter of grammatical rules. Greek has no indefinite article (‘a’ or ‘an’) and the problem arises of how we translate a Greek word into *English* idiom. If the Greek has no article, should we include one in English or not?⁴ In this case the Greek has no article, but we should understand the phrases to require it in English.⁵ We should note, too, that in verse 9, there is no definite article before ‘faith’ but sense does not require it in English.

What needs to be seen, however, is that the meaning of ‘word of wisdom’ may probably be very simply discovered by reading what Paul wrote earlier in 1

¹ *lovgo* "sofiva" ... *lovgo* "gnwvsew".

² O. Procksch, *levgw ktl* in TDNT, IV, p 92, ‘The LXX uses them as full synonyms’ for *rb...d...*. Students beginning their study of Greek will doubtless recall learning the Principle Parts of verbs; the verbal roots of *lovgo* and *rJh\$ma* both are used in the Principle Parts of *levgw* (I say): *legw*, *ejrw*, *ejjpon*, *ejjrhka*, *ejjrhmai*, *ejrrhqhn*.

³ See A. Debrunner, *levgw ktl* in TDNT, IV, p 76; ‘*o[noma* and *rJh\$ma* together form the sentence (*lovgo*)’.

⁴ *NRSV*, *RSV*, *AV*, *RV*, *ASV*, *JB*, *NASB*, *NIV* all translate with the article.

⁵ This is generally defined under what is known as the Canon of Apollonius. Wesley J. Perschbacher, *New Testament Greek Syntax, An Illustrated Manual*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1995, puts it as follows:

‘Usually when a noun is modified by another noun in the genitive case, both nouns will have the article prefixed to them or neither will have the article. When both nouns are anarthrous, usually they are both mutually definite or both indefinite or both qualitative’ (p 45).

In this case both must be understood as definite since, if both were indefinite, the sentence would be meaningless, i.e. *a word of a knowledge, a word of a wisdom*.

Corinthians. In chapters 1-4 the subject involved the divisions in the Corinthian congregation and the evident devaluing of Paul's apostolic role because of his refusal to use the Greek rhetorical methods. 'Greeks seek wisdom' (σοφία *sophia*⁶) and their speakers were trained to provide their messages in terms of the accepted wisdom of the day. In strong contrast Paul insisted that

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. ³And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. ⁴My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. (1 Cor. 2:1-5)

Human wisdom comes under the judgment of God who, in his own wisdom chooses the lowly and apparently foolish people of the world to be saved through an equally apparently foolish 'word' (1 Cor. 1:18, 26-29), the 'word of the cross'. While Jews saw the cross of Christ as a scandal, the Greek world was generally contemptuous of the preaching concerning the death and resurrection of the Jewish Messiah (see Acts 17:32).

Over against the futile wisdom of the world (1 Cor. 3:18-20), God does have a wisdom, and those who are mature (possibly a word deliberately chosen to contrast with the language of the Corinthians themselves⁷) may know it. The wisdom is, however, found 'in a mystery' (1 Cor. 2:6-7), the mystery of the cross. If true wisdom is to be had, it will only be the wisdom of God in the cross of Christ. But while the Corinthians persist in their immaturity, that is, their refusal to live as men and women who have received the Spirit, that wisdom will be foreign to them.

Now, with such a strong introduction to the letter, when the first 'gift' mentioned is 'the utterance of wisdom', it can hardly be doubted that Paul has in mind the issue which occupied the first four chapters. The utterance of wisdom is first the capacity which God has given him! He has preached the cross of Christ. Furthermore, when other serious issues are raised in the letter, as in chapter 6 with the matter of fornication, the work of the cross and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believers are still the determining factors. The church can never move beyond the cross; they always stand in need of the utterance of wisdom.

I would, therefore, suggest that a definition of 'the utterance of wisdom' as a gift in the church may be 'the given capacity to discern the effects and implications of the work of the cross in a particular situation'. But the overriding point is that the context of the whole letter should determine the matter, not the experience which someone has *called* 'a word of wisdom', irrespective of how valuable that experience may have been or seemed to be.

A similar method can be attempted with 'the utterance of knowledge'. In our English Bibles the word 'know' or 'knowledge' appears about fifty times in 1 Corinthians, but most of these uses translate words other than γινώσκειν (*gnosis*). Nonetheless, using synonymous words, Paul asks the readers on ten occasions 'do you not know ...?'⁸ Then, in chapter 8 he approaches the matter of food offered to idols in these words.

⁶ Hence the person who 'loves wisdom' is a philo-sopher'.

⁷ See Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1987, p 102f and *n* 18.

⁸ οὐκ οἶδτε

Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that ‘all of us possess knowledge.’ Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.² Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge (1 Cor. 8:1-2)

...⁷ It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.⁸ ‘Food will not bring us close to God.’ We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.⁹ But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.¹⁰ For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? ¹¹ So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. (1 Cor. 8:7-11)

Here, ‘knowledge’ is obviously a key word for the Corinthians. It seems that they are claiming to *know* all that is required, but are in fact demonstrating that they are quite unaware of the real issue, namely love of their brothers and sisters. Of course, this is again raised in chapter 13, where the misuse of the gifts is addressed in precisely these terms.

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all *knowledge*, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. (1 Cor. 13:2)

All their boasted knowledge is nothing without love. Indeed, seeing from the perspective of what will be, Paul could state that ‘knowledge ... will come to an end ... we know only in part’ (1 Cor. 13:8-9).

So ‘the utterance of knowledge’, whatever it may be, obviously stands as a significant element in the context of 1 Corinthians and in the life of the church. Whether it relates to the function of the genuine teacher⁹ or to some other activity may be hard to determine, but simply to assume that it relates to some ‘supernatural insight into a situation’¹⁰, again helpful as that may be, seems to me to ignore a large body of material in the literary context.

My point in saying these things is not to be at all negative. Thank God for his intervention into the lives of men and women. But it is to argue that the *language* of the New Testament ought to be understood in terms of the first context before we adopt the *language* into our own contexts. On the other hand, we must avoid the temptation to be so locked into ancient contexts that we actually exclude any divine intervention in our own. As someone once said, there are many evangelicals today who would give their right arm to have the supernatural in the New Testament — and their left arm to keep it there!

The Gifts and the Goal

Understanding the gifts in the church *ought* to be quite simple. Here is the church, the body of Christ, his bride, waiting for the consummation of all God’s purposes for creation. But as the church waits it does so in faith and so knows now, albeit in a provisional way, all that will be on that day. As Hebrews 11:1 put it, ‘Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen’.¹¹ Although this statement

⁹ See, for example, Barry Chant, *Spiritual Gifts, A Reappraisal*, Tabor College, Sydney, 1993, p 51f.

¹⁰ Is this, perhaps what Paul refers to in chapter 14, when he speaks of a ‘revelation’ being given (verse 26)? There, though, that word stands in close proximity to ‘prophecy’, so again we should be hesitant rather than dogmatic.

¹¹ AV. The word *υποστασις*”, translated here as substance, is elsewhere translated as ‘confidence’, but was also the word used to identify the being of God in the later controversies concerning the person of Christ, ‘Of one substance with the Father’.

is often regarded as a *definition* of faith, I would argue that it is a *description*, so that the meaning is that faith results in assurance of those things for which we hope. In other words, what we wait for in faith has substance now and so faith gives evidence or conviction of what may not yet be seen. 1 Peter 1:8 seems to identify this aspect when it says

Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy.

‘Glorious joy’ is literally ‘a having been glorified joy’¹² The reality of the glory ‘yet to be revealed’ is present in our joy.

The gifts which the church knows are introduced within this context in 1 Corinthians.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus,⁵ for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind —⁶ just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you —⁷ so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift (*charismata*) as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁸ He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 1:4-8)

The various gifts are the expression of grace enriching the church so that they have all the resources needed as they wait for the revealing of Christ. The word ‘strengthened’¹³ in verses 6 and 8 is ‘confirmed’ in some other translations and, while it has been suggested that ‘the testimony of Christ’ is another way of saying ‘the gospel’¹⁴, it is at least possible that Paul goes further, understanding that the gospel which he preached was actually ‘the testimony of Christ’, that is, it gained its power because Christ was the one bearing witness in the gospel to his own resurrection power. Now that testimony which brought such a transformation (it is ‘the power of God’, 1 Cor. 1:18) has been confirmed by the ongoing supply of all that is needed in the church. Furthermore, that confirmation continues to the end. I am not suggesting that ‘gifts’ somehow validate the church as genuine, but we would have to say that a church which denies the ongoing activity of Christ is a strange contradiction.

This picture of the gifts as ‘teleological’ or ‘goal directed’ is also seen in Ephesians 4:11-16 (see the chart on page 2). The gifts mentioned are all with a view to the ongoing ministry of the saints so that the church may be built up. In English, ‘built up’ is a phrase which generally means something like ‘strengthened’ or ‘encouraged’ or, from another angle, increased in size. The idea of being strengthened and encouraged figures in Paul’s thinking about his own ministry in Romans 1:11-12.

For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift¹⁵ to strengthen you —¹² or rather that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both your’s and mine.

Likewise, numerical growth is also mentioned as a feature in the accounts in Acts and can hardly be denied in Revelation 7:9. But here in Ephesians the meaning is spelled out in the passage.

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body

¹² dedoxasmevnh/, which is a Perfect passive participle from doxavzw I glorify.

¹³ Ejbepaiwvqh; the same verb is used again in verse 8, bebaiwvsei.

¹⁴ See Fee, *First Corinthians*, p 40.

¹⁵ Cavrisma ... pneumatikovn

of Christ,¹³ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-13)

The gifts are in order that the church may be built up and so ‘come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ’. This latter phrase is, literally, ‘to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ’¹⁶ and while initially that may not seem to add much, when we recall that Paul has already called the church ‘[Christ’s] body, the fullness of him who fills all in all’ (Eph. 1:23) then we can understand him to be saying here that the goal is measured by the stature of the fullness of Christ which is the church over which he is Lord. The maturity for which the gifts are given is the maturity, the completion, of the church as it is in Christ and as it will be when Christ is revealed (as in 1 Cor. 1:7).

The Gifts and their Use

The four main passages in which the gifts are listed have one thing in common — all four understand the gifts to be used in love. Indeed, in the extended discussion in 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul goes so far as to say that the use of the gifts without love is finally pointless. The gifts only have meaning when they are activated in love. To the Romans Paul wrote, ‘let love be genuine’ (12:9); immediately before speaking of the gifts, Peter wrote,

The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers.⁸ Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Pet. 4:7-8)

In view of the coming goal, the end¹⁷, all things must be done in love. To say that ‘love covers a multitude of sins’ must mean that as God’s love has brought cleansing to all, so those who live by that love must themselves treat the sins of others with the same love, so that division within the church is totally excluded. In fact, this point has been made on previous occasions in 1 Peter;

Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. (1:22)

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. (3:8)

In Ephesians Paul wrote that the growth to maturity, of which we have spoken, can only take place in love.

But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love. (Eph. 4:15-16)

‘Speaking the truth in love’ is, literally, ‘truthing it in love’, and while speaking is a strong element in truth,¹⁸ the thought seems to be that of functioning in the truth in love. Truth is what you do as much as what you say.

¹⁶ ejj" mevtron hJlikiva" tou' plhrwmatu" tou' Cristou.

¹⁷ tevlo"

¹⁸ This verb, ajlhqeuvw, is used only twice in the New Testament, here and at Gal. 4:16. The RV margin (its preferred reading) has ‘dealing truly’.

Romans 1:18ff set the stage for understanding this. The truth of God is continually present to the creation and has been since the world began but men and women, confronted by the truth, actively suppress it by acts of wickedness. They ‘exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images’ and ‘exchanged the truth of God for a lie’ (1:23, 25). Written in a similar vein, John’s Gospel records Jesus saying that ‘you will know the truth and the truth will set you free’ (John 8:32) and that, as the truth of the Father (John 14:6), he as Son will set men and women free (John 8:36). The work of redemption means that men and women are freed from the lie and into the truth. This is the ‘new creation’. Recreated to live and move and have our being in God, we are now free to live in love and so to live in God and John’s instruction is that we should not love in word only but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:18). These deeds done in love are the very essence of the new creation, ‘For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life (Eph. 2:10). Living as members of the church means living as members of Christ’s body, the bride who is ‘one flesh’ with him (see Eph. 5:30-32), and therefore the gifts in the church are only of value as they are exercised in love.

We should, at this point perhaps, notice the distinction between ‘natural abilities’ and ‘gifts’. While natural abilities are still gifts in the sense that all things are dependent on the generosity of God to the creation, gifts differ in that, as those things which are for the building up of the church (Eph. 4:12; 1 Cor. 14:12), to be effective they must be done in love and their benefit comes not from the gift itself but from the Spirit. These gifts are ‘manifestation[s] of the Spirit for the common good’ (1 Cor. 12:7).

The love of which the Scriptures speak is of a different order to that which is common to fallen humanity. The word *agapē* (*agape*), while a common Greek word for love in the ancient world, takes on a richer meaning when John tells us that ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8, 16) and that love is seen in his action towards rebellious, hostile humanity in the cross of his Son. This love is unconditional; God loves only because he loves because he is love (cf. Deut. 7:7-8). Such love as this cannot be self-generated by fallen humanity, but instead, ‘we love because he first loved us’ (1 John 4:19). Gifts exercised in love are thus exercised in the whole context of God’s great action of redemption. This is a matter, then, of believers consciously and deliberately abiding in love and so abiding in God. Although such living may and must be habituated, it never becomes merely automatic, hence the stern warning to the Ephesian church in Revelation 2. They had left their first love and must repent and do the first works again, those works which were done in love; their standing as a church depended upon it (Rev. 2:4-5). Hence Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (indeed the whole chapter) must not be romanticised; it is a matter of utmost seriousness.

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

The Gifts and Worship

The topic of ‘spiritual gifts’ in 1 Corinthians 12-14 occasions most of the discussion in churches today. Books abound, for and against the presence or exercise of gifts, and

some of them are valuable, even some of those opposed, since they sometimes do expose weaknesses in the teaching of those who are in favour.¹⁹

What is of prime importance for us is the fact that the exercise of the gifts here has particular focus on the worshipping community.²⁰ The work of the cross, bringing cleansing of the conscience, liberates men and women to worship. All that was essential in creation is restored in the last Adam. The first Adam was the high priest of Eden, leading the creation in worship, with the ‘Edenising’ of the whole earth in view. His sin could be defined as the rejection of worship in that he, along with his posterity, ‘did not honour [God] as God or give thanks to him’ (Rom. 1:21), but instead, ‘worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator ...’ (Rom. 1:25).

The history of Israel centres around its worship. The Tabernacle and then the Temple, with the activities which take place there, is of major significance. In Israel’s poetry, both hymnic and prophetic, the Temple is the most beautiful place, where the nations will come for the restoration of blessing (see, Isa. 2:2-3; 66:18-21). Redemption means that Israel will be restored to true worship (as in Ezekiel 40-48; Mal. 3:1-4 etc.), the nations will join them (Isa. 66:23) and all creation will be free from its bondage to decay (Isa 55:12-13; 65:25; cf. Rom. 8:19-23). It is the restoration of worship through redemption that is a powerful testimony:

I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. ²He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. ³He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD. (Psalms 40:1-3)

The letter to the Hebrews, written from the standpoint of Israel’s fulfilment in Christ, sees the climax of Israel’s role in exactly these terms:

...if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, ¹⁴how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to *worship* (serve) the living God! (Hebrews 9:13-14)

Worship is far more than an activity carried out when the church is gathered together (as, indeed, it was far more than a cultic activity in Eden) and this is the point to which Paul leads the Romans when he commences chapter 12.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sister, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Rom. 12:1)

¹⁹ Apart from the many commentaries on 1 Corinthians, there are many works which either pastorally or academically (or even polemically) deal with this subject. Among the non-polemic are: Bingham, Geoffrey, *The Day of the Spirit*, NCPI, 1985; Bittlinger, Arnold, *Gifts and Graces*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1967; Bridge, Donald and David Phipers, *Spiritual Gifts and the Church*, IVP, 1973; Carson, D. A. *Showing the Spirit*, Lancer, 1988; Chant, Barry, *Spiritual Gifts; A Reappraisal*, Tabor College, 1993; Christenson, Larry, *Speaking in Tongues and its significance for the Church*, Fountain Trust, 1968; Dunn, James D. G. *Jesus and the Spirit*, SCM, 1975; Green, Michael, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1975; Packer, J. I., *Keep in Step With the Spirit*, IVP, 1984. There are, of course, some writers, who shall remain anonymous here, whose writings do little justice to their cause. One author I read recommended praying in tongues because, among other reasons, it helped him go to sleep in airport terminals! Some others are so dominated by their experiences that their examination of the scriptures is almost valueless.

²⁰ A full study on that topic is beyond the scope of this paper, but more detail can be found in the studies for October 1995, *Creation, Worship and the Triune God*; April 1997, *The Priesthood of all Believers*; and June 1997, *Christ, The High priest of the Sanctuary*.

He reminds the Corinthians that not only is the church ‘God’s temple’ (1 Cor. 3:16-17; see Eph. 2:19-22), so too are their bodies (6:19-20). But the church *is* the ‘temple’ and the temple *is* the place of worship.²¹ The presence of God and the angelic messengers cannot be ignored in the gathering of the believers; prayer and prophecy, the two aspects of communion with God, must be carried out with due sense of the functional hierarchy of the new creation (1 Cor. 11:1-16, esp. vs. 10). If in the Lord’s Supper it is the ‘body’ which must be discerned (not meaning the body of Christ in the bread but the gathered community as the body of Christ) that must mean that the presence of Christ in the whole body is also to be discerned. The sectarian spirit which was addressed in the early chapters of 1 Corinthians is still a controlling element in this discussion of what happens when they meet together, eating the Lord’s Supper and exercising the gifts (1 Cor. 11-14).

1 Corinthians chapter 12 is not really about the gifts; it is about the unity of the church as the body of Christ.²² Perhaps that is why it is hard to define some of the gifts which are mentioned; that was never the purpose. The Corinthians knew what Paul was saying because they lived with the various gifts within their gatherings. Their problem was not understanding the gifts but misusing them. They needed to be reminded that while there may be varieties of gifts, it is the same Spirit who is active in all, there may be many ways of serving, but there is only one Lord being served and there may be all sorts of activities taking place, but it is the same God activating them in everyone. The point is that whatever the gift is, it is the manifestation of the Spirit. It is his presence and ministry which must be recognised. So wisdom is uttered ‘through the Spirit’, as is knowledge. If a person has a special measure of faith, again there is no credit to that person. Likewise, suppose that a person has ‘gifts of healings’²³ or has been granted various exercises of ‘powers’, or brings a prophetic word, can discern spirits, speak in unknown languages or even understand what is being said; It is still the one Spirit working in and through each person. If I have one gift and you another, the choice was entirely the Spirit’s. I may ask, but it is his decision to give.

The church is the community created to worship. I suspect, but have no way of proving, that the gift of tongues may be best understood as being an expression of worship. In 1 Corinthians 14:2 Paul reminds them that ‘tongues’ involves speaking to God, not to other people.²⁴ The problem in Corinth seems to be that worship was being offered with no reference to the context of the worshipping *community*. That is why, although tongues is a good gift (as if God would give a gift which is not ‘good’) and one which Paul would like all to have (1 Cor. 14:5) and, indeed a gift which should not be forbidden²⁵ (1 Cor. 14:39), it is still a gift which must be used in such a way that the whole community can *consciously* worship in unity. Thus there is the need to

²¹ The city, the bride, in Rev. 21 has no temple *in* the city, because the temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb, and the bride is now in full communion and intimacy with her husband. The whole city is given over to worship.

²² The same principle is true in Ephesians 4, which commences with the dynamics of unity (4:1-6).

²³ The phrase is strange, since both words are in the plural. The following phrase, ‘workings of miracles (powers)’ is similarly plural.

²⁴ While it is often understood as a (partial) reversal of the judgment of Babel, could it be that the tongues described in Acts 2 was the gift of restored worship? Cornelius, the Gentile, quite properly in the light of the purpose of God described above, was also granted to enter into the worship (Acts 10:46) through the gift of repentance (Acts 11:18).

²⁵ What Paul is saying, I presume, relates to a total prohibition. Quite plainly it is the responsibility of those in leadership to require that both speakers in tongues and prophets restrain themselves for the good of the whole community (1 Cor. 14:26-32).

‘interpret’. If there is to be prayer (as 1 Cor. 11:4-5 indicates there must be) then it needs to be understood, so that all can agree, can say ‘Amen’ (1 Cor. 14:16). Prophecy is vital (1 Cor. 14:1-4), but even the one who prophesies is not ‘greater’ than one who speaks in tongues *if* there is an interpretation (1 Cor. 14:5)!

To the Philippians, Paul wrote,

I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil. 1:6)

There are gifts for the church because God is working his good purposes out and supplying all that is needed to see us through to the goal. We must work out (that is, ‘live out’) our own salvation with fear and trembling, but we can only do so because God is at work in us, both to will and work for his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13).

But there are gifts for the church because the God who gives good gifts to the church is seeing his whole creation through to the goal. While he gives gifts to the church, he also continues to do ‘good’ to the creation, ‘giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy’ (Acts 14:17). The ‘good work’ of God is the action of the faithful creator (1 Peter. 4:19). Gifts in the church, then, are as much ‘providence’ as they are sometimes spectacular. They are what we would expect from the one who declared, ‘See! I am making all things new’ (Rev. 21:5).

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The Four main Passages which describe the use of 'Gifts' within the Church

Romans 12:3-8	1 Cor 12:4-11	Ephesians 4:11-16	1 Peter 4:8-11
<p>For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.</p>	<p>Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.</p>	<p>The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, ¹³for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. ¹⁴We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.</p>	<p>Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹Be hospitable to one another without complaining. ¹⁰Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. ¹¹Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.</p>

The Eschatological Community

Eschatology refers to the 'end', the 'last things', 'last times', or to Jesus as 'the last man'. The church is a community with this orientation. It is the eschatological community. However, a title like this may cause us to wonder what the church really is, for we know it as a group of believers who meet together on a regular basis, who preach 'the gospel' and who exercise 'gifts' in some form. Furthermore, the group which meets will, hopefully, have an understanding of itself as an essential part of the one body of Christ, as a holy community with a worldwide concern yet a concern that will not compromise the apostolic truth as it fulfils its mandate.

While this is not a wrong picture, as the previous chapters have shown, it is still possible that we may only have a somewhat static view of the church. That is, we are still focussing on what we *are*, even if that is coupled with a concern to bring the church to a more dynamic *experience* of what we are. Such phrases as 'Be what you are' or 'Become what you are' certainly have their place but, for the moment, we should turn our attention to the idea of 'renewal'.

RENEWAL - TO WHAT?

We must allow that the word 'renewal' has come to mean 'charismaticised', to coin a term, so that some speak of leading a church 'into renewal'. But with or without that particular thrust, there would hardly be a pastor who did not desire to see the church over which he has oversight grow and mature. The question which should be asked, however, is 'grow and mature, or be renewed, into what?' While answers to that may vary, depending usually on the background of the one asking the question, there is often in mind some notion of an almost Edenic time in the past to which the church should return. For some, that would be the period of the early church, when the Holy Spirit was so evidently active, and the believers were involved in the use and enjoyment of the gifts which Christ has given. For others, perhaps it is the age of the Puritans, when men and women were thrilled with the Scriptures and longed for and were given full and applicable expositions. Either way, and these are obviously not the only options nor are they mutually exclusive, there is still a desire to return to 'the good old days'.

It is not surprising to realise that in the good old days there were those who were labouring because they thought that the church ought to get back to the good old days! Why else would the Puritan preachers work and write as they did? Of course, at Pentecost there was a rich awareness that the old had passed away and everything had become new, but it was not long before there were those who saw that the good old days, when the Law of Moses was revered and observed, ought to be recovered. Much of the New Testament, especially in Paul's letters, has to answer this reactionary call. Once we recall this, the obvious tensions reflected in the New Testament documents become clear, especially in Galatians and Romans, parts of Acts and elsewhere.

On the other hand, there is sometimes a selective amnesia about all this. Those who long for a return, for example, to New Testament Christianity often forget that almost from the beginning there was great pain involved in being in such a church. Halcyon days they were not. There were arrests and imprisonments, purges and deaths. Being a Puritan at the time of the Restoration in England was fraught with similar hardships, as in August 1662

some two thousand faithful Pastors were 'ejected' from their congregations and often reduced to penury. Also, in New Testament times, there were the constant problems of heresy within the church, immorality, internal friction and possibly even murder! Thus James wrote,

Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? ²You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. (James 4:1-2).

So what is the paradigm for renewal?

REACHING THE GOAL

In 1 Corinthians 13:13, Paul identifies three abiding virtues, faith, hope and love. These are permanent issues for the church and, indeed, these three elements appear together regularly in the New Testament.¹ Certainly Paul says that 'the greatest of these is love', doubtless because of the point he is making about the way the Corinthians were behaving, but also because of the eternal nature of love (1 Cor. 13:8; cf. 1 John 4:8, 16).

As we saw in the previous study, the gifts are essentially goal directed. They are provided 'as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 1:7) and will most certainly cease 'when the complete comes' (1 Cor. 13:10).² The gifts are a partial³ experience of that which lies ahead. It is 'what lies ahead' which gives meaning to the present. Love, which is God himself in the action of his Triune being, has come to us. In doing so it has confronted us with such effectiveness that we cannot but hear him speak and trust him even though we do not *presently* see him. Therefore, to do as the Corinthians were doing, focussing on the present experience of the gifts (or whatever), with the consequent conflicts of interest, is to miss the point of the present experience. There is something far greater yet to come.

For that reason, we should note the place of 'hope' in the New Testament. The church has 'been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the

¹ 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; Gal. 5:5-6; Rom. 1:1-5; Col. 1:4-5; Eph. 4:2-5; Titus 2:2; Heb. 6:10-12; 10:22-24; 1 Pet. 1:3-8.

² Speaking of the meaning of verse 10, Gordon Fee (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1987, p 644 n. 23) has the following comment.

This has taken several forms, depending on how one understands *tevlion*. (1) Some see it as referring to love itself. In this view the Corinthian desire for gifts reflects their immaturity; when they have come to the fullness of love they will put away such childish desires. ... (2) Others see 'the perfect' as referring to the full revelation given in the NT itself, which when it would come to completion would do away with the 'partial' forms of charismatic revelation. Given its classical exposition by B. B. Warfield, this view has been taken over in a variety of ways by contemporary Reformed and Dispensationalist theologies. It is an impossible view, of course, since Paul himself could not have articulated it. What neither Paul himself nor the Corinthians could have understood can [*sic*. 'surely he means 'cannot'] possibly be the meaning of the text. (3) Still others see it as referring to the maturing of the body, the church, which is sometimes also seen to have happened with the rise of the more regular clergy (Eph. 4:11-13 is appealed to) or the coming of Jews and Gentiles into the one body ... This view has nothing to commend it except the analogy of v. 11, which is a misguided emphasis at best.

It is perhaps an indictment of Western Christianity that we should consider 'mature' our rather totally cerebral and domesticated — but bland — brand of faith, with the concomitant absence of the Spirit in terms of his supernatural gifts! The Spirit, not Western rationalism, marks the turning of the ages, after all; and to deny the Spirit's manifestations is to deny our present existence to be eschatological, as belonging to the beginning of the time of the End.

³ They are *eik mevrou*" (1 Cor. 13:9-10).

dead' (1 Pet. 1:3). We shamelessly rejoice in our hope of the glory of God (Rom. 5:2, 5). We ought to stir one another up to love and good works, especially as we 'see the Day approaching' (Heb. 10:24-25). This hope, as Peter said, results from the resurrection of Jesus. All that we presently experience, in particular the purifying trials we must suffer, will find meaning 'when Jesus Christ is revealed'. For the present,

Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, (1 Peter 1:8).

We have seen that this 'glorious joy' is in fact a joy which 'has been glorified',⁴ with the implication that our joy in Christ is a present participation in the glory which is yet to be revealed in us. As such, Christian joy stands in some contrast to circumstantial happiness, in that it can embrace the suffering which would render us 'un-happy'.

Hope is essential to true humanity. Although we are sometimes presented as having a hope in order to provide some sort of opiate for our sufferings, Biblical hope is far from that. Indeed, implicit within the account of the creation is the understanding that there was hope before there was any suffering from which to escape. What was implicit there has become explicit in the New Testament; the resurrection of Jesus from the dead has made sure of that.

The creation 'mandate', 'be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it' (Gen. 1:28), is plainly saying that there is a goal towards which Adam (that is, humanity, male and female, Gen. 1:27) is to be moving. Furthermore, moving towards that goal involves the totality of Man's being. He does not merely have a goal *while* he lives; his living, his marrying and having children and his filling the earth and ruling over it, is directly involved. All of it is his vocation. That this is far more than just population growth is seen in Genesis 2, where Adam is to lead the creation in worship, so that we can conclude that the whole earth will be vibrant in its existence before God.

This goal was never changed. Neither did the intrusion of sin cause any modification. The prophets continue to stress the vastness of the goal which God has established.

But the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. (Habakkuk 2:14, cf. Num. 14:21)

Men and women may well have 'fallen short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:23), and have 'exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images' (Rom. 1:23), but the time will come when all the earth again is filled with knowledge of the glory. Isaiah's wording which omits 'of the glory' links this knowledge with the transformation of the creation.

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. ⁷The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. ⁹They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. (Isa. 11:6-9)

Later he added,

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. ¹⁸But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. ¹⁹I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my

⁴ See 'The Church and the Gifts — 2' p 6 and n 12.

people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. ²⁰No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. ²¹They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²²They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. ²³They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD — and their descendants as well. ²⁴Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. ²⁵The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent — its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD. (Isa. 65:17-25)

This is nothing less than the restoration of creation to worship. Thus,

...you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. (Isa. 55:12)

The incarnation of the eternal Word has added another dimension to this view of the goal. For instance, now we can see that this goal involves humanity standing in a particular relationship to God which was previously only partially described. That relationship is nothing less than humanity as the bride of Christ. The man Adam and his wife stand as an anticipatory expression of the final goal, the second Man, the last Adam, and his bride.⁵ *Behind* the creation lay the purpose of God — ‘he chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world’ (Eph. 1:4). Furthermore, the bride is also called ‘the wife of the Lamb’ (Rev. 21:9; see 19:7-9), meaning ‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ (John 1:29; cf Rev. 5:6, 9; 7:14). But, mysteriously, the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8), that is, before there was any sin from which we needed to be saved.

This language of ‘the world’ having its sin removed (see also 1 John 2:2), being reconciled (2 Cor. 5:19), does not imply what is generally described as universalism. That would mean that, in the ultimate, every human being will be saved. But it does mean that on that Day, there will be nothing in the whole of creation which is not radiant with the glory of God (Rev. 21:11, 23).

God’s glory is his burning moral purity. This does not mean only that it burns up that which is impure — it certainly does that — but his being does not depend on sin and evil for its identity. Before there was sin, Man was crowned with glory and honour (Ps. 8:5). Though God will not share his glory with another, that is with idols (Isa. 42:8) humanity was created to participate in the moral glory of God. The sheer radiance and utter joy of this is now seen mostly in its denial, in the loss of glory and the futile attempts to replicate the reality. As Hosea put it, there is no knowledge of God in the land and the people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:1, 6). This does not mean that there was intellectual ignorance, rather that the people (or, God in his judgment of them⁶) had ‘changed their glory into shame’ (Hos. 4:7).

However, the sheer radiance and utter joy of this glory is also seen in the incarnation; the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we saw the glory (John 1:14). The light of the knowledge of the glory of God is in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). He is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15) and has maintained the integrity of the glory with

⁵ Eph. 5:32. This sometimes expressed as Adam being ‘protological’ of the ‘eschatological’.

⁶ So AV, RV, ASV, RSV, NIV, NEB. The JB has ‘they have bartered their glory for shame’.

which he was crowned (Heb. 2:9). The purpose of God in this was that Christ might be the firstborn within a large family, with all the members conformed to the image of the Son (Rom. 8:28-29); he is glorified, therefore, so are they (Rom. 8:30). The suffering, the death of Christ for sin was, then, appropriate since God has determined to bring 'many sons to glory' (Heb. 2:9-10).

The goal is simply this: when he appears we will be like him (1 John 3:2). When Christ who is our life appears we also will be revealed with him in glory (Col. 3:4). By means of the lake of fire, all creation, will have been purged, of its corruption. All the evil personages, both human and non-human, that is Satan and his demonic powers, otherwise seen as the Dragon, the beast and the false prophet, as well as the false bride Babylon, will have been removed. All that will remain is the great multitude which no one can number, all transformed by the full revelation of their moral glory as the *renewed* creation. The paradigm for renewal is not what was but what will be.

MAKING ALL THINGS NEW

In the man Jesus 'the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily' (Col. 2:9). We should note the present tense; the fulness continues to dwell⁷ *bodily* in him. In other words, it is the man Jesus who still stands as the guarantee of our salvation. He is 'wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption' (1 Cor. 1:30). So Paul continued to the Colossians that 'you have come to fulness in him' (Col. 2:10). If a person is in Christ then that is 'new creation' (2 Cor. 5:17). This means that the creation which is in Christ is qualitatively distinct from that which was in Adam; it stands over against that which was in Adam. The following clause explains this; 'the old things have passed away, see, the old things have become new!'⁸ Creation has been brought back to newness in Christ. In the words of Adrio König, wherever Christ is, there the goal has been reached.⁹ Now, at last, there is an Adam who does not pass death on to his posterity. At his resurrection, Jesus, 'the last Adam, became a life-giving spirit' (1 Cor. 15:45).

This restoration of creation, this renewal, did not take place apart from the historical process. We understand that the God who makes all things new has been doing so from the beginning and that, in particular, he has been working through the nation Israel. Even identifying Jesus as 'Christ' recognises this. 'Christ' is the Greek word translating the Hebrew 'Messiah' — in English it is 'anointed'. 'Jesus Christ' is 'Jesus the Jewish Messiah'. He is the one who stands as the climax of all that God intended through Israel. We saw above that the purpose of God was the restoration of creation, but the method was made quite plain in Genesis 12:1-3: God will renew the creation, he will bless the nations, he will remove the curse, through Abraham.

⁷ katoikei'

⁸ The Greek text, ta: ajrcal'a parh'lqen, ijdou; gevgonen kainav is ambiguous. The latter clause may mean that new things have come, with kainav as the subject of gevgonen. This is the way the text is understood in the RSV and NIV. The question involves whether we see that the new creation is a total replacement of the old or its renewal and transformation. The NRSV together with the AV and others take it this way. See Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1997, p 297.

⁹ See his book, *The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1999) for a thorough treatment of this. My own *Maranatha* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1998) examines the Biblical picture of hope in a similar way.

As this developed, it became clear that it was the nation Israel which was the focus of God's action. In what is almost a theological summary of Israel's history, the Apostle Paul wrote of them this way.

They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises;⁵ to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 9:4-5)

He was lamenting Israel's failure to receive the promised blessing themselves, and so their failure to be the channel of restored blessing to the nations and so to all creation. In spite of their rich gifts, Israel did not respond to the Messiah when he came. This was the problem which Jesus confronted in Luke 24:25f.

Then he said to [the two on the road to Emmaus], 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' (Luke 24:25-26)

Confronted with the clear prophetic word, which had plainly indicated the plan of God, they had not believed it and so were unable to recognise the next step in the process of renewal when it appeared to them. As representatives of Israel, these two had been participants in the blessings which God had given yet were unable to see them in the context in which they were given.

There is no space here to examine in detail the items mentioned in Romans 9:4-5,¹⁰ but the issues are fairly obvious. Israel was given these blessings; but why? A purely static view of Israel, like a purely static view of the church, will hardly ask this question. However, if Israel's role is to be a participant in the restoration of creation, it would follow that these gifts were given because they were elements in creation itself. The very provisional place of Israel meant that these gifts would be fulfilled later on in the person of the last Adam. However, the nature of grace as God giving himself in order to restore to humanity and to creation all that was lost at the fall must mean that adoption, glory, covenants, law, the worship, and the promises; patriarchs, and Messiah were all significant parts of the original creation.

Some of this has already been seen. Adoption as sons was the eternal purpose, fully worked in Jesus. Glory we have discussed. Covenants were a significant feature of Israel's life, but were never apart from the covenant with creation. God is seeing his creation through to its goal because he is faithful to the covenant in which creation was brought to be; he is a faithful creator (1 Pet. 4:19). Law, the Torah given through Moses, which Motyer called 'the written, preceptual image of God',¹¹ was nothing other than the eternal law of God, given in covenantal form. When the nations come to Israel to learn Torah (Isa. 2:3), they would be regaining the knowledge of the glory of God. Worship we have seen was an integral part of creation and the promises, though first expressed at Genesis 3:15, were in fact the basis for the creation (Eph. 1:4 etc). The patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, could hardly be envisaged as apart from the promised blessing, given that the blessing would come through Abraham and his seed, and it is obvious that Messiah is the

¹⁰ A few years ago, Geoff Bingham analysed these eight items in the Monday Pastors' Studies. While he identifies the church as the new Israel, a point with which I disagreed at the time, nonetheless these studies opened up a wide vista for understanding the great blessings of God. In a recent conversation Geoff raised this passage as a line of thought for eschatology and I am deeply grateful to him for it. To my knowledge no one else has made this point.

¹¹ 'Law' in W. Elwell (Ed). *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1984, p 624.

seed of Abraham *par excellence* (see Gal. 3:16) whose relationship to the church was the very basis for creation.

These gifts to Israel pertain to the function of Israel to be the means by which renewal comes to creation. But recalling the descriptions of Israel as the bride of Yahweh (for example, Jeremiah 31:32), it is not unreasonable to see this bride as an anticipation of the bride of the Lamb, and the gifts, flowing from the act of creation, as being the very things which will crown the bride in the new creation.¹² And this is surely what we see: the bride is glorified; the worship is total; the law is no longer weakened by the flesh; the covenant with the creation (and so the covenants made throughout history) stands as the faithful creator has the new heaven and new earth as the revelation of his faithfulness. The promises have been fulfilled; nothing is there which has not been announced beforehand by the prophetic word, however much the dimensions of the fulfilment may be a wonderful surprise. The climactic declaration is evidence of this, as in Revelation 21:7 the old covenant promise is now, 'I will be his God and he will be my Son'. In Romans 11:17-24 (cf. Gal. 3:14, 29) Paul indicates that Gentiles have been grafted in to the root of Abraham. Israel's father is now seen to be the father of all who believe, of Israel and the nations (Rom. 4:11-12). Of course, triumphant over all these things is the Messiah.

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming, 'Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.' (Rev. 12:10).

The Messiah reigns as the true viceroy, the fulfilment of all that Adam was but refused to be. Now, having put all his enemies under his feet, he has done all that the vocation of Man required, and so he is truly subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him.

Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.²⁷ For 'God has put all things in subjection under his feet.' But when it says, 'All things are put in subjection,' it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him.²⁸ When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

Small wonder, then, that Paul should have said that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29). Creation was established in hope, that is, with this fulfilment in view. It was a good beginning! Israel was given a hope (cf. Jer. 29:10-11), indeed God himself was their hope (Jer. 14:8; 17:13; Acts 28:20). We have been saved in hope (Rom. 8:24) and we rejoice in it (Rom. 5:2). Far from hope disappointing us, the love of God has been flooded into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, so that the reality for which we hope, though not seen yet, is richly known (Rom. 5:5).

WAITING WITH PATIENCE

And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

¹² I should think that it is of little consequence whether or not we see the church as 'the Israel of God'. If we do, then we will say that there is a continuity from Israel to the church. If we do not, then we are simply saying that those things which pertain to Israel under the old covenant are not lost when Israel becomes one among the great number of 'disciplined nations'; rather those gifts were always for the nations.

¹²While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. (John 17:11-16).

The church is a community of men and women who are ‘organically’ joined to Christ. The connection is deeper than any human relationships — his death was our death, his resurrection the first fruits and guarantee of our own. He is in us and we are in him. We live, but it is not we who live but Christ who lives in us. All this is plain, but so is the fact that we are still living in a world which is generally somewhere between indifferent and actively hostile to the realities which we hold so dear.

Jesus’ prayer in John 17 has been answered. The later prayer for unity (verses 20-24) has been answered, so that what must now be our concern is ‘to *maintain* the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ (Eph. 4:3). So how has this section of his prayer been answered? To a certain extent, the section preceding this, chapters 14-16 of John’s Gospel, have told us, so that this prayer is the intimate petition of the Son to the Father concerning all that he has just taught the disciples. In those chapters he told them that he would be leaving the disciples but that he would not leave them orphaned but would be present with them when the Spirit was given. Indeed, his leaving, physically, was an essential part of the plan, so that the true unity of the believers with the triune God might be restored. Now that the Spirit has been poured out (John 20:22, cf Acts 2:33), there is nothing which can separate that which God has joined.¹³ Thus Paul’s observation:

In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory. (Eph. 1:13-14).

Yet with all that, the Scriptures are filled with exhortations and warning for believers to move on in faith and not to be seduced by the world around us. The bride is engaged to the Lamb, which in Biblical terms means ‘married’, even though the full expression of the marriage is not yet seen. The marriage banquet has not yet taken place and the bride still waits the time of his coming for her. So in the meantime we are surrounded by pressures which attempt to draw us back to a life which has finished. At the Cross, we were crucified to the world and the world to us (Gal 6:14). The flesh, with its passions and desires, has been similarly put death, so how can we live any longer in them (Gal. 5:24)? The answer is twofold. First, it is inconceivable that one joined to such a husband should even consider the allurements of another. Secondly, it is equally possible that, having been joined to him, we may forget that we were cleansed from our old sins (2 Pet. 1:9). It is a culpable memory loss and one fraught with danger, so the reminders are urgent and significant.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble. ¹¹For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you. ¹²Therefore I intend to keep on reminding you

¹³ We might compare the hymn of William Cowper’s which said, ‘Return, O holy Dove! Return, sweet messenger of rest! I hate the sin that made Thee mourn and drove Thee from my breast’, with Geoff Bingham’s response (NCTM Hymn Book Vol 2, N^o 19), ‘Ah, Spirit dear, the sin that’s sad, Still never drives You from my breast’. The first sounds extremely pious but in reality opens us up to all sorts of false insecurities.

of these things, though you know them already and are established in the truth that has come to you. ¹³I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to refresh your memory, ... ¹⁵And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. (2 Pet. 1:10-15)

Believers need constant refreshing in the knowledge of sins forgiven. Only in that knowledge (personal and not merely cognitive) is there the likelihood of genuine hatred of sin (cf. Ezek. 36:25-27, 31). And it is only in the knowledge of the victory of Christ that we can see the true nature of the enemy and the way he attacks. For instance, Paul wrote that we are not ignorant of Satan's devices (2 Cor. 2:11), reminding the Ephesians that we are not wrestling against blood and flesh but against spiritual powers who are in fact incapable of penetrating the armour which God supplies. Satan, hates the believers because he hates the one who has defeated him and so he goes to 'make war on ... those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus' (Rev. 12:17). But the armour is uncomplicated; truth, that is things as they really are, righteousness¹⁴, the declaration of God concerning our true standing, the gospel of peace, that is peace with God through the work of reconciliation, faith, believing what God says, and salvation itself. These are not really different pieces of armour but different aspects of the one great gift which has been given.

Because we are living in bodies which are not yet transformed from mortality to immortality, from dishonour to glory, we still suffer the effects of living in a 'body of death' (Rom. 7:24), and we need to 'put to death things that are earthly in us (Col. 3:5) and refuse to let sin exercise a dominion in our mortal bodies (Rom. 6:12). But the basis for doing so is simply that we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, the condemnation is gone forever (who is to condemn? Rom. 8:34). We have died and our life is hid with Christ in God (Rom. 8:1-8; Col. 3:3). Our hope is in *him*, and so we will purify ourselves as he is pure, knowing that when he appears we will be like him and we will appear with him in glory (1 John 3:2-3; Col. 3:4).

If believers are organically joined to Christ, it is also true that we are organically joined to each other: 'By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body', each integrally joined to all the others. Put simply, we need each other, because our identity is not found in our individual relationship with Christ but in our corporate relationship with him. The church, then, is not an option for believers, as if it was just another meeting to attend (although it would be hard to deny that many local churches do cause us to think that way). No, given the urgency of the times and the nature of the attacks, '

let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb. 10:24-25)

It is the church which is moving towards the consummation, not merely the individual members. Mutual encouragement and exhortation is a fundamental ministry, given the eschatological nature of the church. I need you and you need me because of who *we* are.

But exhortation and encouragement is not only a ministry of the church, it is also and primarily a ministry of Christ to the church. He will have a pure bride; he loved her and gave himself up for her in order to make her holy and to present the church to himself without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind (Eph. 5:25-27). Where the church resists

¹⁴ This can also be translated as 'justification'.

the purpose, there must be discipline, not in the way that human parents discipline their children but in the way the Father of spirits disciplines his children in order that we may share his holiness (Heb. 12:9-10).

Of course there is discipline which is not punitive, which is simply aimed at purifying our faith, our determined trust in him and his promises, so that when Jesus Christ is revealed our faith will be a cause of great praise, glory and honour to him (1 Pet. 1:5-7). Still, there is a discipline which though painful for us is the discipline we *must* have. The church must be brought to repentance for its slackness, arrogance, its moral indifference or worse. But this is still the discipline of love. Those whom he loves he reproveth and disciplines (Rev. 3:19). However, again the reason lies in the great and glorious purpose of God.

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. (Rev. 3:20)

When will he come in and eat with us? Certainly we have intimacy with him now, but the words of the Spirit to the churches (Rev. 2-3) lie at the heart of understanding the goal. He disciplines us because this meal is the wonderful wedding banquet, when the Lamb and his bride are joined and history, the plan of God, consummated. Then the bride will be dressed richly in the fine linen which her dear lover has given, namely, the righteous deeds of the saints (Rev. 19:8). This is what the new creation is all about, this is renewal. 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand for us to walk in' (Eph. 2:10). He is making all things new now and on that day, all that pertains to the 'old creation', the polluted and unproductive creation, will be gone for ever.

How do we exhort each other? Simply preaching moralism, good living, or whatever, is at best static and at worst a denial of the reality. What will stir the soul and the church to holiness in living? The answer as someone said, is 'Tell them about the banquet'.

Tell them about the banquet,
Tell them the feast that will be,
The rejoicing and tasting and feasting
As the wine of the Kingdom flows free.
With the endless rejoicing of meeting,
The communion so sweet at the core,
Of talking and laughing and wonder
And the songs of the evermore.

Tell them about the Speakers:
The Patriarchs rising will give
Of the visions of Yahweh's great splendour
And communion that caused them to live
Where the idols were gaudy and shabby,
Or fierce in their ruling of men,
For the Patriarchs knew of the glory
The Spirit imprinted on them.

The Kings will be there with their speeches
Who know of the Kingdom of God,

And the Priests will laud in their wonder
The law and its power of blood;
The Prophets will dance for the sorrows
Messiah would share in His flesh
To give garments of joy to the mourners
And bring primeval beauty afresh.

Messiah will rise in the Spirit,
His tender hand soft on His Bride,
He will bow to acknowledge the Father
Who gave her to be at His side.
He will hand all the glories of Kingdom
To His Father, ineffable King,
And millions of sons and of angels
Will join as the galaxies sing.

In the songs that are ever and endless
Of the banquet of worship and praise,
Of the union of God with His image—

Sydney Pastors Study 1999 November, Ian Pennicook

The Bride and her people—always.
Ah tell them about the banquet!
The Seer cried in weeping delight,
'Tell them the banquet is coming,
Yet the banquet is here day and night.'

The songs of the banquet we're singing,
In faith with love's full hope in sight,
The foretaste keeps life in the suffering
And Heaven makes darkness all light.
The thousands and myriads are singing
As angels and creatures adore,
And wisdom and honour and glory

Flood heaven and earth evermore.

The Three rise as One in the banquet
In union the One are the Three,
The love and the power of communion
Encompass the Love-Family.
All creatures are one in the Father,
All things unified in the Son.
One fellowship are in the Spirit
And the banquet has only begun.
(1993 *Geoffrey Bingham*.)

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